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How Can I Know That I Am Really Saved? (Part 3)



How Can I Know That I Am Really Saved? - Steve Gregg

In this segment, Steve Gregg discusses four tests for knowing if one is truly saved, using the template from 1 John. Gregg emphasizes the importance of love as a deal breaker for being saved and the presence of the Holy Spirit as evidence. He also notes the importance of love, faith, godliness, and brotherly kindness, and discusses the way these qualities produce actions of loving one's neighbor and serving others. Finally, Gregg encourages an examination of one's own love, knowledge, and discernment through scripture to gauge spiritual progress.

Transcript

We have been using 1 John as a template for looking at these four tests of knowing that we're really saved. It's from 1 John that we find several different passages that tell us that if we believe and confess certain things about Christ and ourselves, then that is one of the tests that we're saved. It is from 1 John also that we read that we know that He abides in us, and we abide in Him because He's given us of His Spirit.

That's the second test. It is also in 1 John, perhaps more than most parts of the Bible, that tell us that love is a proof of salvation. That's our first point, that love is a proof of genuine salvation.

In 1 John 3.14, John says, We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. And then he flips that around and gives the flip side, He who does not love his brother abides in death. Now, passing from death unto life means that we were formerly not saved and now we are.

We have life. We were once dead. Remember in Ephesians, Paul says that we were dead in trespasses and sins, but God in His abundant mercy has made us alive in Christ and raised us up with Christ.

So, that's part of getting saved, is coming to life out of death. So, we don't pass from death unto life by loving people, but we know that we have passed from death unto life if we love the brethren. And maybe even more certainly, we know that we have not passed from death unto life if we don't love the brethren.

He that does not love his brother abides or remains in his original condition, unsaved. He abides in the realm of death. Now, another passage in 1 John that says the same thing a little differently.

Beloved, let us love one another. This is 1 John 4, verses 7 and 8. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Well, being born of God and knowing God is what we are wanting to know if we have been.

Well, it says if you love, everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Now, you might say, well, I know a lot of loving people who aren't Christians, don't profess to be Christians. And I want to remind you that as we focus on each of these tests each week, we're really looking at a composite picture of a true Christian.

Just like when, you know, the police try to get a description of the criminal who got away and the people who saw it tried to describe the nose, the person's nose, like a hairy head, what the shape of his face was, and you get a composite drawing. When you put these four together, you have the composite picture of a true saved individual. If you have only one of them, you don't.

For example, if you find someone who's very loving, but they don't believe that Jesus is the Christ, they deny that Jesus is the Christ. Well, 1 John says they're anti-Christ, but they may appear to be very loving. You might even find people who live a righteous life, which is the fourth test we haven't looked at.

Maybe even more righteous than some Christians, you know, and yet they don't believe in Christ. Or they do it all without love. Well, I mean, that one test by itself, no one test by itself can really prove what we're talking about.

We're looking at a composite here. We're looking at all these things. Everyone who loves, and we might add who also passes the other three tests, because John does not intend to exclude that information that is also found in his epistle on these other things, does know God and is born of God.

And again, he puts the negative. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. So, this is like a deal breaker.

And you know, a lot of religious people who are in churches and who are called Christians have fallen short in this one area, perhaps more than others. Most Christians clean up their act a bit, hopefully considerably. If they were very sinful before they were Christians, they become more obedient to the commands of Christ.

If they're in a Pentecostal or Charismatic type church, they might even speak in tongues and give themselves evidence that they have the Holy Spirit, if that's what they interpret to be the evidence. They might, of course, be able to recite theology correctly, and yet

they can be extremely censorious, extremely judgmental, extremely unkind, unsympathetic, uncompassionate, lacking all the traits that are part of being loving. And this is really, it's perhaps the absence of this more than anything else, I think, that has turned the average non-Christian off from the average Christian that he or she thinks he is known.

Now, I realize that non-Christians sometimes judge Christians more harshly than is fair, and often will amplify any little defect in a Christian because they want to, and because they want to find excuses for, you know, rejecting Christianity. But honestly, there are people who perhaps would be drawn to Christ if they had seen the love of Christ in Christians. And instead, what they've seen is Christians who, like the Pharisees used to, you know, pull their garments around themselves and say, I'm not going to touch any of these, you know, unclean people around me because we've got homosexuals in this community, we've got, you know, abortionists, and we've got drunkards and drug addicts and, you know, people who've done bad stuff.

Well, Jesus lived among people who did bad stuff like that too, but they were comfortable around him, which is amazing. It's really an amazing thing, isn't it, that Jesus attracted sinners to himself where modern Christians repel them. And I believe the difference between Jesus and modern Christians often is just in this area.

It's not the righteous living that attracted the sinners to Jesus. His righteousness, now I'm sure the fact that he was righteous and lived righteously, gave credibility to him in their sight that he was a true man of God. But that's, I mean, that's not what they were drawn to.

The Pharisees had ostensible external righteousness too, but they didn't really attract crowds of sinners to themselves. It was the love that was in Jesus that made it obvious that he was somebody that was approachable, that he was somebody that might actually care about them enough to lead them to God and not judge them too severely. So, I mean, this is what is the distinctive of Christians.

Jesus said this in John 13, verses 34 and 35. He said, A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. This was in the upper room just before he was arrested, the same night.

He said, As I have loved you, that you love one another. He said, By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another. This is how people can know.

All will know, and you're one of those people who can know that you're one of his disciples too by the same test. We know we've passed from death unto life because we love. We know that, and all will know that.

All will know that we're really disciples by this test. Not by the fact that we have really

gotten into the religious groove, and know how to speak the Christian lingo, and know how to stay away from the wrong kind of people, and hang out with the right kind of people. All of those things can be okay, and can even be necessary.

But if it's without love, you know what Paul said about things that are without love. It's worth nothing. So, love is a proof of genuine salvation.

But secondly, love is the evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence. Now, last time we mentioned the second test is that we possess the Holy Spirit. That's one of the tests that John gives.

