

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fifteenth Sunday After Trinity, September 28, 2014**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 398, 401, 405, 403, 644.

Lessons: Psalm 119:115-135, Revelation 2:1-7, Mark 12:28-34a.

Sermon Text: 1 John 3:11-18

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The Word of God in John's letter tells us that *"anyone who does not love his brother"* (1 John 3:10) is not a child of God. John comes back to love, brotherly, Christian love again and again. John repeatedly shows God's abundant love for believers in this letter. Brotherly love is part of the very essence and substance of the Christian life. The tree is known by its fruit, and the faith of the Christian must be revealed in love.

That, according to the Word of God, and according to the last instructions of Jesus, is the outstanding trait and characteristic of the believer. As we continue our series on First John, we could say

**IT'S ALL ABOUT LOVE**

1. *"We should love one another."*
2. *"Do not be like Cain," but beware of hate!*
3. **How we show love.**

Hate is the lack of love. If one does not love, he is caught up in hate.

John has been called the apostle of love.

So how does one learn love? From birth humans are selfish. We want. We want food. We want someone to give us love. We want someone to take care of us and give us things. And I think that most of us have been blessed with a mother's love that she fed us and cared for us. A father's love that he provided for us and cared for us. And so we learned love from examples. But we had to be taught even more – to share, to be kind, to give. All these ways of showing love were taught to us in childhood – early childhood if we were fortunate – by Christian parents and others who loved us and gave to us – their time, their possessions, but especially of themselves.

But the greatest teacher of love is God. *"We love him, because he first loved us."* (1 John 4:19 King James Version), or as the New International Version reads, *"We love because he first loved us."* True love comes from God. If it weren't for him, and his loving us first, we'd have and know no love at all. God's love shows itself especially in his forgiving our sins. God is just and faithful to assure us of the forgiveness of our sins as we repent and confess them to him. Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the price for all our sins. His Holy Word assures us that all our sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. That is the greatest of all possible loves.

We learn about God's love from his Word and from his forgiving our sins, as taught in his Word. We don't learn about it from nature, or the things God created. From them we learn only about God's power and that he is wise, eternal, powerful and divine.

John previously told us *"But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him."* (1 John 2:5)

In our text today John returns to a theme he had written about – love and hate – in the previous chapter: *"Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. Anyone who*

*claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him."* (1 John 2:7-11)

Loving one another is founded and based on God's love for us. It all starts there. *"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."* (1 John 2:15)

Look at how grand and special God's love for us is: *"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him."* (1 John 3:1)

Our text is the first place in this letter where John specifically says *"love one another"*. Now he is getting into a major idea of this letter.

Paul had written this about love in Romans 12:9-10: *"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves."* He also wrote to the Thessalonians: *"Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other."* (1 Thessalonians 4:9)

Peter wrote: *"Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king."* (1 Peter 2:17)

And the writer to the Hebrews emphasized *"Keep on loving each other as brothers."* (Hebrews 13:1)

If someone reading John's letter expected some grand new teaching, he would be disappointed. This is not a new message. As God loved and continues to love us, we should love one another, *"This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another."* In fact, Jesus' disciples had heard this before, on the same night in which Jesus was betrayed, recorded in John 13:34-35: *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

Then he gives a terrible example of not loving, of lack of love, of hate. This is an example of an especially terrible sin, terrible in that it led to the death of another human being. *"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."*

Cain murdered his brother and *"Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him."* Here God equates hate with murder! John here is much sharper than in the previous chapter where he wrote *"Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness."* (1 John 2:9)

*"Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you."* Hate and lack of love is the normal, original state of everyone. It is only when Jesus Christ comes into one's heart that we can know real, true love.

*"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death."* We know we will have everlasting life in heaven because we love each other and vice versa, the love we show for each other shows we have eternal life. This is not why we will have eternal life. We have eternal life as a free gift from God, who sent his only-begotten Son to earn eternal life for us. Loving our brothers is an example of good works showing that we have faith. The epistle of James is especially clear here *"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do."* (James 2:14-18)

John goes on: *"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."* This is really what love is. In perhaps that best known of Bible passages, John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life,"* we learned that the Father loves mankind and each of us. Here it becomes plain again that God's very only-begotten Son loves us and this is how we show it: that we are willing to sacrifice for our brothers.

***“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. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”*** We ought to; we should lay down our lives for our brothers. Drastic? Yes, but that certainly shows ultimate love. After all, that is what Jesus did for you!

John uses the word “brother” consistently to refer to Christian brothers. However, Scripture also makes it clear that we should treat all men as we do our Christian brothers. God repeatedly tells us ***“Love your neighbor as yourself.”*** (Mark 12:31)

Less drastic than dying for one another but very important in showing Christian love is sharing material possessions with those in need. People in John’s day were certainly persecuted and often suffered and often had their belongings confiscated, taken away. In some places Christians were in real danger of even being executed. So this was a problem even in John’s day. Here was an opportunity to show that God’s love was in their hearts. So, too, don’t we daily have opportunity to show love in this way? If we do not share and do not want to share, how can God’s love be in us?

The apostle Paul had received this divine revelation as recorded in Acts 20:29-31: ***“I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.”*** Paul had served as pastor in Ephesus, a congregation John had also, later, apparently served in Ephesus. John is writing to combat that very problem. False teachers did come in to the congregation at Ephesus. Our epistle lesson, the letter to the church at Ephesus in the book of Revelation, tells of the problems facing this congregation. The book of Revelation was also written by John. False teachers obviously downplayed the role of loving one another in the lives of the Christians. They were also sowing the seeds of what later became known as Gnosticism, questioning the fundamentals of the Christian faith, and the true relationship between the deity and the humanity of Jesus. And they were questioning who really is a Christian, who is a genuine believer. They wanted to open the definition of who is a Christian a little wider to include some other people, people who didn’t believe Jesus died for all their sins, people who didn’t believe Jesus was really, truly the very Son of God come to earth. They wanted some inclusiveness without repentance and without a confession of faith in Jesus Christ. Doesn’t that sound like many churches even today? John, who lived to see the fulfillment of Paul’s prophecy, writes these letters to emphasize the truth of the gospel and the importance of living by God’s truths.

John is writing most likely from Ephesus first of all to the church in Asia Minor, but of course this letter, this inspired Word of God was then distributed to the whole church warning them about the insidious inroads of false doctrine. And he calls for love, true, genuine, God-worked love.

***“Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”***

In this final admonition in our text we find encouragement to love, not just in words, but in deeds, and to let it all be a truthful, honest love. Only God can see into the heart to see what is really there. What is in the heart often becomes visible in the life of a human.

Let the love in our hearts, which springs from God’s love for us, always be shown in our words and actions! Amen.