

## The Authentic Christian and Brotherly Love

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Rich Nathan  
November 11 & 12, 2017  
The Authentic Christian  
1 John 3:10-18

If someone was to ask you: What is the one distinguishing mark of a Christian, what marks off a Christian as a child of God? What would you say?

Some of you might say: truth – what marks off a Christian is truth! Christians are people who tell the truth. Christians are people who believe the truth. Christians are people who value the truth. Didn't Jesus say:

John 8:32

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

The Apostle Paul tells us:

2 Thessalonians 2:15

So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings<sup>we</sup> we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

But the Apostle Paul reminds us:

1 Corinthians 13:2

If I ... can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge ... but do not have love, I am nothing.

What is the distinguishing mark of a Christian? Some might say that the mark of a true Christian is faith. Authentic Christians are known by their faith. As the Apostle Paul wrote:

Romans 3:28

For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

Last week, the Protestant portion of the Christian church celebrated the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther, who initiated the Reformation, said:

“Justification by faith is the principal article of all Christian doctrine which makes true Christians indeed.”

We know that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Yet, the Apostle Paul writes regarding faith:

1 Corinthians 13:2

... if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

Some might say that an authentic Christian is known by the supernatural – spiritual gifts and spiritual power. After all, Christianity is a supernatural faith. We read in 1 Corinthians 2:

1 Corinthians 2:4-5

<sup>4</sup>My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, <sup>5</sup>so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

Christians are a supernatural people. Christianity isn't just a philosophy or a religion or a worldview. Nevertheless, the Apostle Paul writes,

1 Corinthians 13:1

If I speak in the tongues<sup>α</sup> of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

1 Corinthians 13:2

<sup>2</sup>If I have the gift of prophecy ... but do not have love, I am nothing.

Maybe the authenticating mark is service and care for the poor. The book of James tells us that without works faith is dead.

But the Apostle Paul writes this:

1 Corinthians 13:3

If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

So, truth is essential and faith is necessary and a supernatural element is vital, caring for the poor is critical, but love is always in first place in the Bible.

Love's primacy

After all, John tells us in

1 John 4:7

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

In other words, if we probe God's essence and we ask "What is God's nature?" at its core, the answer is "love". Love was always in first place for Jesus.

Richard Stearns, the head of World Vision, which is a great Christian non-profit organization that helps tens of thousands of people around the world, especially children, who are affected by natural disasters, famine, flood, earthquake. Richard Stearns summarized Jesus' teachings this way:

*Love God. Love your neighbor. That's it. That's the "Bible for Dummies."*

We've been studying a little book in the New Testament called 1 John where the Apostle John repeatedly asks the question, "How do you know if you or someone else is a real deal authentic Christian?" So many people claim to be Christian. "I wear a cross around my neck, therefore I'm a Christian. I read the Bible so I'm a Christian. I was baptized. I go to church. My mother or my grandmother was a devoted Christian so that makes me a Christian." Or "When I was growing up and the church doors were open, we were there, therefore, I'm a Christian."

John, along with the rest of the Bible, tells us that the ultimate test of the reality of our faith is love. 21 times in a little five chapter book, John speaks about love. Today as we continue our series on The Authentic Christian, I've titled my message, "The Authentic Christian and Brotherly Love."

Let's pray.

As I mentioned to you last week, John responded to the heretics who were coming into his churches upsetting everyone by saying that there are three tests, three proofs, of authentic Christianity. First, he says that there's a belief test. An authentic Christian believes that Jesus is the Christ, the divine Christ. Second, John says that there's a moral test. An authentic Christian repents of sin in their life. They don't live lifestyles of sin. Third, there's a love test. Authentic Christians love their brothers and sisters in the church. Three tests to know if you are a real deal Christian: a belief test, a moral test and a love test. John says that if you are truly a Christian, you'll believe certain things, you'll behave certain ways, and you'll love your brothers and sisters in the church.

This week, we're going to focus on the love test. Now, as an artist, John has just two colors on his color palette – black and white. There are no blues, no reds, no yellows, there are definitely no grays. There's no shading, no middle ground, no halfway points, no compromises in the way that John writes. It's black or white. It's either or. In this text that we just read from 1 John 3, you're either a child of God or a child of the Devil.