Well, elsewhere in Scripture, the main test that we have the Holy Spirit is that we love. According to Paul in Galatians 5.22, the fruit of the Spirit is love. Of course, he continues with that list, but love is first.

Commentators are not agreed whether Paul is giving a list of nine totally different things in sequence, when there are nine fruits listed there, or whether he is saying the fruit of the Spirit is love, colon, and then the other eight are simply unpacking that word. I personally take the first view. I think love is simply mentioned first in a list.

But the thing is, it is first. And it is the most prominent fruit, that the Holy Spirit is present. We know this from many other passages, including Romans 5.5, where Paul said, Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us.

It's the love of God that's poured out into our hearts, so that we have hearts full of love, if this is the case for us, because of the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. This is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. In 2 Timothy 1.7, Paul said, For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of? Well, power.

Yeah, love, power, and of a sound mind. So, but he says, but of love. It's the spirit of love.

2 Timothy 1.7. And so, possessing the Holy Spirit and being loving are really inseparable. If a person says they are spiritual and have not love, well, Paul has some things to say about that. Now, a lot of people think they're spiritual because they have spiritual gifts.

Because they speak with tongues, because they prophesy, because maybe they're even a gifted teacher or preacher. And they feel like, well, that qualifies them for being a spiritual Christian. Well, Paul doesn't think so.

Love is a more sure proof of the Holy Spirit's presence than spiritual gifts are. You remember the contrast between the Christmas tree and the fruit tree. The Christmas tree may have gifts hung upon it, but they tell you nothing about the tree.

The tree is not even alive. It didn't produce the gifts. Someone else puts the gifts on the tree.

A fruit tree produces fruit, and therefore the presence of fruit on the tree tells you that the tree is alive, and even tells you what species it is. The fruit tells you something about the tree. The gifts on a Christmas tree tell you nothing about the tree.

And likewise, the gifts of the Holy Spirit on a Christian don't tell you anything about whether they really even are a Christian. In the Old Testament, Saul, when he was pursuing David, ran in among a group of prophets, and the Spirit came upon him, and he fell down and he prophesied. Well, he wasn't a spiritual, godly man, and yet he prophesied just like the Old Testament prophets.

Balaam, in the Old Testament, prophesied, and he was a wicked man, the Bible says. In the New Testament, we have Caiaphas, in John chapter 11, the leader of the Sanhedrin, the chief priests who condemned Jesus. On one occasion, he actually prophesied, not knowing he was doing so, according to John chapter 11, verses 50 and 51.

And so, a gift can be manifested through someone who is not even saved. Obviously, therefore, having gifts of the Spirit can't tell you whether you're saved or not. Remember Jesus' statement near the end of the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew chapter 7, where he said, Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name, and we cast out demons in your name, and we did many mighty works in your name.

And you'll say, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of iniquity. People who had what appeared to be gifts, dazzling gifts.

And yet, he said, I never knew you. Well, Paul said, with reference to this matter of love being a more sure test of the presence of the Holy Spirit than spiritual gifts are. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul said, Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels.

Now, he's waxing eloquent here. Tongues, in this context, he's referring to the gift of tongues. 1 Corinthians 13 is sandwiched between 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Corinthians 14, and it's one continuous discussion from the beginning of chapter 12 to the end of chapter 14.

We're familiar with 13 because it's set apart, and we usually call it the love chapter, but it's in the context of the gifts of the Spirit. And when he says, Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, he's referring to the gift of tongues. Some have actually taken him literally enough to think that he's saying there are languages of angels as well as languages of men.

Others would say he's just been using a hyperbole. Even if I do speak in tongues, the most glorious tongues, not only human tongues, but if I could speak in heavenly, angelic tongues, but have not love, I have become like a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal,

which is merely just irritating noise. And yet, if I have the most wonderful gifts of the Spirit, how about prophecy? Paul said, Cover the best gifts, especially that you might prophesy.

Paul said, And though I have the gift of prophecy, but have not love, I am nothing. It's not just that it doesn't get me all the way there. It doesn't get me anywhere.

I am nothing at all if I don't have love, and it doesn't matter how many sensational gifts I can exhibit. And so it's more of a proof than spiritual gifts are. Love is also more of a sure proof of the Holy Spirit's presence than spiritual or theological knowledge.

We live in an age where people who are educated, intelligent, articulate, able to lay out deep spiritual truths will get a certain amount of respect in the Christian community. That's always been the case, I'm sure. I believe that Apollos got that kind of respect when he came to Corinth after Paul had left.

And so some of the people in Corinth who had been converted by Paul's presence decided they wanted to be of Apollos instead of of Paul. And Paul had to write back to them and say, Listen, Apollos and Paul, we're just different servants of the same master. You're not of Apollos or Paul.

But Apollos was a man mighty in word and apparently able to explain things. Well, Paul could do that too, but he said that when he came to Corinth he didn't rely on that. He said he didn't want their faith to rest in enticing words of men's wisdom but on the power of God.

But the point is people have always been impressed with people who know a lot and who can express it a lot. I would have to say that from my youth I have received more respect than I have ever deserved in the body of Christ because I happened to have been raised knowing the Bible. And because I knew it, people tended to defer to me in ways that I didn't, in other respects, deserve to be deferred to.

So I know this phenomenon myself. But it is love that is the proof of the presence of the Holy Spirit, not knowing a lot about the Bible or about theology. Paul said, And though I understand all mysteries and all knowledge and have not love, I am nothing.

1 Corinthians 13, 2. So I could have the gifts of the Spirit like prophecy and tongues in the extreme, or I could have total knowledge of all mysteries, more than any theologian. And yet without love it doesn't count at all, not at all. Paul said elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 8, 1, he says, Knowledge puffs up, which means makes you arrogant.

But he says love edifies. Edifies means builds up. If you love others you will build them up.

If you are knowledgeable, it will tend to just make you puff yourself up. Now, it's not

inevitable that a person who has knowledge has to be arrogant, but it is, Paul knows the tendency is there. And that is something to watch out for.

