

“A Love or Hate Relationship” (1 John 3:10b-24)

A man was working on a crossword puzzle and asked, “What is a four letter word for a strong, emotional reaction toward a difficult person?” Someone standing nearby said, “The answer is hate.” A lady interrupted and said, “No, the answer is love!” What a response—love...a strong emotional reaction toward a difficult person! We are all working on that same crossword puzzle, but the way we answer is up to each one of us.¹

Today, I would suspect that there are some people in your life that are difficult to love. Perhaps it is your boss or one of your neighbors. Maybe it is your spouse, one of your children, a sibling, or a person in our church. Whoever it is, God is calling you to love that person. Of course, one of the questions we face is, “What does it mean to love?”

The Internet search engine Yahoo! compiled a top-10 list of the words Web searchers want to define. The top two words on the list are “veracity” and “love.” Yahoo! concluded the report noting that “many of us are still trying to find meaning for some of life’s littlest, big words.” Perhaps this report also reveals that truth and love still matter to the average person, even when our culture clouds their real meaning in the chaos of moral relativism.²

In the passage that we are going to look at, John, the beloved disciple, really bears down and formulates his thoughts on his specialty—love. He will declare that love is righteousness in action. John will argue that love is the ultimate expression of spirituality. Therefore, as followers of Jesus we need to go against the flow of our confused culture, and continually renew our minds with the truth about what love is and is not. The source of that truth is what God says in the Bible. In 1 John 3:10-24, we will learn what love is not (3:10b-15), what love is (3:16-18), and what love does for believers (3:19-24).

1. Love rejects hatred (3:10b-15). John begins this section in 3:10b with these words: “**Anyone who does not practice [lit. “do”] righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.**” Now this is a very sticky wicket! John says that the Christian who does not love his brother is not “of God.” What exactly does this mean?³ Some have come to the conclusion that if you’re not loving other Christians, you’re not saved. The NIV contributes to this line of thinking when it inserts the word “child” into the translation, indicating that “anyone who does not love his brother” is not “a *child* of God.” Actually, the word “child” is not in the original Greek text at all. The NIV has bypassed legitimate translation and moved to interpretation.⁴

The interpretation of 3:10b—if you’re unloving, you’re unsaved—has a number of problems, not the least of which is the word “brother.” By simple observation we note that “he who does not love his brother” is nonetheless still “his brother.” He’s an unloving brother, but he’s still a brother. This is significant because John consistently uses the term “brother” in the context to describe a Christian. So logic forces us to conclude that if the unloving brother is still a brother, then he’s still saved. And we are similarly forced to conclude that the phrase “not of God” must mean something other than “not saved.”

Well, what does it mean, then, to say that “the one who does not love his brother” is “not of God?” I think John is saying that when we do not love our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are “not of God” in the sense that this failure to love doesn’t come from God. As believers, each thought, each attitude, each action always raises the question: Where is this coming from? God or Satan? The Spirit or the flesh? When we fail to love others, we have joined sides with Satan and are living according to the flesh. When we love others, it comes from God and His Spirit working through us. The unloving Christian is “not of God” in the sense that God is not behind what he or she is doing. Love is the natural expression of the Christian life.

The Greek word for “love” is the word *agape*. It is the highest form of love. It’s the love that Jesus commands His followers to practice. *Agape* love is others-centered and disregards self—it considers others to be more important than yourself. *Agape* love chooses to serve others for their benefit. It is unconditional. It is sacrificial. It is giving. It is not self-seeking. It is against the flow of our culture. It is hard work. *Agape* love is honoring to God in that it demonstrates to others what He is like. When we love others with *agape* love we are showing off God, because He is the source of *agape* love. We know that when we are loving others with *agape* love, we’re plugged into fellowship with God, drawing on Him as the source of our love. And when *agape* love shines through us, God is honored.

All of this is to say that biblical love is not about affections; it is about decisions! Today, you can choose to love anyone even if you don’t like the person. Nowhere in Scripture are we commanded to “like” everyone, rather, we are commanded to love others (cf. Matt 27:37-40). For love is the most distinguishing factor in the Christian.

John continues his argument in 3:11: **“For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.”**⁵ Again, the word “love” appears. Thus far in John’s letter, the word “love” has appeared seven times. From this point forward, the word “love” will appear 35 times!⁶ The message that John and his faithful followers had heard from the beginning was Jesus’ command to His disciples to love one another as He had loved them (John 13:34-35; 15:12).