You either love or you hate. You either give of yourself or you're a murderer. John is trying to awaken people to the seriousness of the heresy. He's drawing a line – it's not a dotted line, it's not a fuzzy line – he's drawing a clear line. You're on one side or the other.

How do we know which side we're on? Let's read:

1 John 3:10-15

<sup>10</sup>This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

<sup>11</sup>For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

<sup>12</sup>Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.

<sup>13</sup>Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters if the world hates you. <sup>14</sup>We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. <sup>15</sup>Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

John is speaking about:

Love's place

John paints his picture of love by painting two opposing visions – a vision of hate and a vision of love. A vision of murder and a vision of generosity and giving. Now, the context of these opposing visions is the family. The dysfunctional family exemplified by Cain and Abel, where Cain murdered his brother, Abel. In contrast to that, John repeatedly speaks to us about our church family and the call to love our brothers and sisters. In fact, John calls us to love our brothers and sisters five times in this little book and to love one another in the church four more times.

In the gospel of Mark, Jesus said something which absolutely stunned his first century audience. Let me read that to you.

Mark 3:31-35

<sup>31</sup>Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. <sup>32</sup>A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

<sup>33</sup>"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.

<sup>34</sup>Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup>Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

You know, Thanksgiving is coming up in just a couple of weeks. These days, at least in America, apart from Christmas and maybe weddings and funerals, families don't really

expect their adult children to come back home to be with the rest of their families. We know these days that adult children have their own lives to live. They have their own families to raise. They need to go where their jobs take them or their studies take them or where new relationships take them. Families in America mostly don't assume that they are going to live in the same city near their adult children.

Jesus says that whoever does the will of God are my brothers and sisters and mother. We just think, "Ok. So what's so radical about that?" After all, many of us are closer to our friends than we are to our siblings. We think it's normal to tell our friends things that we'd never tell our parents or our kids. But in Jesus' world, what he was saying would have been scandalous. It was shocking. The family bond was not like it is in America today. The family bond was tight and it lasted over generations.

The Jews living in the first century lived much more like people in non-Western societies do today. It was normal for adult children to live close to their parents, even in the same house. The family unit would often be a business unit as well, in which everyone in the family – grandparents, parents, and kids – participated in supporting the family. They held everything in common. Loyalty to the family was your first loyalty in the first century Jewish mind. Everything revolved around your blood relatives.

What Jesus is saying in this radical statement in the gospel of Mark is that "I'm going to redefine the whole way you think about yourself and your relationship with God by redefining the way you think about family." Jesus says, "If you become one of my followers then your family is not just those you are related to by blood or marriage. Your family – your brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers and children and grandchildren and grandparents – now extends towards other followers of Jesus."

Do you know that the most common way for the New Testament to refer to the church is that the church is an extended family? We are a big family. 232 times in the New Testament we are called brothers and sisters. There are other metaphors for the church in the New Testament. We're called the body of Christ. We're called the temple of the living God. We're called the new Israel. But by far, the most common way for the New Testament to describe the church is that we are a family together. Church is not a place we go to. Church is what we are. It is impossible to be a Christian without being deeply connected to a church.

I think it's great if your closest friends are also in the church. Many of mine are. But some of my dearest friends are scattered across the country, indeed across the world. The New Testament doesn't say, "Look to the church because the church is where you'll get your need for friendship met." I do believe that you can find many friends in the church, don't get me wrong! But the New Testament says, "Look to the church because the church will be your family." Discovering family is especially critical for us these days. So many of us have extended families scattered across the world. Let the church become your family. Let the church be what the church is.

What does it mean that the church is to be your family? Family is to be a shelter from the storm, from all the storms that break upon our in lives. Where do you run when you are hit by the storms of life – unemployment, a break-up with your boyfriend or girlfriend, problems with extended family? You run for refuge into the arms of your church family.

Family is to be the one place in the world where if you are a total failure, if you are a screw up, if you are facing the storm of your own stupidity, a storm of your own making, that you can run to family and they will accept you. Jesus didn't come just for the well- for the people whose lives are super-successful. He came for those who have been hit by a storm.

Do you understand what it means that we in the church are to be an extended family offering refuge to people who are hit by storms? We do small groups here at Vineyard not because we are trying to multiply meetings, let's just have another church activity during the week from Wednesday at 7-9:30. Let's sit around in a nice little group with a piece of pie on our knee and a cup of coffee saying that we are fellowshipping with each other while we flip back and forth in our Bibles.

