

Believe and Love

Cultivating Authentic Christian Community

1 John 3:11-24

Pastor Bryan Clark

A little over a year ago I was driving home one day and meandering through the back roads and there was a 1972 Volkswagen Super Beetle, sitting in a pasture with a “For Sale” sign on it, calling to me. I went home and talked to Patti and we thought, “Let’s go for it”. So we bought it and we spent the last year basically remodeling this thing—redoing it from the bottom up. It was so rusted out that we took the body clear off the chassis and started from scratch and built it all the way back up. Last month was the great unveiling and for the most part it’s been okay. But the engine was having some trouble continuing to run—it would lose power and it would idle funny and it would die. Now the charm of your new Volkswagen Bug, for Patti, kind of wears off when you’re dying in the intersection and everyone is honking. (laughter) So you know I did need to get this fixed. I had trouble figuring out what’s going on and then I started to find crud in the fuel filter. I figured out the gas tank was corroded and it was putting crud in the fuel and that, then, was getting stuck in the line and that would cause it to do that. Now I suppose you could manage the problem: You could clean up the carburetor; you could clean out the fuel line, change the fuel filter—probably once a week! But all you’re doing is managing the crud until you finally get to the source of the problem. And to get to the source of the problem, the car needed a new tank. Strangely enough that is what we’re talking about today. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 John, Chapter 3.

John’s been working really hard to say we aren’t in the process of just managing our crud, but we’ve actually had the tank replaced. What’s happened is radical! We have the seed of God; we have the nature of Jesus; we have the Spirit of God. When we are born, we are born with a corroded tank. That’s the result of original sin. There’s junk in our tank and it continually messes up our system. We can try to manage that along but, until you actually get to the source of the problem and experience a rebirth—a new creation, a new nature—you’re never really going to make much progress. So John is trying to separate out the false teachers from those who have experienced this radical transformation. I don’t think John is trying to convince his readers that they’re not believers. I think it’s just the opposite. He’s affirmed several times he believes they are. What he is trying to do is separate out the false teachers who say they know God but they live immoral lives; they’re very unloving; they lack compassion and that’s very different than the nature of Jesus and so there’s this divide between what’s true and what’s not true. We pick it up in verse 11:

For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; (*NASB, 1 John 3:11)

Now I mentioned the very first week that John tends to talk in cycles. Now I didn’t say *circles* but *cycles* and what I mean by that is, he’ll address a topic; he’ll move on and then he’ll come back to the topic and expand on it. So in chapter two we talked about love. We talked about love as an old, new commandment. It’s been around from the beginning because it’s the essence of the life of God but also there’s a new commandment. There’s a new side: as of the death, burial and the resurrection of Jesus, He empowers us to live that out in a whole new way. So we talked about that at length and I’m not going to go back through all of that, other than to just remind ourselves that we defined love—not as an emotion. The Bible doesn’t define love as an emotion. You can’t command somebody to feel good about somebody else. It just doesn’t work that way. It’s an act of the will; it’s to lay down your life for someone else. It’s to think of someone else as more important

than yourself. That's the essence of love. So he reminds us, from the beginning, this is what has defined life. Verse 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.

John goes all the way back to the beginning of the story and there's this great divide. There's this divide between Abel, who chooses to surrender to God and live life God's way, and his brother Cain, who chooses to be his own god and live life his way. Now I think it is worth noting that in the beginning of the story, as far as we know from the text, there were only four people on the face of the planet: Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel. There were no gangs; there were no bad neighborhoods; there were no bad schools; there wasn't an alcohol and drug problem; there weren't bad movies. There weren't any of the things that we tend to blame today—and Cain slaughtered his brother. That's actually the language that's used there. Why did he do that? Well the text tells us **...Cain was of the evil one.**

