**How To Love!**

**1 John 3:13-18**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text says, “Whoever does not love, abides in death.” That is a very succinct summary of the entire Law of God, both table could be summed up in the command – Love! Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself. It is a command of which we fall far short.

So, the question we might ask is, “How to love?”

Our text says, Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 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? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

We know that the world hates us. It hates us because it is enamored with Satan. It is enamored with evil. It hates Jesus! And it hates Jesus because people lant to be the masters of their own destiny, they want to be their own saviors, they do not want to be called sinners in need of repentance.

In short, they do not want to be loved. I know, you are thinking, “What do you mean pastor, everybody wants to be loved!” Really? If people wanted to be loved, then they would be overjoyed to hear that Jesus loved them so very much that He died upon the cross to purchase their forgiveness. His love moved Him to die that they might never die. He loved, by giving His life that they might have eternal life.

You see, we are told about the highest kind of love later in John’s first epistle. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

How do I know they do not want to be loved? Simple, they do not want to have anything to do with the only act of true love in the history of the world. Too many do not want to believe they are sinners in need of what Jesus did for them, out of His great love for them. You remember what I said last week about those who do not believe in hell? Those usually do not believe they are sinners.

It should be easy to be a Christian. All you need do is believe and confess that you are a sinner, and trust in Christ for forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation – out of God’s great love. The problem with that for many, is that also requires them to declare their pet sin is truly sin, and that they are to turn away from it. They would rather remain in the love of their sin, than truly be loved.

That is what it means when our epistle lessons says, “Whoever does not love abides in death… By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 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? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

How are we to love? We are to love by knowing what true love is. True love is what Christ has done for us. In love, He laid down His life for us. We are to love in the same manner, lay down our lives for the brothers.

How do I love then? Well, it is not a feeling in the heart. Love is not getting what you want. As our text says, Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

Love is sacrifice of self for another. It is doing the dishes. Love is cooking supper for your husband! Love is cooking supper for your wife. Love is cleaning the garage. Love is mowing the lawn. Love is doing what mom or dad said – without grumbling. Love is not “knowing your wife” tonight, but it is shutting off the TV in the middle of your favorite show, doing a Bible reading, reading a meditation on that reading, having a prayer with her, then talking with her, giving her your full attention.

And then, the next night, love is not “knowing your husband” tonight, but shutting off the TV in the middle of ***your*** favorite show so that you might have time in God’s Word, meditation upon it, and prayer. Then talking with him, giving him your full attention.

What part of your life do you sacrifice in order to love your neighbor? Do you sacrifice a few hours to help your neighbor with a broken arm clean the gutters? Did you pass on a few dollars to the person in line in front of you at the grocery because when all was totaled, they began to remove stuff from their cart because they did not have enough money?

What was the sacrifice you made so that you could help another? You want to know how to love? That is how you answer it!

How to love? Here is another way, and our text says it quite plainly, “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” Unwillingness to forgive others, to hold onto the hate that consumes our heart, is the same as saying that Christ’s death for their sin was not payment enough. Unwillingness to be reconciled with our neighbor is an unwillingness to love. Unwillingness to forgive is the same as desiring that they perish eternally. It is like saying, “They can go to hell for all I care.” How vile and evil are such thoughts? Such thoughts are not loving.

Concerning the things you heard in these last few paragraphs, I think it is safe to say to you – as I said to myself as I wrote those words – Repent!

Repent and be loved. We love because He first loved us. Jesus is love incarnate. Out of His great love for you, for me, and for all mankind, He knew death so intimately that we might not have to come to know death.

You are to abide in this love of God. You are to know His love intimately through the hearing of His word and the receiving of His body and blood in the Blessed Sacrament. These are the gracious means God has instituted to bestow upon you His love, and to move you from abiding in the death of your sins. Christ takes death away from you.

When we refuse to abide in the love of God in Christ Jesus - when we fail to take advantage of hearing the absolution in which Christ’s love cleanses us of our sin, we seeking death eternal.

When we forget the love of God, given in baptism, we abide in death.

When we neglect Christ’s love, failing to regularly and frequently eat and drink of His body and blood in the Lord’s Supper, we are embracing death.

God desires to love you in Christ Jesus. He desires to give love incarnate to you, to give forgiveness and life to you.

When you act like those in the Gospel lesson, who had other things to do and refused the invitation to come to the feast, you are despising God by despising His gifts. This is the feast! Do not be those who did not come and find yourself eternally out of the eternal banquet.

But God does not relent. God knows your sin and your death. He loves you and grants to you His life. He gives to you His love. You know of His love, for you have knowledge of how He loves you. You know He was born of a virgin and lived the perfect life of love that He lovingly sacrificed unto death to pay for your sin – to pay for your lack of love. You know that He rose again on the third day, proclaiming victory over sin and death. You know that He ascended into heaven and there pleads your case before the Father. But you need more than simple head knowledge.

Dearly beloved of God, it is by His grace that God wants to save you, through His undeserved gifts to you. His grace comes to you in marvelous, loving, gifts to you. These gifts bestow the love of God in Christ Jesus, and work faith in you to trust the benefits of His perfect life and His innocent suffering and death.

How to love? Abide in love! Abide in Christ! Live in the forgiveness, life, and salvation He grants unto you.

Live each day in Christ. For those who live in Christ, have overcome and defeated death. To live in Christ is to live in God’s love. Living in love, leaves no room for death. Death has no power over Christ, and so, as you are in Christ, death has no power over you.

Love absolves your sins – it forgive you for all those times when your love for God faltered and failed, and forgives you all those times you loved yourself more than your neighbor.

Live each day in Christ. Live each day in your baptism. Baptismal waters daily cover you, drowning and putting to death all sin. As you daily sorrow over your sins and turn from them to trust in the forgiveness purchased by Christ, you are raised to a new life, a life lived in Christ.

Today God would love you! Come to the table. Eat and drink of the love of God in Christ Jesus, His body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sin. God would love you in Christ, and in Christ there is no death. In Christ Jesus you are the beloved of God – for all eternity. Amen.