

# Satanic Atrocities and Christian Love

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Well, it is a delight for me to welcome you to our service this morning as we open God's word which is a light in the midst of a very dark world, is it not? It is the word of God alone that can give us perspective and to give us direction in light of an ever increasingly dark world that is all around us. And with those things in mind, I invite you to turn to the book of 1 John as we continue teaching through the book of 1 John and once again the timing of the Lord's providence in the teaching of his word is just exquisite. We don't have to artificially try to adjust to the calendar or artificially adjust to events around us. The word of God speaks to us in a timely fashion as we just honor it and go through it systematically as we try to do week by week and as the murders in Connecticut are all fresh in our mind, we come to a passage that deals with the very topic of murder that helps us understand the source of murder and gives us, by contrast, a sense of direction for what life in the body of Christ should be. This is really remarkable. I never cease to marvel at the timing of the word of God and only the Spirit of God could produce such exquisite timing in the life of our body here at Truth Community Fellowship.

Let's say one thing for a beginning, starting point as we gather here this morning and the events of the past week certainly make this plain, that we, meaning mankind in general, and you and I in particular, we're not and are not born into loving obedience to God and we are not born into a loving relationship with mankind. We are born into sin and we are born into hostility toward God and all of the tragedies and all of the violence that we see around that are simply a reflection and an affirmation of what the Bible teaches us to expect. Colossians 1:21 says that, "you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds." When we see evil deeds manifested around us either in our private lives as people betray us or as we betray others even in our own conduct, as we see it played out in the headlines around the world and see unspeakable atrocities committed, we should realize that what we are seeing is simply a manifestation of what the Bible teaches to be true about the nature of humanity. Mankind is not good. Mankind is wicked. Mankind is depraved. This is what happens when men are given the opportunity to act out that which is upon their true inner hearts. This is not shocking to the Bible student that we would see things like what's transpired in the past 72 hours or so. This doesn't surprise us. The Bible says that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and is desperately wicked. The Bible says that you lust and you do not have and so you commit murder and the source of all of these things are rooted not in external things like gun control or whatever, it's rooted in the hateful animosity that animates the human

heart. That's why these things happen and that is why it is so necessary to proclaim all the more the Scriptures and to proclaim all the more the sinfulness of man and to proclaim all the more the necessity of repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. This affirms us all the more in what we do. It doesn't dissuade us or distract us. This is why we preach that men must be reconciled to God because the outworking of sin is so horrible and so consequential that it could only lead to a righteous judgment in the end. This is why, beloved, part of what the Scripture teaches is that we must be saved from this perverse generation. We must be saved out of this perverse generation and what I beg each one of you to realize even as we prayed in our pastoral prayer this morning, is to understand and to realize that the wickedness is not merely something that is out there, the wickedness is that which dwells in our own hearts as well; that there are impulses of sin even in believers and for those of you that have not yet been converted to Christ, your heart is dominated by the same kind of dark sinful impulses that motivated a man to assassinate defenseless children. We have to take the teaching of Scripture seriously, that there is no one who does good. There is none who are righteous, no, not one, and it's simply a matter of degree to which our sin is played out. It's not a matter of difference in quality that distinguishes one sinner from another. These things are of such great consequence.

Now, what I would say to you as a body of believers here is that there is great comfort for us who believe the Scriptures to understand that the Bible teaches us to expect this; that sometimes the curtain is drawn back and we see wickedness in a greater extent and on fuller display than what we usually see it in our normal lives. From a scriptural perspective, these kinds of human atrocities are not unexpected. This is to be expected from the hearts of men whose hearts are filled with insanity and who are motivated by everything that is demonic and contrary to the holiness of God. There is a sense of perspective that you can get only from the Scriptures, and to realize as we see in our passage today from 1 John 3, to realize that this thread of atrocity was present from the very beginning after the fall of man.