But love, therefore, is more to be desired even than knowledge. Not that we're supposed to desire ignorance either. The point here is not that we shouldn't seek the gifts, but we should seek the fruit.

Some people say to certain Pentecostal people I know, I'll take the fruit of the Spirit, you can have the gifts of the Spirit. Well, I didn't know we had to choose between them. Is God saying, okay, listen, you can either have the gifts or the fruit, but you can't have both.

That's being greedy, you know. It seems to me that we should desire, as Paul said, the best gifts, but realizing that even if we had them, without love it's nothing. Likewise, we should seek to know God and to understand mysteries if they're available to us.

It says in 2 Peter 3, in verse 18, we should grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And Paul said, excuse me, Peter said in 1 Peter 2, that we should, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that we should grow thereby. We should seek to know more.

But we should be aware that the more you know, the more there is a spiritual challenge. You're more likely to be puffed up, and you need to make sure that you're not evaluating your own spirituality by a false measure, namely by what you know. But it should be more what you love.

You know the old saying, and it's quoted a lot, I almost don't quote it because it's so common, but, you know, people don't care what you know until they know how much you care. They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. You know that one? Well, that's this very same thing, knowledge versus love.

Also, love is a more sure proof of the Holy Spirit's presence than great faith. Now, there's nothing wrong with great faith. In fact, if anything, I think we all would wish to have more faith.

The disciples were often rebuked by Jesus because they had little faith instead of great faith. And some people were commended by Jesus because he said, I've never seen such great faith as in this centurion. Or he said to the woman, the Syrophenician woman, he says, Oh, woman, great is your faith.

That's what I want. Well, I want to have great faith. There are some churches, some movements that emphasize faith so much, and they're not just talking about faith in others or believing the right doctrines.

They're talking about a dynamic faith. They actually would say that, you know, it's all

about faith, that you can have health and wealth and whatever you want as long as you have enough faith for it. It's only your lack of faith that prevents it, they would say.

But no matter how much faith you have, if you don't love, well, it's, again, not much good. In 1 Corinthians 13, 2, Paul said, Though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains. I haven't seen anyone with that faith yet.

Or at least I haven't seen any mountains moved without a caterpillar. And so it's not by faith that it's been done if mountains have been moved. But he says, If I have not love, I'm nothing.

So it doesn't matter if you have the gifts or all knowledge and understand all mysteries, or if you have great faith to move mountains. None of those things really are proof of anything as much as love is a proof of genuineness. At the end of 1 Corinthians 13, at verse 13, Paul said, Now abide faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love greater than faith, greater than hope.

The greatest of all, he says, is love. Okay, so love is the evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence, and connected to that, love is also the essence and pinnacle of personal spirituality. Obviously, if I want to know if I'm a spiritual person, that has to do with the presence of the Holy Spirit in me and the work of the Holy Spirit in me.

And since the presence of the Holy Spirit is best recognized, best demonstrated by having love, so also, the more I love, the more that is the gauge of whether I'm a spiritual person or not. When you grow as a Christian, more spiritual, it should be that you're growing in love more and more, that this is the fruit that is ripening, and you can see yourself as being more compassionate, more sacrificial, more, you know, sympathetic, and so forth, with others, that you love them more than when you're not so spiritual. At least, spirituality is measured by that.

In Colossians 3.14, Paul said, But above all these things, and these things includes a list in which such things as humility and patience are mentioned, in verses 12 and 13. Above all these things, put on love. So, you put on love above all the other things, and then Paul says this about it.

He says, which is the bond of perfection, which is kind of a strange expression. It's not exactly, not immediately clear what that means, that love is the bond of perfection. In consulting modern translations, I found that most of them agree with the English Standard Version, which translates, which is the bond of perfection, with this phrase, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Well, you've got the word perfection in there, and the word bond, or binds. They're adding some extra words, obviously, that aren't in the text, but they're doing so in order to basically try to clarify what they think Paul means when he says love is the bond of

perfection. Love is the bond that binds together something.

One might think that it binds Christians together, although these modern translations seem to feel like he means love binds all these other virtues together. Humility, patience, and kindness, and so forth. These things are all bound together by one overarching quality, which is love, but that's the pinnacle of spiritual maturity.

1 Peter says the same thing. 1 Peter 4, 8 says, and above all these things have fervent love one for another. Notice Paul and Peter both.

In Colossians 3, 14, Paul says, above all these things put on love, and Peter says, and above all things have fervent love for one another. There's a lot of things the Bible recommends that we do and have in our lives. There's many qualities that are desirable, but both Paul and Peter, and I dare say if Jesus had been asked to speak on the subject in similar language, he would have said the same thing.

Above all these things in importance is love. Now, Peter, in 2 Peter 1, gives a list of the kinds of qualities that a Christian needs to have in his life or her life. And I'm going to take these one phrase at a time with you.

Peter says, but also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue. Now, all Christians have faith. That's the fundamental thing.

You get saved by having faith. But you're not just supposed to have faith. You're supposed to grow.

You're supposed to add dimensions to your Christian and your spiritual life. And virtue is to be added. It's not enough that just you have faith and nothing more.

It is. Take it into heaven, but it's not. That's not what God has in mind for you is to just have faith and no development.

You need to add virtue to your life, to your faith. And to virtue, knowledge. So you do need to grow in knowledge.

It's important. And to knowledge, self-control. It doesn't help to know a lot of things if you don't have any control over yourself.

You can know exactly what you're supposed to do, but you won't do it until you have self-control, which is one of the fruit of the Spirit also, according to Galatians 5. And to self-control, perseverance, which is stick-to-itiveness. And to perseverance, godliness, which is piety, basically, having a godward attitude, being aware of God, being concerned about the things of God. And to godliness, brotherly kindness, which is awfully close to love, but Peter has something a little less than agape in mind when he says that, because he adds to that.

And to brotherly kindness, love. Now, the point here is that these are all virtues that are to be added one by one. And the top of the pyramid, the top of the mountain, is love.

And here, of course, love is the Greek word agape. I won't give you a study on the Greek word agape. I'm assuming every Christian has heard that word and knows that that's the distinctive word in the New Testament for Christian love and for God's love.

And so it's at the top of the list of virtues, as you keep adding one thing on top of another. So love is the essence and pinnacle of personal spirituality, but love is also the governor of all actions. It's to govern everything you do.

Now, you do lots of things, and you're supposed to do lots of things. You raise a family, you make a living, you interact with your neighbors, you go to church, you confront people who are doing the wrong thing, you endure confrontations from people who think you're doing the wrong thing. There's all kinds of things that you do, but love is to govern all the things.

In 1 Corinthians 16, 14, Paul said, Let all that you do be done with love, or, of course, through love. Whatever you do, make sure that love is what's motivating and governing your actions. It's, as we saw, not enough that you go to church, that you have spiritual gifts, that you can expound on Christian theology correctly.

Everything that you do is worthless unless it's done through love. And that has to do also not only with your religious activities, but all of your social activities, all of your interactions with other people, all of the way you spend your money, everything. The way you spend your money, how could that be affected by love? How could it not? I mean, if you see your brother has need and you don't help, how does the love of God dwell in you? See, everything in your whole life has got to be governed by love.

And we'll talk more about what love looks like in a moment. In Galatians 5, 6, Paul said, For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything. The expression, avails anything, means counts for anything or accomplishes anything with God.

It doesn't get you anywhere with God. Being circumcised doesn't put you ahead of the game with God. Being uncircumcised doesn't either.

Neither of those things make any difference at all to God. What does? Well, a faith working through love. Now, we know that we're saved by faith, and we know that it's not being uncircumcised that justifies a person, it's faith.

But Paul here tells us what kind of faith, because as we've seen, the devil believes, the devil has faith of a sort, but not the kind that gets a person saved, because the devil isn't saved. The kind of faith that saves, the kind of faith that shows that you're saved, is if you have a faith that works through love. It produces actions, and those are loving

actions.

It's the governor of all actions in the life of the believer. In addition to being the governor of all our actions, it's the summary of all our duties. Love is the summary of all duties.

We get this from Paul and from Jesus. Paul said, in Romans 13, verses 8 and 9, He who loves another has fulfilled the law, for the commandments are all summed up in this saying, namely, you shall love your neighbor as you love yourself. He said, all the commandments are summed up in this one thing, and if you've done this one thing, you've fulfilled the law.

The next verse, Romans 13, 10, says, Love does no harm to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. Now what Paul is saying is that the instructions God gave in the law are intended to keep you from harming people, and since love never harms people, it is the fulfillment of the law. If you love people, you won't harm them, you won't rob them, you won't kill them, you won't lie to them, you won't do them any harm.

Now, does love ever hurt people? I dare say it does. The Bible says that a person, for example, who does not discipline his child, does not love his child, and love actually compels a parent to steer a child right, even if that is a painful steering process, because the parent loves the child. It's the difference between hurting someone and harming someone.

If you are a judicious disciplinarian, you may inflict some pain from time to time on a child to teach them the lessons that they need to know for their own good, but that will not harm them. They will not be the worst off for it. They will feel pain, but they will be better off for it.

And this is, of course, what the Bible teaches about God's love for us also, that whom He loves, He chastens. He corrects every child that He receives, it says in Hebrews, actually quoting from Proverbs 3, but it's repeated in Hebrews 12. And so, love may hurt, but it will never harm.

Harm is where damage is sustained as a result of somebody's actions, and that is, by the way, if people discipline their children, and the children are permanently damaged, that was not loving discipline. That was not proper discipline. That was abuse.

In Galatians 5.14, Paul, again, says, For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, you shall love your neighbors yourself. That's not new. That's what he said in Romans also.

But we see that he says it twice. Romans 13 and Galatians 5.14. Jesus said something essentially the same. He said, Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them.

For this is the law and the prophets. When he says this is the law and the prophets, of course, he's speaking to Jewish men who had been brought up to know that the law and the prophets defined what a man's supposed to do, what God wants people to do. And they'll be judged by whether they keep the law and the prophets or not.

So, Jesus said, Well, this is all the law and the prophets. It all boils down to this one thing. You know what you want people to do to you? Do that.

Do that to them. That's loving them. That's actually Jesus putting the Old Testament command, You shall love your neighbors yourself, which Paul in Galatians 5 said, All the law is summed up in this one word, you shall love your neighbors yourself.

Jesus takes that, you shall love your neighbors yourself, and puts it in practical terms. Here's what it looks like to love your neighbors yourself. You remember what you want done to you? Whatever you want done to you, you want that because you love yourself.

You want people to treat you right. You want people to treat you justly. You want people to be merciful to you.

You want people to be aware of your needs. Those are things you want because you love yourself. Well, you need to love other people like that.

That is, do to them the things you want done to you. That's just the same teaching put into more practical terms. But this seems to be speaking only of love for one another.

I mean, all these verses talk about love your neighbors yourself. What do you want others to do to you? Do to them. Is this only talking about loving other people? What about the love for God that Jesus said was the first and great commandment in Matthew 22, 38? That was, of course, the passage where a scribe, a lawyer, came to Jesus and said, What's the great commandment? He said, Well, the great commandment is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and all your strength.

He said, This is the first and great commandment, and the second is like it. You shall love your neighbors yourself. But all these passages in Paul and such, even in Jesus, in Matthew 7, 12, where he says, As you would that men do to you, do to them.

And that's the whole law in the prophets. They don't mention love for God. Those are all just talking about loving each other.

So where does this come into the picture, loving God? Well, what you'll find is that loving your neighbor for the right reasons is loving God. It says that in 1 John 4, verses 20 to the end of that chapter, and then into chapter 5, verse 1. John says, If someone says, I love God, and hates his brother, well, he's a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has seen? So in a sense, if you claim

that your love is for God, but you don't have any for your brother, then John is not impressed.

