

1 John
Love as a Sign of Life (Part 2)
1 John 3:11-24
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It was in the late 1800's that the European continent was plagued by great political instability, by severe economic problems, and by growing religious persecution. All of those issues combined in a perfect storm to fuel what was the largest mass human migration in history. Before the year 1890, states in our country regulated immigration. Castle Garden, in the battery of Manhattan, was New York's immigration station, and was the largest in the country. In fact, from the year 1855 to 1890, about eight-million immigrants passed through its doors, mostly from countries in Northern Europe. But Castle Garden was not equipped to handle the quickly growing influx of more than a million immigrants a year, so the federal government built a new immigration station on the famous Ellis Island.

Ellis Island began receiving immigrants on January 1, 1892. You may know that the very first immigrant processed at Ellis Island was a seventeen-year-old girl from Ireland named Annie Moore. She came along with her two younger brothers; they were hoping to be reunited soon with their parents and two older siblings who were already here in the US. Over the next sixty-two years, more than twelve-million immigrants arrived in the US through Ellis Island.

The reason I share that background is because in the passage we come to this morning, John actually uses the language of immigration to describe what has happened to every single Christian spiritually. We left the place of our birth to arrive in a new land; we have passed over from the realm of spiritual death, in which we were born, to the new realm in which we now live, the realm of eternal life. And so, we consider what's happened to us again here in 1 John 3.

We're studying the second test that John gives of eternal life in this letter, and it's the second time he's come to this test. It is the test of love, "Love for God and Love for His People." This paragraph runs from chapter 3, verse 11, down through the end of the chapter, verse 24. But this morning, we'll just read the portion of the section we hope to get to, so let me read from 1 John 3, verse 11, and we're going to study verses 14 and 15, but I'll read down to verse 18. You follow along as I read, 1 John 3, verse 11.

For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; 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. Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 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? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

Now, the point of this paragraph that begins in verse 11 and runs down through verse 24, is that true Christians, those who've truly been born again, are no longer filled with hate as they once were, but are now marked by genuine love for one another. But how exactly does loving believers confirm that we have eternal life? Well, as John presents the test of love for a second time in this letter, he draws several crucial conclusions about how love and the absence of love confirm the true condition of the professing Christian's heart.

So, let's walk our way through this. Let me just remind you the two conclusions that we noted last week. The first conclusion he makes is that “Loving Believers Is Required by Our Lord's Command.” That's the message of verse 11, this is the commandment we heard from the beginning, we heard with the gospel. And so, it's something our Lord demands from every true disciple.

The second conclusion that he arrives that is that “Loving Believers is Absent from the Unbeliever's Heart.” That's the message of verses 12 and 13. It's absent as shown in the prototype of the unbeliever hating a believer as Cain hated his brother Abel because he was a believer and killed him. And it's true of all unbelievers, verse 13, the world hates believers. So loving believers is absent from the unbeliever's heart.

Now today, we come to John's third conclusion and it's this, “Love for Believers is Crucial for a Believer's Self Examination,” love for believers, loving those who are professed brothers and sisters in Christ is crucial for a believer's self-examination. This is the message of verses 14 to 18. John reminds us here that love for other believers is, in fact, one of the three crucial tests of eternal life. You want to know if you have eternal life? Well, look at your love for Christians.

Now, he explains how this test of love for fellow Christians works. Let me just give you an outline of this paragraph, verses 14 to 18. We're going to consider in verses 14 and 15, “The Evidence of Love” and what that evidence shows. Secondly, in verse 16, we're going to consider “The Example of Love—Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself,” and what He did. And then in verses 17, and 18, “The Expression of Love,” love puts on work boots, love meets practical needs, it works on behalf of others. So that's what we're going to see as this section unfolds. But today, we're just going to consider the first of those in verses 14 and 15, and that is “The Evidence of Love,” the evidence of love.

Now in verse 14, love's role as an evidence of eternal life is "Directly Stated." He just comes out and says it. Then in verse 15, he presents the "Biblical Arguments" for that position. So, verse 14, is the "Statement." and then in verse 15, is the "Argument." So, let's look first of all, at "The Evidence of Love, Directly Stated." He just comes out and says that your love for other believers is clear evidence of eternal life. He begins in the first half of verse 14 by stating it positively. And John loves to do this. He's going to ~~he's going to~~ say it negatively in the second half of verse 14, but he begins by just directly stating it in a positive way. Look at verse 14, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren."

