

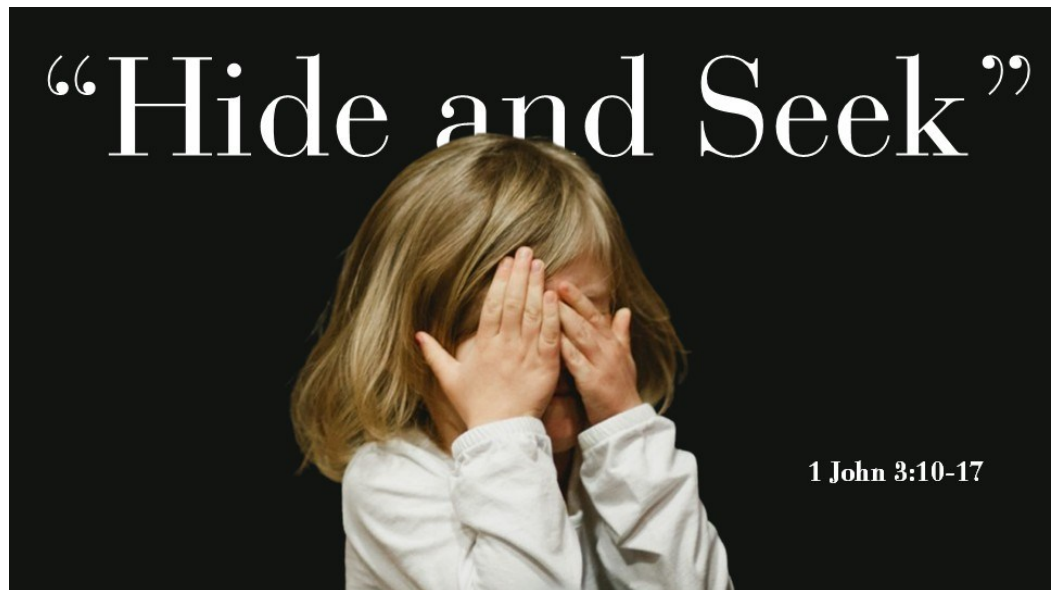
“Hide and Seek”

1 John 3:10-17

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at Believers City Church
in Menomonie, Wisc
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10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor [is] he who

does not love his brother. 11 For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, 12 not as Cain [who] was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. 13 Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love [his] brother abides in death. 15 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down [our] lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?



The author of our text is known as the ‘apostle of love.’ The “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23, 20:2). This was a guy who actually walked with Christ...ministered with Him...heard Him speak and watched Him live and die. All of that gives him a certain license. How could anyone who claims the faith even attempt to wrestle with what John has to say?

It seems that, through this text, we have been ‘served.’ There is no wiggling out of his words. John ‘cuts to the bone.’ Once again, *this is John...* and there is no credible way out of what he says to us! I think John would have been “unfriended” by a lot of church-going folks a long time ago if they had had the opportunity!

Throughout this letter, John paints pictures of the true Christian and the pseudo-Christian, ranging from the subtle to the overt. And it appears that such is not done to serve as a license for us to be spiritual police towards those around us, but rather primarily so we might truly evaluate our own standing by a faith litmus given by Christ, not by the adulterated greater church of 21st century.

The words of John the apostle herein have a very contemporary feel. Our prevailing church culture today has subtly but steadily diluted the premise of what it looks like to be a Christian. As true believers, we often experience the hostile and aggressive intolerance toward Christians from the world on one side and the often equally intolerant position that many church-going folks will actually take toward the biblical disciple. Thus, the authentic Christian is finding himself increasingly ‘squeezed.’

For many, the answer to such conflict is simply to “hide.” To hide from the world... and hide from other confessing church-goers who hold a more “Jesus-lite” position. It’s the “duck and cover” version of Christianity. We avoid conflict and confrontation, and most of all, we keep our mouths shut. Then there are others who publicly claim a faith stance, but they, too, are attempting to hide for fear that their true colors will be discovered.

