

Commit to One Another

I John 3:16-18

Join me this morning in turning to I John 3:16-18. It is here that we will camp to uncover our admonition. With this we will come almost full circle from where we began back in April.

Would you stand with me in honoring God's Word as we read this passage together?

Let me read the same passage from both the Message and the Phillips paraphrases.

"We know and, to some extent realize, the love of God for us because Christ expressed it in laying down his life for us. We must in turn express our love by laying down our lives for those who are our brothers. But as for the well-to-do man who sees his brothers in want but shuts his eyes - and his heart - how could anyone believe that the love of God lives in him? My children, let us not love merely in theory or in words - let us love in sincerity and in practice."

"This is how we've come to understand and experience love: Christ sacrificed his life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves. If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God's love? It disappears. And you made it disappear. When We Practice Real Love. My dear children, let's not just talk about love; let's practice real love."

Now you may be wondering after reading that where the one another admonition is. It's not something you can easily pick out. We find it neatly tucked in here and will carefully unwrap like a gift. Nestled in our passage is this concept of being committed to one another. You might say that the passage is about love not commitment. But isn't that what love is all about? Isn't love, especially the kind of love described here, about commitment? Let me say it this way and be as candid as I can.

The degree to which you love someone as outlined for us here is the degree of commitment you will have to them.

Let me see if this illustration will make sense. After Mom returned home from her leg amputation she needed help - lots of help. There were times she sat in her wheel chair, but she spent a lot of time in bed. Every two hours even during the night Dad would roll her over so she wouldn't get bed sores. If he was out on the road working for the sheriff's department he would swing by to roll her over. That level of commitment did not begin in the twilight years of their marriage, it was a growing commitment we were privileged to witness throughout the 53 years they were married.

After Mom passed away, Dad said he would do it all over again.

Not too long ago when we were visiting with Dad, he told us of a woman in his church who was trying to set Dad up for a date with her widowed mother. After a few times he finally, gently, but firmly told her he wasn't interested. He told her that the Lord gave him one wife to love and that was his Lizzy. He exhibited total commitment and that without complaining.

So when you have a passage like the one that is before us this morning, you can't help but see in the reading the commitment God has toward us and the commitment He expects toward each other. His commitment stems from a deep, abiding, and never changing love. He is the one who has clearly stated in Scripture that "I have loved you with an everlasting love." And if we were to ever doubt it we need look no further than the cross. That is both the degree and depth of His love, but more on that in a moment.

There are three things I would like for us to glean from this passage today.

Such commitment involves comprehension
Such commitment involves charity
Such commitment involves conduct

I. COMMITMENT INVOLVES COMPREHENSION – v. 16a

When we think of what it means to commit it refers to bringing together, to give in charge or trust, to deliver for safe keeping.

When someone passes away and we stand at the gravesite you may hear the minister express it this way: “We have gathered here to commit to rest the body of our loved one and friend.”

When we go to the bank and deposit a check into our account we commit those monies to the bank for safe keeping.

Robyn and I have a trust and we have designated two people committed to carry out our wishes.

The word can also mean to put officially in custody or confinement.

One of the responsibilities Dad had working for the Sheriff’s department was to transport prisoners after sentencing to the facility where they would serve out their sentence. On arrival he would take the prisoner and commit the individual into the custody of the officer in charge of processing them into the system. They were no longer Dad’s responsibility. They were entrusted to someone else.

The word has one more meaning. It is to bind by a promise or pledge. We might think of this kind of commitment as we recite the pledge of allegiance, our marriage vows or when recruits recite the military oath as they are sworn in.

They are expressions of commitment out of love for a country or a person to defend, honor and support.

The first thing we notice in our passage is that commitment involves discovery.

A. Commitment Involves Discovery Of His Love

“This is how we know what love is...”

John begins by helping us see that love is something we have come to know and in the tense to keep on knowing. John 3:16 is probably the single greatest verse on what we need to know and do to be saved and how it is we come to receive salvation. By it we come to know that God dearly loves us and the expression and cost of that love.

I John 3:16 is it’s equal in that sense. They both tell us about love, the love God has for us. Sometimes we can wonder about it like if we’re going through a pretty difficult time or when we received some difficult news.

Some people look at situations around the world and wonder about God’s love. That’s what we heard after towers fell on 9/11 or the tsunami off the coast of Japan. “If He really was a God of love, He wouldn’t let innocent people die like that or cause a child to starve to death. He would intervene.”