In 3:12-15, John begins to argue from a negative vantage point by declaring that we should not behave **“as Cain,⁷ who was of the evil one⁸ and slew⁹ his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous.”** You may recognize this as an allusion to the Old Testament account of Cain murdering his brother, Abel. According to Gen 4, both brothers brought offerings to the Lord. The Lord respected Abel’s offering but did not respect Cain’s. Cain became angry and killed Abel. John uses Cain as a contrasting example of *agape* love, not just because of his act of murder, but because of the self-seeking attitude behind the murder—an attitude that originates not with God, but with Satan. It is “of the wicked one.”

The Bible does not say that Cain was unsaved. A number of scholars believe he was indeed saved.¹⁰ Regardless, Christians have committed murder, as Cain did (e.g., Moses, David). This is why Peter even warned his readers, “Let none of you suffer as a murderer...” (1 Pet 4:15). It should be obvious that Christians are capable of murder and hate. Therefore, we are to recognize that a lack of love for other believers is a very real possibility that must be faced and overcome. Yet, I believe John’s primary concern is not with first-degree murder. Instead, he seems to be suggesting that believers are capable of murdering brothers and sisters in a figurative sense (see Jas 3:14; 4:2).¹¹ Are you happy for your Christian brother or sister who receives a blessing like a new house, new car, a promotion, a raise, public recognition? Do you rejoice when your brother or sister is recognized in church for serving our body? If you really love someone, you’re happy for them. Any other response is of the wicked one.

In 3:13 John writes, **“Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.”** The description “brethren” (*adelphoi*) occurs only here in 1 John. At this most critical point, the author appears to step past his relationship to them as “little children” to openly proclaim them his peers. Perhaps they have already experienced persecution with him. Or perhaps he associates himself with them this way because he knows that if they receive his letter and obey it, persecution will soon come because they have identified themselves with him rather than with his opponents.¹²

John tells his brothers and sisters that just as Cain hated Abel, the world will hate us when we demonstrate *agape* love. This could rightly be translated, “when the world hates you” because the Greek syntax makes it clear that it *will* happen. This does not mean that everyone in the world will hate you. It means that when we love others with *agape* love the world will hate us.

Why is this? *Agape* love goes against the flow of this world. It shines a light in the darkness. And those who are enjoying the flow and the darkness will not necessarily like it. Some will be skeptical; some will feel threatened; others will mock. When we love others, we can't expect to be applauded by anyone but God. In fact, the closer you get to Jesus, the more like Jesus you are in this world, the more this world is going to be uneasy around you (cf. John 15:18). Moreover, Satan himself is going to attempt to hinder you and render you ineffective in your Christian growth and ministry. But please remember that when the world hates you it is not necessarily you that they are angry with. More likely, they are reacting against God in us, rather than reacting against us personally. But John encourages us by saying that although we may not be applauded, loving others with *agape* love is the primary way we can experience the new life that has been given to us as believers in Jesus Christ.

John puts it like this, in 3:14: **“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.”** Love for other Christians shows the presence of new life in us. “Death” and “life” are two vastly different spheres of existence. The contrast shows the great change that has taken place in the believer's life. The one who does not love at all is the person who is abiding in death rather than in eternal life. John made the case extreme to make his point clear. His contrasts are death and life, hatred and love, darkness and light.

The phrase “passed out of death to life” may ring a bell with you. Jesus used the phrase back in John 5:24 when He said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.” John is saying that “we know” (recognize) that we are Christians by the fact that we have love for our brothers and sisters in Christ.¹³ In other words, our salvation can be experienced and appreciated right here and now when we share our Christian love for one another. Love is righteousness in action and provides experiential evidence of our faith.

Author Bryan Chapell tells of some friends who grew up in the church and have a fine house, sweet kids, and good jobs. But the wife has an emotional/mental problem. She periodically steals from her own family and gambles the money away. She's been to counselors, doctors, and pastors, but nothing helps permanently. Imagine your own wife stealing from you, pawning objects of value, withdrawing money from bank accounts intentionally (but not infallibly) denied her, and lying about it for months. Every time she's stolen from her husband and ruined his future, he's forgiven her and taken her back. Even when she gave up on her own life and tried to kill herself, he refused to give up on her. Chapell asked this husband once why he didn't end this marriage, in spite of pressure from many friends and family to do so. His words were courageous and simple: “She is a good mother most of the time, and my children need her. But more than that, they need to know the love of their God. How can they know of a Father in heaven who forgives them if their own father won't forgive their own mother?”¹⁴

This man exhibits a life that is supernatural. He is leaving very little doubt that he has passed out of death into life. Today, will you trust Jesus for this kind of love? Will you submit your rocky marriage to Him? Will you give Him your challenging children? Will you ask Him to enable you to love that Christian?

