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A Letter to Dear Children, Part 12

A Pair of Redefinitions

Text: 1 John 3:11-15

When last we peeked at this text, John was reminding these first century Christians that as they surrendered themselves to Christ they had the *right* to call themselves the children of God. John reminded these saints that they were *not* the children of the devil. In these verses 11-15, John is going to revisit two well-known terms and give his dear spiritual children a new insight on those two terms.

**Love**

Love. A many-splendored thing. Love. That which makes the world go ’round. Love. A feeling that makes you quiver when a significant other comes into the room. Love. Most of us think we know what it means.

**Illus.**

An Internet post I read, contained the responses of children aged 4 to 8, who were asked, “What does love mean?”

Their responses:

“When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn’t bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So, my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That’s love.” Rebecca- age 8

“When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouth.” Billy – age 4

“Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other.” Karl – age 5

“Love is when you go out to eat and give somebody most of your French fries without making them give you any of theirs.” Chrissy – age 6

“Love is what makes you smile when you’re tired.” Terri – age 4

“Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is OK.” Danny – age 7

“Love is when you kiss all the time. Then when you get tired of kissing, you still want to be together and you talk more. My Mommy and Daddy are like that. They look gross when they kiss” Emily – age 8

“Love is what’s in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen.” Bobby – age 7 (Wow!)

“If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend who you hate,” Nikka – age 6 (we need a few million more Nikka’s on this planet)

“Love is when you tell a guy you like his shirt, then he wears it every day.” Noelle– 7

“Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well.” Tommy – age 6

“During my piano recital, I was on a stage and I was scared. I looked at all the people watching me and saw my daddy waving and smiling. He was the only one doing that. I wasn’t scared anymore.” Cindy – age 8

“My mommy loves me more than anybody. You don’t see anyone else kissing me to sleep at night.” Clare – age 6

“Love is when Mommy gives Daddy the best piece of chicken.” Elaine-age 5

“Love is when Mommy sees Daddy smelly and sweaty and still says he is handsomer than Robert Redford.” Chris – age 7

“Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you left him alone all day.” Mary Ann – age 4

“I know my older sister loves me because she gives me all her old clothes and has to go out and buy new ones.” Lauren – age 4

“When you love somebody, your eyelashes go up and down and little stars come out of you.” (what an image) Karen – age 7

“Love is when Mommy sees Daddy on the toilet and she doesn’t think it’s gross.” Mark – age 6

“You really shouldn’t say ‘I love you’ unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget.” Jessica – age 8

And the final one — Author and lecturer Leo Buscaglia once talked about a contest he was asked to judge. The purpose of the contest was to find the most caring child. The winner was a four-year-old child whose next-door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman’s yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his Mother asked what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, “Nothing, I just helped him cry”.

Love takes on a multitude of forms and shapes.

John will say that one of the ways we demonstrate that we are God’s children is that we love (v.10). This call to love others is old and goes back to the beginning (11).

Love is, according to John, a set of actions in behalf of another. Love *can be* terribly superficial. We could talk about it but never act. That was the problem with Cain.

**Illus.**

The old riddle: How long did Cain hate his brother? As long as he was able (Abel).

In the previous message in this series, I suggested that God is not everyone’s parent. Some people are children of the devil. Cain is described as being “of the wicked one” (v. 12a). Cain was a murderer. What is murder? Is it possible to fail to love and, in doing so, murder another? Could I be a murderer without ever picking up a gun or a knife? Could I be a murderer without ever driving a car into a group of people or poisoning someone’s food or drink? The answer is “yes”. Murder, like love, is a series of actions toward another. In Matthew 5:21, Jesus redefines murder for a group of smug, self-righteous hearers on the hillside.

Matthew 5:21-24(NKJV)

**21**“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ **22**But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother [b]without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of [e]hell fire. **23**Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24**leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Q: How do we know whether or not this new life in Christ is working?

A: We love others. (v.14)

To fail to love, that is, to hate, is to murder. If love is a set of actions in behalf of another, then murder is a set of actions that fails to love and honor another.

In this text, John defines two words or concepts we think we know well. I can hear us now: “John can’t tell me squat about love. I know love AND John surely doesn't need to be trying to school me about murder. I am no murderer!”.

John will say that love is the single greatest measure of one’s spirituality, one’s fellowship with Jesus. John will say that talk is cheap and of no value if words are not accompanied by action in the interest of another. (v. 14).

As for murder, John will say that our goal, our commitment, ought to be to share life with others. A murderer cuts life off. A believer does the opposite.

Question: Are we lovers of others or are we those who terminate life, that is, murderers?

**Illus.**

A lover’s note of regret:

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| Dearest Jimmy,  No words could ever express the great unhappiness I've felt since breaking our engagement. Please say you'll take me back. No one could ever take your place in my heart, so please forgive me. I love you, I love you, I love you! Yours forever, Marie.  P.S., And congratulations on willing the state lottery. |

May we love others not because someone came into money but because loving is how we demonstrate we are not murderers and it is how we show we are God’s children!

Amen.