John is describing for us what love looks like. He gives us a canvas on which to paint a mental picture in our minds eye. Since we were not there in person we have to accept the truth of what John reveals in God’s Word, trust his analysis.

I have all the cards that Robyn has ever given me. All the birthdays, anniversaries and just because days. I have the very first emails we exchanged as we shared information about ourselves in the “get to you know you” stage before we actually met on a date. It was a time of discovery and in short order there was a mutual affection and love for each other that grew the more we discovered about each other – and she still loves me in spite of me. And as you would expect, as time continues to roll by, we continue to discover more about each other which in turn causes that love to grow deeper. There is a delight in the journey of discovery.

Now I can dig out all those cards and emails from Robyn and read them over and over again and again after which I can conclude from the reading that I think she loves me. But the real understanding or knowing of her love is in what I experience each day as she demonstrates it in multiple ways.

Now God already knows all about us, so the discovery is on our part as we learn about the extent of His love for us.

We discover that He loved us when we were His enemies.

We discover that He loves us even when we sin.

We discover that He loved us from before the world was framed or we were born.

We discover that He loves us the same every day and the love will be the same for all eternity yet to come. It won’t change one bit. He won’t change

His mind about you.

The word “know”, doesn’t mean just an intellectual understanding of what this love is. It’s not something we know from a text book. I can study for a test and know the material in order to answer the questions, after which I will most likely forget a lot of it. It is an entirely different factor altogether to experience it.

Let’s say you love history and love reading about history. You know intellectually a lot about history. Let’s also say that you love history so much that you become a history professor in order to teach others who love history or maybe you are the curator of a museum so that when visitors come in you can engage them in the facts of history. Now it’s one thing to know about history from reading books, but what if you were to actually go on an archaeological dig where you discover some piece of ancient history that you are teaching in class. Your love for history would be enhanced because of the firsthand experience.

Some of you will remember the cartoon Sherman and Mr. Peabody. They were boy and his brainy dog that would travel back in time to experience history in person.

That’s the meaning of the word John uses here, to know something beyond an intellectual understanding because you have actually experienced it. You know it firsthand.

My Dad loves ribs. When he was the head mechanic at the Birmingham school district before moving to camp he had a guy who would deliver parts and he would tell Dad how good his ribs were. Finally Dad told him to stop talking about it and bring some in so he could judge for himself.

One day he brought Dad a lunch sack and handed it to him. It was empty. He said “Howard, I brought you some ribs and as I was driving I got to thinking about how good those ribs tasted and I smelled how good those ribs would taste and I said to myself, ‘Howard won’t miss one.’ Then I had another and another and pretty soon they were all gone. I brought you the smell.”

How do we know what love is? John explains it in the very next sentence. “Jesus Christ laid down His life for us.”

Now John is not saying that Jesus laid down His life only for the disciples who were His ministry team.

Neither did he mean all the other followers of Jesus like Mary, Martha, Elizabeth, and Zacchaeus or any of the 120 followers who were in the upper room after Jesus’s ascension or the witnesses to that event.

He doesn’t mean Jesus died just for those who were alive when He was alive.

And he doesn’t mean just those who were at His crucifixion or who saw Him after the resurrection. And he doesn’t mean that we must experience crucifixion just like Jesus to know this kind of love. What does love look like? Jesus Christ died for all. John explained it in the previous chapter. I John 2:1-2

How do we know what love looks like? All we have to do is look at the cross and Jesus’ death to see the ultimate expression of love. It’s not just talking about it, it’s an action.

So, if we want to really know what love is, it involves a commitment to discover. I can read the dictionary definition of love but to really comprehend it I must discover it from the experience of Jesus on the cross when He died for each of us. And why did He die? He died so that we could have eternal life. Commitment involves discovery about His love.

Something else we need to comprehend is that commitment involves discernment.

B. Commitment Involves Discernment About His Love

Commitment is able to discern between real love and false love. The devil comes in looking like an angel of light but his intent is to kill and destroy. He dangles a lot of things in front of us and says this is what love looks like. But his works are counterfeit. They are temporal not eternal. They

take life, not give life.

Jesus gives us an example of the difference in John 10. He likens Himself to a good shepherd. That shepherd will do anything for the sheep. It says in 10:11 that the “good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” That’s how much he loves the sheep. On the other hand there is the hireling who at the first sign of trouble exits stage left. The sheep are on their own.

