

1 Jn. 3:14-18 (WCF 26:2) “Maintaining the Communion”

For the Children: When you are friends with someone, you need to work at keeping the friendship going. If you stop seeing each other or talking to each other, you’ll probably stop being friends sooner or later. The fellowship of God’s people also needs to be worked at. We do so by worshipping together, using our gifts to help each other, sharing God’s Word with each other, and giving practical help where needed. If we don’t do such things, it might be asked if we really love God or our brothers and sisters! **Questions:** Why does the way we treat other Christians show whether we love God? What will happen to us if we do not love our Christian brothers and sisters? What are some ways young people can help each other in the church?

Introduction:

First Point: A Matter of Life and Death

- **From Death to Life:** The world hates God’s people. But we have moved into a different place than that of hatred and death
- **The Evidence of Life:** The evidence of this “change of address” is our love of the brethren. This is set in sharp contrast to the world. See also 1 Jn. 4:20. The reason for this is that our brethren “represent” Christ to us. For they are all sharing in His gifts and graces, and sharing those with us. How we treat our brethren is, in a sense, how we treat Christ Himself (Mt. 25:34ff)
- **The Evidence of Death:** Failure to love our brethren, on the other hand, reflects death – as with the world. To close the heart to a brother, to fail to love him, is to “murder” him in our heart. See LD 40. Q/A 106; Mt. 5:21-22. Such unrepentant “murderers” will not inherit God’s Kingdom. See Jn. 8:44; Jn. 2:9-11; Rev. 21:8; 22:15

Second Point: A Matter of Reflecting Christ’s Love

- **The Greatest Love:** Christ’s love for us teaches us what our love for our brethren should be like. His love for us involved laying down His life for us (v. 16). See Jn. 15:12-13. The essence of that love is self-sacrifice for the welfare of those who do not deserve it (agape)
- **Laying Down Our Lives:** We must model our love of the brethren on Christ’s sacrifice, by “laying down our lives” for them. We can’t do that exactly as Christ did, a “once-for-all” atoning sacrifice. But we can be self-sacrificing. We can also have Christ’s love as the motive for our actions, so we love the brethren out of love and gratitude for His sacrifice for us. This will not always mean we have to die physically for each other. But it does mean that all we do should be characterized by self-sacrifice for His sake. When we love in this way, the result will be the maintaining of our communion with our brethren

Third Point: A Matter of Deed and Truth

- **Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is:** We are not to love by mouthing empty slogans, but with actions that follow our words, springing from a genuine motive (v. 18). Our hearts are not to be “closed” – we are to have genuine sympathy for our brethren (v. 17), so that when we see a need and can help, we follow-through with actions.
- **Not Refusing Those in Need:** This applies to helping with practical needs, in outward, temporal things (v. 17, with WCF 26:1 and 2). See also James 2:14f. We could add to that the visiting of widows, the elderly and the sick, practical help in the life of the church, raising money for needy brethren or churches at home or abroad
- **Communion in Worship, Gifts and Edification:** Sharing with each other, out of the gifts and graces of Christ in which each of us shares, means a sharing in worship, the use of spiritual gifts, and mutual edification (WCF 26:2). These things are essential for maintaining the communion of the saints. Attending services, Bible studies, sharing the Word with each other, encouraging and admonishing and advising – our involvement in such things will show whether we are loving in “deed and truth”

Conclusion: