



The Marks of a True Christian (1 John 3:10-24)

I. INTRO

- A. A woman was surprised at church one day when another woman, who had often snubbed her, went out of her way to give her a big hug before the service.
1. She wondered what had initiated the woman's change of heart.
 2. The surprised woman received her answer at the end of the sermon that day when the pastor said: "Your assignment for next week is the same as last week. I want you to go out there and love somebody you just can't stand."¹
- B. If loving others were only as easy as giving a hug to someone you don't like, then we all could excel in love. Just hug it out and move on!
- C. But, real love [the Greek word is *agapao*] is a bit more difficult than that! It requires continual effort, because at the heart of loving others is putting the other person ahead of yourself, and that can be a huge battle.
- D. For this reason, the NT as a whole and Grandpa Pastor John in this letter never tire of exhorting us to love one another.
- E. John was present to experience the love Jesus demonstrated at the Last Supper, when Jesus took the basin of water and washed the disciples' feet. He then heard Jesus say: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all [people] will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." --John 13:34-35
- F. Then John was also present for the supreme demonstration of Christ's love when Jesus willingly went to the cross to die for our sins. And so the "son of thunder" became known as the "apostle of love."

¹ Adapted from *Reader's Digest*, Apr 2002: 48.

- G. In our text for today, John is in the second cycle of applying the three self-scoring tests of authentic Christianity:
1. The **moral test** of joyful and responsive obedience to Jesus Christ because of what He has done for us (2:28-3:10).
 2. The **relational test** of forgiving and loving one another because Jesus has forgiven and loved us.
 3. The **doctrinal test** of believing the gospel – that Jesus is God, come to earth to live perfectly and die horrifically for those whom He has adopted into His family.
- H. I will read our text for today, pray, and then we will see what John has to say about the marks of true Christian.
- I. Without trying to be too simplistic v. 10 is a kind of thesis statement for what follows and vs. 23-24 are summarizing statements: ¹⁰ *By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.* ¹¹ *For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another;* ¹² *not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.* ¹³ *Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.* 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.* ¹⁵ *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.* ¹⁶ *We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* ¹⁷ *But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?* ¹⁸ *Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.* ¹⁹ *We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him* ²⁰ *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;* ²² *and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.* ²³ *This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.* ²⁴ *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. --1 John 3:10-24

II. BODY

- A. This passage identifies three marks of a Christian – one is implicit in the thesis statement and two are explicit in v. 23.
- B. So, I would like to focus in on them and consider three points:
1. **V. 10: The implicit mark of a true Christian is GRATITUDE (continuous grateful worship) over our adoption into God’s family.**
 2. **V. 23: The first explicit mark of a true Christian is to BELIEVE in the name of God’s Son Jesus Christ. (This is a continuation of the doctrinal test that we have looked at for the last two weeks.)**
 3. **V. 23: The second explicit mark of a true Christian is to LOVE one another.**
- C. So, the marks of true Christianity according to Grandpa Pastor John are: **GRATITUDE, BELIEF, and LOVE.** We’ll look at them one at a time:
1. **V. 10: The implicit mark of a true Christian is GRATITUDE (continuous grateful worship) over our adoption into God’s family.**
 - a. In 3:1 we are told that Christians have been adopted into the family of God: *“Behold what manner of love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” --1 John 3:1 (Adaptation of KJV, NIV, ESV)*
 - 1) It is a statement that conveys worshipful bewilderment at the miraculous good fortune of being adopted into God’s family.
 - 2) Last week I spoke about John moving from *knowing* to *beholding* right in this verse.
 - 3) Adoption is a powerful image for the Christian – we are saved by God’s mercy and grace.
 - 4) Adoption is a legal declaration – once and for all time.
 - 5) When a child is adopted there is a moment when the papers are signed – the child who was not your son or daughter is now legally your son or daughter.

