

Sacrificial?

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[0 : 0 0] Good afternoon everyone. Can I repeat the welcome Johnny gave at the start, particularly if you're visiting our great city. Hope you have a wonderful time here with us seeing the sights and that God will really bless you as you relax here.

We've been going for the last month and a half through the first letter by John in the New Testament. And I thought since we're more or less halfway through the book at the moment, and there's a slight change of emphasis over the next chapter or two, it might be worth just taking stock very quickly.

John and Graham have explained very clearly to us that 1 John is a book that was written into a particular situation. There are people who had gotten to the church who said, we have superior knowledge, we are more spiritual than everybody else, we have no sin, we put all that behind us, and we are really just a bit better than everybody.

And they cause a lot of trouble, eventually it appears they had left, but not without causing a great deal of disruption in the church, and perhaps unsettling church members that may be thinking, well, have we really got the truth?

Are we really Christians? And John is writing to assure people that the test of Christianity, of Christian faith, is that we believe in the Lord Jesus and that we are obedient to him, and it's not all about having knowledge, it's much more about having love for one another.

[1 : 1 9] Now that continues to be a large part of the theme of the remaining chapters in the book, but as I said, I think there is a bit of a change. In the last two and a half chapters, John is not so much thinking about the people who have come into the church and the damage they've done, he's thinking about the people who are still there, and how they should deal with one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus.

When we read the passage in a few minutes, you may notice again and again, John talks about the brothers. I think particularly in the second half of the book as well, we can see the close link between John's first letter and John's gospel.

Now see it throughout the book, right at the start of the book he talks about in the beginning, as he talks about in his gospel. But from the middle of chapter 3 onwards, there's a very close parallel between what John writes to his readers of his letter, and particularly the teaching of the Lord Jesus in the upper room to his disciples in John's gospel.

Now when you read John's gospel, there is a very clear message in it. The message of John's gospel is believe and live, or maybe more accurately believe and have life.

He explains at the end of his book in chapter 20, These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

[2 : 4 5] If we take the most famous verse in John's gospel, chapter 3 and verse 16, it says, Whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. We go through lots and lots of verses in John's gospel that bring us this theme, if you believe in Jesus, then you will have life, life not of yourself, but life given to you by God.

And that's very much also in John's letter, and we'll see that as we read our passage this morning. But John's letter has a slightly different emphasis at points. So not just believe and live, he says know and love.

In John's first epistle, the word know is used 42 times, mostly in chapters 2 and 3, and the word love is used 45 times, mostly in chapters 3 and 4.

So he's saying once you've believed in the Lord Jesus and have life through him, you will love and you will then have assurance you will know that you belong to him. And that's the sequence, I think. You believe in Jesus, that is the only way to have salvation through him.

You believe that he lived, that he died for you, that he rose again, and that he can bring forgiveness for your sins. When you do that, you're given life by God, you're given eternal life, and that life leads you to love others.

[4 : 00] And we'll see in a few minutes just how critical that is. As you have life through the Lord Jesus, so that brings a love for him and for others. And that love you have for others is one of the key evidences when you're thinking, well, do I really belong to Jesus?

Am I really a Christian or not? John says one of the key ways in which you can identify that you do belong to Christ, that you can know that you are saved, is by the love you have for others.

So you believe, and that brings you life. You then love, and that brings you assurance. It brings you the knowledge that you are God's child. Look out for these as we go through the passage.

We're looking at 1 John chapter 3. I'm going to steal a couple of verses from last week's passage, and we're going to start at verse 11. 1 John chapter 3 and verse 11. John writes, This is the message you heard from the beginning.

We should love one another. 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 brothers were righteous.

[5 : 09] Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.

Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. 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.

This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence, whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God, and ask from him, and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands, and do what pleases him.

[6 : 27] And this is his command, to believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them.

And this is how we know that he lives in us. We know it by the spirit he gave us. We pray God will help us to understand what he has to say to us from his word this morning, this afternoon.