Discernment can distinguish the difference between true love and false love.

One more thing is involved in comprehending commitment. It involves delight.

C. Commitment Involves Delight From His Love

Take a look back at chapter 2 again. Let’s read I John 2:4-6.

If we say we love the Lord there should be a delight to do His commands. Take a journey with me in the Psalms where we realize a correlation in the delight we have for the Lord and delight in His law.

Psalm 1:1-3

Psalm 37:4

Psalm 40:8

Psalm 119:16: “I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your Word.”

Psalm 119:24 “Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.”

Psalm 119:35 “Direct me in the path of Your commands, for there I find delight.”

Psalm 119:47 “I delight in Your commands, which I love, and I meditate on Your decrees.”

Psalm 119: 70 “...I delight in Your law.”

Psalm 119:77 “Let Your compassion come to me that I may live, for Your law is my delight.”

Psalm 119:174 “I long for your salvation, O Lord, and Your law is my delight.”

When I was in High school I helped a local farmer collect sap from his maple trees in the spring. He would boil it down to make syrup. It took 30 gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup. We hauled a lot of sap.

Let me see if I can boil this down. There are a lot of commands given in Scripture that Jesus condenses

into two. If we love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength, then it follows that we will love others as well. If we love the Lord as we should, if we delight ourselves in Him, then we’ll love others the way we should. We’ll be committed to their well-being. Loving God and loving others will never become a burden or a hassle.

When we are committed to the Lord and to His Word, it logically follows that we will be committed to each other.

Next week we’ll be finishing our journey through the one another passages. As we conclude this series I look at it this admonition to commit to one another this way: if we are committed to one another out of love for God and each other we will -
Forgive one another

Be united to one another

Consider one another above ourselves

Honor one another

Be devoted to one another

Serve one another

Comfort one another

Encourage one another

Be kind to one another

Pray for one another

Be truthful with one another

Commitment to one another involves delight from God’s love, shown to us in Jesus Christ dying for us. When we begin to comprehend that we’ll understand more clearly what John describes as love seen in Jesus laying down His life for us.

In a small book written by Amy Carmichael simply titled “If” she writes a series of compelling arguments to help us determine if we truly understand the love of Calvary’s cross. She opens with this statement: “If I have not compassion on my fellow-servant even as my Lord had pity on me, then I know nothing of Calvary love.”

The cross bids us to consider carefully the level of commitment we have toward each other.

Do we comprehend the degree of God’s love for us in Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross on our behalf? As we discover and discern and delight in the breadth and length and height and depth of His love, a love that cannot be severed by anything, we will develop a growing commitment to each other.

Commitment involves comprehension.
Commitment also involves charity.

II. COMMITMENT INVOLVES CHARITY – vs. 16b-17

John lays it right out there straight for us to see. If we fully comprehend the love that was shown to us in Christ laying down His life for us, then the expectation is that we do the same. That's commitment.

Four principles about commitment surface for me that stem from love for each other.

A. Commitment is Personal

Jesus expressed that truth to His disciples on the night He was betrayed.
John 15:13 "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

If you noticed in our passage, John uses the word "brothers" identifying the target of our commitment. It is to be toward other Christians.

But we see a shift between verse 16 and verse 17. John narrows it down from the plural "brothers" to the singular "brother." Notice..."If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?"
A rhetorical question for sure, because the answer is quite obvious. The love of God can't be in the one who is withholding help.

Dr. Tony Evans said "If you are insensitive sociologically, you don't get it theologically."

What he means by that is if we aren't putting pavement under our shoes toward each other then we don't truly understand what love is. It goes so far as giving one's self to another.

Laying down our life has no atoning value, no saving merit as Christ's did, but it is a proof of our love.

Peter once told the Lord that he would die for Christ, but then denied Him. Later he would be

tested again, and this time he would give his life for Christ. He was committed to the end.

Philip Bliss isn't a name you hear much. Most of you may have never heard of him. We sing several of his songs like *Jesus Loves Even Me* and *I Will Sing of My Redeemer*. In 1876 he was travelling to Chicago by train with his wife. There was a tremendous snow storm that made traveling treacherous. While crossing a bridge it collapsed and the cars plunged 75 feet into the ravine. Bliss managed to crawl out a window only to find that his wife was still trapped inside when the coach caught fire. Other survivors urged him not to go back in but he shouted as he returned to the car "If I cannot save her, I will perish with her." Both died that night.