John closes this section in 3:15 with these gripping words: **“Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”** John does not say that the one who hates his brother and is a murderer does not have eternal life. He says that he or she has no eternal life **ABIDING** in him.¹⁵ Eternal life is not abiding in these believers in the sense that it is not the controlling factor in their lives. When the phrase “abiding in Him” is added, John is referring to a sphere or quality of life—ongoing intimacy/closeness with God. Anything outside of this realm is “abiding in death,” at a spiritual level. We must remember that the emphasis in eternal life is on quality, not quantity. All people exist forever. It's the quality of their existence which differs. And we can experience this improved quality of existence (eternal life) right now as we love our Christian brothers and sisters.

Here's the point I think John is making: By choosing *agape* love, we will experience the new life more abundantly (cf. John 10:10). The issue is not whether or not we have eternal life; all believers have eternal life. The issue is the full knowledge and experience of it. When we love others, we will experience new life to the fullest. When we don't love others, we "abide in death" by acting out of the deadness of the old man who has a deadly attitude toward others.

Can a Christian hate his brother? Yes! When we allow resentment to rise in our hearts, when we withhold forgiveness, when we disregard feelings of compassion, when we resist the promptings of the Spirit to give help, John calls it "hate."¹⁶

We must remember that *John is writing experientially*. John cannot be talking about how one becomes a Christian because no one becomes a Christian by loving his brother! Children of God are capable of both hatred *and* murder. John's point is: You cannot be hateful and living out the new life you possess at the same time. When a Christian hates, he conceals who he really is rather than making it "manifest."¹⁷

These are stern words. You may be thinking, "Well, 'hate' seems like such a strong word. I'm not sure I've ever truly hated anyone. So I'm probably not a murderer like John says." Actually, the context of this verse defines for us exactly what "hate" means. The last half of the verse immediately preceding provides the parallel. The last part of 3:14 and the first part of 3:15 are synonymous; they are restatements of the same idea. Therefore, the one who hates in 3:15 is the same person as he who does not love in 3:14. As such, to hate here simply means to fail to love with *agape* love.¹⁸ This is a very sobering idea: our failure to love with *agape* love is hateful and murderous.

It's made even more sobering by the idea that when we fail to love, we don't have eternal life abiding in us. This does not mean that if you hate someone or even murder someone, you're going to hell. Once again, I'm afraid the NIV may contribute to this notion. Strangely, the translators of the NIV simply drop the word "abiding," suggesting that if you are hateful you simply do not have eternal life. That the word "abiding" is indeed in the original Greek text is undisputed. It's one of John's favorite words, and he doesn't use it needlessly. In the context leading up to 3:15, we have seen that believers may or may not be abiding in Christ (e.g. 1 John 2:6, 28). The issue is not whether the believer is saved; the issue is whether the believer is abiding in the light of God's presence and fellowship.

I take abiding in Christ to mean the same thing as abiding in eternal life because, after all, Jesus is eternal life (1 John 5:20). So when a believer focuses on the new man, living in surrender to the Holy Spirit and the word of God, he is abiding in Christ, he is abiding in eternal life, and he loves his brother. Conversely, when a believer falls back on the old man, he is not abiding in Christ, he is not abiding in eternal life, and he does not love his brother, and it's hateful and murderous. That's the point of 3:15.

[If hatred of a brother Christian is the opposite of eternal life, what does true Christian love look like? John explains.]

2. Love demands sacrifice (3:16-18). In 3:16 John writes, "**We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.**" The opposite of Cain (3:12) is Christ. Cain took a life; Christ gave His life (cf. John 10:11). John's words clearly echo Jesus' words in John 15:13: "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." True Christian love has an objective standard—the love Christ demonstrated when He laid down His life for us. We were by nature His enemies (Rom 5:6-8; Eph 2:1-3). We were guilty, hell-deserving, devil-embracing sinners. We were repulsive to God's pure, unsullied holiness. Yet, God, in His desire to have His wrath appeased, crucified His Son (Isa 52-53; Rom 3:21-26). This gracious act has freely made salvation available to us if we will simply believe in Christ.