If you can love the God who you do not see, you can love your neighbor whom you have seen, John implies. That seems like he considers that loving the one you see is actually easier, or at least easier to observe, than loving someone that you can't see. And John says, In this commandment we have from him that he who loves God must love his brother also.

Now, whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves him who begot, that is, if you love God, who is the one who begot all those who believe in Christ, they're begotten of God. Everyone who loves God who begot also loves him, that is, the child of God, who is begotten of him. If you love God, you love his kids.

Love me, love my dog. You know, if you love somebody, then their kids are going to be special to you. If their kids are not special to you, then you don't love them.

Why? Because their kids are special to them. Because their kids are the apple of their eye. How can you, in any sense, be said to be concerned about what they are concerned about if you're not concerned about their children? How can you say that you love somebody if you don't love their kids? Now, I realize you might find their kids more irritating than your kids, even if they're not.

It's easier, we learn how to endure our children's annoying behavior, and then we go to someone else's house, and their kids are annoying in different ways that we're not accustomed to, and it gets on our nerves more. But the truth of the matter is, being annoyed by annoying behavior is not the same thing as not loving. Loving, as we shall see, is practical.

It's not failure to become irritated by irritating behavior. Love is that you are committed to somebody, that you would lay down your life for somebody. And if you have that... Well, I put it this way.

I would lay down my life for my children, and anyone who loves me, I would think, would lay down their lives for my children, as I would lay down my life for theirs, for their child. Why would I lay down my life for their child? Because I love them, and they would want their child to be delivered from some harm, and if I'm able to pay the price to restore their child to them, then that would be the loving thing to do. If you love the father, you love the father's children.

Everyone who loves him that begat, loves him that has begotten of him, John says. And therefore, the best way you can love God, is by loving his kids. Now, of course, love for God is manifest in other ways too.

I mean, obviously, by reverencing God, by not taking His name in vain, by not worshiping

other gods and so forth. There are some of those issues also that are not directly related to loving other people. But the New Testament writers seem to be focused on this one thing, primarily.

That you want to love God? I'll tell you how to do it. Love His kids. Love those who are begotten of Him.

And that is loving God. So, John says in 1 John 4, 11, Beloved, if God so loved us, which is something to be marveled at, he says, we also ought to love. Well, what's the logical final clause to this sentence? If God so loved us, we ought to love God.

That's not what he says. If God so loved us, we ought to love one another. What's the reasoning there? If God loves us, then we ought to love Him by loving those that He loves, which is our brothers and our sisters.

It's also got another line of reasoning behind it, and that is that if God loves you and me, then how can I not love you? Are my standards higher than God's? I mean, if God sees something in you worth loving, and I say, well, I don't. I can't love you. Well, then obviously I'm putting myself in some kind of higher category than God Himself.

God can lower Himself to loving you, but I simply can't do that. I love whoever's calling, but I'm going to hang up on them, which is a good example of what I'm talking about, hurting people you love. It happens to be one who's begotten of me, even.

I will talk to him. I'm sure it's not an emergency. Okay, so if God loved us, it doesn't say we ought to love God.

It says we ought to love one another. That's how John reasons. Now let's talk about the practice of love, because love is not strictly an emotion.

And that's where we need to really kind of get our thinking more biblical than it is by default. Our default thinking about subjects like love comes largely from our culture. Now if you were raised in the church, obviously you might have something more of a spiritual or biblical view of love, but there's a good chance that you hear more about love from movies and from poems and from conversation with people who are in love and things like that than you hear from the Bible, unless you're meditating day and night on the Scriptures, which is, of course, what you're supposed to be doing.

But more often Christians are getting ideas about love from the culture. And the culture basically understands love to mean that you feel good about somebody. Being around them makes you feel good.

In fact, we even call that being in love. And, in fact, it is so much tied to that that lots of people, even who get married, decide when they stop feeling good around each other that they're not in love anymore. How can you expect people to stay together who don't

love each other, I often hear.

If a man doesn't love his wife, why should he stay with her? If a woman doesn't love her husband, why should she stay with him? What's that mean? Well, I guess, as I understand it, if a man doesn't love his wife, then he'd better love his wife, because that's what he's commanded to do. But you can't be commanded to feel good about somebody. What kind of a command is that? How could God or anyone else command you to feel a certain way? Feelings just don't come because you invite them by, okay, come on, I want to feel love.

Well, you can't make yourself feel love. Love, we mistake love in our culture for like. Now, when I was a little kid, I was raised in a Christian home, and my parents used to say, well, you can love somebody without liking them.

And I thought, well, that doesn't make a lot of sense. How could you love someone without liking them, when, in fact, loving them means liking them a lot? But my parents were actually right, and I was wrong, because I was young and foolish. The truth of the matter is you can love somebody that you don't like.

You are not commanded to like anyone or anything. What you like and what you don't like is related to your tastes, some of which are ingrained from growing up. If you don't like food that's healthy and you like ice cream instead, you're not to be blamed for liking it.

Now, you might be blamed if you yield to those likes to the point where you make foolish decisions about how you nourish yourself. But you don't have to like somebody who's torturing you. Who could like that? Jesus didn't like being crucified, and He didn't like the attitudes of the people who crucified Him, I'm sure.

But He loved them enough to say, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. He was on their side.

You see, loving someone means that you have a commitment to them. You're on their side, even if they're not on your side, that you want what is good for them, not because you feel like you want it, but because you're committed to want it. You're committed to laying down your life for others.

That's a commitment. It's not an emotion. Now, you may find once you begin to act on that commitment, you may find that actually some emotions of the right type actually arise.

And I've heard James Dobson and many others comment about that kind of thing, that when husbands and wives say they don't love each other anymore, they say, well, do you remember how you acted toward each other when you were in love with each other? Start doing that again and see what happens. And there's all kinds of testimonials from

people like that, that lo and behold, they start feeling like they love each other again when that happens. But that's not what I'm talking about.

I'm not talking about how to restore feelings of love. That's for marriage counselors to do. And I'm talking more about general Christian love, which is not an emotion, but it's a practice.

