

# Session 2

## THE CHURCH: LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

*1 John 3:11-24*

### Memory Verse

*Those who obey God's commandments remain in fellowship with him, and he with them. And we know he lives in us because the Spirit he gave us lives in us.*

– 1 JOHN 3:24, CSB



## The Church: Love For One Another

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** Christians love others because they themselves have experienced the amazing, immeasurable love of God in Christ.

**?** Have you ever used a real compass (not a phone application)? If so, what did you use it for?

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**?** How does a compass work? What is its purpose?

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A compass works by magnetism. The needle in the container is just barely affixed to its position so that it is free to twist and turn in any direction. On the other hand, it isn't free at all because there is an invisible force that is compelling it toward the magnetic north pole.

Those who are in Christ, though they are free, are also compelled toward something. When a dead sinner is made alive by the mercy and kindness of God in Christ, his or her soul sets off toward the Redeemer. Like a needle toward a lodestone, the Christian's soul cleaves to God. What is the force that draws them that way? It is love. The Christian prays to God, sings to God, reads God's Word, gathers with God's people, submits to baptism, and takes part in the Lord's Supper because the love of Christ compels them (2 Cor. 5:14). We love because He first loved us (1 John

4:19). Yet, God's love doesn't only compel Christians to love God, but also to love those around them. Christians love their neighbors.

Christians, of course, aren't compass needles. They are sentient creations of God who have been made alive in Christ and delivered from the curse of sin. They, however, still battle against the old sin-dead nature, which still works to supplant the Christian's love for God and neighbor with a love for self and sin. This is why Jesus told His followers to love each other as He had loved them (John 15:12). They needed clear instruction, as do we.

## Session Summary

Those who love God with the kind of love that God Himself has shown toward His children do so because of who He is, not because of the services that He can provide them. That's not what divine love is according to Scripture. That sort of love is more akin to greed or selfishness than biblical love.

Furthermore, not only will true Christians love God selflessly, they will also love their neighbor sacrificially. The blueprint for sacrificial love is found in the pages of the Gospels. God the Son, Jesus Christ, was both the expression of God's love for His people and the explanation of how God's people ought to love one another.

The theme of 1 John 3:11-24 is love for one's neighbor. John listed several startling truths that put meat on this often-abstracted bone. It's quite easy to say, Christians should love one another. But considering what that really means and how to carry it out is a much messier business. Here are seven observations on this type of love according to 1 John 3:

- Loving our brothers and sisters is evidence that we have passed from death to life (v. 14).
- The one who does not love remains in death (v. 14).
- If you hate your brother you are a murderer (v. 15).
- We know how to love by considering Christ's example (v. 16).
- Love is expressed in compassion and action toward those in need (v. 17).
- The fruit of love produced in us gives us confidence when our hearts condemn us (vv. 21-22).
- Being obedient to the command to love others strengthens our prayers (v. 22).

The bottom line is that those who are in Christ will not only have an abiding affection for their God, but they will also love their neighbor. A redeemed soul always results in a changed life and that changed life will always reflect the character and will of the Redeemer. Christians love because Christ first loved them. The next logical question is, “In what ways do Christians love others?” John said, “This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us” (v. 16). Further, Jesus said, “This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). Let’s consider how Jesus loved Christians in order to discern a template for how

## 1. Supplying Physical Needs (1 John 3:17)

Jesus commanded His disciples to love each other as He loved them. There are two ways to understand this command. First, we can read this passage as a command and an explanation of how to carry out that command. Second, we can read this passage as an opportunity to consider and ponder the love of Christ toward poor, wretched sinners. This command is a directive, but it is also a description.



How did Jesus describe His love toward His followers in John 15:13?

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Jesus said that there isn’t a greater love than when a person sacrifices their life for another. Don’t forget that Jesus was speaking to His disciples in the upper room during the last supper. He was only hours away from being delivered into the hands of Roman soldiers by one of His own disciples, condemned to death by Pilate, and fastened to a wooden cross.

We can’t know what the disciples thought when they heard Jesus say those words, but their meaning became crystal clear before long. Jesus perfectly exemplified this “greater love” in His sacrifice. Jesus, on the cross of Calvary, did something for sinners that they are unable to do for themselves. He paid the price for sin. He bore the wrath of God. And through His death, He wiped away the sin debt of all those who would call upon the Lord with faith in the gospel and with the repentance of sin.



## How did Jesus' sacrifice on the cross instruct Christians in their understanding and practice of love?

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Christians can't offer themselves up as a sacrifice for the sins of another. Only Christ could do that because only He was a spotless, blameless offering. Jesus loved people more perfectly and more sacrificially than Christians could ever love another. Christians, however, can follow in their Savior's example by loving one another in sacrificial ways that reflect the divine love that Jesus portrayed at Calvary.

Love means sacrificing one's self for the beloved. When Jesus said, "Love each other as I have loved you," He meant that Christians should love their spouse, children, fellow church members, and neighbors in a sacrificial way. He meant that Christians ought to put the good of the beloved before their own good. Jesus meant that their acts of love should be characterized by selflessness and other-centeredness.

Jesus' love was tangible, visible, and concrete. It was a real cross. He bled real blood. He felt real pain. His love went far beyond well wishes. John referred to this when He said, "If anyone has this world's goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God's love reside in him?" (v. 17). Sometimes loving our brother simply means supplying them with physical resources to help meet physical needs.

