

Confident Love

What is it about Kala?" asked Coleen. "She's never been married. She's not rich. She's not a supervisor who can give people more money."

"She's nice," offered Lakesia.

The two women were talking about their 46-year-old co-worker, Kala. She seemed genuine and regardless of the office politics and gossip, Kala always rose above it. Her love was consistent and without bias.

"She's more than nice," countered Coleen.

"Right, she's a Christian," said Lakesia.

"A lot of people say they are Christian," said Coleen.

"Yeah, but she really lives like it," replied Lakesia.

Coleen had to admit that Lakesia was right. Kala went out of her way to love the people in the office, and yet it seemed effortless to her. Coleen also had to acknowledge that she had started out feeling uncomfortable around Kala, and then eventually began a subtle slander campaign against her.

Coleen would make negative remarks about Kala and her work performance. However, over the years, Coleen's campaign seemed to backfire, and Kala appeared to be getting sweeter and certainly not upset or vengeful.

Coleen was irritated this morning because try as she might, Kala continued to show her love and kindness.

"You know," Lakesia broke into Coleen's thoughts. "Kala once told me that before she came to Christ, and even for a while after, she was a mean, angry, and vengeful person. I guess you should be glad she's not that way anymore."

- 1.** *Is it natural for us to love those who have wronged us?*
- 2.** *Why do we need to experience Jesus' love before demonstrating unconditional love toward others?*
- 3.** *How can our practice of loving unconditionally make a difference in the world?*

Proof of Life

1 John 3:11-15, KJV

11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

1 John 3:11-15, NIV

¹¹For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ¹²Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. ¹³Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. ¹⁴We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

The command for believers to love one another was not new even in John's day. Decades before John wrote this letter, Jesus gave this instruction to His disciples as something that should characterize His followers (John 13:34-35). We do not know John's reason for renewed emphasis on love, but it might have been false teachers among his readers.

Cain, on the other hand, exemplifies not only those who hate their brother, but also the contempt of the world toward believers. The devil still stirs up envy for the righteous behavior of those in Christ just as he did with Cain toward his brother. Though everyone in the world will not oppose us, its hatred should not surprise us (John 15:18-20).

How do we know we belong to Jesus rather than the evil one? We reveal our identity through our love for each other. That is the proof "we have passed from death to life" (vs.

14). As Jesus said, “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24).

We cannot feign genuine love for others in order to look like those who are truly alive spiritually in Christ. Genuine love for one another comes from Jesus’ presence inside those who know Him. It’s the proof that we have passed from spiritual death to true life in Christ. Those who continue in murderous hatred for believers demonstrate that they remain in spiritual darkness.

4. *How does our behavior stir up hatred on the part of the world?*

5. *How can we know that we have passed from spiritual death to true life in Christ?*

Sacrificial Love

1 John 3:16-18, KJV

16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

17 But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

1 John 3:16-18, NIV

¹⁶This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

We pass “from death to life” through faith in Jesus’ sacrificial death on the Cross. His death in our place represents the essence of sacrificial love as well as an example for us to follow. Biblical love, like that of our Lord, always seeks the well-being of fellow believers through both actions and words. Jesus died so that we might inherit eternal life.

While very few of us, if any, will be called to give up our lives to save that of another person, we can display sacrificial love in other ways. John gave us one such situation where someone sees a fellow believer “in need” (vs. 17). Refusing to give assistance to that other believer, however, brings into question the genuineness of the first person’s faith.

Sacrificial love results in physically meeting the need rather than mere talk. John said our love must produce “actions” (vs. 18) that reveal the genuineness of our faith.

6. What does it truly mean to love one another?

Confident Hearts

1 John 3:19-24, KJV

19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

1 John 3:19-24, NIV

¹⁹This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: ²⁰If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

²¹Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²²and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. ²³And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴The one who keeps God’s commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

Visible expressions of our love for others do not save us, but they do provide evidence we truly know the Lord as our Savior. When these expressions spring from within us, they reassure our hearts and give us confidence of our salvation even when our hearts condemn us.