Verse 16 is incredibly important. In it, we learn three important truths:

- *Christ's death was voluntary.* John tells us that Jesus “laid down His life.”
- *Christ's death was vicarious.* Jesus died on behalf of others. He laid down His life “for us.” The preposition “for” (*hyper*) is of mega importance. It means “in place of, instead of.” It suggests that the death of Jesus was substitutionary.
- *Christ's death was victorious.* The tense of the verb “laid down” signifies a once-for-all action. When Jesus died on the cross, He exclaimed in triumph, “It is finished!” (John 19:30) That means His death was that of a champion having pulled off a massive coup against the old enemy.¹⁹

The only natural and appropriate response to this is to lay down our life for others. John tells us how to do this, in 3:17-18: **“But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart²⁰ against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”** These two verses make it clear that love is personal, not impersonal. It is active not passive. Mother Theresa once said, “Love cannot remain by itself—it has no meaning. Love has to be put into action, and that action is service.” Or to use the familiar cliché, “Actions speak louder than words!”

In these verses, John moves from the plural “brethren” in 3:16 to the singular “brother” in 3:17. He brings it down to brass tacks! John writes that if we have the ability to meet legitimate needs and we are in a position to “see” (*theoreo*) with our own eyes a brother’s need, we must act. To withhold help from a brother in need, to shut off compassionate action, is to deny the presence of God’s love in our hearts. John is also clear that our first priority is to care for our brothers and sisters in Christ (cf. Gal 6:10). Only when we first care for our fellow Christians, with whom we will spend eternity, are we prepared to care for the needs of the world. That’s why our mission strategy logically entails loving the body and then leading the world.

The Lord is calling each one of us to strive to meet just one person’s need.

- Once a month, we collect a benevolent offering. These monies go toward helping those in our congregation that are in significant need. When you give to this offering, you are loving in deed and truth.
- Every Sunday afternoon, we have a team that goes downtown to minister to the homeless. By serving on this team or furnishing supplies, you are living out the principles of this verse.
- One a month, our church feeds the homeless downtown. When you partner with this ministry, you are able to touch lives in a very meaningful way.
- Once a month, our church opens up our clothes closet and meets the tangible needs of those that need clothing. During this cold time of the year, how important is this act of love?

There is a cartoon of two turtles. One says, “I’d like to ask God why He allows poverty, famine, and injustice when He could do something about it.” The other turtle says, “I’m afraid God might ask me the same question.”²¹

Not only are we to meet one another’s material needs, *agape* love also includes personal service and the giving of oneself to others. There are many people in our churches in need of love who would welcome friendship. If you never see opportunities to show God’s love to others, you are too self-focused. Many people come to church with the mindset, “I need to get my needs met.” In fact, they live each day with that selfish focus. They get frustrated or depressed because others are not meeting *their* needs. The proper way to come to church or to live each day is with the mindset, “Lord, use me to meet someone’s needs.” When you live that way, you find that the Lord does meet your needs. Jesus summed this up well in Matt 6:33: “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

A young mother admitted in a church service that she never seemed to find time for her own personal devotions. She had several little children to care for, and the hours melted away. Imagine her surprise when two of the ladies from the church appeared at her front door. “We’ve come to take over,” they explained. “You go into the bedroom and get started on your devotions.” After several days of this kind of help, the young mother was able to develop her devotional life so that the daily demands on her time no longer upset her.

A precious widow was married to a wonderful man that maintained their yard. Since his death, she hasn’t been well enough to care for the yard herself. Consequently, it has gotten out of hand. So a family in the church adopted her and took the responsibility of caring for her yard.

The reason that many of us do not live out these verses is that we are too busy. A young executive by the name of Josh was cruising down a Chicago neighborhood street in his two-month-old, 12-cylinder, Jaguar XKE, when a brick sailed through the air and struck its shiny, black, passenger door. Brakes slammed, gears ground into reverse, and tires spun the Jaguar back to the spot from which the missile had been launched. Josh jumped out, grabbed the kid that threw the brick, and pushed him against a fender. “That’s my new Jag,” he shouted. “That brick you threw is gonna cost you lots of money!”

The youngster began to sob: “I’m sorry, mister! No one would stop! I didn’t know what else to do. It’s my brother. He rolled off the curb, fell out of his wheelchair, and is hurt. He’s too heavy for me. Please, help me lift him back into his chair.”

Josh’s head of steam evaporated. Straining, he lifted the boy’s brother into the wheelchair, wiped the scrapes and cuts with his handkerchief, and checked to see that there was no serious injury. He then watched the younger brother push the wheelchair down the sidewalk toward their home. Josh never did fix his car door. He kept the dent to remind himself not to go through life so fast that someone would have to throw a brick to get his attention.²² May we learn from Josh.