Look with me at 1 John 3, beginning in verse 10 which is where we left off last time and we'll pick up and see it now as we continue on. And as we see this, as we see the darkness by contrast, we're going to see the mandate for Christian love within the church by way of clear contrast that seeing the atrocities played out before us should make us all the more motivated to love one another within the body of Christ. That's the teaching of our passage here this morning. 1 John 3:10,

10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. 11 For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another;

Notice the contrast now as we go into verse 12,

12 not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

Look at verse 13,

13 Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us [speaking of Christ, of course]; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

Now, we're going to focus this morning primarily on verses 11 through 13 but I just want to point out something by way of contrast that kind of sets the whole stage for what we're looking at here this morning and sets the stage for the things that will come this week and two weeks from now. Notice that with the light of Connecticut fresh in our mind, notice the exact contrast with our Lord Jesus Christ. Here we are watching play out in the news media a man who went in and killed others for the fulfillment of whatever lustful things were animating his heart. By direct contrast, our Lord Jesus Christ, rather than coming in judgment to slay his enemies, whereas a wicked man just slayed innocent people, our Lord Jesus Christ came and laid down his own life and received an unjust murder in his own body in order to achieve our redemption, in order to save guilty men. A man goes and kills innocent children, we are here today remembering and celebrating the fact that an innocent man sacrificed his own life to save guilty sinners, you and me. The incredible contrast between our Lord and our world could not be on fuller display between the headlines and the passage that we are just naturally coming up upon here this morning in our teaching of God's word. You have to love the Holy Spirit for working out the timing of that as he has.

What we have in front of us here is that throughout the book of 1 John, John has been, the Apostle John has been teaching us the marks of a true Christian and he has been teaching us how Christians can live and achieve spiritual victory in the midst of a hostile world, a dark world. How is it that we rise above such depressing news around us and still continue to live with joy even as we grieve with those who grieve. Well, this is just another aspect of it that is laid out for us here in chapter 3, verse 11. This passage is teaching us the necessity of love within the body of Christ; teaching us the necessity of holy loving, you might say. For the past several weeks, for those of you that haven't been able to be with us, we have been studying the nature and the necessity of holy living as a mark of true Christianity; that only true Christians truly live righteously and, stated differently, only those who live righteously are truly Christians because we can't be born from above, we can't be born of a holy God and continue to live in sin. That's the whole argument of John's teaching here.

Look at chapter 2, verse 29 just to remind you of what he said, chapter 2, verse 29, "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him." God, a holy God gives birth to spiritual children through faith in Jesus Christ. He draws them to himself. He imparts his own nature to them. Well, naturally then, follow the logic, naturally then, those who have been born of God are somehow going to reflect his moral character in their lives. Now, watch this, watch this. You've all been around the Bible long enough to know that the only means of salvation is found in the cross of Christ. Only in the cross of Christ was sin decisively dealt with. Only in the cross of Christ was the certainty of salvation purchased for everyone who would ever believe in Christ. What was it, beloved, what was it that motivated Christ to come? Why was it that Christ did that on our behalf? Scripture teaches us that it was an act of unspeakable love. It was an act of unspeakable self-sacrifice on behalf of Christ, by Christ, even better stated, an act of self-sacrifice by Christ, an act of loving, giving self-sacrifice on behalf of unworthy sinners. It's because Christ was motivated by the love of his own heart, not by any attraction in us, a purely motivated from his own loving character to save us and to offer himself on behalf of our sins.

Let me remind you of chapter 4, verse 10. Actually, let's go to verse 9. We'll be running into this soon enough in our exposition but I want you to see this and what we're saying is that there was a righteous God that gave birth to us and our salvation was born out of an act of love as well. Chapter 4, verse 9, "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him." Verse 10, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Right there is what I want you to see, beloved. Salvation was born out of an act of love, an eternal love that God set on his people from before the beginning of time.

Now then, now then, what does that mean fundamentally for life within the body of Christ? What does that mean for the fundamental disposition of your character? That has profound implications for everyone who names the name of Christ. It means that if you have truly been born from above, born from this God who in an act of love saved you from sin, then by necessity, by obvious implication, the entire orientation of the Christian life would be one of similar self-sacrifice on behalf of believers around us. If God laid down his life for you at the cross, then by implication, I who have been born of that same God and the recipient of that act of love for the salvation of my soul, there is going to be a powerful animating force of that same sacrificial love for the people of God in the heart of everyone who believes. Without that, someone who is indifferent to the body of Christ or hostile to the body of Christ, is simply manifesting by the nature of their ongoing pattern of life that they have never been born again no matter what else they may say with their lips about knowing Jesus. It is a necessity. It must be that the powerful force that took Christ to the cross would become the same powerful motivating force in the way that we interact with one another, such that a self-centered, selfish, grudging, hateful life could never be flowing out of that wonderful saving act of Christ on our behalf.