Now, the emotion, it's always nice if the emotions you already feel toward someone make it easy to practice love toward them. But whether it is easy or not, it is still the sum of all your duties, is to love them. And John said in 1 John 3, 18, My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Love is something you do. It's deeds. It's not what you talk about.

It's not saying you love someone. It's doing love. What's that look like, to do love? Well, here's what Jesus said.

We saw it a moment ago, Matthew 7, 12. Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do that. That's love.

This is the law and the prophets. Do to them the thing you would want them to do to you. I want to break that down into certain things that the Scripture gives us.

All three of them are going to be about devotion. But we don't understand the word devotion today. We know about devotions.

Devotions means you have a quiet time and read your Bible and say a little prayer at the beginning of the day before everyone else is up. That's having devotions. I don't know where that word came from, to be used that way.

In the Bible, the word devotion is not something you can put an S at the end of. Devotion means total surrender. In the Bible, you would devote something to God.

You would devote a lamb or you would devote something of yours to God, and you'd take it to the tabernacle, and it became the property of God. You surrendered it to Him. You took your hands off it and gave it to Him instead.

Devotion is a word that means to surrender or to yield something. Something that you have, you give it up and give it to someone else. You devote it.

And so, devotion is simply the noun for that verb. It is the surrender of something. Well, first of all, love is the surrender or the devotion of our lives for others.

The most obvious Scripture that everyone, I think, probably thinks of about that is Jesus' words in John 15, 13, To His disciples, greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. To surrender your life for someone else. That's the greatest

proof of love.

That's the greatest demonstration of love. These are the words of Jesus, but John in 1 John says essentially the same thing in 1 John 3, 16. He says, By this we know love.

Now, elsewhere he says, We know that we've passed from death unto life because we love. But how do we know if we love? Well, here's how we know love. Because He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Now, laying down your life. We think immediately of Jesus laying down His life for us. That means He died for us.

And we ought to do the same for each other. Well, how many of you are going to get the chance to do that? To die for somebody else? Some might. I mean, it doesn't happen very often.

I had a, back in 1980, I was married for about six months. And my wife and my daughter from a previous marriage were walking together on Old San Jose Road, and a truck came around at high speed. And my wife saw the truck just a second before impact, and she pushed my daughter to safety.

I don't know if my daughter was in her way. She might have been able to jump herself to the other side for safety herself. But she thought only of her stepdaughter, toward whom she had no natural motherly affection.

But my wife was an extremely godly woman. And she was remarkable even in the months before that for her godliness. But she, I mean, in the moment where she had to act intuitively, and, you know, where what you are comes out in those moments when you don't have time to think, what's the spiritual thing to do? You know, I mean, she laid down her life for somebody that she was not even related to.

Now, that's, not everyone's going to have that opportunity. Now, John tells us we should lay down our lives for each other. But is he thinking only of those times where we have the right to, you know, someone comes to that door right now with an AK-47 and says, okay, someone here has got to die.

Who is it going to be? Okay, I'll go save these people. Take me. You know, I mean, that would be very heroic.

And, you know, then I would lay down my life for you. But is that the only way I can lay down my life for somebody? How many people get that chance? John makes it sound like this is something we're all supposed to do. And maybe he means something like that.

Maybe he means we should all be willing to do that. But it really is kind of a theoretical thing. Oh, I'm willing to do that, but I'll never put to the test on that.

Or unlikely that I will. But how about my life moment by moment? You know, my life consists of moments of time. There's a certain number that are given to me from the time I'm born to the time I die in this world.

Life is measured in increments of time. And for me to take the time that I could use for my own pleasure or for my own, you know, gratification or whatever, and to devote that, especially if I know of somebody who has need, for me to go and spend time with somebody that's not particularly exciting for me to be with, but I know that they have need. That would be a way of laying down at least a little part of my life.

The thing about laying down your life is that it's something you do kind of once for all, and then you have to remind yourself that you did it all the time in many different situations. Jesus said, he that seeks to save his life will lose it. And he that loses his life, for my sake shall find it.

Was he only talking about martyrdom? Could have been. All the disciples he was talking to actually did face martyrdom. But I think he was thinking in broader categories.

Laying down my life, seeking to save my life or laying down my life, is something I can do every day, every time I've got a choice to make between what I'd really rather do and what would really be something that someone else needs for me to do for them. That would be laying down my life for them. And so every time I would give up my rights, every time I would give up my prerogatives in order to do something that is needed for someone else, is a laying down of my rights of sorts.

And we are to do that on a regular basis. Now if the time comes where it's actually me or him and someone's got a gun, they're going to choose who they're going to kill, which is a far, far better thing that I do today if I go to the guillotine instead of them. But that's going to be a rare situation.

When you look enough like a condemned criminal that they'll take you to the guillotine instead of him. You're going to have to lay down your life in smaller ways than that, a lot more frequently than those other big opportunities to die as a martyr are going to come up. That's how, basically what love is, is putting others before you, yourself.

Your life is what you wake up and have some of until you go to bed at night. Of course you have it when you sleep too, but you're not making decisions about it during that time. So when you're awake and making decisions, the question is, given the opportunity to serve yourself or serve another, serving the other is a practical way of laying down your life.

And that's what we're supposed to do, like Jesus did that. He didn't just lay down his life at the cross, he laid down his life every day. You know, he wanted to rest after ministering for days without end.

And so he took a boat across the Sea of Galilee to get away from the crowds. Well, the crowds anticipated him. They ran around the end of the lake and they were waiting for him when he got to the other side.

He was weary. He was looking for some, you know, rest and relaxation. And he saw these huge crowds there waiting to be healed and to be taught.

When he saw them, what did he do? He taught them and he healed them. Spent another three days at it even. There was a time in, I believe it's in Mark chapter 3, if I'm not mistaken, that says that Jesus was teaching for several days to the extent where he didn't even stop to eat or sleep.

