

A NEW LOVE

John 3:11-24

INTRODUCTION

We are currently in a series that highlights our core values as a church. So far we've covered the first three: Biblically Grounded, Prayerfully Dependent, and Gospel-Centered. This brings us to our fourth of six core values, which is "Relationally Connected."

God has not designed His church to be isolated but connected. One of the predominant pictures the Apostle Paul uses to describe the church is that of a body. There is no one part of the body that is detached - everything is cohesive and united. If there ever was a rogue body part, it would quickly cease to be alive. Much like a flower slowly dies after being cut from its stem, so any body part dies after being cut away from its body. ***The body is connected as it is so that it might thrive in both diversity and uniformity.***

However, the church is not connected in the same way a human body is. There is a far greater natural element of disunity. When we become Christians, we don't suddenly become physically connected to everyone else - GROSS! No, we venture all throughout town of our own free will with our own free minds. I have my own personality, temperament, sense of humor, experiences, feelings, and ambitions that are totally different from yours! ***Of course these differences create disagreements.*** (ISFP personality joke) This is just one small example of how our differences can create disagreements! And if we're honest, we know these disagreements that settle in our sinful hearts can quickly lead to damage in our relationships. ***You can see the progression: differences → disagreements → damage.***

TRANSITION

It's for this reason that we want to examine what the Bible says about relationships, specifically relationships within the body of Christ. Our text in

1 John 3:11 begins by saying, *“For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.”* The defining characteristic of a true Christian is love. ***Love has a way of overcoming differences, disagreements, and damage.***

The greatest example of this is when Jesus in love upon the cross overcame the damage created by our sin. We were at war with God because of our sin. Yet Christ’s humble example of coming down to earth as a human and sacrificially laying down His life for lost sinners brought reconciliation to our relationship with God. ***His love overcame our differences, disagreements, and damage due to sin.***

And it was this same love that He infused in our hearts so we might love others just as He did with us. ***This new love is what enables us to overcome the differences, disagreements, and damage that we experience with one another. Our main point today is that Jesus has given us a new love with which we are to love one another.***

SETUP

Before we specifically address this new love in detail, we will first diagnose an old problem. Then we will elaborate on our new love. Finally we will conclude with a recurring temptation.

BODY: AN OLD PROBLEM

We will begin with an old problem. You will notice after v.11 commands us to be loving, v.12 gives us an example of someone who wasn’t loving. This person’s name is Cain. ***The story of Cain is an old story of an old problem that still rages in our hearts today.***

It takes us back to Genesis 4. Here we see that both Cain and his brother, Abel, offered sacrifices to the Lord. Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground. Abel brought an offering of the firstborn of his flock, including the fat portions. And it says the Lord had regard for Abel’s offering but not Cain’s offering.

Why did God regard Abel's offering and not Cain's? I think there are two reasons: **First, Cain gave a generic gift from the ground, but Abel gave a special and sacrificial gift from his flock.** It was the firstborn along with the best part - the fat portions. Secondly, Hebrews 11:4 tells us that Abel made his offering **by faith**. It says, *"By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous."* God knew the heart of Abel, that he gave from faith. On the other hand, Cain's offering was made from the flesh. **What we learn here is that the quality of the gift doesn't matter nearly as much as the reason for giving it.**

Now the point here is what resulted in Cain due to his gift being disregarded - **It says he grew angry!** And his anger led him to hate his brother to the point that he murdered him! What's worth noting here is the root cause of Cain's anger: It wasn't due to a disagreement between him and Abel. **It was because of a disagreement between him and God!**

Cain was angry at God so he decided to take that anger out on his brother by murdering him. 1 John 3:12 asks the question: *"And why did Cain murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous."* Because Cain felt unaccepted by God, he decided not to accept his brother. **The first ever murder committed was not a horizontal problem, but a vertical problem!**

This story illuminates the old problem at the root of our issues with others. It's this: **Our problems with others result from our own problems with God.** Think about it: Why do marriages fail? Not just because of damage done person-to-person. The root issue is unresolved damage between them and God. Why do parents forsake their children in adulthood or children ignore their parents? This issue is deeper than mutual problems. It's the unresolved problems we experience with God. **You can bet that if you are not walking with God, you cannot walk well with others.**

Let's give a couple examples that make this believable. In our text of v.12 and v.15 we can see two sinful emotions within Cain that led to the

murdering of his brother. The first was jealousy. Cain was jealous that Abel's offering was accepted and his wasn't. The question is where did this jealousy come from? ***Where does your jealousy come from?*** It comes from experiencing a lack of something you think you deserve or should have in your life. Normally God would be the One who satisfies that need or want, but for some reason He hasn't and it leaves you discontent.

So, ***jealousy sprouts from a lack of contentment in God.*** Because God didn't see Cain as righteous, a void grew in his heart. This void made him jealous of what Abel had which he lacked! ***He allowed his flesh to be amplified because his soul was not satisfied. His vertical problem led to a horizontal problem.***

I wonder what voids or discontents you might have with God? How might that be causing you to relate to others? Are you overcome with jealousy or are you content in the Lord? If you think God should be giving you something that you don't yet have or may never have, this will make you bitter towards others. You will see what they have and proceed to not only despise them but despise the God you love.