You see, listen to me, there is so much, I understand, there is so much talk of love at this time of year and it becomes hard to even make it go beyond sentimentality and so I just have to trust the power of the Holy Spirit to make this plain and distinct in your hearts between what we see, you know, the smarmy stuff that we hear in the world. God the Father reproduces his love in those who are truly his children. Just as he reproduces the pattern of righteousness in those who are his children because he is a holy God, he is righteous and therefore he gives birth to righteousness, because he is a loving God as well, he gives birth to love in the lives of his people as well. And not just sentimentality but a spirit of self-sacrifice on behalf of those that God has also saved. There is a natural affinity, a natural love, a natural giving that takes place within relationships in the body of Christ that occurs naturally and inevitably because of the common source of the birth of our new souls. And the apostle makes it clear; he sharply divides into two clear groups, doesn't he?

Look back at verse 10, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." John has emphasized this priority of love earlier in the letter as well. Look back at chapter 2, verse 9 as you see these themes woven together of righteousness and love side by side. In chapter 2, verse 9, he says, "The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes." You see the twin emphasis on righteousness and love as being the marks of a true Christian and so this brotherly love is essential to Christian character.

What I want to show you now from our passage in 1 John 3, are two contrasting natures of this love that marks us. We're going to see the positive priority of love in verse 11 and then we're going to see a negative picture of hatred, you might say, in verses 12 and 13. The contrast is very, very clear. First of all, first point for this morning: the positive priority of love. And what I love about this and one of the things that I love about this is that in these early days of our fellowship for those of you that are visiting, we're a new body of believers gathered together; we haven't even been at this for a full year yet; we really started meeting weekly just in February so just for a few short months. And what I want you to see and what I want you to think about as we come together here is that what we're getting here is a blueprint of what our lives should be like going forward. We've come from a lot of diverse different situations, coming from a lot of different places; we don't have the inertia of an accumulated 20, 30, 40 years of bad examples, maybe, that are animating us. We have the opportunity as a body of believers to set these fundamental dispositions in the way that we interact with each other as the defining marks of the life of our body going forward for a long time to come. We have the opportunity to set a trajectory that will be a blessing to those who have not yet even heard of us. We have an opportunity to set a trajectory that will be a blessing to a generation yet to be born. So we must see this as an urgent matter, not only for our individual lives but also for what it means for the future life of our church, that we would be a body of believers committed

to self-sacrificial love for one another. Not merely saying things sentimentally as if love was simply an emotion that we carried about that didn't affect what we did. We view each other as the objects of our tangible mercy and love for one another. If we set ourselves toward that direction, we can expect the blessing of God on what we do. Not only in the proclamation of the word but in how we love one another and give ourselves to one another. This is the priority of the church. This is the priority of Christ. He loved us and gave himself up for us, then we love each other and give ourselves up for each other as well.

Look at verse 11 with me, the positive priority of love. John says, "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." John says, "This was true, this was stated right from the beginning from your very first exposure to the Gospel. You heard this from me right at the beginning. It is grounded in the nature of God who gave birth to us." Now, listen: most of you are going to say you love Christ, most of you are naming the name of Christ as you are in here today and I'm grateful for that and I affirm you in that, I see the manifestation of the love of Christ in your life. What I want you to see is the centrality of this theme in the very nature of being a Christian.

Turn over to the Gospel of John 13. What I want you to see is just that this has been prevalent, this has been dominant even before the cross. Christ himself made this a dominant theme as he was about to depart from the disciples and head to Calvary. John 13:34, Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." Notice the "one another's" right there woven in everything that Jesus says, that you love one another. Yes, we love Christ, we love God vertically but there is an essential working out of this horizontally as well as we love one another. Jesus said in chapter 13:35, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Look over at chapter 15, verses 12 and 13, "This is My commandment, that you love one another," there it is again, "just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." You see again the element of sacrifice horizontally that is animating the life of a true believer. We gather together as a group of believers. We have a mutual obligation of love toward one another. We have a mutual privilege of love toward one another. This is how the body of Christ works. We're not individual silos of Christians that are moving about going through life, there is an interaction of love, an interaction of life that comes together in the body of Christ and is to be the mark of those who know the name of Christ, who have truly been born again. It could be no other way. Christ gave for us, we're in his family, now we give of ourselves to one another.

Look at verse 17 of chapter 15. Jesus said, "This I command you, that you love one another." Beloved, it's not just a matter of a changed nature that calls for this, this is the command of Christ upon his people. This is the authoritative word of our Master, of our Lord who says, "This must be the way that you live." And so we gladly obey that command. This doesn't cut against our nature. This doesn't go against the grain of the

affections of our heart. Of course we want to love one another and so we give glad obedience to this command of Christ which was central to his departing message to the disciples as he went to sacrifice his body and life on their behalf for their sins.

