

# The Books of 1, 2, and 3 John

## Lesson 6: Love One Another in Deed and Truth -- 1 John 3:11-24

It is one of the oldest stories in the Bible, and John reaches all the way back to it. Two brothers bring their offerings. One is accepted, one is not, and instead of repenting, the rejected brother turns on the one God favored. Cain rises up and kills Abel. John uses it as a dark mirror: "We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother." And then the unsettling question: why did he murder him? "Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous." Hatred, John is saying, is not a private feeling. It has a family tree, and Cain is at the root of it.

So do not be shocked, John says, if the world hates you. The same spirit that rose up in Cain still rises against the righteous. But here is the line that ought to stop us in our tracks: "Whoever does not love abides in death." And then, even sharper: "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer." John refuses to let us hold hatred at a comfortable distance, as though only the violent are guilty. The cold heart and the clenched fist are cousins.

But John never leaves us in the dark for long. He turns from Cain to Christ. "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us." There is the definition. Not a feeling, not a sentiment, but a Savior on a cross, pouring out His life for us. And the conclusion is breathtaking in its plainness: "we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers." Real love is cross-shaped. It costs something. It shows up not merely in words but in food shared, needs met, lives spent.

Then John brings it home to the place we need it most: the conscience. He knows our hearts can condemn us, can whisper that we are not loving enough, not faithful enough, not enough. And he answers that anxious voice with the gospel: "God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything." When we love in deed and truth, we reassure our hearts before Him, and we draw near with confidence. Love, it turns out, is not only how we obey God. It is how we come to rest in Him.

**Group Discussion:** John says that real love is not merely words but action and truth, and points to Christ laying down His life as the model. Why is it so much easier to talk about loving people than to actually lay down our time, comfort, and resources for them?

**Personal Reflection:** John says that when we love in deed and truth, we can reassure our hearts before God even when our hearts condemn us. Is there a place where your own heart condemns you, and how might loving God and others actually quiet that anxious voice?

*Read 1 John 3:11-24*

## Study Questions

1. John says, “this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another” (v. 11), and contrasts it with Cain (v. 12). What does the example of Cain teach us about the real nature and source of hatred, and where it leads?
2. John says we should “not be surprised” that the world hates us (v. 13). When you face misunderstanding or hostility for following Christ, do you respond with bitterness, with self-pity, or with the love John commands? What would change if you expected such opposition?
3. John writes, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers” (v. 14). What does this teach about love for fellow Christians as evidence of genuine spiritual life, and what does the absence of such love reveal?
4. John says bluntly, “everyone who hates his brother is a murderer” (v. 15). Is there someone you have written off, resented, or quietly wished ill toward? How does Jesus’ standard expose the condition of your heart toward that person?
5. John defines love by the cross: “by this we know love, that he laid down his life for us” (v. 16). How does the cross redefine what love actually is, over against the way our culture defines love as mainly a feeling or an affirmation?
6. John asks how God’s love can abide in someone who sees a brother in need and “closes his heart against him” (v. 17). When did you last truly see a need you could meet, and what keeps your heart open or closed in those moments?
7. John urges, “let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth” (v. 18). What does this teach about the difference between professed love and practiced love, and why does God insist that real love show up in concrete action?
8. John says that loving in deed and truth lets us “reassure our heart before him” (v. 19). Where do you most need your anxious, self-condemning heart quieted, and how might obeying God in love bring you that assurance?
9. John says, “whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments,” and names the commandment as believing in Jesus and loving one another (vv. 22–24). How does this passage tie together faith, obedience, love, answered prayer, and the abiding presence of God, and what does it teach about the kind of faith that truly saves?
10. Look back across this passage, from Cain to Christ, from cold hearts to laid-down lives. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you, through this passage, into someone who loves not merely in word but in deed and in truth.

## Now or Later

**Reflect on these passages:** Genesis 4:1–12, the account of Cain and Abel that John draws on; John 15:12–13, no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends; Luke 10:25–37, the good Samaritan who loved his neighbor in deed; James 2:14–17, faith without works toward a

needy brother is dead; Matthew 25:31-40, ministering to Christ by ministering to the least of His brothers.