

CHRISTIANITY (*defined*)
A Study of 1 John
“A Matter of Love and Death”
1 John 3:10-18

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INTRODUCTION: One year ago, not only were we not able to gather as a church, but there was no March Madness basketball tournament. Because of that, interest in the tournament this year is at an all-time high. Approximately 80 million people filled out a March Madness bracket predicting who would win the matchups. How many of you filled one out? I filled out two – one for our church staff, and one for CBS sports. I picked Gonzaga to win in the church bracket and Baylor to win in the CBS bracket. But in the first round, over half the teams I picked lost.

In fact out of the 80 million bracket predictions, do you know how many are still correct? Zero. That’s not unusual, because in the past thirty years of filling out paper brackets and now online brackets, not a single person has correctly picked all the winners in all 67 games. The most anyone has ever predicted happened in 2019 when one man in Ohio correctly predicted the winners into the sweet sixteen. That’s as far as anyone has ever gotten.

For years, Warren Buffett has offered to give a Billion dollars to anyone who can correctly predict the winners of all 67 games. That’s no problem for him for two reasons. First, he’s worth a \$100 Billion, and he would hardly miss a \$Billion. Second, he’s a smart man and he knows the odds.

The odds of someone correctly choosing every winner in the NCAA tournament are **1 on 9.2 Quintillion**. You don’t have to take my word – you can Google it - after church. To get a quintillion you take a billion and multiply it by a million. There are better odds of me making four holes-in-one in one round of golf than correctly predicting the winners of all the games in the NCAA tournament.

I say that because those are long odds. Nobody can predict the winners of just 67 basketball games. So what are the odds that I could predict

something much more important than the NCAA tournament? Like for instance, what are the odds that I could predict whether I'm going to Heaven or not? The odds are not 1 to 1 – that means 50% accuracy. The odds are 1 to zero – which is 100% certainty. The Apostle John wrote this short letter two thousand years ago so that we can KNOW without any doubt that we have passed from death to life. You've heard the expression, "It's a matter of life and death." When it comes to salvation, the Bible teaches that it's a matter of love and death. Let's read **1 John 3:10-18: This is how God's children and the devil's children become obvious. Whoever does not do what is right is not of God, especially the one who does not love his brother or sister.**

For this is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another, unlike Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

Do not be surprised, brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers and sisters. The one who does not love remains in death. (*It's a matter of love or death*). Everyone who hates his brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has this world's goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God's love reside in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth.

There is a false belief going around today that's very popular. Although it has religious overtones, it is the philosophy that says, "We're all part of one family." It says, "God is the father of all. And we're all brothers and sisters together." People often say that we are all part of the family of God. We are all part of the family of humanity, but the Bible teaches that there are two families and two fathers. Verse 10 refers to the children of God and the children of the devil. Jesus never once said that God was the father of everyone. In fact, in John 8:44, He pointed his

finger at some religious hypocrites and said, **“You are all of your father, the devil, and the works of your father you do.”** So the Bible never teaches this idea of the universal fatherhood of God.

We're born into the wrong family, and that's why we must be born again into God's family. The way you know which family you're a part of is determined by how you treat others. In this passage of scripture John addresses four levels of human relationships. He starts with the worst level – murder; and moves to the highest level of love. Let's examine the first three levels of relationships briefly, and then we'll spend the most time talking about love. Because salvation really is a matter of love and death.

1. MURDER: I'll kill you. The lowest level of human relationship is when a person cares so little for human life that they willingly take the life of another person. The first murder in the Bible is recorded in Genesis 4. Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden of Eden and their firstborn son was named Cain, so they started raising Cain. They had other children, including a son named Abel. We talk about dysfunctional families, the very first family was so dysfunctional that Cain killed his brother Abel. Through the years, people often asked me, “Who did Cain marry?” My answer is, “I'd tell you if I were Abel.” John used this first murder to warn us of the danger of murder. 1 John 3:11-12 says, **“We should love one another, unlike Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.”**

Abel is named in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11 where the writer says that he offered a better sacrifice than Cain. And the Bible says, **“Even though Abel is dead, he still speaks through his faith.”** Adam had a son who was a first murderer and a son who was the first missionary. God showed up and asked, “Cain, where is your brother?” God knew where Abel was. Cain responded in anger, “I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?”

The implied answer is, “Yes. We should look out for one another.”

When God gave the Ten Commandments, one of them literally said, “You shall not murder.” Respecting the sanctity of human life is one of the basic premises of civilized society.