In Greek, the language is an inflected language, so ~~if~~ often, if you want, you can build the pronoun that you intend to use into the ending of the verb itself. You don't need a separate pronoun. Many languages are like that. But if the Greek writer wants to emphasize the pronoun, he can include it separate from the verb to stress it and he does that here. The sentence begins "We," as with the pronoun occurring. And what he's doing is he's saying, "We true believers, as opposed to the unbelievers back in verse 13, we believers know." That is, this is a commonly understood accepted fact by believers. What is it that we know? Verse 14, "We know that we have passed out of death into life."

I have to stop there because John paints for us here two beautiful word pictures of the new birth. And if you're a Christian, you've experienced the new birth. If you're in Christ, you are born again, you are born of God, "you've been born from above," as Jesus puts it, in John chapter 3. And here he paints two word-pictures of that new birth. The first is moving or immigrating. The Greek word translated "passed out" here, literally means to 'pass over.' And it's used often geographically of leaving one country or one territory and moving to another. So, we have passed over, we have left our home country, and we've gone to immigrate to another country. True believers have changed homes; we have spiritually immigrated to a new country. It's the

language of Colossians 1:13 where Paul writes, God "...rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son." You are a spiritual immigrant; you no longer live in the country in which you were born, which was the country of spiritual death, and you now live in life. By the way, the verb here is a powerful one, this idea of 'passing over.'

But notice, there's another word picture, not only is it this immigration, spiritual immigration, but the other word picture in this expression is resurrection. Becoming a Christian is not just making a personal decision. Becoming a Christian is not just deciding, you know, I like Christ, and I like the ethic He stands for, and therefore, I'm going to associate myself with the Christian church. No, becoming a Christian is a spiritual resurrection. Notice he says, true Christians "have passed," and the perfect verb tense there emphasizes this happened in the past and its results are permanent. He says, "We have passed (literally) out of the spiritual death into the spiritual life." The definite article emphasizes that these are two distinct realms, the realm of life and the realm of death. And there are only two, there's no neutral territory.

Every person is born into the realm of spiritual death. Romans 5:12 says, "Therefore, just as through one man (That is Adam.) sin entered into the world, and death through sin," and by the way, that's spiritual death—separation from God; that's physical death that eventually comes as a result of sin; and then that's eternal death that all who do not embrace Jesus Christ will endure forever; they're all included in this expression. He says, "...just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned." You are cursed; I am cursed; we're born cursed; we're born spiritually dead—disconnected from God our Creator.

Ephesians 2 puts it this way, "...you were dead in your trespasses and sins." God, even when we were dead, in our transgressions, he goes on to say, "...made us alive together with Christ

(by grace you have been saved).” You see, we were all born into spiritual death. But if you're a Christian, you have been born again, you have been born of God, and now you no longer belong to the country, the realm and to which you once belonged, but now you belong to the realm of eternal life. As a result of the fall, we were spiritually dead, separated from God, as Paul puts it “alienated from the life of God.” But by grace through faith, God saved us, and He gave us new life. He caused us to be born again unto a living hope, and now we enjoy, instead of that separation from God, we enjoy what Vine calls “Conscious existence in communion with God.”

It's exactly what Jesus said in John 17:3, when He said, “This is eternal life,” here's eternal life, you want to know what it is? It's not living forever, everybody's going to live forever in heaven or hell, it's not duration, primarily; it's a different kind of life. He says, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” John is saying here, in our text, that Christians know that the promise Jesus made in John 5:24 is true of us.

What is that promise? John 5:24, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

But how do we know that that has actually happened to us? How can you know that that's happened to you? Look at 1 John 3, verse 14, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because (Here's how we know, because) we love the brethren,” literally, “because we are loving the brothers.” The present tense there, “are loving” points out that the kind of love that marks a genuine Christian is not an occasional event. Rather it is a characteristic pattern; “we are loving.” We can have confidence that we have eternal life because we love our fellow-believers.

Now don't misunderstand, we don't earn eternal life by loving believers; we provide evidence that we already have eternal life by loving them. It is evidence of life. As one commentator,

Lenski, puts it, “Both physical life and spiritual life are not seen directly but are apparent only from their evidence from their activity.” You cannot see my physical life, but you see the activity of that life as I move, as I speak, as I breathe, as my heart beats, you can see that activity. The same thing is true spiritually. You're loving other believers is how you can see evidence of spiritual life.