And what I want you to see is this: notice again, I call your attention back to the phrase "one another." Jesus is not calling us here to an indiscriminate love to all of mankind everywhere. That's a burden that's impossible to fulfill in most respects. You know, I can't love somebody in Mongolia the same way I can love you when you're right here in front of me. He's not calling us to an indiscriminate of all men everywhere but he's calling us to a particular special kind of love to other believers and particularly within a local body, there is a particular kind of love, a particular priority that we give toward loving one another as being part of the body of Christ in a local assembly. He's calling for love as the dominating motivation, as the dominating operative principle within the church. One writer said it this way, he said, "Love is not feeling warm toward other people in general but doing good to specific individuals. Failure to love the family shows the lack of the family's inner bound."

So what I want you to see is that there is a particular circle, a particular priority of love that we give within the body of Christ. It's not that we don't love men outside the body of Christ, it's not that we don't sacrifice for others outside the body of Christ. What I want you to see is the elevation of that priority in the lives of true Christians; that this is a priority and this is a particular responsibility that we bear under the authority of Christ to one another and it's a mutual obligation and privilege that we share with one another within the context of the body of Christ. We love each other in a way that goes beyond the way that we love the men in the world. How do you do that? Jesus makes it pretty simple and practical. It's not rooted in massive great sacrifices of life necessarily, sometimes it happens, but what I want you to see is that as we move a little bit forward now, is that this kind of love manifests itself in the simple daily operation of life. This is an orientation of mindset that plays itself out in very unspectacular matters of service to one another.

Look over at Matthew 25:34. Jesus says, looking forward to a coming time of judgment when the nations are gathered before him, he separates the sheep from the goats and, "the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'" They can't even fathom the fact that they had served Christ in this way because it was all worked out in the natural flow of life that was the flow of the things that were in their heart.

Verse 40, "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine,'" notice the brothers of mine, "even the least

of them, you did it to Me.'" When we see needs within the body of Christ presented before us, we meet them as we have the capacity to do, and it's in the simple acts of food and clothing and things like that. It's a big deal. It's a big deal when people sign up for a food chain to serve a needy family within the church. It's a ministry to Christ as we serve one of those that belong to him. Christians surround each other with this kind of love and you do this, you already do this. What I want you to see is the holy sanctified nature of these simple things that you hardly even think about. You visit the sick. You counsel. You teach. You minister in music. You write notes to the discouraged. You bake. You share your professional expertise with those within the body of Christ.

What I want you to see is when we talk about this positive priority of love, that your unassuming love in routine life has a particularly magnificent eternal significance attached to it because you are putting the eternal love of God on display when you serve Christians like that. You are testifying to the reality of your salvation. You are manifesting an overflow. You are giving a lingering aroma of the great central sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf on the cross and when we sacrifice on behalf of one another in these simple ways of daily life, we are manifesting the lingering aroma of that sweet aroma of the death of Christ for those that he loved himself and gave himself up for. Beloved, when we have these opportunities to serve one another, we don't resist those or resent them, we run to them, and as we do, we are manifesting exactly what Scripture is talking about here. I want you to see how, in one sense, how great and attainable it is to manifest the love of Christ.

Let me say this: for those of you that are on the periphery, those of you that aren't involved in the lives of other Christians, kind of going about life without troubling yourself with the concerns of others in the body of Christ, you really need to realize that you can't keep living that way; that there needs to be a time of turning in your life. If you're a true Christian, let this be a wake-up call to you that the call of God on your life is to serve the body of Christ with the gifts that he has given to you, with the resources and the talents that he has given to you. God doesn't gift to us to keep this to ourselves, he gifts us so that we would serve the body of Christ in the whole diversity of ways that we have our different talents and giftedness together. And listen, for those of you that are on the periphery, there is room for more. There is room for more of this love. There is always room for one more to be added to this kind of serving body of Christ and to gather around. In the years to come, I know for certain that we are going to gather around each other in times of joy and in times of sorrow, when tragedy comes and it will come to us within our own body, when that happens, we are going to rally around one another and love one another through those dark times because that's what Christians do. That's how we serve one another. And what you should see and what should start to attract you and give you a sense of confidence and encouragement is that as a member of the body of Christ, we have an assurance going forward that we're not going to go through those things alone and our mutual commitment to one another is that we're not going to go through hard times alone because Christians love one another. That's the priority of our life. "Christ loved us, gave himself up for us, ah, well, I'll do the same thing for the people in Christ around me." And I thank God that so many of you are already like that with your life.