That's not why we do small groups here. We do small groups – women's groups, men's groups, coed groups, and support and recovery groups because people are being blasted by storms and we must have hundreds of refuges in this church for those who are struggling with loneliness; those who are struggling in their careers; for those who are reeling from the pain of a child's rebellion or a child's disability; or the disability of a parent or spouse; or who are fearful or alone because they are widows or widowers; or folks who are simply beaten up by the world.

*Some of you still need to get connected with a small group! Community Life is hosting a great event called GroupLink this Tuesday.*

GroupLink  
Tuesday, Nov. 14 @ 7:00pm  
Cooper Road Campus

*It's a large meet and greet where you can meet different leaders of existing groups or even start a group with people in your neighborhood. Don't worry if you're an introvert the idea of a big group doesn't appeal to you. The event will be structured to help you meet folks and find a good fit. **The event is this Tuesday at 7pm at Cooper Rd. in the high school room.** We'll be starting groups from all campuses.*

You know, there are lots of Christians in this church who are really trying to be faithful and stand up for Christ in their college and high school classrooms, in their workplaces, in their neighborhoods and in their extended families. And every once in a while they get beaten up as they faithfully bear witness to Christ. It is in the context of their church

family that they can run to their brothers and sisters and say, “I am hurting. I just got beaten up. I need you guys as a refuge, as a safe place.”

It’s in Jesus family, getting together with a small group of Christian guys or Christian women, or in a coed setting or in a support for life group that we can practice the family relationship of Romans 12:15.

Romans 12:15

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

I read a story about a 4-year old child, whose next door neighbor was an elderly man, who recently lost his wife. On seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the older gentleman’s yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his mother asked what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, “Nothing. I just helped him cry.” That’s what families do. They help sad people cry. We have so many folks in the church who recently lost loved ones. The church is a family where we can help people cry.

Family is a training ground for life. How is it that we pass along our faith so that the next generation is not simply a bunch of barbarians? Where does it happen that a child learns to function in the larger world and relate to other people as a civilized human being? Where does it happen, if it happens? It happens in family.

Lots of people who are coming into our church family have never had anyone teach them how not to quit. If they are angry, or experience rejection or are misunderstood, the church can teach people not to quit!

Where do people learn to tell the truth? We learn to tell the truth in the extended family called the church and particularly in our church’s small groups where we get to practically live out our family relationships.

It is in the extended family called the church that men and women learn healthy non-sexual ways of relating to members of the opposite sex. Some men and women who come into our extended church family have never learned how to simply have a healthy non-sexual relationship with someone of the opposite sex. People need family to be made into disciples of Jesus. The church is that family!

As I said, John paints in two colors – in black and white. And in verse 12, John speaks about love’s opposite.

Love’s opposite

1 John 3:12

Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous.

1 John 3:15

Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

To hate someone is to dehumanize them, to look at them and not see them as a person made in the image of God. So we can neglect them because they are not fully human to us. So we can abuse them. We hate someone when we neglect their existences. When we treat them as nothings. Let me bring this down and ask you a personal question. As we move into the holiday season, is there anyone who has become a nothing to you? A non-person? An ex-spouse perhaps? Your in-laws? Your current spouse's ex-spouse? Your parents? Your siblings?

The Cain within us treats people as nothings. These are non-humans that I don't need to pay attention to – a grandparent or a great-grandparent who is in a nursing home. I don't need to visit my great aunt. Is there anyone that you say, "I don't owe them any responsibility at all. I'm allowed to shut my heart to them. I'm allowed to shut my ears to their concerns."? Is there anyone about whom you say, "I don't need to pray for them. I don't have to feel anything about them anymore. I don't have any duty to this non-person."?

The Cain within us treats people as nothings. The heart of Cain looks at people as objects to be used for our own advancement or our own pleasure. If you want to see a perfect example of the Cain within us, someone who hates their brothers and sisters, consider the continual revelations of sexual harassment and sexual abuse over the past few months. Harvey Weinstein, Judge Roy Moore, Kevin Spacey, Bill O'Reilly, Louie CK and the tens of thousands of sexual assault victims who are using the hashtag #MeToo. To an abuser, what are the women and men that they've been harassing other than objects? Non-persons to be used. Not fully human. Not people with feelings. This is not a person, he or she is just someone you have sex with or molest, a piece of meat that you chew up and spit out. They're not someone's daughter or son or sister or brother, not someone made in the image of God. Whenever we treat people around us as objects, as nothing, we are acting like Cain the murderer. Cain the hater.

