

The Family Likeness of Brotherly Love

1 John 3:11-24

1 John 3:11-24 - *“For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another,¹² not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous.¹³ Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.¹⁵ Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.¹⁶ By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.¹⁷ But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.¹⁹ And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.²⁰ For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.²² And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.²³ And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.²⁴ Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.”*

Background Notes

The theme of 1 John is “Christian fellowship.” The term “Christian fellowship” in 1 John doesn’t mean Christians getting together for coffee or church dinners or other social functions. “Christian fellowship” is defined in 1 John 1:3: *“And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.”* When together our focus is on the Lord, and on what He has done for us, and on what He is doing for us, we are enjoying and experiencing **real** Christian fellowship.

Chapter 1 taught us that Jesus Christ is the **basis** of Christian fellowship, and true joy is the **result** of Christian fellowship. “Walking in the light” and confessing our sins are requirements for experiencing and enjoying Christian fellowship.

In 1 John 2 we learned that obedience and love for fellow believers are tests of Christian fellowship. In addition, separation from the world and separation from false teaching are tests of Christian fellowship.

In 1 John 3 we have the test of **family likeness**. Do you remember that we mentioned that 1 John is like a family picture album? A family picture album contains pictures of all the family members, and you’ll see your picture there if you’re in

the family. Just a few months ago I was looking at an old family picture album and I saw a picture of my great-grandfather. I could have sworn I was looking at myself - except for the clothes! There was a strong family likeness.

So if you're in the family of God you will see your "picture" in 1 John. You'll recognize your family likeness in 1 John. Just as family likenesses are seen in a family picture album, so family likenesses are seen in God's family picture album.

"Righteousness" is the family likeness in God's family picture album in the first half of chapter 3, and it is a test of Christian fellowship. In the second half of the chapter, the family likeness is "brotherly love." Here again, this family likeness is another test of Christian fellowship.

Doctrinal Point

The family likeness of brotherly love is a test of Christian fellowship.

Love for fellow believers is a test of Christian fellowship, as we discussed in chapter 2. Once again brotherly love is mentioned as an important character trait that should be seen in God's family members. We have two sub-points under our doctrinal point.

a. Cain is a negative example of brotherly love (v12-15).

Cain is the negative example. Cain murdered his brother because his works were evil, and his brother Abel's works were righteous (v12). Outwardly, Cain's works did not appear to be evil. After all, he brought the best of his works to God. But that's exactly the problem. He came **his own** best way! He didn't come to God by God's way - through sacrifice. Cain is like a lot of people today – people who try to come to God in their own way rather than coming by God's way - through Christ alone. I trust you're not in that category.

Because God rejected Cain's offering and accepted Abel's offering, Cain was jealous of Abel - and his hatred resulted in murder. Hate is murder in embryo form, as verse 15 indicates. "*Whoever hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*" This verse does not mean that a murderer cannot become a Christian. No, a murderer who repents of his sin before God and comes to Christ as His Savior will receive eternal life.

But a person who calls himself or herself a Christian and yet continually hates a fellow believer, and will not help a fellow believer in time of need – that person is not in the family of God. That person has not passed from death to life. That person has never been born again. He or she does not have life in the family of God. That person "*abides in death*" (v14). That person is spiritually dead.

b. Jesus Christ is the positive example of brotherly love (v16-18).

In verse 16 the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the supreme example: *“By this we know love because He laid down His life for us.”* He gave His life for us so we could be saved from sin and eternal death. Romans 5:8 says, *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

Now 1 John 3:16 goes further: *“And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”* Laying down our lives is the ultimate sacrifice, and many Christians have given up their lives for fellow believers. Think of the Christian pastors under communist regimes who gave up their lives for their flocks. Verse 16 is the greatest expression of brotherly love.

Verse 17 is the minimal expression of brotherly love: *“But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”* You may never be called on to give your life for a fellow believer - but the Lord definitely calls you to share with your brothers and sisters who are in need.

That doesn’t mean that we should give to every Christian who’s looking for a handout. We should be sure that person is truly in need. But when we see real needs in God’s family, we should be willing to share. Something is wrong if a Christian is a rich hoarder! (Some of us don’t even have a chance to worry about that problem!) But seriously speaking, we all could probably do just fine with less than we have! We all should look around to see where the needs are, and then be willing to share.

Verse 19: *“And by this we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before Him”* *“And by this”* – to what does the word “this” refer? “By this” – showing brotherly love and sharing with those in need – we have assurance that we’re in God’s family. So brotherly love is definitely a test for who is in the family - and who is not.

Verses 23-24: *“And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him.”* So brotherly love is an important family likeness, and brotherly love will be seen in our lives if we’re in the family.

At this point some of you may be worried. You’re wondering if you really are in God’s family, because as you examine your heart, you don’t find a lot of brotherly love. It’s never wrong to examine your heart before the Lord. In fact, God helps us examine our hearts about this matter in three ways:

- **Our conscience** (v20-21).

“For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not

condemn us, we have confidence toward God.” God uses our conscience to convict us - and also to confirm for us our love for fellow believers.

- ***Our prayers*** (v22.)

“And whatever we ask, we receive from Him because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” How's your prayer life? Are your prayers being answered? Maybe your prayers aren't being answered because you're not doing those things that are pleasing in His sight – like showing brotherly love. That's the context here.

- ***The Holy Spirit*** (v24).

“And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.” The Holy Spirit motivates us as believers to show brotherly love, and then assures us when we do show brotherly love.

Once again let me ask you: do you see your picture in God's “1 John family picture album “? The family likeness of brotherly love is a test of Christian fellowship.

Practical Application

Don't be surprised if the world hates you!

Verse 13: *“Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.”* As Cain hated Abel, whose works were righteous, so the world hates those who have been born into the family of God. So don't be surprised if the world hates you.

The masks come off when the spiritual issues arise. If you don't bring up life's important issues, the people of the world around you will love you. But if you mention the truth that people are born on the road to hell, and they must trust in Jesus Christ to get right with God - I assure you, you will experience the mockery and hatred of this world.

Businessmen and women, you will experience the hatred of this world when you refuse to compromise your biblical business ethics. Young people, you will experience the hatred of this world when you stand for the God of the Bible in the classroom, and when you hold to the moral standards of the Bible on the campus. God will bless you, but you will experience the hatred of this world.

Don't be surprised if the world hates you!