Now he just came off the discussion that we talked about last week—of the difference between a child of God and a child of the devil. We are born with a corroded tank and there's all kinds of junk in our tank that makes us very selfish. At the end of the day the corrosion—the crud that's in our tank—is utter selfishness. That is our default setting; that's who we are. We talked a couple of weeks ago about the world's operating system. Once you're cut off from a relationship with God, then you have to become your own god and you have to make yourself significant. You have to give yourself value. The nature of the system requires you to be selfish; there is no other option. So every day is a choice between you and me and I can't think of someone else as more important than myself because what's at stake is my significance; what's at stake is my value. Therefore I have to be selfish; the system requires that. So the crud in my tank is utter selfishness and that defines everything that I do. So that's, in essence, what John is saying was true of Cain. Cain was selfish to the core because he was a child of the devil and that defined his life. He was **...of the evil one and slew his brother.**

Most of the translations avoid the term *murder* or *kill* because the Greek here is very graphic. Literally it means to cut his throat, to slaughter, or to butcher. This was not an accident; this was Cain slaughtering or butchering his brother. It's a very violent picture. Why did he do that? For what reason did he slay him? Because **...his deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous.** Cain's deeds were evil. Both Cain and Abel came before God but Abel came, surrendered to worship God, and Cain came, being his own god, and God called his deeds evil. Now basically what we're talking about is this: When the light shines into the darkness, the light exposes our *rats* and, at that moment, either we deal with the rats or we extinguish the light. Abel's behavior exposed Cain and Cain was left with a choice: Either he's going to change his behavior or he's going to put out the light. And his choice, obviously, was to extinguish the light.

Now that's the very same story as the story of Jesus. In the first century the religious leaders had everyone convinced that they were the most righteous among them, and everyone believed that until Jesus showed up. When Jesus shined the light of true righteousness into the darkness, the rats of the religious leaders were exposed and, at that moment, they either had to deal with their rats or extinguish the light. Jesus is like the ultimate curve-wrecker. Remember when you were in high school and the hard class is chemistry and algebra and all these classes? While most of us are slugging it out in the 80's there was always somebody that would ace the test and wreck the curve—and nobody liked them. (laughter) Jesus was the ultimate curve-wrecker. Everything was

fine until He shows up and reveals the true standard of righteousness—and the Pharisees were busted and their conclusion is, “We must extinguish the light!” The Jewish teachers believed that Cain and Abel’s story was a foreshadowing of the future of the world—that there would be those who will surrender to God as God and there will be those who will be their own god and be dominated by this selfish crud in their tank. And life is going to be defined by those who chose to be their own god, having their stuff exposed by the light, and they’re going to resent that; they’re going to hate that, which is exactly where John goes in the text. Verse 13:

Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.

Now, again, the word **hate** is not necessarily a strong emotion; it’s the contrast to love. If love is ultimately a willingness to think of others as more important than myself, then hate is being selfish to the core—using and abusing people, dominating people in order to gain my own significance and my own value. Now John is just simply repeating what Jesus said. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that, “*The world hated me; the world’s going to hate you. The world persecuted me; the world’s going to persecute you.*” This is really important to remind ourselves. I think sometimes we get it in our heads that if we are really good Christians, the world will love us. Jesus was perfect in every way and they executed Him. And He said, “This is the way it’s going to be.” This is the Cain and Abel story. When the light of righteousness shines into the darkness, people in darkness are going to resent it. Sometimes people don’t like us because our behavior is really bad but other times, when we’re just seeking to do the right thing, people will respond to that; they’ll react to that; they hate that and you wonder, “What did I do wrong?” Sometimes you’re doing nothing but simply exposing what’s in the darkness and people resent that. And that’s what John is talking about here. I think he’s referring to the false teachers. There’s this divide and we should expect that; it goes all the way back to the Cain and Abel story.