John says, in contrast to the model of Cain, here is what love should look like in a family. How do we know what love is? John gives us...

Love's pattern

How do we say, "I love you?" You could buy one of those books – 100 or 1000 ways to say it.

Scientists have actually put together a mathematical formula for calculating couples love for each other. It wouldn't be America unless something like love was quantified and we could attach a number to it. But these scientists have an equation involving four factors that can be plotted on a graph and you can know exactly where you line up; what percentile you are in regarding love.

Some biochemists have attempted to reduce love to our chemistry. They have identified a hormone, oxytocin, which is suggested to be at the core of many of our expressions of love to each other. Love is chemistry, nothing more!

John says that love isn't just figuring out the right thing to say. Love can't be reduced to an equation. Love isn't just your biochemistry, though biochemistry will be involved in love.

Again, let's read verse 16:

1 John 3:16

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Jesus is the ultimate model to be imitated by authentic Christians. If you want to know if you're a real deal Christian, do you often ask yourself the question, "What would Jesus do in this situation?" Genuine Christians are called to be imitators of Christ. We're to be peacemakers in our families and in our workplaces because Christ is a peacemaker. We're to forgive other people because Jesus forgave us. We are to be generous because Jesus was generous. We should be humble because Jesus was humble. We're supposed to be kind because he's kind. We're merciful because Jesus is merciful. We should tell the truth all the time because Jesus is the truth. Most importantly, we're to love our brothers and sisters. Do you know what love towards our brothers and sisters ought to look like? Listen to Jesus' own words:

John 13:34

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

The pattern for love is Jesus. We say, "This person doesn't deserve to be helped or to be loved." Jesus says, "You didn't deserve to be helped or be loved by me. Love them as I have loved you." If you're not convicted by those words, brothers and sisters, you're not thinking deeply enough about these words. "As I have loved you." How has the Lord loved us? Does he love us only when we deserve to be loved? Does he love us only when our behavior has been acceptable? Does the Lord love us only when we've been faithful or when we've been unfaithful? Jesus says love one another as I have loved you!

There's a particular way that love is to be expressed. The model is Jesus. The pattern is Jesus. And finally, love is very practical.

### Love's practicality

Here's what we read:

#### 1 John 3:17-18

<sup>17</sup>If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? <sup>18</sup>Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

Love is very practical. You don't necessarily have to give people what they are asking for. As a general rule, we ought to help. A simple way to put into practice 1 John 3:17-18 is to give to Vineyard Christmas for Kids.

We've been doing Vineyard Christmas for Kids here at our church for years. Those of us who have the world's goods, we have money, we donate money to our brothers and sisters in the church who otherwise couldn't afford Christmas for their kids and families. Don't just wait until you're in the mood to give, obey 1 John 3:17,18. Take money from your wallet or your purse or if you have a check and make a donation to Vineyard Columbus and put in the memo line "Vineyard Christmas for Kids" or "VCK" and put that donation in the boxes on your way out of the auditorium today. At our campuses, there is a box in the back that you can put the money in.

If you have the world's goods and you see someone in need, give. Love is very practical. Give to people in need. If you see a hungry person on the street offer to buy them some food. You don't have to slip them a \$20. Ask, "Can I buy you a sandwich?" Marlene and I frequently drive by folks who are homeless and we say, "Gosh, I want to do something for this person. They are standing out here on the highway." One way to help is to have a Ziploc bag filled with some items in your car. Give these items to a homeless person when you have an opportunity to bless them, in the bag could be gloves, a hat, or some thermal socks. You can go online for some suggestions. We're collecting backpacks to distribute to the homeless this Christmas. You can find out what items to put in the backpack.

I want to finish today's talk by showing you a video. If someone was hungry and asked you to share your food, would you share? Or would you help them out by buying them something?

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- I. Love's primacy
- II. Love's place
- III. Love's opposite
- IV. Love's pattern
- V. Love's practicality