

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. ¹⁹ **This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence** ²⁰ **whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.**

²¹ **Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God** ²² **and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.** ²³ **And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.** ²⁴ **Those who obey his commands live 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.** (NIV 84)

Theme: Love without Limits

You can use your words to say anything you want; you can make whatever claim you care to make. Did you know that I can dunk a basketball, run a mile in four and a half minutes, and can solve a Rubric's cube in under 20 seconds? You don't believe me do you? Well it's true—I said so. "Talk is cheap" you say, "put your money where your mouth is." That is the thing about words, you can say whatever you want, you can make whatever claim you care to make, but if you can't back it up, if you don't prove it, than your words don't mean a thing—they're worthless.

But isn't that what we often try to do with love? We tell our spouses, kids, and perhaps other relatives, "I love you," and figure that we are covered—and some of us can't even get to that point! We know the golden rule, "Love your neighbor as yourself," which summarizes the second table of the Ten Commandments; and so we tell ourselves that we do love all people no matter what. But talk is cheap; you can saw I love you all you want, but unless your actions back up your words, they don't mean a thing.

And think about the opening lines of our text, **let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.** Love in God's eyes isn't a feeling or an emotion—it's not the warm fuzzies you get inside of you when you are with someone; it's not just the feeling of closeness you have good friends or your family. Love, first and

foremost, is an action. It's showing love not just by what you say, but what you do and don't do. And we do it sincerely, we do good things for others, not because it's expected of us, or because we might get something in return—unbelievers do that on a regular basis. No a Christian treats all people, no matter who they are and what they have or haven't done with love—as he himself wants to be treated.

By our actions—not our words, we indicate who we are or who we aren't, whether we are followers of Christ or not. As we read in verse 19, **This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence.** So your acts of love are proof that you truly are a child of God; and when you love someone sincerely others will see your faith and rejoice. John makes a similar point in verse 35, **By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.** We have nothing to fear if our actions follow our words of love.

But that's exactly the problem, isn't it—we don't always love as we should. We don't always do good to others—especially those that hate us or mistreat us. We have a hard enough time with words—saying words of love, or anything nice at all to some people; let alone our actions following those words. Instantly your mind thinks back to a certain instance when you got into a heated argument with someone; and you said something that you instantly regretted but harmed a relationship for years to come; and possibly never recovered. Or the time that you spread the rumor about someone, or talked bad about him behind your back. Now, what about your actions—when you got into a physical fight with your sibling, a friend, or someone else. When you saw someone in need, but didn't do anything to help him; or when you took something that didn't belong to you. Your mind goes on and on.

And you remember that it's not just your words, but also your actions that prove who you are—whether or not you are a Christian. What does your conscience tell you? Your conscience thinks back to all the wrongs you have committed, all the sins you have done by word or deed—or lack thereof. And you know what your sins deserve; so your heart condemns you. And so does Satan. He whispers in your ear, "you can't possibly be a Christian; just look at all the horrible things

you have done. There are countless unbelievers who are more loving than you; there is no way God is going to let you into heaven.” When you think of God’s omniscience, the fact that he knows all things, does that make you happy or afraid? John says at the end of verse 20, **he knows all things**. That’s right God knows all things, he knows all your thoughts, your words, and your actions. He knows of and remembers every single sin you have ever committed. “Great,” you say, “it’s not just my conscience that condemns me, but God does too.”

But that’s not the context in which John says this. All of verse 20 reads, **whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything**. Our hearts may condemn us; but God doesn’t. For God knows all things—he knows that he chose you to be his own and to be saved through faith in his son. He knows what is in your heart—he knows your faith. He knows that his son, Jesus came down to this earth for us and not once did he fail to show love to someone. And he gave us that perfect life as he suffered through the eternal punishment for our sins and died in our place. And that through faith you have already received those blessings! God is greater than our hearts, he overcomes our conscience. Our consciences condemn us; but in the Lord our consciences are no longer burdened, because in the Lord we stand forgiven. And that is a fact. We may not feel it. We may not feel forgiven. But our feelings don’t matter—they don’t take away from the truth. The truth is that Jesus suffered and died for the sins of the whole world—**the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all**. If we were saved based on feelings we would never be sure—feelings come and go they change multiple times a day. But the fact remains that Christ paid for your sins on the cross. So our salvation is not based on feelings but on truth.

And so we will not be condemned. As Paul says in the first verse of Romans 8, **There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**. The Lord Jesus Christ suffered and died in our place, paying the price for the world’s sins. As a result God declares us not guilty—despite our sins we have been acquitted and will not face the eternal punishment and condemnation that our sins deserve. This comes to us by the love of Christ. And Christ’s love isn’t given to us simply by his words of love and compassion—and he certainly

was filled with words of love and compassion. But on numerous occasions he promised to die and rise for us; and all those words would have been pointless if he had not actually risen from the dead—and that is exactly what the Lord did. He saved us with love—not empty words but with actions.

It is love that Christ died for us despite of who we were and what we do on a constant basis. We weren’t his children, but his enemies; we didn’t do what is pleasing in his sight, but couldn’t do anything but sin—and yet, Christ died for us. As Paul points out in Romans 5, **God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us**. It is an act of love that led God to send his son. And as John explains just a few verses before our text, it is an act of love that led Jesus to give up his life for us, **this is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us**. The love of Christ, is a love without limits!

But this gift of Christ is only received through faith in him. That is a command of God—to believe in him. And this is how much God loves us—he gives us that faith himself through his gospel. We were born as enemies of him; we can’t come up with that necessary faith on our own. We would never choose to believe if it was up to us. So the Lord gave us the very faith that he commands; as Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 12, **no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit**. This is another gift of God—not mere words, but an action, a gift of love.

And because our Lord loves us we know that we are able to pray to him and ask him for anything and he will give it to us—anything that is for our eternal welfare. Since we have been redeemed by Christ we can ask God for anything as a little child asks his own father for anything and knows that all good things will be given to him. Or as Paul says in Ephesians 3, **In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence**.

This is this limitless love of Christ that leads us to love others—not just with words, but also with actions: a limitless love. So we show the love of Christ by showing love to others. We do this sincerely and willingly—out of love for Christ, not because it’s expected of us or to get something in return. Love for others is doing things for them without expecting any return as Christ gave up his life for us. As John tells us as Christ gave up his life for us so, **we ought to lay down our**

lives for our brothers. This is something only Christians can do because only those that follow Christ can love with a selfless love like Christ.

And so we know that we are Christians—that we are his children; moved by the Holy Spirit we show love to others. Will we fail? Sure; all the time. And yet by the love of Christ in suffering and dying in our place, we stand forgiven. And so we strive to love—and that striving to love and obey is proof that you belong to him. And so we love, not with mere words (talk is cheap) but we prove our love with actions. And that love, with actions, is one like Christ's—without limits. Amen.