Another example closely tied to jealousy is anger, or hatred. V.15 tells us that hatred is the same as murder, whether we carry it out or not! Jesus set the precedent for this in Matthew 5:21-22. Here He says that hatred is the same as murder! Again, the question is, what caused Cain to hate his brother? The clear answer is that the unresolved hatred he had for God caused him to hate his brother. He didn't pursue peace with God, so it trickled out as anger with Abel. Our point is this: ***Anger sprouts from a lack of peace with God.***

If you lack an inner peace with God, many menial things will cause you to become angry. A passing remark from a coworker, even if it was meant to hurt you, will cause your blood to boil and begin looking for a way to retaliate. A petty disagreement in your family that you take personally will cause you to raise your voice in frustration. Or a misunderstanding at

church will cause you to form an assumption that allows subtle and secretive bitterness to grow in your heart.

You can see this lack of peace cannot be contained in the heart. Rather, we wear it on our sleeves. ***Pain in our relationship with God is like a river that must flow somewhere.*** Most likely it will flow into the lives of those around us.

Brothers and sisters, our problems with others result from our own problems with God! ***Our love-problem is ultimately a God-problem.*** This is an old problem that goes back to the beginning of time. This requires us to first address potential problems we may have with God before acting on a problem with another person. When we operate from peace and contentment with God, it significantly changes the way we relate to others. It allows the new love we have in Christ to flow freely into the lives of others.

BODY: A NEW LOVE

This leads us from an old problem to a new love. Look at v.14: ***“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers.”*** Paul is saying, “Do you know what proves the radical transformation of Christ in your life? The fact that you now love the brothers.” Notice that he’s only talking about the way you love other believers. Actually this entire passage only addresses the way we love one another in the household of God!

But his point here is that before the new birth, you wouldn’t have loved them in the same way you are now. ***However, now that you’ve been given new life in Christ, there is a new love that flows from your heart into the lives of others! Our spiritual birth brings a new love for others.***

Before we were operating out of our own definitions and motivations for love: “I will do something nice to you only if you will do something nice for me.” ***Love was very self-seeking:*** “It’s about what I want!” ***Love was***

purely emotional: “I love that person for the way they make me feel.” ***And love struggled to make a commitment***. What if that person stopped loving you? Why should you continue making an effort to love them? ***It all shows how self-orienting love can be despite its effort to be others-oriented***. It’s the reason why the divorce rate is so high and why there is so much pre-marital intimacy: “It’s about what I can get out of the relationship.”

But everything changed when God came into our lives. Before we had our own definition of love, but now we learn as it says in 1 John 4:8, that ***“God is love.”*** And Romans 5:8 says ***“God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”*** This new love has not only displaced our previous definition and motivation for love, but it has radically transformed it! ***It has the ability to heal our (old) problems with others because our previous problem with God has been dealt with!***

Through Christ’s transformation of bringing us from death to life, we now stand in loving awe of the One who loved us even into His own death! ***You see, Christ’s death put to death our old love and His resurrection brought to life a new love within us!*** I want us to see two new ways this love demonstrates itself with others.

First, there is a ***New Humility: We put others before ourselves.*** V.16 says, ***“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”*** This text says that if we want to understand love, we have to look at the example of Jesus. Jesus did not want to die on a cross. In the Garden of Gethsemane He said to His Father, ***“If you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”*** Even Jesus put the will of His Father in Heaven before His own will. In obedience, He humbled Himself and laid His life down. ***Our text says this is love on display.***

It starts with a radical movement in your heart to let go of your will and choose to put others first. This is what Philippians 2:3 says: ***“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more***

significant than yourselves.” Our biggest problem in loving others is our love of ourselves. Before we would happily love others if it didn’t conflict with loving ourselves. But this new humility teaches us to love by laying down our loves to do so!

I wonder where there might be conflict right now between your love of yourself and your love for another, between your will and the will of another? Our new humility in Christ tells us to let go of our loves so that we might freely love others.

This decision often leads to a legitimate sacrifice, which is why Christ’s new love always brings us a ***New Sacrifice: We serve the needs of others at the expense of our own.*** V.17 says, *“But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”* Yet again we see that this new love is not a contrived love we conjure up within ourselves. ***Rather, it is God’s love that’s active in us!*** Here we see that God’s love is not active in someone who does not willingly make sacrifices to help his brother or sister.