This gentleman on the screen here is Dr. Bill Franklin. Dr. Franklin is 103 years old, and he received an MBE in June for his services to medicine. He was involved with Alexander Fleming in the development of penicillin.

He was one of the first people to promote the pollen count as being a good warning for hay fever sufferers that they needed to get their pills out. He also developed a theory that people are subject much more to allergies these days because we're too keen on hygiene, and we don't build up enough resistance to infection.

He was a leading doctor. Dr. Franklin has had his 15 minutes of fame, perhaps, in the last two or three weeks. He was on Desert Island Discs, and perhaps the oldest person who had ever done that.

[7 : 41] And I came across him, I first heard him, when he was part of the VJ Day commemorations on the BBC. Dr. Franklin, at the start of the war, was in Singapore. He got captured by the Japanese, and for three and a half years he suffered along with many, many other British and Commonwealth servicemen at the hands of the Japanese captors.

He was beaten up. He saw terrible things in his work as a doctor. He emerged from it, emaciated, and looking in very poor shape. The BBC did two interviews consecutively with ex-prisoners of war.

One of them said, I can't forgive the Japanese. I wouldn't be true to myself if I forgave them. And who am I to criticise someone who'd been through so much and felt that way?

But Dr. Franklin, when he was interviewed, said, I can't hate the Japanese. I don't hate them. If I hated them, it wouldn't do them any harm.

Hate only harms you. And Kirsty Young, who was presenting, said to him, have you always had this attitude? Is this something that's just grown on you as the memories of the war have got a little bit more distant?

[8 : 53] And he said, no. When I was a child, I said to my brother, I hate you. And my father pulled me up, and he taught me never to hate. You only harm yourself if you hate.

I looked on the internet and came across a longer quote from him. He said, you must not go on hating people. It does you harm, but it does not do them any harm.

Also, I am a Christian who was taught to love, not hate. That's how I live my life. And that's very much the message of the first part of the passage we're looking at this afternoon.

That the responsibility of the Christian and the sign of life in the Christian is that we love others, that we don't hate them. And John uses two examples to illustrate that.

The example of Cain, and then the example of the Lord Jesus. So first of all, we have the example of hate in action. Now, as he does quite a lot in his gospel and his epistle, John goes back to the beginning.

[9 : 59] Cain was right at the beginning the son of Adam and Eve. And John says, Cain gives us an example of just how bad it is to hate others.

Now, remember the story of Cain and Abel. They both brought sacrifices to God. Cain brought sacrifice of fruit. Abel brought sacrifice of livestock. And God was pleased with Abel's sacrifice.

He wasn't pleased with Cain's sacrifice. And Cain got really jealous and he killed his brother. That is the example of Cain. And John says, anyone who hates their brother or sister or hates others, they are like Cain.

And in particular, Cain hated Abel because Cain had done something that wasn't so pleasing to God. Abel had done something that pleased God. And it was Abel's righteousness and Abel's superior spiritual sacrifice that really got to Cain and that made him hate and ultimately kill his brother.

So in that case, good provoked evil. The good of Abel and Cain, looking at it, provoked Cain to hate him and to do what was wrong.

[11 : 16] And John says, it's like that in our world today. If we live lives of service for the Lord Jesus, if we talk to others about our faith, if we present them their needs of the Savior, some by the grace of God will come to love and to trust him.

Many will reject us and perhaps will hate or despise us for what we do. And John says, don't be surprised when that happens.

That's the work of the evil one in our world, getting into people's hearts and minds and turning them against what is good. And then John says, and he's echoing here the words of the Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

He says, it's not just the action that counts. Cain went all the way and murdered his brother. But John says, it's not the actual action that's important. The thought counts.

Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. That's terribly strong words, isn't it?

[12 : 25] That if we hate someone, it's almost as if we had physically murdered them. That is how serious it is when we hold these feelings of resentment and hate against others.

And we might say, well, that's very true and very interesting, but it's not really very practical for us. We don't hate others. We are Christians. We love others.