- 6) Likewise, becoming a Christian crosses a legal line – passing from “not being” to “being” in the family of God.
 - 7) And let’s not forget 1 Tim 2:4: *“[God] desires all [people] to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*
--1 Timothy 2:4
- b. With that attitude of gratitude let’s look again at v. 10: *“By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.”* --1 John 3:10
 - c. *John is making a very powerful statement in this verse – and one that becomes extremely controversial in our western 21st century cultural climate: John is saying that, ultimately, there are only two families on planet earth and everyone belongs to one of the two – either we are children of God or children of the devil. (That’s pretty heavy.)
 - d. Because this can be a very threatening and controversial statement in our western culture, I would like to be as practical as possible and build a case for John’s statement...
 - 1) Every human on the planet is a spiritual being. Even people who say they are not spiritual make multiple spiritual decisions and exercise faith every day. These decisions determine the state of their spiritual condition.
 - 2) Everybody has spiritual beliefs and makes faith choices.
 - 3) Science is a systematic discipline that builds and organizes knowledge in the form of testable and repeatable explanations about the universe.
 - a) Science consists of empirical observations and evidence that can tell us what IS but when science begins attempt to tell us what OUGHT to be it – then it crosses the line into religious (or moral, or philosophical) beliefs.
 - b) If someone, for instance, were to assert that everyone has to decide for himself or herself what is right (or moral). That statement is a religious premise, which is a belief, not a scientific empirical fact.

- c) If that same person decided there is no judgment day – that everyone gets to decide morality for himself or herself – that is a religious belief. It's not based on science. Correct?
 - d) Someone could scientifically study the universe and determine that no evidence of God could be found. S/he could then make a spiritual determination that there is no God. But would this person have scientific proof that there is no God?
 - e) People base their entire destiny (and perhaps eternity) on beliefs without any scientific evidence all the time.
- 4) So, everyone has made SOME kind of faith determination. Everyone has faith premises.
- 5) **Here is what it comes down to – and what John is saying in v. 10: We can either decide that God is my Judge or I am my own judge. These are the only two religions – two spiritual families.
- a) The first created being who asserted that he was competent to run his own life without accountability was the devil.
 - b) **It's either "My will be done" or "Thy will be done" (Mat 6:10, 26:39; Mk 14:36; Lk 22:42).
 - c) Ultimately there are the only two positions that form a basis to live life – and both are profoundly spiritual constructs.

2. **V. 23: The first explicit mark of a true Christian is to BELIEVE in the name of God's Son Jesus Christ.** (This is a continuation of the doctrinal test that we have looked at for the last two weeks.)

- a. In verses 23–24 John begins to intertwine the three self-scoring tests he have already laid out, speaking of the connection between the doctrinal test (v. 23), the relational test (v. 23), and the moral test (v. 24), all of which enable us to know that we "abide in him."

- b. Here is how John says it in John 6:29: *“Jesus told them, ‘This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent.’”* -- John 6:29 NLT
 - c. *“All [God’s] commandments are in two words. That we should believe and love - in the manner and degree, which [Jesus] taught. This is the greatest and most important command that ever issued from the throne of glory. If this be neglected, no other can be kept: if this be observed, all others are easy.”* --John Wesley ²
3. **V. 23: The second explicit mark of a true Christian (and point #3) is to LOVE one another.**
- a. John states 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.”* --1 John 3:14
 - b. While this fruit of the Spirit never grows to perfect maturity in this lifetime, we should be able to see growth in love when we compare our self-focused life before conversion with our focus since we began to know and live for God.
 - c. If we say that we know Jesus, but continue to live for ourselves, if we’re unwilling to be inconvenienced or sacrifice ourselves and our possessions to meet the needs of others, we need to examine whether or not we’ve truly passed out of death into life.
 - d. If we have tasted God’s love in what Jesus Christ accomplished through His death and resurrection, the new direction of our lives will be to grow in love for others.

III. CONCLUSION

- A. John is writing to a church that is in the midst of some significant struggles. Ephesus had LONG been the center of false religions and cults.
- B. So, to extend the idea of what happens when Christians love one another I would like to conclude today by showing you how the Christian Church grew very quickly during the first two centuries...

² John Wesley. *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (Classic Reprint) Forgotten Books 2012: 663.