The reason the early church was so healthy and evangelistic was because of their willingness to sacrifice their needs for one another. Acts 2:42-47 gives a summary of the early church’s fellowship. V.44 says, *“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”* It was this untethered generosity for the needs within the church that led to the fruit of v.47 that says, *“They had favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”*

Other early Christian writings confirm this radical generosity. The Didache, written around AD 100, was a handbook of moral and practical governance for churches. In one part it says, *“Let your money sweat in your hands until you know to whom you should give it.”* Another part says, *“Share everything with your brother, and do not say it is your own; for if you are sharers in the imperishable, how much more the perishable things?”*

Another early Christian historical writing from AD 125 says, *“They love one another, esteem widows, and rescue orphans from any who ill-treat them. Whoever has [wealth] gives to him who has not, without boasting. When they see a stranger, they take him into their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother.”*

Why express such generosity? Two reasons: ***First, it demonstrates a tremendous Christian witness of love to the person who receives from you.*** The giving of a thing is really the giving of your heart. And not just your heart, but God’s heart. People feel loved by God through the way you lovingly give to them.

Second, you can express such generosity because you already have everything you need in Christ! In heaven right now an unfading inheritance awaits you. Your eternal reward in Christ frees you to give without reservation right now! Jim Elliot famously said, *“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”* I wonder how God might cause His new love in you to produce new sacrifices for others?

SUMMARY

Brothers and sisters, V.18 confirms everything we have said so far. It says, *“Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.”* This doesn’t mean that words of encouragement are unimportant; they just don’t require the same level of sacrifice. Love always goes further when it moves from stationary talk to active deeds. We are reminded from Romans 5:8 that *“God demonstrated His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”* And John 3:16 reminds us that *“God so loved the world that He GAVE His only Son...”*

Our love for one another here at Oakwood must follow this same active demonstration. Yes, let us encourage one another in word, but let it also go further to intentional acts of kindness. So many of you already demonstrate this in such clear ways. Oakwood is a very loving church, but it always has

further to go! ***Our challenge is finding new ways to express Christ's new love for one another through a new humility and new sacrifice.***

BODY: A RECURRING TEMPTATION

But what about when we fail to love others in this way? What if we have failed to do so in very overt and obvious ways? What if these failures to love actually felt like expressions of hate to others? For example, you decide not to help a friend in their time of need. Or you decide not to pick up the phone to give your grieving friend counsel in their hour of loss. Or you decide not to attend a friend's birthday and give them a gift because you were "too busy" that day.

These failures to love can produce feelings of regret and guilt in us. ***And rather than having our faith confirmed by our good deeds, we question our faith because of our lack of good deeds.*** We've talked about an old problem, a new love, but let's finish by touching on a ***Recurring Temptation: Our failure to love others tempts us to believe God's love may fail us.***

The book of 1 John is all about bringing clarity to who a genuine believer is but also about bringing assurance to that genuine believer. Here in chapter 3 the book doesn't fail to accomplish this. V.19-20 say, ***"By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything."***

Our heart tends to condemn us when we fail to love but rather choose to do evil. But here it says God is greater than our heart. ***The interpretation here is that God's hold on our salvation is greater than our feelings that He let go.*** In other words, Truth usurps feelings.

There should never be a time when a Christian should suffer from a lingering guilty conscience. We are not to look back in regret. The Apostle Paul said in Philippians 3:13 that there's ***"one thing he does: he forgets what lies behind and strains forward to what lies ahead."***

If a Christian has a lingering regret or guilty conscience, he doesn't have an emotional problem; he has a theology problem. His issue is that he doesn't understand the extent of the atonement of Christ.

If you are hanging onto a sin, then part of you believes you need to be the one who pays for that sin. Imagine eating out at a nice restaurant for dinner with a good friend. At the end of the meal, your friend says he's going to pay for the food. You try to stop him but he insists. After you leave the restaurant, you decide to sneak back in to pay your portion of the bill. But the waiter says he can't take your money; the bill's already been paid in full by your friend.

Church, that friend sitting at the table with you is Jesus. He paid the full bill for all your sin. There is nothing you've done against Him or someone else that He hasn't entirely paid for and forgiven you for! But if your guilty conscience causes you to despairingly retreat back to help cover the bill then your theology is askew. ***He paid the whole bill so that we can confidently go forward in full forgiveness.*** Praise God!

So to prevent this recurring temptation from gaining a hold in your life, ***fight feelings of guilt with the Truth of God's Word.*** God has cast all of your sins into the deepest ocean. Our job is to live like that's true.

CONCLUSION

We shared at the beginning how the church faces a challenge for unity because of the many differences we all share. We can therefore struggle to truly feel connected to one another as a body of believers. ***But the one thing we've learned today that binds us together despite our differences is the new love we share in Christ.***

We all come from different backgrounds but our final destination is the same. We all have different sins, but our forgiveness in Christ is the same. We all have different bodies, but we are all filled with the same Spirit. We

all have different people we are tempted to be bothered by, but the same love of God has been poured into each of our hearts!

Therefore, it is our job to exercise this new love towards one another.

Consider the love of God in us to be the blood that must flow to all the different body parts. If the blood ever stops pumping, a real threat to our health exists! But if we allow God's love to freely flow through us to others, then our church body will thrive!

My prayer is that this new love finds ways to express itself to others in our church. It starts with learning their name! But may it continue to learning their weaknesses and needs and caring for those needs as the Lord sees fit.

COMMUNION

CLOSING PRAYER