For Philip Bliss, commitment to his wife was personal.

Warren Wiersbe has written that "Self-preservation is the first law of physical life, but self-sacrifice is the first law of spiritual life."

B. Commitment is Practical

Looking back at verse 17 we notice three conditions of being committed to helping someone.

1. You must have the means or goods, the stuff if you will, to help meet the need.
2. You must know that a need exists.
3. You must be loving enough to want to share.

You aren't condemned if you are too poor to help or if you don't know the need exists, but you are if you harden your heart. The KJV uses the phrase shuts up his compassion which literally means to slam the door shut.

Paul reminds us through his letter to the Galatians that we are to do good to all people and especially to those who are believers (Galatians 6:9-10).
How committed are we to the practical aspect of helping a fellow believer?

James says if we know to do good and don't do it, it is considered sin. (James 4:17)
Is our commitment to one another born out of convenience or conviction?

Is our commitment more from a sense of duty or devotion?

There is a retired couple in Dad's church whose ministry is to drive other people to appointments or outpatient procedures. If someone didn't have a family member to drive them that's what this couple did. Appointments could be in Alpena or West Branch or Grayling or Saginaw. They would drive and wait. Commitment driven by love for the Lord and each other sees and does.

When I had my series of steroid injections in my back, I wasn't supposed to drive afterward for a couple hours, so someone from church would pick me up at the office and drive me to Ann Arbor so Robyn didn't have to take time off work.

It is not something that can be half-hearted or done in a haphazard fashion. It is an intentional investment in other that is sacrificial. Commitment costs. John is saying here that commitment does not ignore the needs of fellow believers. James 2:14-16

Commitment is practical.

C. Commitment is Proactive

It doesn't wait to be asked, it offers.

One night at a church meeting a young mother with several children admitted that she never seemed to have time in the day with all the responsibilities to have personal devotions. The next day two women from church showed up at her door and explained they were there to take over watching the kids so she could go to her room for a quiet time. They did this for several days allowing the young mother to get a routine developed where she could have regular devotions.

Commitment is proactive.

D. Commitment is Penetrating

People need to see the love of Christ manifested. They need to see it. Jesus said others will know we are His disciples if we love one another.

The world is already skeptical and defensive. Let's erase that skepticism through commitment to caring for one another's needs.

When we are wholeheartedly committed to each other, people will notice. As the world looked in on a fledgling group called the church, they saw their devotion to one another and Acts 2 says many were added daily. They came to know Christ through what they witnessed about the believers.

J. Vernon McGee writes "One of the most tragic things in the world will be when many believers come into the presence of Christ, having had this world's goods down here and not having used them for the cause of Christ."

Commitment involves comprehension

Commitment involves charity

Our last point, commitment involves conduct

III. COMMITMENT INVOLVES CONDUCT – v. 18

Talk can be as cheap as a stereotypical used car salesman's suit. In our vernacular we might say it something like this: "put your money where your mouth is."

To love in word simply means to talk about a need. To love in deed means to do something about it. To love in truth is to genuinely love a person with the heart and not just with the tongue. It is practical, visible, and active. In this case actions do speak louder than words. Let me remind you once again from the candid pen of James who said to know to do something and not do it is sin.

And once again from Tony Evans "If you are insensitive sociologically, you don't get it theologically."

From James 1:27 we read: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." Now giving words of encouragement isn't wrong, but it is if we can do more. Our faith is exhibited by our actions. Our faith is lived out by loving others

in actions and truth.

What kind of picture of Jesus's self-sacrifice are we giving to the world? What is our conduct toward one another?

This passage reminds us that commitment involves sacrifice, there is a commitment and cost in money or things or time.

It may just be sitting with a friend who needs to talk about something heavy on their heart.

It may be driving someone to an appointment, helping with some cleaning, or some other activity. It is intentional. It is self-sacrificing not self-serving.

Commitment involves surrender as you give to the Lord yourself and all you have for His service. It's a surrender of the will to do for others.

Commitment involves service to others as you help them with a need. It is a willingness to serve others as Jesus did, not look to be served.

Let's not be like the boy who followed his sister into the house crying and telling his mother he didn't do anything. We are called to act.

We have been given an example in the person of Jesus who was committed to us by laying down His life for us. He gave His all. Are we giving our all.

Commitment sees the task to the end.
How will you commit yourself to others in the week ahead?