Why is that? I like the way D. Edmond Hiebert puts it; he says:

Fallen human nature is selfish and resists any claims on its time that conflicts with those of self. (Ooh, that's good, let me read that again.). Fallen human nature is selfish and resists any claims on its time that conflicts with those of self. Therefore, when an individual consistently places the welfare of others above his own, it is a sure sign that he has received a new nature.

Lord willing, next time that we study this text, we will look at a definition of love. And it's seen in the life of Jesus Christ, in His self-sacrifice for others, that's what love looks like. And we can recognize the sign of life in us by a consistent pattern of sacrificing ourselves for the benefit and good of others who on whom we've set our love, and especially fellow believers.

That makes sense, doesn't it? I mean, the Scripture says that love is the greatest of the three Christian virtues, 1 Corinthians 13:13, “...now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.” Love is the first fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22, “...the fruit of the Spirit is love.” Love always exists wherever there is true saving faith. Colossians 1:4, “...we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints.” Love for other believers is the primary mark of a disciple of Jesus Christ, John 13:35, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” And here in our text, we

discover that love for believers is a primary sign of eternal life. Verse 14 says, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren (brothers).”

Now, this is an interesting change because if you remember back in the first test of love, back in chapter 2, verses 9 and 10, there, John says, we are to love, and he says, “He loves his brother.” Now that expression could mean that we're to love those who are our blood relatives, which of course is true, because we're to love everyone in our lives, even our enemies. But here in verse 14, John says, notice how he puts it, “because we (are loving) the brethren,” or the brothers. And by the way, that expression for you ladies is not exclusive of you. In the first century, that was a way to say, “the brothers and sisters.” And whenever you come across that in the New Testament, it's talking about your brothers and sisters in Christ. So, he says here that we are to love or “we do love the brothers.” That can only mean one thing, our Christian brothers and sisters, those who are members of God's family with us.

You see, Christians love and seek to do good to everyone. But a key piece of evidence of spiritual life is when you truly love other believers. Why is that? Well, as I mentioned last time, unbelievers love those who love them, those from whom they can get something, right? Jesus made that comment in the Sermon on the Mount. But unbelievers never love believers because they are believers. Only true believers do that. That's why this is such a powerful test. Notice what Paul writes in Galatians 6:10, he says, as believers “...let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Believers love other believers.

By the way, this is why true believers don't permanently forsake the church, the gathering or the assembly of Christ's people. Hebrews 10, verse 25, “not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the

day drawing near.” In fact, let me put it pointedly. “You show me a professing Christian who is content week after week, year after year not to be connected with believers in a local church, and I’ll show you someone with serious cause to question the reality of their faith; because authentic, genuine Christians crave Christian fellowship.” In fact, Christians actually enjoy one another; they don’t just tolerate it.

If you’re a real Christian, you’re not sitting here going, “Wow, these are not my people. I don’t really want to be here. I’m happy to get what I can get, but I’m eager to leave, and I don’t care about these people.” If that’s who you are, you’re not a Christian. Real Christians love other Christians! That’s what Jesus said, that’s what John is saying here. They enjoy worshiping with, praying with, talking with other believers. And by the way, they enjoy talking about spiritual things and not just how the Cowboys are doing this year. Which, by the way, there’s nothing wrong with talking about how the Cowboys are doing this year. I’ve enjoyed that myself. I’ve been a Cowboy fan my whole life. It’s one of the few years recently that we can actually talk positively. So, I’m not dissing on that, but I’m just saying that real Christians enjoy talking about more than that kind of stuff. They enjoy talking about spiritual things with other believers. So, in the first half of verse 14, John states it positively, “True Christians Love Christians.”

Then in the second half, he states that same basic truth negatively. Notice how he puts it in verse 14, “...He who does not love abides in death.” Literally, the Greek text says, “The one not loving is remaining in death, the one who has a pattern and practice is not loving those that he or she says are his brothers and sisters in Christ, that one is abiding, the word just means ‘to stay or remain,’ is remaining in spiritual death.” The absence of love reveals such a person is still in his original state in which he was born, he’s still spiritually dead regardless of how much life he claims. So, in verse 14, love’s role as evidence of eternal life is directly stated.

