

Love in Action and Truth

In the name of God's own Son, dearly loved children of the Father:

“See the kind of love the Father has given us [NIV: lavished on us] that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are! The world does not know us, because it did not know him. Dear friends, we are children of God now, but what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he is revealed we will be like him, and we will see him as he really is. Everyone who has this hope purifies himself just as Jesus is pure.” (1 John 3:1–3 EHV¹)

Doesn't that answer some of the most strident questions by secular humanists who insist that all religion, especially the Christian religion is the problem in the world? Most people see religion as only a way of making the world a better place by improving morals. But who gets to decide what are the right morals? Only those who say they must decide for themselves? Is there really no one in this world whose conduct is so bad that they can call it “evil”? And who can defend the evil done by church people “in God's name?” One faith persecuting another to death – as when some very religious people teamed up to crucify the Lord of glory! If that's all I knew of “religion,” I'd have no use for it either. But this verse makes me stop and think. Why do Christians need to purify themselves like Jesus? Christians are not pure in themselves? Could that be why some Christians are not as good as some non-Christians in an openly moral way? Dear Holy Spirit, we need help to **Love in Action and Truth!**

“Dear children, let us love not only with word or with our tongue, but also in action and truth.” We were taught to prayerfully question the text. So what would it look like to **love in action**, but not in **truth**? Without **truth** can **love** be sincere? Does the Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible mean something greater than my “truth” or yours? In answer to my prayers the Holy Spirit brought three Bible people to mind as examples. One in marriage, one in religion, and one in politics. God guide our hearts and lips.

“This is how we know that we are of the truth and how we will set our hearts at rest in his presence: ²⁰If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.”

Men in the Bible with a condemning heart and a guilty conscience – wouldn't King David top the list? Read 2 Samuel 11, 12; Psalms 32, 51. Talk about a king and politician giving God a bad name! Adultery with Bathsheba, murder of her husband, incest and rape....Even though David was forgiven by God, violence never left his family as a consequence of his sin. The Bible is brutally honest, transparent of sin among God's people. There's something far more important here than moral reform. The Bible says God does not discriminate. God calls a world of rebellious sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus.

If our hearts condemn us, God...knows everything. God knew that David would repent with Nathan's emotional word picture. God knew David's Descendant would be the Christ of God whose blood washed away all sin. God knew David as ***“a man after my own heart. He will do all that I want him to do.”*** (Acts 13:22) And one thing David did was not to take the law into his own hands. Early on David was running for his life from King Saul, jealous of David's popularity from killing the giant Goliath with nothing but his shepherd's sling, bringing one of Israel's greatest national victories. King Saul with thousands of soldiers pursued David, maybe ten or twenty years. Several times David could have killed Saul as his own soldiers kept urging. Yet David restrained his men: ***“May I be cursed if I do something like this to my master, who is the Lord's anointed—that I would stretch out my hand against him, since he is the Lord's anointed.”*** (1 Samuel 24:6) Once back in a cave David got close enough to cut off the corner of Saul's robe. Would you believe that David had a guilty conscience?

¹ EHV ~ Evangelical Heritage Version (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022, Amazon-Kindle, LOGOS.

David's men demanded **Action**, but David would not follow their advice outside of God's **Truth**. Saul was God's anointed king. David submitted to the governing authorities. (Romans 13) God's mercy empowered David to mercy Saul. It's like our Palestinian Christian guide describing the persecution they endure in the Holy Land from Jews and Muslims. "You know that when we hear 'Palestinian' in America it usually means 'terrorist'?" "I know," Sam smiled, "but we teach our children to love their enemies and do good to those who hate them." Like David, Sam and his fellow Palestinian Christians are empowered by the risen Christ to **Love in Action and Truth**. Does our media get it? Politics in God's **Truth**?

How about power in religion? "*Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God. ²²We also receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commands and do what is pleasing in his sight.*" Jesus nicknamed James and John "*Boanerges*," "Sons of Thunder." After Luke reports that "*Jesus was determined to go up to Jerusalem*" to suffer and die for our sins, a Samaritan village refused to welcome Jesus and His disciples. Samaritans hated Jews and visa versa, even though both religions claimed to follow Moses. *Boanerges* had a solution. James and John asked Jesus: "*Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?*" End it; smoke 'em, Lord! *But [Jesus] turned and rebuked them. "You don't know what kind of spirit is influencing you. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy people's souls, but to save them."* Then they went to another village." (Luke 9:54-56 EHV) Faulty religion demands **Action**, but God demands **Truth**.

One more example from marriage. Before our Supreme Court tried to redefine marriage, many Americans had suffered so much marital abuse that they don't want to marry anymore. End of abusive relationships? If the verbal abuse hurts worse than physical, many men must be hurting from the verbal contempt of their wives. The Apostle Paul advised people not to marry, unless they'd fall into sin by enjoying the intimacy God reserves for marriage in the Sixth Commandment. And what is a godly woman supposed to do if she wants to respect her husband, but he literally makes it impossible?

Issues like these are why we have Bible Information Class for adults to ask questions and Catechism Class for 7th and 8th graders. Today lets take one powerful example in a beautiful and intelligent woman named Abigail. Her husband Nabal lived down to his name which means, "fool," not someone lacking intelligence, but missing any spark of moral decency.

Back when David and his men were running from Saul, they did not, like most soldiers, steal for food. They protected Nabal's flocks and herds, then asked for a little consideration from Nabal during sheep shearing time. Nabal's men agreed David deserved help, but Nabal blew them off. He violated God's **Truth** as expressed in the verse before our text: "*Whoever has worldly wealth and sees his brother in need but closes his heart against him—how can God's love remain in him?*" (v.17)

Abigail heard about this just in time. As David and his fully armed soldiers topped the rise above the ranch house, Abigail rushed uphill with donkeys loaded with food for David. She took the blame on herself. She used an emotional word picture² to convince David that the Lord would throw his enemies away like a rock from a sling. Wouldn't the memory of killing Goliath hit David right in the heart? She saved him from needless bloodshed by revenge – and he knew it. But Abigail still wanted to respect her husband. Nabal was drunk when she got home, so she told him the next day. God struck him; Nabal died.

Marriage, religion, politics – "*Let us love not only with word or with our tongue, but also in action and truth.*" One of our African American sisters echoes what Pastor Gawrisch is writing in his *New Life News* series of articles: "It's not a political problem out there, it's a heart problem in here." John concludes: "*This then is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and that we love one another just as he commanded us. The one who keeps his commands remains in God and God in him. This is how we know that he remains in us: We know it from the Spirit, whom he has given to us.*" The Holy Spirit in Word and sacrament creates and nurtures faith in Jesus to literally *guard* God's commands and to live like branches on the Vine. (John 15) **Love in Action and Truth**. Amen.

² Check out Gary Smalley series, *Keys to Loving Relationships*, for this helpful communication tool.

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