In both cases, John is calling everybody in. No more hiding. John is calling us in: "Ally Ally in free" ...the phrase shouted in hide-and-seek to signal that the game is over.

In verse 10 of this chapter, John is defining what few dare to define. John is defining what a real child of God is. It's not what one **says**, or by their **church attendance** or even their **service**. "*So now we can tell who are children of God and who are children of the devil. Anyone who does not live righteously and does not love other believers does not belong to God.*"

John says "*We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren...He who does not love his brother abides in death.*" We **can** know that we are truly redeemed Christians...faithful children of God in good standing... by the tangible evidence of love expressed towards our God, as well toward those who are fellow believers. He says that if we **do not**, we **are not** true Christians. Such does not mean that we lost it when we spewed hatred through a verbal gush or gossip, or that venting tirade on social media, but rather that we literally never had it, ...that we, as verse 14 says, **still abide in death**.

Our immediate knee-jerk reaction can often be one of incredulous and even hostile indignation: "*How dare you take such a position of judgment against me!*" And yet again I remind you that **I** am not saying this...**Believer's Church** is not saying this...(at least firstly and uniquely)...but this is **JOHN**...the **apostle of Jesus**...a 'son of thunder'...a member of the 'inner circle' of Jesus...the "special forces" of the apostle division of the spiritual marines. There is just no way to dance out of the ramifications of this. Take a moment and let this roll over you. Because few passages in scripture have such blistering ramifications, and can so clearly and overtly separate the sheep from the goats.

Such definitive position... by us *or* John... is apt to cause us to squirm. Because we have frankly been beaten down in the past few decades with the siren call of the unredeemed, the rebellious, the 'runner'...all chanting in unison "*Hey...don't judge me! The bible says don't judge me!*" But wait...does it really say that? We know that Matthew 7 tells us to "*judge not, lest you be judged...*" Jesus went on in that passage, ...not prohibiting judgment ...but to say that the judgment with which you exercise will be exercised 'back at ya,' and with the measure you use it, it will be measured toward you. "*Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?*"

James 4 tells us "...*who are you to judge your neighbor?*" And Romans 2, "*Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?*"

But what about John 7:24? There we are told to "... *do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.*" Proverbs 31:9 tells us "*Open your mouth, judge righteously...*" Galatians 6 says "*Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness*" and 2 Timothy 2:24 "... *the Lord's servant must correct his opponents with gentleness.*" That's hard to accomplish without any judgment on our part! 1 Corinthians 6 adds to this debate with "*Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame.*" Leviticus 19:15 "*in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.*" 1 Corinthians 5:12 "*Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?*"

Matthew 7:15 warns us to "*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.*" Again, how do we do that unless we make some judgment? 1 Corinthians 14:29 tells us to "*Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.*"

Christians are often accused of "judging" whenever they speak out against sinful action or acknowledge a state of immaturity in another's walk. But such is not the meaning of the biblical position of "Do not judge." There is a righteous kind of judgment we are actually *supposed* to exercise—yet indeed with a careful discernment. (John

7:24). Such judgment is not only **NOT** prohibited, but in fact we are scripturally called to do so with the ultimate goal of bringing repentance in the other person (James 5:20)...to foster growth and maturity...to restore an outlier to fellowship. We are to 'speak the truth in love' (Ephesians 4:15). We are to 'proclaim what God's Word says about sin.' 2 Timothy 4:2 instructs us, "*Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.*" The fact is, we are to "judge" sin and one's faith manifest, but always with the goal of presenting the solution for sin and its consequences.

So knowing this fact, John "steps up" and says "this is a Christian" and "*this is not.*" Thank you brother John, because someone needs to do it or a lot of people are going to spend eternity in hell with surprised looks on their faces! He doesn't say "**Bob** is not a Christian" but rather says certain behaviors negate a claim of salvation, and then lets the chips fall where they may.