[As our passage concludes, John addresses a very relevant question as it relates to *agape* love: Why bother? Is *agape* love worth it? After all, *agape* love is hard. *Agape* love is so demanding, so unending, so costly, so humbling, so thankless, and so misunderstood. Sometimes it’s hard to see how *agape* love can be worth the effort. John counters these questions with an amazing truth...]

3. Love cultivates confidence (3:19-24). In these final six verses, John unpacks a primary blessing that will come to a Christian who lives out *agape* love. John explains that a lifestyle of *agape* love gives confidence before God.²³ In 3:19-21 John writes, **“We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him²⁰ in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things.²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God.”** The phrase “by this” refers to what John said in 3:17-18. To the degree that we love others, God will give us confidence before Him. As Peter says, “Love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet 4:8).

In 3:22, John further explains that this confidence can transform our prayer lives. John writes, **“And whatever we ask [in prayer] we receive from Him,²⁴ because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.”** We will receive our requests if our prayers are in accordance with the will of God. John did not state this condition here, but he mentions it later (5:14-15).

John closes this passage with these words: **“This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.²⁵ The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.”** When we live out *agape* love, the Holy Spirit grants us spiritual success in our purposes under God.

There is a legend about a king who decided to set aside a special day to honor his greatest subject. When the big day arrived, there was a large gathering in the palace courtyard. Four finalists were brought forward and from these four the king would select the winner.

The first person presented was a wealthy philanthropist. The king was told that this man was highly deserving of the honor because of his humanitarian efforts. He had given much of his wealth to the poor. The second person was a celebrated physician. The king was told that this doctor was highly deserving of the honor because he had rendered faithful and dedicated service to the sick for many years. The third person was a distinguished judge. The king was told that the judge was worthy because he was noted for his wisdom, his fairness, and his brilliant decisions. The fourth person presented was an elderly woman. Everyone was quite surprised to see her there because her manner was quite humble, as was her dress. She hardly looked the part of someone who would be honored as the greatest subject in the kingdom. What chance could she possibly have, when compared to the other three who had accomplished so much?

Even so, there was something about her; the look of love in her face, the understanding in her eyes, her quiet confidence. The king was intrigued, to say the least, and somewhat puzzled by her presence. He asked who she was. The answer came: "You see the philanthropist, the doctor, and the judge? Well, she was their teacher!" The woman had no wealth, no fortune, and no title, but she had unselfishly given her life to produce great people. There is nothing more powerful or more Christlike than sacrificial love.²⁶

My challenge for us today is that we become individuals who love one another and that we teach one another to do the same.

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Scripture Reading

1 John 3:10b-24

John 13:34-35

John 15:9-14

Luke 10:25-37

Romans 12:10

Galatians 5:6

1 Peter 1:22; 4:8

Study Questions

1. The epitome of “righteousness” is a commitment to love other believers (3:10b). To what degree do I love my fellow Christians? What types of people do I struggle to love? How can I learn to love those that I have difficulty with?
2. John plainly states that the world will hate us (3:13). When have I been hated by the world? What brought this about? In this particular situation, would I do anything differently if I could live it over again? Why or why not?
3. The primary evidence that we are Christians is our love for fellow believers (3:14; cf. John 13:34-35). Does my life provide evidence to those who observe me that I am a growing Christian? Why or why not? What can I do to ensure that my love quotient improves?
4. How have I sacrificially laid down my life for other Christians (3:16)? In what concrete ways have I practically met the tangible needs of others (3:17-18)? How did this make me feel? Share some experiences.
5. How does our love for others give us boldness before Christ in prayer (3:19-24)? Can I sense a lack of power in my prayers when I do not love other Christians? Am I concerned about this? If so, what will I do to begin to love those that I come in contact with? Read 1 Peter 1:22; 4:7-8. What is the general principle born out in these verses?

Notes

¹ Kent Crockett, *The 911 Handbook* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 23.

² Preaching Today Citation: "Searching for Meaning," Yahoo!, <http://buzz.yahoo.com>, (12-03-04); submitted by Rich Tatum, Romeoville, IL.

³ John uses "of God" in a way similar to Gamaliel in Acts 5:38-39. In speaking of Christianity he said the work is either "of men" or it is "of God." If it is "of men," it will come to nothing, but if it is "of God," it cannot be overthrown. He speaks of who is behind the work, men or God. It's like saying the believers are either on God's side or man's.

