

Fourth Sunday of Easter – Epistle

LOVE TOT HE LOVELESS SHOWN

1 John 3:16-24

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Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

1 John 3: 16 We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 17 How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. 19 And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him 20 whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; 22 and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him. 23 And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. 24 All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

DIAGNOSIS: Loveless Lives

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *World's Goods (v. 17)*

Outward wealth, as attractive as it may seem, may hide the ugly truth of inward spiritual poverty. So John says in this epistle: You can have the world's goods but be absolutely devoid of God's love in your heart (v. 17).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – No Love Abides Here

The world's goods too easily take up residence in hearts where God's love has previously resided. And hearts without God's love are not just vain and self-interested but ugly hearts. Such hearts not only refuse to offer a brother or sister help, but they also forget that Christ "laid down his life for us" (v. 16).

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Our Hearts Condemn Us

Without the "truth and action" of loving others (v. 23), without trust in God's Son, there's no way for us to reassure our hearts. Our hearts condemn us, for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything (v. 20). Most especially, God knows when we've pushed him out of our hearts onto the street, and God doesn't like being evicted from the very place he wants to reside.

PROGNOSIS: A Life Laid Down in Love

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – He Laid Down His Life... (v. 16)

Amazingly, while we empty our hearts to make room for wealth—which will serve no heavenly good, conversely God serves our earthly and heavenly good in Christ by making room in his heart for us. In fact, "we know love by this," that Christ laid down his life for us (v. 16). Not just heart but every bit of himself—for us.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – ...For Us (v. 16,

continued)

“For us.” It’s a two-word pledge of love that gets too personal to ignore; it cuts to the heart. Call it open-heart surgery, if you will, performed by the Spirit. For it’s by the Spirit’s work that we come to know that Christ abides in us (v. 24). The Spirit opens the heart, and Christ enters in. And we, for our part, gratefully sign consent to treat. Without the Spirit we would have no life; but with the Spirit Christ abides in us.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Worldly Good*

When Christ repossesses his proper place in our hearts, concern for the world’s goods fades. In fact, doing worldly good becomes the pressing concern. Is a brother or sister in need? Then how can I refuse to help? After all, if Christ laid down his life for me, certainly I can do worldly good for my neighbor.