The greater world of Christianity today has become a 'mile wide and an inch deep.'" Statistics overwhelmingly show that the vast majority of Americans believe themselves to be Christians, while church attendance (let alone actual participation) is FAR below that number. And when the doctrinal questions start to come up, it quickly becomes evident that many folks have a completely different definition than that of the faithful minority. Knowledge and understanding of the Word? **Well**...(they can quote "...do not judge!"). Moral purity? Faithful service? Seek first the kingdom of God? Love the Lord with all your heart and living? Hmmm...not so much. Instead of stepping up, it was just a whole lot easier to hide...and moreover, to redefine the concept of what a Christian actually is.

John is saying there are actually two groups of people and only two: the children of God and the children of the devil. John clearly took the position that not everyone is going to heaven. The righteous practice righteousness. Those that *do* not, *are* not. We do what we are: that's a fact. John goes on in this passage to speak concerning an authentic practice of righteousness. The child of God, he tells us, loves his brothers. It's a test.

How can we authentically love our brothers and sisters if truth does not take center stage? This fellowship has paid dearly over the years for trying to love in a Christlike manner. But indeed, it is hard to receive correction. And even harder to accept an insinuation that we are not where we should be with Christ. A lot of folks over the years have 'walked' because someone expressed concern about their spiritual standing. Instead of realizing that real love mandates such an interaction, and Jesus Himself practiced this kind of love, we are offended and turn and bite the hand that has fed us...not to mention the hands that loved us for such a long time.

Somewhere we have gotten the idea that Christ love is to always feel good and is always emotionally pleasant. But nowhere is such a version of love presented in scripture, but in fact, that version is actually the world's definition! Thus demanding such an interaction with your brothers and sisters is not of Christ, but of the world. Furthermore, rejecting the biblical version only expresses the fact that we are unfamiliar with it, and of course that *should* cause great concern in us! For the understanding of the nature of Christ and His church is a crucial handprint of salvation! This is why John was able to say "*These people left our churches, but they never really belonged with us; otherwise they would have stayed with us. When they left, it proved that they did not belong with us.*" (1John 2:19)

John says 'You are to love one another.' Yet I ask today, do we as Christians really know what that even looks like? We grasp the concepts of fellowship, kindness, and blessing. We embrace all the lovely aspects of community. But do we understand what 'Christ loving' really looks like? Do we not factually acknowledge that God often says no, as well as allow us to go through uncomfortable and even painful experiences because He loves us? A.W. Tozer once was quoted as saying "*It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply.*"

From the "*In the beginning,*" God has been loving mankind with an inexplicable and unsurpassed love. But not the love of this world, rather a love He calls "agape." Agape love is a love that is sometimes gloriously joyous, and sometimes very painful. Such is the biblical account, from Genesis to Revelation. Yet such love was always

executed on our behalf...a Creator and Redeemer's parental care and nurture. It was...*and is*, always meted out with the desire that we become something *more*. It rejects the blinders we want to wear when it comes to one another. It is a love that is best *for the other*, not for the one giving it out! Worldly love is different. It is designed more for *me the giver* than *you the receiver*.

Most folks will just never get it. In fact, John says "don't be surprised if what you get in return for your practice of Christ love, is actually hatred." Don't be surprised! But honestly, I still am regularly surprised! A few years ago, our country starting passing "Good Samaritan" laws. This came about due to people trying to stop and help someone who was in a crisis or life-threatening situation, and then would later be sued by the person they tried to help because things didn't go well. But how did the rescuer have anything to do with getting you into that situation? Was it not simply love to try to rescue you?

Let's face it: **God's love, judges**. He judges our actions, our intentions, and the possible consequences. God, in the exercise of His perfect agape love, will always speak and often even intervene if we are heading for the cliff. He does so, because if He did not, we could not say that He really loves us. And He does love us so very much! John is calling...*God is calling*, us to love our brothers in the same manner. It is the "smoking gun" of the authenticity of our salvation.