Now we come to verse 15, and in verse 15, it's "Biblically Argued." Here, John gives proof of what he just said back in verse 14. Look at verse 15, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." Now, if you had a problem following exactly what John's argument is, don't be disappointed in that, it's not unusual because John does something often in his writings that he does here. And that is, he condenses his argument, he sort of implies some things and clearly states some things that you're supposed to understand. Remember, he shepherded these people as their pastor for many years, and so they knew his thinking, they knew how he presented himself, and so he just does that. And so we can miss something if we're not careful. For us to fully understand his meaning, we need to spell out not only what he says, but also what is clearly implied beneath what he says. So let me do that. There are three specific parts in his argument in verse 15, and let me take them apart, and then we'll put them back together.

The first part of his argument is this, "If you are not consistently loving someone, you hate him," if you are not consistently loving someone, you hate him. If you compare verses 14 and 15, you'll see that John doesn't allow any middle ground; you either love or you hate. This is exactly what he said back in chapter 2. Look at chapter 2, verse 9:

The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

Now, in our western mindset, and frankly, in our sinful human mindset, we look at that and go, "Well wait a minute, can we get a third category? Can we add to our multiple choice selection here, because there are a lot of people in my life I don't love and I don't hate, I'm just indifferent

towards them; I'm apathetic toward them—Why isn't that a category?" And the answer is, "It's not in the mind of God!" It may be a category in your mind, but it's not a category in the mind of God. Everybody in your life you either hate or you love; there are no exceptions. Now, why is that true? Why is there no neutral ground between love and hate?

Now, stay with me, this is really important for you to understand. It's because of the nature of God's moral law. You see, God's moral law is not merely negative, telling us what not to do. In fact, it is primarily positive, telling us what we should do. Let me show you this. Turn back to Exodus, keep your finger here in 1 John, go back to Exodus 20. In Exodus 20, verses 3 through 17, you have 'The Ten Commandments.' Here is a summary of God's moral law; this is what God requires. Think of 'The Ten Commandments' as like an outline of what God requires of us. The first four-what He requires of us toward Him; the final six-what He requires of us toward others. It's like a series of hooks, ten hooks on which you can hang everything God demands. It's a great summary; you can carry this with you. It's called "The Ten Words" at one point in the Old Testament. You remember ten words and you remember a summary of everything God requires. So here you have 'The Ten Commandments.'

Now, you'll notice that eight of 'The Ten Commandments' are worded negatively; just glance, beginning at verse 3, and you will see again and again, "You shall not, You shall not, You shall not." Eight of the ten are expressed negatively. So 'The Ten Commandments' forbid certain actions. Again, just look at them. God forbids our having other gods, our making an idol, our taking God's name in vain, murder, adultery, stealing, bearing false witness, coveting, "You shall not." To obey God's Law, you can't do those sinful actions.

But here's the really difficult part. Even if you don't do those things, and I'll show you in a moment you have, but even if you could not do those things, you still haven't kept God's Law because God intentionally worded two of 'The Ten Commandments' positively. Look at verse

8, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." And by the way, the spirit of that command is still true today. If you look at that command, you'll see that it's really about God being sovereign over our time. And He says, "Here's what you're to do with your time, you're to work six days a week, either at your business or in keeping your home and your life in order, and then I'm going to set aside time for you to worship me." Under the Old Testament, it was the Sabbath day, the seventh day, commemorating God's creation and His resting on the seventh day. In the New Testament era, the day of worship is prescribed as the Lord's Day in Revelation 1. It's the first day of the week, the day our Lord rose from the dead. It's not a Christian Sabbath, but it is the day designated for God's people to worship. But notice it's put positively, "Remember the sabbath...to keep it holy."

Look at verse 12, "Honor your father and your mother." Now, did you notice that God broke the pattern? Eight times He says, "You shall not, you shall not," I think that's eight, and then He says two times, "You shall!" Why? Did God like lose track of what He was saying and how He was communicating? No! Why didn't God just say you shall not violate the sabbath, and you shall not dishonor your parents? It's because he was teaching us something very important. The two positive commandments make the crucial point that God also demands that we do, positively, the opposite of what each negative command forbids.

Let me illustrate that for you. Let's take the first four; here's what God commands you and me to do. He commands us to love and worship Him, the one true God. He commands us secondly, to worship Him from our hearts and only in the way that He's prescribed and not to come up with our own way of worshipping Him. Thirdly, He commands us to set apart and

treat as holy, His person, His name, and everything connected to Him. Fourthly, he commands that we work six days each week, but set aside time to worship Him as He's prescribed.