Jesus said that Satan was a murderer from the beginning, so it was Satan who tempted Cain to kill his brother. So every time a gang member shoots another person, Satan is whispering in his ear, “Kill the sorry, dude.” Every time a well-fed and well-paid doctor snuffs out the life on an unborn child in the womb, Satan whispers, “It’s just a blob of tissue.” One would think that during the pandemic the murder rate in America would be reduced, but just the opposite happened. The murder rate in Chicago jumped by 50% from 2019 to 2020. In NYC the murder rate grew by 40%. Murder is the lowest level of human behavior. The next level John mentions is:

2. HATRED: I’ll hurt you. John wrote in verse 13 that we shouldn’t be surprised when the world hates us. Jesus said the same thing in John 15:18. **“If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you.”** When we follow Jesus and dare to claim the Bible truth of right and wrong, the world is going to say, “That is hate speech.” What they really mean is, “I hate you for your position.” Even when the world hates us because we speak the truth we cannot hate others. We must always speak the truth in love. I’ve said before that you will make enemies because of your position, but you should never make enemies because of your disposition.

1 John 3:15 says, **“Everyone who hates his brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.”** You may be feeling pretty secure that you’ve never murdered anyone. But in the sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that if you have enough hatred in your heart that you want to kill someone you are guilty of murder. You may have never killed anyone. Have you ever been angry enough with someone that to want to hurt them?

There are some people that probably the only reason they don't kill people is because it might get them in trouble. And they love their self so much. I heard about a lady who was at a zoo, looking at the lions and the tigers. And they were just sleeping with their tails moving slowly.

And she said to the zookeeper, “That cat looks just like my pet cat. They're just exactly the same!” And that zookeeper looked at her and said, “Oh, no. In that cage is a killer. The only thing that's keeping that cat from killing you right now are the bars on that cage.”

And there are some people who hold such hate for someone that the only thing keeping from hurting them are the bars of the criminal justice system.

In the next chapter, John states this even clearer. He writes, **“If anyone says, “I love God” and hates his brother, he is a liar.”** There is far too much hatred already in the world. What the world needs now is love – God’s love.

3. INDIFFERENCE : I’ll ignore you. This third level doesn’t say, “I’m going to kill you.” Or “I’m going to hurt you.” In some ways, it is the meanest level of all because it says, “If you have a need, I don’t care about you. I’ll ignore you.”

1 John 3:16-17 says, **“If anyone has this world’s goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God’s love reside in him?”** The answer to John’s question is, “There’s no way God’s love resides in a person who has the ability to help someone in need, but they withhold compassion.”

Jesus said that the second greatest commandment was to love your neighbor as yourself. Then a lawyer looking for a loophole asked him, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered by telling a remarkable story. That story is so famous that millions of people have heard the term “the Good Samaritan” without knowing the origin of the phrase or the story itself. In Texas, we even have a Good Samaritan Law.

Jesus related a story about a man who was traveling the well-used road from Jerusalem to Jericho. He was mugged by some robbers and they beat him up, stole his clothes, and left him half-dead. Jesus said a Levite, someone who worked at the temple, saw him and he ignored him. Then a priest walked by and ignored him as well. Finally a half-breed – a despised Samaritan - stopped to help the injured man. He picked him up, washed his wounds, and gave him the coat on his back. He took him to an inn and left some money to take care of him.

Then Jesus cross-examined the lawyer. He asked, “Which of these three proved to BE a neighbor to the man in need?” The lawyer said, “The one who helped him.” Jesus said, “Go do the same thing.”

That’s what John has written. If God’s love is dwelling in you, you cannot be cold and indifferent to the needs of others.

And finally, there is the fourth, and the highest level of living.

4. CHRISTIAN LOVE: I’ll lay down my life for you. In 1993, there was a one-hit Europop song by Haddaway that asked the question, “What is love? Baby, don’t hurt me. Don’t hurt me no more.” It became a brain-worm after a famous SNL skit featuring Chris Kattan, Will Ferrell and Jim Carey.

But we know the answer to the question, “What is love?” Because Jesus said, “No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends.” Love is laying down your life for someone else.

That’s what we read in 1 John 3:14: **We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers and sisters... This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters... Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth.** We shouldn’t just love in word. We should love in action. I heard Jerry Vines tell the funny story once of a preacher who preached a sermon one Sunday on loving your neighbors.

That next week he was pouring a concrete patio area behind his house. He left it to let it harden and when he looked out the window, some neighborhood kids were writing their names in the concrete. He opened the back door and yelled at them to get out of his yard.

His wife heard him and said, “I thought you preached last Sunday that you were supposed to love your neighbors.” He said, “Well, I do love them in the abstract. I just don’t love them in the concrete!” That’s our problem. We say we love others, but sometimes we just don’t show it. We’re going to be talking about love a lot over the next few weeks because that’s the theme of 1 John 4 and 5. The Bible says, **“These three remain: Faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.”**

Let's me show you four ways that love is the greatest. We aren't going to look up these scriptures, but you can jot them down.

(1) LOVE IS THE GREATEST VIRTUE. In 1 Corinthians 13:1-2, Paul is comparing love with all the other virtues. He said, "If I have faith to move mountains, but don't have love. I am nothing. If I give away everything I own to the poor and have love, I am nothing. If I die as a martyr but don't have love, I am nothing. If I'm the greatest preacher in the world but don't have love I'm like a clanking gong or a noisy symbol. Love is the greatest virtue.