John has already declared that the righteous do righteousness, and the holy do holiness. He has barricaded the door of escape on this and nailed it shut. No one can thus claim "*well...I don't hate that person...I just have issues with them*"...or "*I don't hate him, I just don't like him.*" We also can't successfully take the juvenile position... "*well, you don't know what they did to me! They started it! They deserve it!*" Every hole of escape...every leak of excuse has been plugged. If you are indeed a real Christian today, you will love the brothers and sisters in Christ. If you do not...in verb action, not just in theory or philosophy, you are not born again and are still lost in your sins.

How can John take such a stance? Because he understands the crucial doctrinal teaching that when we become 'reborn', the spirit of God comes to live in us and exercises a vast control over our actions and being. And if "God is love" and "God is in us" then *we will love*, and love is in us ...and that love will naturally flow forth from us. We cannot operate in both worlds and exercise both a spiritual and worldly dynamic. James too makes prohibition of the same idea...that blessing and cursing cannot come out of the same mouth.

And we must be VERY careful to not play the game of hide and seek...dodging the ramifications of what we do and what we are! John moves like a hockey goalie to block any shot of attempted escape. He is clearly calling for us to "show the money." To "speak the truth in love." How quick we are to say we love people but how slow we are to actually show it. We hold tight the mantra that we love like Jesus and love the church, but we fail to actual live it out.

What does this love actually look like? "Christ love" gives time to the other...*serves* the other. It gives physical form and action to our words. It sacrifices for others. It is imminently interactive and personal. If you knew someone who was blind and they were walking toward the edge of a cliff, it would be hateful for you to not warn them. If you saw a child playing with a kitchen knife and did nothing to try to stop them, you would be understood as being calloused, uncaring, and flippant. Thus it is not hateful to warn them of an impending judgment that is coming, on the contrary, it is the most loving thing you can ever do...even if it comes at the expense of their hating you as John has already said.

John is not giving an "easy Jesus" sermon here. He executes a leveling right cross punch saying "*the guy who hates his brother is a murderer.*" Woa. That's some serious language! One cannot help but wonder... if this is so clearly stated...why such fails to have the obvious impact upon all of us? We seek rather to sweep the whole matter under the rug. We are quick to claim that we don't actually *hate* them anyway! John and his letter then falls prey to our current practice of redefining words and terminology. **What does this hate really look like then?**

We could go to a dictionary at this point and seek the precise definition of "hate." Yet would any of us fail to know hate if we were face to face with it? I could google the word "bear" and look at pictures and read the descriptions of such, and I might still be able to say that I know little about actual bears. But I promise you that if I come face to face with one, I will know it's a bear! That's where we are with hate. The problem resides in whose eyes were are seeing through. The one who hates another and would openly debate the premise of hate, ...or the one on the receiving end of such?

The one on the receiving end of such seems to have a clarity of hate. When the aim is directed at the person and not their sin...that is hate. But let us be careful here not to start the 'dance.' If there IS sin in the camp...and we are claiming we are trying to wave off the blind man from the edge of the cliff, then such requires interaction with that person. Discussion. Verbal explanation of the danger. Personal and active efforts to intervene.

We are aware that the act of murder itself was certainly condemned, but hatred is a "heart" sin, and any hateful thought or act is literally an act of murder in God's eyes for which justice will be demanded, possibly not in this life but at the judgment. Luke 6:45 tells us that "*A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*" What that means is our actions are an indicator of what is in our hearts...love or hate. Because what's in there...according to scripture, is coming out!

So terrible is the position of hate for a brother before God that John has already told us in chapter 2 verse 9 and 11 that a man who hates is said to be walking in darkness as opposed to the light. But the factual reality is that countless folks continue to profess religion but remain in seething attack mode against a brother. The Scriptures declare that such a person is a liar (1 John 4:20). He may fool men, but not God. How many believers live for years pretending that all is well, putting on a front, only to be found finally wanting because they have harbored hatred against a fellow believer?

Love for the brethren is manifested in this way: "And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." There is nothing cerebral or philosophical about that. It is real, practical, and action oriented. It is what Jesus did for us, and what being a Christian is all about.