And so that his mother and brothers thought he'd gone mad. And they actually went to take him into their custody and take him aside for some enforced rest and relaxation because he was losing sleep and meals for several days running. They just thought that's nuts.

That's not going to work. You're going to have to take some breaks here. You're going to burn out.

But Jesus never did burn out. But he did lay down his prerogatives. He laid down his life and his comforts and his preferences in order that people who had needs could be helped by him.

That's what it was about. So devotion or surrender of our lives for others is one way of practicing love. Another is devotion or the surrender of our resources for others.

By resources, primarily we're thinking in terms of material things. I suppose whatever, you know, spiritual gifts or talents or whatever we have could be seen as a resource also of sorts. It's another kind of wealth.

But in devoting our resources to others for God's sake, in 1 John 3, verse 17, which is the verse after the last one we looked at, the last verse we looked at said, Hereby we know love because he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. Then this verse says, But whoso has this world's goods, this is expanding on how we lay down our lives for the brethren. Whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? The rhetorical question, of course, implies it doesn't, and you shouldn't pretend that it does.

If you don't help the person that you see in need and you have what it takes to help. Now this is a rather simplistic little maxim here because obviously life can be a little more complicated than that. You might have the money to help somebody that you see in need, but you actually have an obligation to pay your rent and that money is going there tomorrow.

You might have money in the bank account and you see someone in need, but you've already devoted it to somewhere else that's equally valid. You can't help everybody in need because the whole world is full of needy people and you don't have all that it takes. But the idea here is, of course, what is it that you are determined to do? What is it that you are inclined to do? What is it your heart is telling you to do? If you see someone in need and you're quite in the position to help them and you're careless about it, you're apathetic about it.

He says, well, that's a good indicator there's no love of God in you. Now there's a world of hurt and a world of poverty out there and we don't all have enough money to fix it all. And by the way, whenever I pull off a freeway and there's a beggar there saying we'll work for food and I know that probably they wouldn't.

And also I hear they're making about \$40 an hour standing or \$80 an hour, I forget what they're making on those off ramps. Still, there's a person with their hand up. I have to really use some discernment.

Is this something that God wants me to help with? If they say they're in need, I can't interview them like the welfare department can before giving them welfare. They're not filling out forms for me. They may be a legitimately needy person.

I really have to be prepared to help them even if I suspect that maybe they'll use the money on drugs. Who knows what they're going to do. I don't give to everybody I see like that.

Partly because I'd run out of money very fast. I can't give to every ministry that I hear from because I'd run out of money real fast. You'd be in trouble if you're deciding to give to every ministry that ever asked for money.

You better not listen to the radio all day because you're going to run out before noon. And these ministries may all have needs. It's clear that in terms of your stewardship of your resources, you're not supposed to just give to the first person who's got their hand out necessarily, but you need to have it in your heart that you will do all you know you can do, and maybe you can't do anything in some cases.

But if you have it and you see a need and your heart is shut up against it, it means you don't care. You wouldn't even help if you could because you just don't have an interest. Well, then you don't have the love of God abiding in you.

In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul is telling the Corinthians that the Christians in Jerusalem have financial need. Now, these Christians in Jerusalem, most of these Corinthians would never meet. The Corinthians were in Greece.

Jerusalem was across the Mediterranean. Most of these people that Paul's writing to would never have any personal contact with the majority of the people that were in

need. And yet he wrote 2 chapters, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, urging them to financially help such people to take a collection for the Jerusalem saints.

In the context of asking them to do this, he says, I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love. That is, Paul's saying, I can't tell you what to do with your money. I can't command you in the name of God to give so much money to these people, but I'm letting you know the needs because this will be a test of the sincerity of your love.

If you can help and you don't, well, then the sincerity of your love just didn't pass the test. Your love is not sincere if you can help and don't. In the same chapter, this is 2 Corinthians 8, verses 8 and 24, he says, Therefore, show to them the proof of your love.

He means by helping them when they're in need. That's a proof of your love. It's the evidence of love.

The devotion of your resources or the surrender of your resources for others is one of the ways that love is put into practice. And the third way is the devotion or the surrender of our service for others. In Galatians 5.13, Paul said, For you, brethren, have been called to liberty.

Only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. Through love serve one another. Devoting your service to others.

You know, whenever there's a group of people sitting around and someone realizes that the dishes have to be washed or that something has to be done, it's easy to sit around and say, Well, if I sit long enough, someone else is going to get up and take care of this, you know. And maybe, you know, you don't want to be like the three stooges who are all trying to let the other guy go through the door first until no one gets through the door. There is a time when, you know, you don't have to compete with everybody who's jumping up to run and do the dishes or to meet a particular service need that has to be done.

But you should assume that the average person would rather not do a job like that. Remember when Jesus washed the disciples' feet? That's something that had to be done. Usually you get the least privileged person in the household, the lowest servant, to do that because it was an unpleasant job.

It had to be done. No one was eager to do it. So Jesus got up and did it.

And Peter actually found that objectionable because Jesus was putting himself below the disciples in washing their feet. And Peter said, I'm not going to let you do that. And, of course, Jesus said, Well, if I don't wash your feet, then you have no part with me.

And Peter, being the pendulum swinger, said, Well, then wash my head and my hands

and my whole body too. And Jesus said, No, just the feet will do. You've bathed recently, I presume.

He that has bathed only needs to have the feet washed, he said. And then he says, after he finished doing that, he says, Do you understand what I've done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and you say, Well, because that's what I am. I am the Master and I am the Lord.

But if I, your Lord, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. And, of course, washing feet is not really the issue in our society. But that doesn't mean we can just discard that teaching.

Some churches, in order to not discard, actually have foot-washing services. I don't know if this church has ever had one. I've never been in a church when they were having one.

I've been in some churches that did have them occasionally, like an annual foot-washing service. I've never attended, partly because it's, I don't know, not that I wouldn't wash someone else's feet. I can't imagine that it would be unpleasant.