Well, if only that was always evident in our churches. How often in our church, and this church is not exempt by any means, do we find people who fall out? There's been some kind of historical incident or apparent slight or something like that.

And people say, no, I'm not going to get on with this person anymore. They avoid each other. There's as little as possible to do with each other. Sometimes it leads to churches being divided and being split.

And John would say to us, have nothing to do with that. If you hate somebody, if you resent something about them, the person you harm most is yourself.

[13 : 27] You will do much more damage to yourself than you do to them. And you will not be displaying the character that we should have if we are followers of the Lord Jesus, if we love him.

So let's not just see this as something for some other people out there in the world. Let's apply it practically to ourselves. Is there anyone, a Christian brother or sister, that you need to sort things out with and to restore a relationship with?

That's hate in action. We then have love in action. This fantastic verse, verse 16. This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

So we've had the example of Cain, the one who hated his brother and who murdered him. And then we have the example of the Lord Jesus, the one who loved us when we were unlovely, when we were sinful, when we had nothing that would make him want to love us.

Yet he did love us and he laid down his life for us. And that is the example that we are called to follow. As in so many things, our example as Christians, if we are believers in the Lord Jesus, is to look at what Jesus did and to imitate it and to become as much as possible like him.

[14 : 44] And in this case, good doesn't provoke evil as it did with Cain. The good of the Lord Jesus provokes good in us. As we see the outrageous love he had, which Paul presented so clearly to us last week, as we see the outrageous love of God and of the Lord Jesus for us, that should stir up in our hearts feelings of love for him, a desire to serve him and to live for him, and also to show the love that he had to others.

As he has loved us, as he has set us an example, so we should imitate him and his good to us should be reflected in the good that we do for others.

But there's one other point I think is really important in these verses. I've summed it up as actions speak louder than words. We might just read verse 16. We say, 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 and sisters. And we might say, I'd be willing to do that. If it came to the crunch, and a brother or sister was in need, and I could do something to help them, even if it cost me my life, I would do that.

But for most of us, that would just be words. It's unlikely that we'll be asked to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. It's just possible, but probably unlikely for most of us.

[16 : 10] And so John goes on in verse 17 to bring it home to us. Here is what it means in day-to-day life to lay down your life for your brothers and sisters. He says, If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need, but has no pity on them, how can the love of Christ be in that person?

Dear children, let us not love with words or speech, but with actions and in truth. See, it's not enough to think the heroic.

To think, yes, if it came to the crunch, I would be willing to lay down my life for the Lord Jesus. I'd be willing to lay down my life for my Christian brothers and sisters. If there's no evidence of us being willing to make small sacrifices in our everyday life, then John would say to us, well, there's no evidence that you have that kind of love that you might make the big sacrifice.

A few of us were involved last week in the Polar Explorers holiday club. And one of the characters we looked at there was Stephen. Stephen who became the first Christian martyr.

And the key lesson with Stephen was that nothing is too ordinary for God. Because before he became the first Christian martyr, Stephen was one of seven deacons who was chosen by the church, by the apostles in the church, to serve those who were in need.

[17 : 32] The widows who had no means to support in their day from the state or anything like that, the church was supporting them by providing food. It was a very early form of food bank.

And Stephen was happy to do the, in many ways, quite menial task of managing the food bank, of distributing the food to those who needed it.

He was willing to do the ordinary things for God as evidence of the love that he had for others. And then he was called on to make the ultimate sacrifice as he was stoned to death for his witness about the Lord Jesus.

They were not willing to do the everyday thing, to show our practical love to others in the everyday. Then we have to question whether we do have a real love for others at all and whether actually we would make that big sacrifice if it came to the peace.

Can I challenge you? Let's all of us in the next week try to find an opportunity to show practical love in a sacrificial way to somebody else. It might be someone who's in need and you give them some food or some clothing or something like that.