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. (vs. 14)

Now we’ve been talking about how radical the language of salvation is. This isn’t just changing out the fuel filter. This is radical! At the core of my being something has changed, in order that there might be a way that the crud gets out of the fuel line. He says you **...have passed from death into life**. That is as radical as it gets. He doesn’t compare someone who’s dead with someone who’s alive. He says you were dead. Every single one of us was born spiritually dead and it’s through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus that we’ve gone from death to life. The fuel tank has been changed; there’s a new fuel that defines us and he says the outflow of that—of such a radical change—would be a life of love. Those who continue to hate, those who continue to be selfish to the core, are not abiding in this new life. Obviously it’s evidence of the old life. Verse 15:

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

Now what’s he saying there? Is he saying that no murderer can experience God’s salvation? And the obvious answer is, “Of course not!” No matter what you’ve done, God is willing to forgive. As a matter of fact there are murderers like Moses and like David and like Paul that certainly have experienced God’s salvation. What he’s saying is that hatred and murder are reflections of the same heart. So if you think about this like a gas line, there are parts along this gas line that are full of crud. It’s in this same line and you’ve got crud all along the way. Now obviously there is a difference between whether we hate someone—again, hate is to be selfish to the core; it’s not driven by kind of these wild emotions. But if I hate someone—versus I kill someone—we understand

practically there's a difference. I'm not going to go to prison for hating someone; I will go to prison for murdering someone. But the case John is making is: it flows out of the same heart—it's evidence that there's corrosion in the tank and it shows up in hatred. But push it to its logical conclusion and it ends up in murder. Murder is the ultimate act of utter selfishness. If it comes down to something between you and me, then I'll kill you in order to benefit myself. Now that's what he's saying. He's making the case that hatred is in the same line as murder. Therefore, if somebody is guilty of murder, track it back, then that's the heart of hatred. What I think he's doing—the logic of this—is he's saying the false teachers are selfish to the core. They don't care about anybody; they're grossly immoral; their lives are not in the slightest way defined by love and compassion. Therefore, even though they haven't murdered anyone, that's the fuel line that defines their life. They hate and the ultimate end to that is murder. So then he turns it around and says: if someone were a murderer, wouldn't you say they aren't really experiencing the life of Christ? So track the fuel line back and you find then that's equally true of people who hate, people who are utterly selfish. It's the same heart; it's the same fuel line. So he's saying just because these people haven't murdered someone doesn't mean that they know God. If their lives are defined by this hatred, by this utter selfishness, it's the same heart; it's the same problem. And he's going to make an argument the same way but to the opposite direction. Verse 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.

So how do you ...**know love**? Love is ultimately thinking of others as more important than myself, laying down my life for another—the ultimate expression of that. Whereas the ultimate expression of a bad heart would be murder, the ultimate expression of a good heart is, “I would die in your place; I would lay down my life; I would die instead of you.” And so he's saying this is the polar opposite; this is the essence of God. Now I hesitate to use the word that Jesus *modeled* love for us. Jesus didn't model for us how to die. He died in our place. That's really important to understand. Jesus wasn't modeling love; Jesus is the essence of love. That's who He is; that's what defines Him. Therefore that was the natural outflow of His heart. He wasn't modeling something; that's just who He is. There was a need and we were desperately lost in our sin. So, rather than us dying for our own sin, He offered to die in our place. That's the ultimate expression of love. But if you back that heart back and we have this Jesus in us, we have His Spirit, we have His nature, then shouldn't we too live that way? Shouldn't our hearts be the same, so then we would be willing to think of others as more important than ourselves. We'd be willing to lay down our lives for others. So he's saying the ultimate extreme to the selfish heart is murder. The ultimate extreme to the heart of love is to lay down your life for another—defining this dramatic difference between the children of God and the children of the devil. Verse 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?

If I see a legitimate need and I slam the door of my heart and I just don't care, how can that be a reflection of the nature or the character of the seed of God in me? Now what is he saying here? Obviously you can push any of these texts to kind of an illogical conclusion. Because we could say, “If I have anything and somebody has need, then I should give it up.” Fine, you don't *need* an iPod; you don't *need* an iPad; you don't *need* a computer; you don't *need* two pairs of shoes; you really don't *need* a car; you don't *need* air-conditioning. I mean you end up like at the end of *Schindler's List*, live in a box and give everything away. That makes no sense and that certainly isn't what God is asking. I think it's much more Good Samaritan-ish. Where, if I'm traveling down the road, like

the story of the Good Samaritan, and I see someone who's been beaten up and thrown in the ditch, I can't just walk away, as if that person isn't there. Compassion would require me; love would require me to do something.

It's really important to remind ourselves that there are hundreds and hundreds of needs in the world today. There's a tendency to think if God has laid something on your heart and you're really passionate about it, all Christians should be equally passionate about your issue. And if you're not as passionate as I am about that issue, you don't love Jesus as much as I do. You have a lot of Christian celebrities kind of going down that path right now. But isn't it okay that God calls some people to *this* issue and other Christians to *this* issue and our issues of compassion might not all be the same? I think the practical implications over the course of my day are I'm going to cross paths with people who need something. They're hurting; they're in pain; they're desperate—whatever that might be. Maybe they need a word of kindness; maybe they need a little time; maybe they need a little love; maybe they need a little food; maybe they need a little shelter. Whatever need is in my pathway—if I have the resources to meet that need—I can't just slam the door and say, "I don't care!" If I really have the nature of Jesus within me, wouldn't my heart reflect His heart, wouldn't I have to respond to that? Now, again, it's really important to understand John is not saying that he believes that his first readers, the recipients of the letter, maybe aren't believers; maybe they don't care about people. He's saying just the opposite. He's actually affirming that they do care! They do have compassion; they do have kindness; they do have love. But he's drawn a comparison with the false teachers—that they don't care. They're all talk; they're no action. They slam the door on people with need and it reflects a completely different heart. He's trying to say one is true and one is not and there's quite a dramatic difference.

In the spirit of verse 17, as John intended it, we would say that as a church we could say the same is true of us. There's always more we could do; there's always a need to do better. But we also have to understand that one of the reflections that God has changed our heart is, we genuinely care. There are thousands of people throughout the city, on any given week, that are out there in the trenches, involved in compassion ministries. You could go to basically any real compassion-type ministry in our city, that are meeting the needs that we all care about, and you will find Berean people there; we are all over the place in this city. And what John is saying is, "That reflects something has changed." Our system isn't defined by the crud that once defined us. We can't just turn our back. There's a sense of compassion; there's a sense of love; there's a sense of kindness; there's a sense in which we need to meet these needs—and it's something we can affirm together as a church.

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, [that's the false teachers; they're just big talkers] **but in deed and truth.** [Let's live out the truth of the gospel. Verse 19:] **We will know by this that we are of the truth,** (vs. 18-19a)

That's an evidence that something has happened, that somehow my tank has been changed. This crud is getting worked out of my system and I see life differently. I can't just walk by people in need and not care about that anymore. Something deep within me has changed. But there's a problem with that; there's kind of a flip side to this. He says,

...we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. (vs. 19b-20)

It's a very interesting verse. What the verse is saying is: because something has changed, because we are not utterly selfish anymore, because our system is not defined by this crud anymore, that we

actually view the world differently and when we see people in need, when we see people in pain, when we see people that are suffering, it bothers us. We feel the pain of that. There's a sense within us that that's not right; the world shouldn't be this way and we shouldn't just walk by; we should do something about that! But what happens is: everyday we're faced with the reality that I wasn't as loving today as I should have been; I wasn't as compassionate as I should have been; I wasn't as kind as I should have been. I didn't really meet that need like I should have and our heart starts to condemn us. When our system was filled with utter selfishness, that didn't bother us. Something has changed and now it does bother us. And there's the potential that our heart condemns us and it starts to say, "Man, if you loved Jesus, you'd be more kind; you'd be more compassionate; you'd be more loving; you wouldn't just walk away. So obviously you're messing up; I'm not sure if you even know Jesus!" So our heart starts to beat us down and condemn us and that's where God's playbook is to say, "But wait a minute!" God shows up and says, "Wait a minute; that's not right! The fact that this bothers you, the fact that you care, the fact that you have this kindness and compassion, you feel a sense that I'm not living up to what I should be living up to is a reflection that something deep down has changed." And God is greater than your heart and God knows the truth. That's what the text is saying. Our heart is a reference to our emotions and our emotions can get out of control and they start condemning us and they start to say, "You know you're a lousy Christian; I'm not even sure you're saved really." And God comes along and says, "Whoa, whoa, your heart's getting out of control. Your emotions are doing your thinking for you." And God shows up and says, "Hey, I'm greater than your emotions and I know what's true." The battle is whether or not we believe God tells the truth. Our emotions are saying one thing; God is saying something else. God is saying, "You have changed from the inside out. That's why you feel the struggle; that's why you feel the pain. And trust Me, what's going on inside of you is new and it's fresh and it's clean and it's right and ultimately you are going to be something magnificent." God says, "Trust Me with that." That's why verse 21 says:

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us...

In other words, what he's saying is when our emotions start getting out of control and start telling us all this stuff about how lousy we are as a Christian, God comes along and says, "Whoa, whoa, you're My child! What's happened in you is radical, it's spectacular. It's taken a while to get the crud out of the system but I'm making you into something wonderful as My child." If I believe God tells the truth, then my heart no longer condemns me. I see this through the eyes of God and I get my emotions back under control and actually now I feel a sense of safety in the presence of God and that's what he says.

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. (vs. 21-22)

What he is saying is our heart no longer condemns us because we choose to believe that God tells the truth and something inside is radically changed. We've gone from death to life. Therefore I have confidence in the presence of God. It's really hard to be intimate with God if you feel like every time you show up He's going to smack you down! And sometimes our emotions start to feel that way. God says, "That's not Me; that's not how I feel about you! I want you to feel safe in My presence; I want you to feel a sense of confidence that I'm doing something radical within you. So when we're in the presence of God, we can ask for what we will and we will receive it because our lives are starting to be defined by what's on the heart of God, what pleases God. Now this is not a verse that says if we go through the check list, God will give us everything we want. It's not a

consumer verse. What he is saying is that, as we begin to believe God tells the truth and align our lives with what God says, we begin to fall more deeply in love with God and our hearts start to resonate with the Spirit of God, with the essence of God. So what bothers God, bothers me. What God cares about is what I care about. Where I have kindness, God has kindness; where I have compassion, God has compassion. Suddenly, there's a sense of synergy; there's this alignment. What God cares about is what I care about and I start to ask for the things that God cares about. I start to ask for what God is most concerned with. So my prayers are answered because now I'm in alignment with God and everything's starting to change. That's what he's saying there. Verse 23:

This is His commandment, *[singular, notice that]* that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.

It's interesting that he takes the two commands and puts them into one. He says actually what I'm trying to say is, "If you believe and experience God's salvation, you will love." They're actually one commandment. If you have the presence of Christ—the seed of God—if you've gone from death to life, if you have the heart of God, it will manifest itself in love. It may take a while to get the crud out of the line but something radical is changing from the inside out. Notice when he says, **...believe in His Son Jesus Christ**, that's the full title there. This is where the false teachers were misleading them. His Son is the idea that Jesus was the eternal God, the eternal God that created everything that is, engaged in the life of the Trinity for all eternity. His Son Jesus, He became a man—Christ the promised Messiah, the anointed one, the Savior of the world. If you believe in the person and work of Jesus, then you're radically changed from the inside out and the outflow of that will be different. The crud will work its way out and you'll be defined by the love of God. In verse 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.

That's a summary of what he's been talking about: that, at the end of the day, if you've experienced His salvation, something has radically changed. You've gone from death to life; you're the very seed of God; you have the very Spirit of God; you have the very nature of Jesus; you have the very heart of God. This hasn't just been a mild change. The entire tank has been replaced; the tank full of corrosion that was sending crud into the line is gone. This is a brand new tank. It's been changed at the foundational, fundamental level. And because of that, it's going to bring new, fresh fuel that is going to manifest itself over time in the changes to us on the outside, because we've been dramatically changed on the inside.

So what does all this have to do with community? I think this has everything to do with community. Sometimes people talk about the fact that it's safer to be real with unbelievers than it is within the church. Why is that? The reason is because unbelievers understand their tank is full of crud and everyone has crud in their tank. That's just the way it is so, when you open up, they're not trying to fix anything. We all have crud and they just kind of accept that. But then you get exposed to the possibility that there is another way to live; there is a way to experience life at a higher level; it doesn't have to be that way. But herein is where we sometimes make our mistake. We don't understand the implications of what we just studied. We begin to lose sight of what part of this is God's part and what part of this is my part. You know, who's the mechanic here—God or me? And if we don't understand that, that something is radically changed at the fundamental level, we start trying to fix one another. We start picking at one another; we start trying to change one another. We've lost sight of the fact that God is responsible to change us. Our assignment is to celebrate, is

to cheerlead, is to believe this and embrace this in one another. That is, if you have trusted Christ as Savior, something radical inside you has changed and it will manifest itself in what's on the outside. The crud is working its way out of the line. I have to believe that! I don't need to fix you; I don't need to pick at you. You know, we have these accountability partners and we have cards and we have questions we ask, so every week we can remind ourselves that we're blowing it! We're losers! "How did you mess up this week?" "This is how I messed up." And everything focuses on the negative and we're trying to manage each other and we're trying to fix each other.

Let me ask you a question this morning. How many of you love to be fixed? (laughter) How many of you thrive on that? How many of you like to breathe life into your soul? How many of you like to be picked at every day? How many of you like to be reminded every day that you've blown it? This is what happens; none of us like that. And so what happens is, we start going underground. "I'm tired of you picking at me; I'm tired of you trying to fix me; I'm tired of you trying to change me. I'm tired of you reminding me every day, every way that I've let you down. So I'm going to tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to take my junk and I'm going to go underground with it and I'm going to pretend. I'm going to pretend that everything is fine; I'm going to pretend that I've got it all together because, if I tell you what's really going on, you'll try to fix me. You'll pick at me and I've had enough of that. That's what happens when we forget what's God's part and what's our part.

I talked about this, this last winter when we were talking about parenting and I said that the parenting model is the discipleship model. Think about it this way: What do my kids need from me? Do they need me every day picking at them, trying to fix them, reminding them every day, every way, they've let me down? Nobody wants that; nobody thrives on that. What they need is for me to believe in them. What they need is for me to celebrate them. If I believe that they have trusted Christ as Savior, something radical and dramatic has happened on the inside and God is doing a spectacular work. I have to believe that! And my job is to believe that, is to believe in them, is to celebrate them, is to cheerlead them and it's to remind them that, regardless of how they feel about themselves, seeing them through the eyes of God, I think they're magnificent. If they don't get that from me—their earthly father—how are they possibly going to believe that that's true of their heavenly Father? But it isn't just the parenting model; it's the discipleship model.

I guarantee you, that's what every believer in this room needs. You don't need somebody picking at you; you don't need somebody trying to fix you; you don't need somebody reminding you every day all the ways you've blown it. You need somebody that believes this theology is true. We're going to take one right out of God's play book. And if God can say, "Whoa, whoa, your emotions are out of control. I know you may feel that way today and I know you're discouraged, but this isn't really true. God has radically changed you. He's changed you from the inside out. There's something really radical going on inside of you and these are the ways that I see it in your life every day. I want you to know I'm proud of you and I see it and God's alive and well in you and He's going to make you into something unimaginable—according to Paul—something so unimaginable, "...no eyes have seen, no ears have heard the wonder of what you will become in Christ."

Just in case you possibly walked through these doors this morning a little bit discouraged, feeling like maybe this week you weren't the greatest Christian; maybe this is another week where you blew it—another week where you weren't as kind as you should have been; you weren't as loving as you could have been; you weren't as righteous as you should have been; you weren't as obedient as you should have been and your emotions are starting to condemn you, saying, "You know you're such a loser; I'm not even sure you're a Christian; what a hypocrite sitting here worshiping God"—this is what happens when our emotions start to get out of control. I want to remind you, that's not true! If you have trusted Jesus as Savior, what has happened in you is radical. You have been

dramatically changed from the inside out. You have the seed of God; you have the Spirit of God; you're in Him and He is in you. You have everything you need to make it to the finish line. Even though your emotions today may be condemning you, God is in the process of making you into a masterpiece of His grace and, just in case nobody told you this week, I want to tell you, "If you have trusted Jesus as Savior, I think you are magnificent—because you are!!

Our Father we are thankful this morning that You tell the truth. You just do, Lord. This isn't some sort of crazy pep talk. This isn't like positive thinking. You said this is true. And You said that when our hearts condemn us, that You say that's not true, that what's happening on the inside is dramatic and what's happening on the inside will manifest itself on the outside as we work the crud through our system. Lord, we're thankful this is true. Lord, just give us the faith to believe, Lord, that we would understand that in the opinion of the only One that ultimately matters, as our heavenly Daddy, You say we're magnificent. Lord, for that we're thankful. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

*Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988,
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
Copyright 2011 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.

Believe and Love
Cultivating Authentic Christian Community
1 John 3:11-24
Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. What are some of the differences between religion and what Jesus offers? Does religion focus more on the outside or inside of a person? Does this work? Why or why not?
2. What happens to authentic community when we start viewing people from the “outside in” rather than from the “inside out”?
3. What do people need most from us in true authentic community? Why?

Bible Study

1. John has been discussing authentic Christian community. He is writing in a spiral fashion, meaning he covered three basic elements of authentic Christian community once, and now he is covering the same elements again, only expanding on what he said before. What did John say about each of these elements the first time around as they relate to community?

Truth about Jesus 1:1-4
Light 1:5-2:6
Love one another 2:7-11

How did he expand his teaching on these elements of community?

Truth about Jesus 2:18-29
Light 3:1-10
Love one another 3:11-24

2. 1 John 3:10 clearly states that how we treat one another makes it obvious whether we are a child of the devil or a child of God. How does this line up with Jesus’ words in John 13:34,35? Is this about changing from the outside in or about reflecting an internal change on the outside? In other words, is John talking about what changes us or the manifestation of what has changed in us?
3. In 1 John 3:11-12, John uses Cain as a picture of the children of the devil. What does John mean by his statement, “And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous.”? What does this foreshadow?

Therefore, what does John conclude about Christians in verse 13? What can you expect in practical terms if you are a child of God? If the world does not like us as Christians does that mean we’re bad Christians? Why or why not?

4. What does John mean when he says if you hate another you are a murderer? How does this line up with what Jesus said in Matthew 5:21,22? What is the real difference between someone who hates and murders and one who hates but doesn't carry it out?
5. How do John's words in 1 John 3:16 line up with Jesus' statement in John 15:12,13? How is the way of Cain contrasted with the way of Christ? Also review Philippians 2:1-11.
6. How do John's words in 1 John 3:17 compare with James 2:14-26? Does this mean we are to meet every need in every place as Christians? Practically what does it mean? How does this line up with Jesus' story of the good Samaritan?
7. What gives us confidence even when our heart condemns us, according to 3:18-22? What does this mean in practical terms? Why does our heart condemn us? Is this a good thing or a bad thing?
8. In 3:23, John offers one commandment that has two parts, to believe and to love. Why are those one command? 3:24 says Christ abides in believers by His Spirit. He is in us and we are in Him. How does that concept help us understand this whole text from 3:10-24? In other words, given this truth, why is it not possible to be a child of God and not love?

Application

1. Is John saying that we should go out and try to be more loving or is He saying in this context that our desire to love others and do better as Christ followers is evidence that we have passed from death into life? What's the difference? Why does this distinction matter?
2. If what John states is true, how does this affect Christian community and what do other believers really need from us? Make a list of things, based on the truth of this text, that we need to do less of and things we need to do more of to experience authentic Christian community. What really breathes life into another believer's soul?