They're going to come to church with clean feet, for sure. Who's going to come to a foot-washing service in church and not wash their feet before they come? But that's just the point. Why have a foot-washing service if everyone's going to wash their feet before they come anyway? The point is, you know, when churches do that, very often they're just, you know, doing something ritualistic or symbolic.

And if it's a blessing to them, then I'm not going to criticize. But that's not the application of what Jesus is saying when He says we should wash each other's feet. Washing feet is something that really had to be done, and no one really wanted to do it.

But through love, you take the lower service. Eric Little, who was, you know, the runner in Chariots of Fire, the gold medalist in the, what is it, 1920 Olympics, I think it was? Sometime around that. 1924.

1924, thank you. He was from a missionary family and had been born in China. And he went back to the mission field after he won his gold medal, and he served in China until he died there.

But what happened is during the war, the Japanese invaded China, and they rounded up all the people who were not native Chinese that were there, missionaries, you know, and diplomats, and put them in internment camps in China. And Eric Little was confined to an internment camp in China. And the sewers, or the latrine, had a drain that never worked.

And so all these prisoners would go in there and they'd defecate or do what they had to do in this room, but it would never drain. So someone had to go in there and shovel it out every once in a while. It was about six inches deep of wading and sewage.

And Eric Little, he went in there regularly. No one else wanted to do it. He went in and he'd be singing hymns and he'd be rejoicing.

He was just as cheerful in real life as he was in the movie. And that's how people remember him. He died of a brain aneurysm in the prison.

He never got out. But he knew that was a job no one wanted, just like washing feet. And out of love he served, which is what Jesus did, what Christians do, what people who love do.

Now we don't maybe often have opportunities to do that kind of thing, but if we don't do the smaller things, it's not likely we would do those hard things, unless we were doing them in order to appear heroic, in which case it's not love at all. If we want to serve people in little ways that need to be done on a daily basis, but we would do what Eric Little did, it's only because we know that it'll be a visible and remarkable show of our great servanthood if we do that remarkable thing. But servanthood should manifest in small ways.

I usually give the example when I teach on this because it seems so real to me. What if you go into a restroom and you use the toilet and you take the last of the toilet paper? Well, there's a new roll sitting there all wrapped up in its Kirkland packaging, and you take it out, and you take off some, and you do what you got to do, right? Then what do you do with the roll? There's an empty spindle there. Well, of course you put it on the back of the toilet, right? Someone else can put it on the spindle.

And someone will if you don't. Maybe. Maybe that roll will be used up before it gets put on there.

But the question is this. What if you knew that the next person to use that toilet was going to be Jesus? Would you take the trouble to put that roll on the spindle when you used up the last bit? Now you might say, don't talk about Jesus using the toilet. That's irreverent.

What do you think he did? You know, hold it in? Jesus was a man. But you know what Jesus said? Inasmuch as you do it to the least of these of my brethren, you do it to me. If you're in a household or church or someplace where the next person to use that toilet is a Christian, that's Jesus, what you do for them, you're doing to him.

And your service to others has got to be motivated by that, not by a desire to be recognized as a great servant. You know, when Jesus washed the feet, there was no value system in Israel that being a great servant was a great thing. But ever since Christianity has taken over Western civilization, being a servant is commendable.

And sometimes we might want to serve ostentatiously because people think, oh, look at that, what a great servant he is. But actually, little ways that no one even notices. Just

because you love Jesus, because you know that you're serving others as him, that's service to him, that's the proof of love.

Galatians 2, excuse me, Galatians 6 says, bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. When someone has something that needs to be done, a burden to be borne, you take that on yourself for them, that's fulfilling the law of Christ. What's the law of Christ? Well, to love one another.

There's actually several more points I wanted to get through today, but I've come to the end of my time. I'll tell you real quickly what they were. Let's see here.

I was going to talk about loving as Jesus loved, and there's three sub-points to that. Without respect to the merit of the person or reciprocation. This is about loving your enemies and people who will never repay you.

Scriptures that Jesus taught about that. You should love without respect to being reciprocated or the merit of the person you love. Run through also without compromising.

The rich young ruler, when he came asking what must I do, it says Jesus looked at him and loved him. And the next thing he said was, go sell everything you have and give it to the poor. That doesn't sound very loving.

That's not what the guy wanted to hear. But Jesus said it because he loved him. Because that was good for him.

Sometimes you feel like, well, I love them so I don't want to confront them. I don't want to give them the bad news. I don't want to give them the hard duty that is really their duty, but I'll let someone else tell them.

Or just let them miss it altogether. But Jesus loved him and told him what he needed to hear, even though it wasn't necessarily the easy thing. Jesus said, he that loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me.

He that loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. You love them more than you love him. You need to tell them things they may not want to hear at times.

Because you love him more than you care about pleasing them. Pleasing God is always going to be the best for them. And also Jesus loved with wisdom and discernment.

You don't cast your pearls before swine. You need to be careful about who you give to. Because sometimes they can hurt themselves with what you give them.

Alcoholics, for example, if you give them money, can go out and hurt themselves with it. Paul said in Philippians 1.9, This I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment. Your love abound in knowledge and discernment.

Wisdom. You need to discern. You need to be a wise steward.

It's not just giving without thinking. You might have to investigate. When you hear 12 ministries all saying they're facing hard financial times, and they all want money, well, what do you do? Send one dollar to each? Or do you do some research and say, Well, I think this one or that one or that one uses their money more circumspectly, or they're bearing more fruit than someone else.

You need to use discernment in how you show love, and how you serve and give and so forth. So we've got love as a proof of genuine salvation. Love is the evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence.

Love is the essence and pinnacle of personal spirituality. Love is the governor of all actions. Love the summary of all duties.

We talk about the practice of love, which is devotion or the surrender of our lives for others, the devotion and surrender of our resources for others, the devotion or surrender of our service for others. And we are to love as Jesus loved, which is without respect to merit or reciprocation, without compromising, and with wisdom and discernment. I wish I could have had more time to take some of those last points.

I received several scriptures we passed over, but those are the points I intended to make.