1. The church was officially launched in 33AD when Peter delivered a powerful sermon 10 days after Jesus ascended into heaven. That sermon is partially recorded in Acts 2 (see v. 40)
2. About 20 years after the Grandpa Pastor John, died (in the early 2nd century), there was a letter written to a non-Christian named Diognetus by an un-named disciple to explain to Diognetus why Christianity was growing so quickly (you can look it up online: **Epistle to Diognetus**). Listen to what it says:

“Christians busy themselves on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They live in their own native lands, but they live as aliens. For every foreign country is to them as their native land, and every native land is as their foreign country. They marry and have children, but they do not kill unwanted babies. They share their table with everyone, but they don’t share their bed with everyone. They love everyone but are persecuted by all. They are poor and make many rich. They are short of everything and yet have plenty of everything. They are treated outrageously but behave respectfully. They are mocked and blessed in return. When they do good they are attacked. When they are attacked they rejoice as if being given new life.”³

3. Based on this letter there are (at least) four qualities/reasons why Christianity was growing so fast – and they are ALL directly related to LOVE:

- a. **Love began to overcome racism**

- 1) The Christians were made up of Jews, and Greeks, and Africans, and Romans – but they were Christians first.
- 2) What Christianity does is give us a higher authority than any of our cultural traditions.
- 3) It relativizes our relationship to our own culture so that we can critique it.
- 4) Consider the biblical of example of Antioch. There were walls within the city separating the races but revival broke out (see Acts 11). In Acts 13 we see that newly appointed elders were from several different ethnicities.

³ Epistle to Diognetus.

b. Love initiated a high view of life

- 1) They do not kill the unwanted – back then, as it is in many parts of the world today, when a female child is born, she was thrown in a river or left in an alleyway.
- 2) Christians saw every life – no matter how unwanted, or expendable to be absolutely and infinitely precious
- 3) The original concept of the orphanage was initiated by Christians

c. Love initiated a high view of sex

- 1) They “shared their table with all but not their bed with all.”
- 2) The Greco/Roman understanding of sex is that it was like an appetite – if you got hungry you ate – and if you felt aroused you had sex.
- 3) Christians came along with an absolutely radical sex ethic – sex is God’s appointed way to say to another human being, “I belong completely, and exclusively, and permanently to you.”
- 4) For the Christian, sex is a celebration of complete, exclusive, and permanent commitment between one man and one woman.
- 5) In the Christian sex ethic people find heart and soul intimacy and then physical intimacy.
- 6) When we give up the Christian sex ethic for the pagan, how liberated are you? How joyful is it? The Christian sex ethic ran through the Roman Empire like lightning – it was so unique that when people tried it they loved it...

d. Love initiated radical generosity

- 1) “They are poor and make many rich. They are short of everything and yet have plenty of everything...”
- 2) The early Christians were marked by “eye-popping generosity.”

- 3) They were radically generous. People were amazed at how quickly Christians were willing to give their time energy and money away.
 - 4) Christian were willing to change their life-style to better position themselves to be radically generous. It says though, “They are short of everything and yet have plenty of everything...” They were short of things because they were so generous, yet they were happy with what they had.
4. How could Christianity travel so quickly through the Greco/Roman Empire with it’s slavery, infanticide, corruption, and decadence, and immorality? How did a world like that turn to Christianity within a couple of hundred years?
- a. Nobody could match the love and beauty of the lives of these Christians
 - b. Their lifestyle was startling and attractive
 - c. A lack of racism → a high regard for human life → a sex ethic of purity and commitment, and → radical generosity
 - d. People looked at Christians and asked, “What has happened inside of them to make them so quick to give their time, treasure, and talents away?
- C. Christianity moved swiftly from the Middle East down to Africa, up to Britain, and out to India. No one could figure it out. But we see that Grandpa Pastor John was right – when Christians love one another amazing things happen.

Application Questions

1. Practically, how would you counsel a Christian to deal with deep-seated bitterness, anger, or hatred?
2. Often we are blind to our selfishness. How can we grow to see it so that we can deal with it in a godly manner?
3. Is there a difference between loving someone and liking him? If so, what are the practical ramifications of this?
4. If we gave to everyone in need, we would literally have nothing left. How do we discern when to give and when not to give?