For those walking in love but feeling insecure, John assured them that “God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything” (vs. 20). Assurance comes from Him rather than how we feel at any one moment. Doubt can spring from our conscience as well as from the enemy. Our confidence comes from the changes in our desires and behavior toward others that reveal Jesus’ work inside us.

When we experience confidence in our hearts toward God, it increases our boldness in His presence and results in answered prayer. First John 5:14-15 tells us that this is not a blank check for anything we want, but that we can know the Lord will graciously respond to requests within His will.

In verses 23-24, John summed up his message regarding our love for fellow believers. First, we must believe in Jesus’ name. Apart from saving faith we cannot show genuine love for others. Once in Christ, He tells us to love one another.

It’s not a matter of our obedience leading to our salvation, but it’s always a matter of our abiding in Him that shows itself outwardly in moral purity and love for others. The Lord’s work inside us produces love for others.

7. What could have caused the hearts of John’s readers to condemn them unnecessarily?

8. What is the cure for hearts that condemn us?



John tells us not to be like Cain, shown murdering Abel in this medieval stained-glass illustration from York Minster, England.

A Changed Heart

Jason's heart raged every time he heard the words "father" or "dad." He remembered his dad coming home drunk and beating his mom. His mom would continually make excuses for his father, but Jason believed his life was better without his father, so he moved out as soon as he could. Jason didn't speak to or see his father for the next five years.

His best friend kept inviting him to church, but he couldn't imagine gaining anything from it. He was fine without it. Finally, he agreed to go out of obligation to his friend.

The church service was more interesting than Jason had imagined. On this Sunday, instead of a sermon, people gave testimonies. As Jason listened to the testimonies, he realized that these people really had a relationship with God through Jesus. Who was this Jesus who gave them such joy and peace? Then, the pastor shared how Jesus' love for us led Him to come and die for our sins. Jason wanted to know more about Jesus and invited Him into his life that day.

He grew spiritually, but his heart was still filled with hatred for his father. He knew he needed Jesus to replace the hatred with love. He prayed for a changed heart.

The next Christmas, Jason's mom asked him to come home for Christmas. She said his father had changed; he wasn't drinking anymore or mistreating her. When Jason arrived, he wasn't sure how he would feel when he saw his father, but his father came and hugged him. Jason couldn't remember the last time his father did that. Returning the hug, he felt God's love building in his heart toward his father.

9. *Why is it impossible to turn our hatred to love in our own strength?*

10. *How does accepting Jesus and His unconditional love enable us to love those we hate?*

11. *What role does prayer play in changing our hearts?*

12. *Is there someone you need Jesus to give you unconditional love for?*

Changed

When Jesus commanded us to love one another, even our enemies, He knew we couldn't do it in our own strength. The Holy Spirit comes to live inside us as we surrender our lives to Jesus. The song "Changed" by Walter Hawkins expresses what this change looks like: "A change, a change has come over me. He changed my life and now I'm free. He washed away all my sins, and He made me whole. He washed me white as snow."

► *If you have not accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, now is the time to do so, and let Him transform you through the power of the Holy Spirit to love others as He loves us. If you are already a follower of Christ, ask yourself, "Am I truly loving everyone, or are there people I hate, even though I might hate to admit that?" Pray about how the Spirit might transform that hate this week into brotherly love.*

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

November 16 through November 22

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** 1 Timothy 3:8-13—Preparing to Become a Deacon.
- Tues.** Acts 5:12-16—Healing Ministry Grows the Church.
- Wed.** Acts 6:1-7—Church Sharing Plan Enlarged.
- Thurs.** Acts 6:8-15—Stephen's Ministry Opposed.
- Fri.** Acts 2:42-47—Sharing All of Life Together.
- Sat.** Acts 4:23-31—Prayer for Boldness and Signs.
- Sun.** Acts 4:32-5:11—Sharing All Possessions Challenges the Church.