Lewis Bayly, a church leader in England in the 17th century, gave this counsel regarding the family meal after Sunday morning service: "And when you go to dinner, in that reverent and thankful manner before prescribed, remember according to your ability to have one or more poor Christians, whose hungry bowels may be refreshed with your meat, imitating holy Job, who protested that he did never eat his morsels alone, without the good company of the poor and fatherless; that is the Commandment of Christ our Master (Luke 14:13)."<sup>1</sup>



**Application: What is one specific and tangible way that you can sacrificially love others?**

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## 2. Loving by Telling (1 John 3:18)

In 1 John 3:18, John told his readers that they shouldn't love with empty speech, but in action and in truth. We know what it means to love in action. When our brother or sister needs clothing, then we provide it to them. But what does it mean to love "in truth."



**Read John 15:15. What else did Jesus do out of love for His disciples according to this verse?**

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Jesus said, "I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father." That may seem a strange example for Jesus to give in order to explain how He had loved His disciples and how His disciples ought to love one another. But if we consider carefully what Jesus said here, this way in which He loved them (and us) will become a very great and precious truth to Christians.

The only way for people to know God is if God reveals Himself to them. God must self-disclose if His creation will draw near to Him and understand the truth about Him. God, however, is under no obligation to do so. God doesn't need people, and He would still be a perfectly good and holy God if He chose to remain shrouded in complete mystery and left us to wonder. In fact, because of the sinfulness of man, this is what we deserve.

But God has chosen to reveal Himself to His creation. From Genesis to Revelation we see God's constant overtures toward mankind. This revelation culminates in the Person of Jesus Christ, God in flesh (Heb. 1:1-2). Jesus Christ revealed to His disciples the Word of God. And because of God's care and provision for all Christians in all times, He has preserved His Word in written form for us. The very words that Jesus spoke to His disciples, words He learned from His Father, are preserved for us!




**Why is telling others the truth about God necessary to truly loving them?**

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What could be more loving than to explain to someone what God has said about the condition and salvation of their eternal soul? Like the disciples then, people today are like sheep that have gone their own way. They are in desperate need of instruction concerning God's nature, will, and provision for their lives. Furthermore, Christians likewise are in desperate need of God's Word. Just as a baby must be nourished in order to grow, Christians receive nourishment from the Word of God first and foremost. This doesn't mean that people will always receive God's Word as an act of love, but that doesn't change the fact that it is.


 **Application: What are some specific ways that you can love someone by sharing God's Word with them this week?**

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### 3. Encouragement Toward Good Works (1 John 3:14)

John was addressing all believers in 1 John 3:11-24. He said, "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers and sisters." We should note that he wasn't saying that Christians should love non-Christians (though they should). In this text, He was talking specifically about loving one another. He was telling Christians that they should look around at their fellow Christians and find ways to love them.

 **What encouragement for loving one another is found in this verse?**

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Read what Jesus said in John 15:16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." The mercy and grace of God in Christ is astounding. Christ chose those men; they didn't choose Him. He pulled them from darkness and sin-death to light and life. What a Savior!

Not only that, but He saved them so that they could serve Him. They were to “go and produce fruit.” Here we see the third and final way that Christ loved His disciples and how Christians should love one another. He spurred them on to good works. Jesus made them productive citizens in the Kingdom. Jesus does this in Christians today. As Christians grow in faith and walk in step with the Spirit, then they produce fruit. This is the kindness of the Lord working on behalf of His children, for the children of so great a Father have a growing desire to serve the purposes of their Father. Blood-bought Christians long to do God’s will.

**?** Read Hebrews 10:24. How does this give practical means of loving one another in the church?

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Christians love their fellow believers when they spur them on to good works. The writer of Hebrews exhorted, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Heb. 10:24). Christians should look for opportunities to spur one another on to do God’s will in their lives.

**?** Application: What are some practical ways that Christians can spur one another on to good works today?

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## Conclusion

Those who are in Christ are not only devoted to worshiping and serving God, but they also are diligent to love their brothers and sisters in Christ. This love isn’t an emotional reaction to circumstance, but an abiding affection for and commitment to fellow sinners who have also been called out of darkness into His marvelous light. The love that Christians have for one another is manifested in meeting physical needs, telling them the truth of God’s Word, and spurring them on to good works.



**?** In what ways have others shown you sacrificial love? How have you expressed sacrificial love to others?

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**?** With whom can you share God's Word in an act of love? What has prevented you up to now?

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**?** In what ways do you need to be spurred on to good works? In what ways can you spur others on to good works?

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**CHRIST CONNECTION:** Christians are enabled to do the good work of loving others only because they have been made alive in Christ. The gospel not only saves people, but it makes them free to do good works for God's glory.

**MISSIONAL APPLICATION:** Christians often find that when they love someone through sacrificial service, they are given opportunities to tell the people they are serving about the gospel of Jesus Christ.



# FOR NEXT WEEK

## The Church: Strengthened For Every Good Work

### Main Passages

- 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

### Session Outline

1. Loved, Chosen, and Called by God (2 Thess. 2:13-14)
2. Stand Firm (2 Thess. 2:15)
3. Encouragement and Strength (2 Thess. 2:16-17)

### Memorize

*Those who obey God's commandments remain in fellowship with him, and he with them. And we know he lives in us because the Spirit he gave us lives in us.*

- 1 John 3:24, CSB

### Daily Readings

- Monday - 1 John 3:11-24
- Tuesday - Ephesians 4:32
- Wednesday - 1 Peter 3:8
- Thursday - Galatians 6:2
- Friday - Hebrews 13:16
- Saturday - Philippians 2:1-4

### References

<sup>1</sup>Bayly, Lewis. *The Practice of Piety*. Britain: D. Midwinter, 1716.