(2) LOVE IS THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT. Once a man asked Jesus what is the greatest commandment and in Matthew 27:37 Jesus said, "**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, your strength, and your mind. And the second is like the first, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.**" On these two commandments hang **ALL the law and the prophets.**" You can take the Ten Commandments and write over them – Love God love others – and you'll never break them. Love is the greatest commandment.

(3) LOVE IS THE GREATEST MOTIVATION. What motivates me to serve God and preach His word. Is it because I like to be at church and like to hear myself talk? No. I am motivated by love. 2 Corinthians 5:14 says, "**the love of Christ compels us.**" In John 21 Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" Then feed my sheep. Jesus didn't ask him, "Peter do you love sheep?" He asked, "Peter, to you love **ME?**" Then feed my sheep. Love is the greatest motivation.

(4) LOVE IS THE GREATEST TESTIMONY. In John 13:38, "**By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.**" He didn't say they'll know you're my disciples if you wear a cross around your neck, or have perfect attendance at church, or have a fish on your bumper sticker. It's love.

Years ago I heard the testimony of a Christian executive from Houston. He was a deacon at one of the large Baptist Churches there. He was one of those hard-driving OCD types who had to have everything in place. He always got up early to drive to his office to beat the rush hour traffic. One morning he got in his car and the battery was dead. He popped the

hood to see if he could fix it, and wiggled a few wires, but nothing happened. He didn't have time to wait for service, so he ran in and asked his wife if he could drive her car.

She agreed and he drove away, but he had missed his window of opportunity to avoid the traffic and soon he was stuck on the freeway which became the world's longest parking lot. He was frustrated. Suddenly the man in the car behind him blew his horn. This really irritated the guy. He said, "Can't he see I can't do anywhere?" So he shook his fist toward the driver behind him, and that guy just waved at him. The longer he sat there, the more he steamed. Then the guy behind him honked his horn twice. The executive gritted his teeth and pounded the steering wheel. When the guy blew the horn the third time, this executive who is usually self-controlled got out of his car and went back to the car behind him. The man lowered the window and the deacon pointed his finger in the guy's face and said, "Listen, can't you see I can't go anywhere? If you blow that horn one more time, you'll be sorry." The man behind the wheel said, "Sir, what's wrong with you? I was just doing what your bumper sticker said – Honk if you love Jesus." The deacon said he jerked his head around and sure enough his wife had a honk if you love Jesus bumper sticker. Immediately the executive was humbled and apologized. God used that occasion to teach him the danger of losing his temper. See we need to take Jesus off the dashboard and put him in our hearts. We used to sing a song that said, "And they'll know we are Christians by our love; by our love; and they'll know we are Christians by our love."

CONCLUSION: Of these four levels of relationships, we should be people who are known for our love. Love is laying down your life for others. I had a seminary professor named Dr. Clyde Francisco. His son, Don, became a popular singer song-writer. His songs were powerful. In 1982 he wrote a song called the Steeple Song. It's a song where Jesus is talking to the church about what's really important. The words are:

I don't care how many buses you own / Or the size of your sanctuary/ Doesn't matter how steep / Your steeple is, if it's sittin' on a cemetery. / I don't care if you pave your parking lot / Or put pads upon your pews / What good is a picture perfect stage / If you're

missin' all the cues? The chorus asks: **Do you love your wife / For her and for your children / Are you layin' down your life? / What about the others? / Are you livin' as a servant / To your sisters and your brothers? / Do you make the poor man beg you for a bone? / Do the widow and the orphan cry alone?** Jesus continues: **I don't care if your pastor is super powered / And your program's always new / What you need is love and truth / And men are gonna' come to you. / It doesn't matter if you know the Bible / If it's all just in your head / But the thing I need to ask you / Is have you done the things I said? Do you love your wife (or husband)/ For her and for your children/ Are you layin' down your life? / What about the others? / Are you livin' as a servant / To your sisters and your brothers? / Do you make the poor man beg you for a bone? / Do the widow and the orphan cry alone?** And the song ends by saying, "Lord, when were you a prisoner, and we did not come to you? When was it that we saw you sick and we didn't follow through?" And Jesus answered, "Any time you turned your head and pretended not to see. When you did it not to the least of these, you did it not for me." That's what love is. Laying down your life for others.

CONCLUSION: A week from tomorrow night, the final game of March Madness will be played. So let's back up to the bracket prediction. Knowing the odds are 1 in 9.2 Quintillion, would you ever bet money that you could predict the winner of all 67 games? That would be a bad gamble. But let me tell you something much worse than that – it's to gamble with your eternity.

Don't leave it to chance. You CAN know for certain where you'll spend eternity. God loves you so much that He send His only son to die on the cross to pay for your sins. If you will admit you are sinner, and place your faith in Jesus, He can forgive your sin and give you a new life, and you can be 100% certain that when you die you will go to Heaven.

Would you like to have that assurance today?