[18 : 42] It might be someone needs something practical done. One of your Christian brothers and sisters struggling with something practically and you can help. It might be visiting someone who's lonely and would welcome a visit and a time spent reading God's word and praying together.

It might be someone who's going through a difficult time and you can sit alongside them and talk to them and pray with them. Look for a practical thing that you wouldn't normally do that will show the love of Christ to your Christian brothers and sisters.

That is how God calls us to be in our Christian communities. That is how we take the example of the Lord Jesus in everyday life and apply it to our church situation.

No good having high thoughts of love and of devotion to the Lord Jesus if it's not seen in the practical, the everyday side of our Christian living.

Let's move on to the second half of our passage. In the second half of our passage, John is addressing a problem that many of us will have experienced. And that problem is that we do something or there's something in our lives that we feel isn't quite right and we think, am I really a Christian?

[19 : 55] Do I really have salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ? That is what the false teachers were probably questioning about some people in the church in John's day and John dresses it head on.

And he says, when your heart condemns you, when there's something about you you know is not right and you haven't shown the character of the Lord Jesus, don't listen to your heart.

Remember that God is greater than your heart. And he says there are a number of things that would be evidences to you that you can have the assurance that you can know that you belong to Jesus, you can know that you have eternal life.

Three key evidences, I think, he presents to us. And the first is the one we've been thinking about. It is strong evidence that we belong to Jesus if we have a real love for him and if that love is shown in our relations with others.

That is what John's been writing about and he says, you can know that you belong to Christ if you have the love of Christ in you. If you doubt your salvation, if you think, well, am I really someone who belongs to the Lord Jesus?

[21 : 12] Examine your heart. Think when I think of the cross and the death of the Lord Jesus and all that he's done for me, does that fill me with love for him, with a desire to live for him and to serve him?

And does it fill me with a practical love for others that I may show out in my life the love that the Lord Jesus showed to me? If you can find in yourselves that the love that you have for Christ reflecting his love for you and the love that you have for others, that is a very strong indicator that you belong to him, that you have eternal life.

If we love others, says John, we can be confident that we have salvation through Jesus. Not that our love is what saves us. We're saved. It's not beginning. We're saved by believing in Jesus and that brings us to life.

But the fact that we have love, that is an evidence of life in the Lord Jesus. And if your heart condemns you, look at the love that you have for him and the love that you show to others and that hopefully will give you confidence before him.

Second evidence, says John, is in prayer. If we come to God with confidence, believing that he cares for us and believing that he wants to give us what we desire, then, says John, we have confidence for God and receive from him anything we ask because we keep his commands and do what pleases him.

[22 : 41] Now, don't, let's just skip over that last passage of the verse. It is about keeping commands which we'll come back to. It is about pleasing God and walking with him. But if we're doing that and we come to God in prayer, as we see answers to our prayer, we have greater confidence in our God and we can have greater confidence too in our salvation and the fact that we know him, that we have life through him.

Again, we'd have to challenge ourselves. What is our prayer life like? Do we ask great things from God? Do we receive great things from God? Or do we actually come fairly tentatively and not with the kind of confidence that John suggests we should have?

And then perhaps we don't see the great answers to prayer that we would like to, that God would want to give to us. But confidence before God, confidence in God and in our salvation through him comes as we pray to him, as we ask from him, as we seek to do his will in the way we ask and for his name to be glorified and as we see the answers, that increases our confidence in him.

And then finally, John says we can have confidence in our salvation and the eternal life we have because of the indwelling spirit that Christ, that God gives us.

Verse 24, the one who keeps God's commands lives in him and he in them and this is how we know that he lives in us. We know it by the spirit he gave us.

[24 : 15] And part of the purpose, the work of the spirit of God is to give us that assurance that we belong to the Lord Jesus, that we are God's children. We can also look at the work of the spirit in our lives and we can say that must have come from God.

As we are able to do things in Christian service that perhaps we would find really difficult and maybe thought we couldn't do as we exercise the gifts of the spirit. As we see, or more likely perhaps others see, changes in our character that we demonstrate the fruit of the spirit, love, joy, peace, and so on.