⁴ Hodges writes, "The NIV rendering here, 'Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God,' is a classic example of theologically motivated translation run amuck. It not only paraphrases the text but misinterprets it at the same time! There is nothing in this text about not being a child of God. How could there be? One *must be* a child of God before one could hate *his* brother. An unsaved man has no Christian brother to hate. Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God's Love* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 152.

⁵ "The whole aim of the Gospel is the creation and strengthening of love." Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John: The Greek Text with Notes* 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 109.

⁶ The beloved disciple uses the term "love" nearly 50 times in five brief chapters.

⁷ This is the only OT reference in John's epistles and the only proper name, except for names of God, in 1 John. This verse is the only direct reference to the OT in the epistle.

⁸ The NIV translates this phrase "belonged to the wicked one." This is a poor rendering. John is not discussing "ownership" of those who hate or love. He is discussing which nature is manifested by love and which is manifested by hate.

⁹ Gk. *sphazo*, the verb for "slaw" or "slay" (used twice in 3:12), has the meaning of "butcher" or "slaughter." See BDAG, Electronic Ed.

¹⁰ E.g., John Sailhamer, "Genesis," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981 [2001]), Electronic Ed.

¹¹ From God's perspective, murder and hate are synonymous. The only difference is the outward act of taking life. The inward intent is the same. The only reason some people have never actually murdered anyone is because of the "bars" that have been put up: the fear of arrest and shame, the penalties of the law, and the possibility of death. But we are going to be judged by "the law of liberty" (Jas 2:12). The question is not so much, "What did you *do*?" but "What did you *want* to do? What would you have done if you had been at liberty to do as you pleased?" This is why Jesus equates hatred with murder (Matt 5:21-26) and lust with adultery (Matt 5:27-30). This does not mean, of course, that hatred in the heart does the same amount of damage or involves the same degree of guilt as actual murder. Your neighbor would rather you hate him than kill him! But in God's sight, hatred is the moral equivalent of murder, and if left unbridled it leads to murder.

¹² Glenn W. Barker, "1 John," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981 [2001]), Electronic Ed.

¹³ If this verse is testing our salvation, we have a problem. What if I am failing to love two, three, or four Christians? If I don't love these brethren, does that mean I am not a Christian? Suddenly we are floating around in the limitless universe of subjectivity again.

¹⁴ Bryan Chapell, "Why He Just Takes It" *Men of Integrity* (September/October 2001).

¹⁵ John views "eternal life" as nothing else than Christ Himself (1:2; 5:20).

¹⁶ Michael Eaton, *1.2.3 John: Focus on the Bible* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 1996), 112.

¹⁷ When someone says, "I hate the church," yet they claim to be a Christian, ask them if they have believed in Christ because this is not what you would expect from a child of God. If they have believed, ask them if they have heard of the judgment seat of Christ because this is not what God approves from His people.

¹⁸ Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John: WBC series* (Waco: Word, 1984), 190.

¹⁹ Sam Gordon, *Living in the Light: 1.2.3 John* (Greenville, SC: Trans World Radio, 2001), 130.

²⁰ The word translated "pity" in the NIV is a Greek noun *splanchna* that denotes the "inward parts" of a sacrifice, then the "sacrifice" itself, then the "inward parts" of the body, and finally the "womb" or "loins."

²¹ Peter John Kreeft, quoted in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 50.

²² Preaching Today Citation: Skip Heitzig, *Jesus Up Close*, quoted in *Men of Integrity* (4-18-05), March/April 2005.

²³ Marshall writes, "This phrase ['before Him,' v. 19] could refer to standing in the presence of God on the day of judgment (4:17), an occasion which might well fill the heart of a man with foreboding. But the context here is one of prayer: dare we approach God with our requests if we feel guilty before him? On the whole, it seems more likely

that this is what is in John's mind (cf. 1 Thess. 1:3; 3:9). We then have a smooth transition to verse 21. See I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*. NICNT Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 199.

²⁴ This verse is often used as a proof-text by the Health, Wealth, & Prosperity movement. But they usually don't bother commenting on the clause that says "because we obey His commands and do what pleases Him."

²⁵ John uses the singular noun for "command" to describe two commands: "believe" (aorist: past time, single action) and "love" (present: ongoing, continuous action). He is saying what has already been accomplished "believing in the name of His Son Jesus Christ" should be demonstrated by how we "love one another." John drops back down to the singular, most important command because he knows we aren't going to remember all of God's commands, so he lays out the essential.

²⁶ Chad Ballard, SermonCentral newsletter, 7-31-06.