Now, let's come to the six commandments about the people around us. Here's what He commands. He commands us to honor the human authorities in our lives, to take every reasonable step to preserve our own lives and the lives of others. He commands us to enjoy His gift of sexuality, both mind and body solely within a God-honoring marriage. He commands us to care for our own belongings and to respect the belongings of others. He commands us to always speak the truth, but to do so in love for and for the benefit of others. And He commands us to be content with and grateful for His providence. You see what God really demands of us in 'The Ten Commandments' is that we love Him, and we love the people around us. It's positive! That's exactly what Jesus said. Turn to Matthew, chapter 22, and look at verse 36. One of the lawyers, one of the Pharisees, asked Jesus this question, verse 36, Matthew 22:

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ (Now look at verse 40.) On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.

Jesus says, “Okay, you want to simplify this thing, even beyond ‘Ten Commandments?’ Here it is, the first four are telling you to love God, and the final six are telling you to love others. Love God perfectly, and love others as you love yourself.” It's what Paul said. Turn to Romans 13 verse 8.

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; (Why?) for (because) he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. (If you love, you've kept God's Law as God intended.) For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there's any other commandment, it is summed up in the saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law.

That's the point of the law. It's not doing something. It's positively loving God with your whole heart and loving the people around you as you love yourself; to obey the intent of God's Law, that's what you have to do. So, listen carefully, that means if we sin against others by doing what God forbids, or if we fail to do positively, what God commands, if we fail to love them, we are in reality, hating them. Why? Because we're doing the very thing that's the opposite of love. We're sinning against them in the way that's the opposite of the love commanded. So, if you're not consistently loving someone, you are hating them.

Let's go back to 1 John, chapter 3, and pick up the second part of John's argument in verse 15, "If you hate someone, you have broken the sixth commandment against murder in your heart," if you hate someone, you've broken the sixth commandment against murder in your heart. (Paraphrase.) Look at verse 15, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer;" everyone, no exceptions. "Everyone, (literally) hating his brother;" the present tense. It's not describing a temptation to hate or a sudden act of sin. John's talking about a continuing habit, a subtle disposition. So, here's what he's saying, "A person who continually harbors hate toward his professed Christian brothers and sisters, is a murderer." That's not me; that's not even John. That's God! If you are consistently hating people around you, God sees you as having violated the sixth commandment, and you are guilty of murder in your heart.

The word ‘murderer’ here is a rare Greek word; it literally means ‘mankiller.’ It’s only in two places in the New Testament, ironically here, and in John 8:44 where it’s used of Satan where it says, “...(he) was a murderer from the beginning.” You see, hatred, sinful anger, and murder, all belong to the realm of Satan and reflect his nature and not God’s.

Now, here's the key question. Why is it true that someone who hates has broken the command against murder; why is that true? Well, it's because God's moral law is primarily internal rather than external. Again, God taught us this within the framework of ‘The Ten Commandments.’ Think about it. One of ‘The Ten Commandments’ deals exclusively with what happens in your heart, the 10th commandment, Exodus 20, verse 17, “You shall not covet.”

This is what got to Paul, a Pharisee, who kept everything externally. But when he thought about that, he realized, “I’m in big trouble because God has a problem with what's going on in my heart.” What this means is not only are we forbidden from violating the negative commands in ‘The Ten Commandments,’ and not only are we required to keep them positively, but God also demands that we keep the spirit of each of His commands within our hearts. John says what that means is that if you hate someone in your heart, you've broken the real spirit of the sixth commandment against murder.

Now, be careful, don't misunderstand what he's saying here. Hatred is not murder. Committing murder is a worse sin than hating in your heart. Murder deserves a worse temporal punishment. Genesis 9 says that the person who murders another human being, his life is to be taken, while that's not required for someone who hates. Revelation, chapter 20, verse 12, says that eventually, every human being will be judged on the basis of their deeds. So, a person who has murdered will be punished worse eternally than a person who has not. There are degrees of

punishment in hell. If you die without Christ, you will face a perfect record of your sins, and you will get perfect justice, you will get the punishment you deserve for all eternity, not somebody else's, yours; that's the justice of God. So, hatred is not the exact equivalent of murder, but hatred in the heart makes you equally guilty of having broken God's Law and equally deserving of eternal punishment. You can break the sixth commandment in your heart, that's the point.

Of course, Jesus said the same thing. Go back to Matthew, chapter 5. In the Sermon on the Mount, He deals here, not with hatred, but with anger. And He makes exactly the same point. Matthew 5:21, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER;' (That's God's Law. That's true. But then you were also told, and here's the rabbi's spin.) and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'" In other words, it's all about what you do externally. So, if you commit murder, you've broken the commandment, and you'll be liable to the court, but if you haven't committed murder, then you've kept that commandment. Jesus says, "Not so fast." Verse 22:

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother (This has to do within the heart.) shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, "You good-for-nothing," (The idea here is, "You idiot! That would be a good modern translation. It has to do with their intelligence, you idiot.) shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' (It has to do with their moral sinfulness, you scoundrel.) that person shall (will) be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell.

What's going on here? Well, first of all, there's not a progression of sin; it's not that calling someone a good-for-nothing is slightly better than calling him a fool. That's not the point. What's progressing here is the punishment. You go from a local court to the supreme court, to God's court. In every case, you have three expressions of the same sin, anger in the heart.

Sometimes it stays in the heart, sometimes it expresses itself in speech, you idiot, or whatever. The point Jesus is making is this, “You think the sixth commandment is all about not killing somebody, but I’m saying to you,” Jesus says, “that if the intention of God’s Law was enforced, if you were merely angry in your heart against another person, you could be taken to the local courts in your community and found guilty of having broken the sixth commandment.” And in ancient Israel in the first century, you couldn’t just kill somebody because the local court said they were worthy of death penalty; you had to take them to the supreme court, you had to take them to the Sanhedrin. Jesus says, “If they were to take your case to the Sanhedrin, and all you were guilty of is being angry enough to say, ‘You idiot,’ you’d be convicted at the supreme court, and you could endure the death penalty if the intention of God’s Law was carried through on it.

And then shockingly, Jesus says at the end of verse 22, “Whoever says, ‘You moral scoundrel, you worthless person’ shall be guilty enough to go into fiery hell.” You know what Jesus says, if all you ever did in your life was become angry in your heart with another person or expressed that anger in ~~in~~ biting language toward them, you could be declared guilty of having broken the sixth commandment in God’s court and sent to eternal hell. That’s all you have to do. It’s not about murdering somebody; it’s about being angry with them and spitting out angry words. It’s about, in John’s terms, “hating them,” in 1 John.

Go back there with me, 1 John 3. John says, “Listen, if you have a pattern of anger and name calling, as Jesus says in Matthew 5, or if you have a pattern of hating someone, and there’s only a hair’s breadth of difference between them, you are a murderer, you’re a murderer.” You say, “How can that be true?” Well, John Calvin put it this way, “We wish him to perish, whom we hate.” You don’t have to pick up a weapon; you just have to feel that kind of anger in your heart.

A third part of John's argument here in verse 15 is, and this wraps this argument process up. "If you are consistently characterized by patterns of anger and hatred (And thereby guilty of murder in your heart), you do not have eternal life." Let me read that again, "If you are consistently characterized by patterns of anger and hatred (And thereby guilty of murder in your heart), you do not have eternal life." (Paraphrase.). Look at verse 15, "...and you know (That is, you are knowing as a generally accepted fact.) that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." Now, John's not saying that someone who's committed murder is beyond repentance and forgiveness.

When I was at "Grace to You," and I've told you the story before, but it's one of my dearest and fondest memories. I corresponded over a several years with a man named Johnny Pyles.

Johnny Pyles was on death row down in Huntsville for murder, and he had come to genuine faith in Christ, and we had a wonderful time of fellowship through our letters. He was eventually executed as he understood he deserved to be for his crimes. But I'll see Johnny in heaven. So, it's not that a murderer can't be forgiven, can't repent and be forgiven.

Instead, John is laying down a general principle, literally, notice what he says, "No murderer (There are no exceptions.) is having (Eternal life isn't something you get in the future. It's a present reality for the real Christian. No murderer is having) eternal life." And "eternal life" refers to both the quality of life, that is, its life from above; it's the very life of God Himself, and also the quantity of life—it's forever. John doesn't mean a murderer, someone who hates, someone marked by anger can't repent, can't be forgiven, can't receive eternal life. Here is what he means. If you are a professing Christian and you are ruled by an angry, hateful, murderous spirit, especially toward believers, you do not have eternal life in you; you are not a true Christian.

This is what the Scriptures teach. Galatians, chapter 5, verse 19 and following, lists anger and outbursts of anger, it says, "...those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

If this is what marks you, identifies you by the people around you, you're not a Christian.

Revelation 21:8 says:

For the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

If you're characterized by these things, John says, "You have an empty profession; you're a false Christian—you don't really have eternal life.

So, what's the application of this passage to us? First of all, if you're a professing believer, if as you sit here this morning, you'd say, "Tom, I'm a Christian, I am convinced I'm a Christian," then you need to take the test of eternal life in verse 14. Look at it again, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren (brothers). He who does not love abides in death." It's as simple as this; if you consistently love Christians, you have eternal life. If on the other hand, you consistently fail to love Christians, you do not have eternal life.

If you sit here this morning and you say, "This is the last place in the world I want to be; my parents drag me here, I'm bored to tears, I'm ready to be out of this place, these are not my people, I'm ready to go connect with those who are," then you're not a Christian, and if you die that way, you will deserve and be sent to eternal hell. If on the other hand, you look around you and say, "You know, there are people I struggle loving, but I love these people. These are my people, I love them, because they have the same Lord, they have the same Father, they believe

the same things that are precious to me, these are my people, and I want to care for them practically.” Then be encouraged; that marks you as having eternal life.

If you're not a Christian, what you've heard in this passage this morning explains why you and I, why we all need the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because when you really come to understand what God requires, when you understand His moral law, you begin to realize you're really in a hopeless situation. You see, most people think they're going to get to heaven. And this is like eighty percent of Americans, they think they're going to get to heaven, they're going to stand in front of God, God is going to put their good deeds and their bad deeds on a scale, and if their good deeds slightly tilt the scale, then they're going to be in. They have completely misunderstood God's Law and what God requires.

The truth is God's Law is, as James puts it in James 2:10, “...whoever keeps the whole law (if you could keep everything but) stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.” You see, God's Law isn't like these little pieces you put on each side of the scale; God's Law is like a chain—break one link and you've broken the whole! Or it's like a sheet of plate glass, hit it once with a hammer and you've shattered it entirely because now you will never be able to love God perfectly or love your neighbor as yourself.

Having failed once; you failed it forever. You, I, we have all broken, listen carefully, every single one of God's moral laws. You've broken every one of 'The Ten Commandments' and so have I; if not actively, you've broken it in your heart. And I think you understand that, but if you struggle with that, come find me afterwards—I'll prove it to you because I know it's true. This is why we need the gospel. You see, we have broken every one of God's commands and we have never kept the positive commands of God's Law, perfectly loving Him and others.

But Jesus came, God sent His only Son into the world, and He was qualified to be our substitute by becoming a human person, and then by perfectly keeping God's law for thirty-three years, He kept it positively, He kept it negatively, He kept it in His speech, in His thoughts, in His actions. He never did anything but love God perfectly and love others. And then He died; He's the only person in the history of the world who didn't deserve to die, and He died! Why? He died for the sins of His people; He died to pay the debt against God's justice for the sins of those who would believe in Him. And on the third day, God raised Him from the dead, and for you to receive the benefit of His death, and be forgiven for having shattered every single one of God's commands, your only hope is to repent of your sins, to recognize you're a sinner, to have genuine sorrow for that sin, to be willing to turn from your rebellion and those sins, and to believe the gospel, to know the truths of the gospel I just shared, to believe them to be true, and then to depend on and trust yourself to Jesus Christ as your only hope of forgiveness and of heaven. And that includes, by the way, that is pictured in the New Testament as "confessing Jesus as Lord." It's pictured as "following Him." It's pictured as becoming "His disciple." That's the only way! Otherwise, you face the reality of standing before God, having shattered every single one of His commandments, and He will be just, and you will get exactly what you deserve. Or you can believe in Christ and Christ gets what you deserve, and you get what He deserves. That's the gospel.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for our time together this morning. I pray that you would burn these truths into our hearts. Lord, for us who are in Christ, thank you for the encouragement, the assurance. Lord, we don't love others perfectly, but as we look at our hearts, we see that we love Your people because You planted that love within us. Thank You for the assurance and confidence that brings that we have eternal life.

Lord, for those who are here who failed the test, Oh God, strip away the façade, help them to see themselves in the mirror of your word clearly, and to repent, and believe in your Son. Don't let them trust in their own righteousness which is hopeless. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.