And the indwelling spirit within us is something that can give us confidence, that can give us the knowledge that we belong to the Lord Jesus. So if this morning you're trusting in the Lord Jesus and perhaps you're having doubts about your salvation, take this from what John writes to us, that we shouldn't be listening just to the guilty thoughts that come from conscience.

Now, conscience is a good thing to recognize that we've done wrong and to be able to confess it before God. But we shouldn't be listening to that and saying, well, perhaps that means I'm not really a Christian. Look at the evidences that there are in your life, that you love the Lord Jesus, you love others, you can give answers to prayer from the past, that the spirit is in you and have confidence that you belong to the Lord Jesus.

And then just to bring it together, verse 23. What is it that defines us as Christians if we are? It is obeying the command of the Lord Jesus.

[25 : 52] And John says, this is his command. He says it's one command, so it's two parts to one command. The command is to believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ. That's very much the message of John's gospel, repeated here in John's epistle.

And also it is to love one another as he commanded us. So challenges take away this morning. First is, do you believe in the name of Jesus?

Do you believe that Jesus is the son of God who came into the world to live the perfect life, who died on the cross to take punishment for your sin, and that through repenting of sin and trusting in him, you can have eternal life.

That is the beginning of Christian life. It is the only way to begin in Christian life, to believe in the Lord Jesus and to trust in him. And if you have done that, take the second part of the command and say, are you loving one another?

Are you loving your Christian brothers and sisters as the Lord Jesus has commanded you and as he loved you? If you are, have that assurance that you belong to him.

[27 : 05] Let me finish with some words by Bob Dylan. Bob Dylan, you may know, came to faith in the Lord Jesus in the late 70s, recorded several gospel albums. I think he may have slipped back a bit since then, but he wrote some tremendous songs of salvation.

And the second gospel album is the one that's on the screen up here just now. And I want to just finish with some words from that. Forget Bob Dylan, forget who wrote it.

Just think about the words and think about how they could apply to you. Whether it is that you need to come to put your faith in the Lord Jesus or whether you need to have greater confidence in what you have through him.

This is what Bob Dylan wrote in the song called Saved. By his grace, I have been touched. By his word, I have been healed.

By his hand, I've been delivered. By his spirit, I've been sealed. By his truth, I can be upright. By his strength, I do endure.

[28 : 08] By his power, I've been lifted. In his love, I am secure. Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank you for your word to us.

We thank you for the priority that we must give to love. We thank you for the tremendous love that the Lord Jesus had for us to lay down his life for us. And we can hardly imagine what that means.

We are just so thankful that he took our place, that he died our death, that he took our sins on himself. And we thank you that in some small measure, we can reflect the love of the Lord Jesus in our love for one another.

And we pray that those of us who know him, that that may be very evident in the way we live together. There may be no sign of hate, of resentment, of not getting on as brothers and sisters.

That our lives may be characterized by that self-sacrifice that the Lord Jesus had. And that that may be seen in the everyday things of life, as we are willing to put ourselves out, often in relatively small things, to show our love for one another and how that reflects our love for the Lord Jesus.

[29 : 23] We thank you too for the verses at the end which tell us that we can have assurance that we know and belong to the Lord Jesus and have eternal life.

We thank you that that comes first from believing in him and if there are any who don't yet believe in the Lord Jesus haven't yet come to that point, we pray that you will draw them to him and that they may find life in him.

And we thank you that we can have assurance of salvation as we look at the love that the Lord has planted in our hearts, as we look at the way we can come to you with our prayer requests and see them wonderfully answered, as we think of the work of the Spirit in our lives and the daily assurance that he gives us about our faith.

Help us to have that assurance and to demonstrate it again through love for others. We thank you for your presence as we've looked at your word this morning. We thank you for the opportunity we've had to worship and to learn from you and we commit ourselves to you now in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen.