

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL  
LETTERS TO GOD’S PEOPLE  
THE GOD WHO DIRECTS HIS PEOPLE  
*Toward Love in Action*

How do you define love? We understand that the word “love” has many different meanings, depending on how it is used. Love can be an intense feeling of deep affection such as the love of a parent for a child. Love can mean taking pleasure in something such as “I love football.” Love can also be described as a person that is loved. “She was the love of his life!” Love in this world feels fleeting at times. Are you looking for a love that lasts? God’s love is love that lasts forever. The Bible describes God’s love in **Romans 5:8 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup> *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

The love of God for His children is a love that was broken and spilled out on a cross for us. God is love in action! Love is something we cannot see with human eyes, but we quickly recognize it. Love is something we do not hear with human ears, yet it speaks to our hearts. Love is something we cannot touch with human hands but yet love can be felt. God is Love.

John who walked with Jesus for three and a half years wrote five books of the Bible. They are the Gospel of **John, 1, 2, and 3 John** and the **Revelation**. John’s account of Jesus in his gospel differs considerably from the other gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. John’s three letters differ from Paul’s letters. Paul’s letters are described as ‘linear’ meaning they have themes that lend themselves to an outline. John’s letters are described as being ‘circular’ meaning he starts with a subject, then discusses another topic, and then circles back to the first topic. He continually stresses the themes of love, light, knowledge, life and Jesus. **1 John**, where we take text from today, was originally written for the churches around Ephesus. In John’s day, like our times, there was an intensity to get involved with ‘church’ activities. It was John’s desire to teach people how to ‘keep it simple’. David Jeremiah describes John’s intent this way, “Walk with Jesus. Cling to your faith. Stay in the light. When you sin, confess and move on. And show your love for Jesus by loving your brothers and sisters in His name.” The writings of John account for only one-tenth of the New Testament, but provide one-third of the references to love.

John described himself as the “disciple whom Jesus loved” and John loved Jesus. He stood close to Jesus as He hung on the cross of Calvary. Jesus left the care of his mother, Mary, to John. John was there looking into the empty tomb on resurrection morning. In his old age as a prisoner on the Isle of Patmos, he was lifted up by the Spirit and saw a door into heaven. From his vision, he wrote the book of Revelation. John was very aware that Jesus was God himself who took on human flesh and dwelt with men, so they could hear His voice, see His face, and feel the touch of His loving hand. God came down to man so that we might have fellowship with Him. Yes, God is Love.

Since God is love, we too should be people who are filled with love; however, we continually encounter people who prove difficult to love and it is not always our desire to love them! It is a struggle at times. Native American Sitting Bull is believed to have said, “I have two dogs living in me—a mean dog and a good dog. They are always fighting. The mean dog wants me to do bad things, and the good dog wants me to do good things. Do you want to know which dog wins? *The one I feed the most!*”

Let’s be people of love even when the way of the world is marked by hatred.

**Read 1 John 3:9-13 (ESV)** <sup>9</sup> *No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.* <sup>10</sup> *By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.* <sup>11</sup> *For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.* <sup>12</sup> *We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous.* <sup>13</sup> *Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.*

Being *born of God* is a reference to the new birth that Jesus spoke about to Nicodemus in **John 3:7 (ESV)** <sup>7</sup> *Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’* Experiencing a ‘new birth’ in Christ changes everything in the believer and we cannot make a practice of sinning after we are born of God! God’s seed abides in His children meaning that God has implanted His very own divine nature, that is His Holy Spirit, within us. Being born again into the family of God does not make us sinless but it sure makes us regret and want to repent when we do sin. Our old nature produces sin, but the new nature leads us into a holy life when we ‘feed it’ with God’s righteousness. **1 John 4:8 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup> *Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

*From the beginning* is a phrase that John used frequently in his writings. In fact, he started **1 John** this way: **1 John 1:1 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—* John was an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus from the beginning – Jesus’ ministry was a ministry of love.

Yes, John considered Jesus’ ministry from the beginning, but, it is possible that he was also thinking of the beginning of the history of man because of he brings up the story of Cain and Abel.

Religious “cover-ups” have been around from the beginning. It started with Cain, the oldest son of Adam and Eve. Cain and his brother, Abel, both brought offerings to God. Abel gave the firstborn of his flock – the best that he had and God was pleased. Cain wanted to appear worshipful so he brought a grain offering but his heart was not right and God was not pleased. He lacked love and we see that in his actions in **Genesis 4:8 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup> *Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.* Cain’s actions spoke louder than his words.

Cain is an example of a life of hatred. It is important to note that Cain and Abel had the same parents who trained them both in the same way. They both brought sacrifices to God. Cain is not presented as an atheist;

he is presented as a worshiper. And this is John's point: children of the devil masquerade as true believers. They attend religious gatherings, as Cain did. They may even bring offerings. But these actions in themselves are not valid proof that a man is born of God. The real test is his love for the brothers and sisters.

We need to be aware that even when people attend church services, it is not proof that they are believers and committed to the ways of the Lord. For some reason, we have a tendency to feel that this is unique to our times but it is not. Paul wrote about such people in **2 Timothy 3:5 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> *having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.*

The way of the church (the 'called out ones') is marked by love.

**Read 1 John 3:14-15 (ESV)** <sup>14</sup> *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.* <sup>15</sup> *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*

It is easy to decree ourselves to be 'sinless' because we have not committed 'such and such' sin. However, we need to remember that Jesus Himself equates hatred with murder (**Matthew 5:22**) and lust with adultery (**Matthew 5:27-28**). We need to examine our hearts since we may not be as 'good' as we think we are.

Habitual sin will hinder us from living a life of loving others. **1 John 1:6-7 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> *If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.* <sup>7</sup> *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.*

Please understand that John is NOT saying that murderers cannot be saved. The Apostle Paul himself took a hand in the stoning of Stephen and admitted that his vote helped to put innocent people to death. But in His grace God saved Paul. John is speaking about continuing in sin. Gotquestions.org explains this way, "The difference between a sinning unbeliever and a sinning believer is that one loves his sin while the other hates it. The believer who stumbles in his walk with the Lord regrets it, confesses it, wishes to never do it again and seeks to appropriate God's power and grace to avoid it. He doesn't consider how much he can sin and still be considered a Christian. Rather, he considers how he can avoid even the appearance of sin in the future."

Paul describes a hateful heart in **Titus 3:3 (ESV)** <sup>3</sup> *For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.* When a hateful heart opens to Jesus Christ, it becomes a loving heart. Then instead of wanting to "murder" others through hatred, one wants to love them and share with them the message of eternal life.

The way of love is marked by action.

**Read 1 John 3:16-18 (ESV)** <sup>16</sup> *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.* <sup>17</sup> *But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?* <sup>18</sup> *Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.*

Christian love is not failure to do *evil* to others. Christian love is doing good for others. Christian love is both positive and negative. **Isaiah 1:16-17 (ESV)** <sup>16</sup> *Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil,* <sup>17</sup> *learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.*

Cain is an example of false love. Jesus is our perfect example of true love. As followers of Christ, we find great comfort in focusing on God's love for us. **John 3:16 (ESV)** <sup>16</sup> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* This verse defines God's action of love for us. It is unique that **1 John 3:16** reveals the definition of the believer's action of love for others: *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.* After we have received the blessing of **John 3:16** it is up to us to be a blessing to others as revealed **1 John 3:16**.

Real love is an action, not a feeling. It produces selfless, sacrificial giving. The greatest act of love is giving oneself for others. How can we 'give up our lives'? By serving others with no thought of receiving anything in return. Time has so much significance in our lives and it is so fleeting. Very seldom will it be necessary for us to die to spread the gospel (although some have died and will die to spread the gospel). What we need today is to be willing to live and breathe to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. Warren Wiersbe shares this story,

Two friends were attending a conference on evangelism. During one of the sessions, Larry missed Pete. At luncheon, when he saw Pete, he said, "I missed you at the 10 o'clock session. It was really terrific! Where were you?" "I was in the lobby talking to a bellhop about Christ. I led him to the Lord," said Pete.

Around church folks, we are often quick to talk about this need or that need. John describes this kind of talk as loving in word. Loving in deed, on the other hand, means to do something about meeting that need. You may not be financially able to meet some needs. And if you are not, the Lord won't call you to do that. Remember, there are other ways to meet needs. Often, meeting a need will involve giving of your time. And, yes, in many ways time is as precious as money. I've learned over the years that when we give financially to God's kingdom, the Lord provides for our needs. I have also learned that when we give of our time to others, the Lord provides us with the time we need for ourselves. We serve an Almighty God. Let's be quick to serve Him by loving others. There is a little game that many of us like to play with those we love. It goes like this: One says, "I love you." The other says, "I love you more." The first one replies, "No, I love you more!" John the Apostle who write with the intention of bringing us 'full circle says in **1 John 4:19 (ESV)** <sup>19</sup> *We love because he first loved us.*