Now that's the positive priority of love. Let me show you why this is urgent, why it is compelling with the negative picture of love. The second point here for this morning, the negative picture of love as we go back to 1 John 3, picking it up in verse 12. And the connection here, the connection here is not immediately evident as you just read through the Scriptures. Look at verse 11 with me again, "this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." The one another there again you see it. Love one another. Horizontally. The Christians that are there in your lives. But then he starts talking about Cain going back to Genesis 4. What is that about? Verse 12, you would expect him to go into some kind of great explanation about the spiritual benefits of loving one another, he goes straight to a dark contrast instead. Verse 12, "not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous." What is that about? Well, look, the story of Cain shows that the absence of love is the mark of the devil. Notice what he says in verse 12, Cain was of the evil one. Cain belonged to the devil, the murderer and the father of lies.

Let's go back to Genesis 4 here, Genesis 4, and just remind ourselves about the story of when Cain killed Abel, coming, of course, right on the heels of Adam and Eve's sin. In Genesis 3, they are kicked out of the garden and the first story that follows, the first historical event recorded, is of a murder. Chapter 4, verse 1. We'll read down through verse 8. "Now the man," referring to Adam, "had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, 'I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD.'" Verse 2, "Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel." So they are siblings, right? "And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard." Watch what happens. "So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.'" Let that be a warning right there in light of what's about to come in verse 8. For those of you that are harboring bitter, angry grudges against others, realize that anger is the motivating factor that leads people to murder. Your grudges are not a matter of internal things that you can keep private and nurse. You need to seriously repent of them because even greater sin is crouching right at the door when you carry that anger and hatred and bitterness toward someone else. You need to repent of that and deal with that before the Lord. Cain did not do that and so look at what happens in verse 8, "Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him." And killed him.

There is no way to minimize what happened in Connecticut in these past few days and I would never ever do that. Alongside that, I want you to see that murder has been woven into the fabric of humanity immediately upon the heels of the fall of man. This is not something unexpected. The scope of it, the victims of it, are unthinkable but the anger

and the wickedness that motivated that atrocious act was woven into the heart of humanity as soon as it turned its back on God and went into disobedience. This is woven into the nature of man. Murder is woven into the very fabric of mankind and if you think I'm exaggerating on the basis of one act, look at the entertainment even that people view as entertainment. Look at the movies. Look at the publicized pay-per-view fights that take place. Look at the video games that take place. People glory in bloodshed and murder and violence. It's not disconnected from what happened in Connecticut, this is what mankind loves. They love the violence. They love the murder. They love the bloodshed. And when they react in revulsion to a particular act, there's an element of hypocrisy that's woven into it as well. And, beloved, do you see, do you see how much we call people out of that perverse generation? We say, "You have to come out of the perverse generation and repent and come to Christ in order to be saved because you have to come out of that wicked environment that you presently love and turn your back on it and give yourself to the one who received violence at the cross rather than perpetrating it on someone else." The depravity that is manifest all around us is so, so great.

Go back to 1 John with those thoughts in mind now. John has made a very sharp black and white contrast between the nature of Christian love and the nature of worldly hatred here and he is doing it in order to instruct Christians about the nature of their lives and what should lie ahead. Cain killed Abel because he resented Abel's superior righteousness. Physically, he was a son of Adam but spiritually Cain was a child of the devil. His jealousy led him to hatred and his hatred motivated him to murder. That's the natural progression of sins of the heart. Now, in terms of following the flow of thought here in 1 John, what the apostle under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is saying is that Cain's murder right at the very start of human history after the fall, Cain's murder of Abel was the start of the pattern of hostility that wicked people would ever show toward the righteous people of God. This was simply the start. This was the overflow. The hostility of the devil against Christ is played out in the hostility of his children against the children of God. This is just a natural outflow of the reality of spiritual life behind the veil that we don't see. Now, John, starting with that example now expands out to show that this is what we as Christians should expect our environment to be when we should expect hostility to come toward those of us who name the name of Christ. This is so important. If you will pay attention to this, it will completely change the way that you react to the world around you.

Look at verse 13 with me. John says, "Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you." This is his real point here as he's talking about Cain, he says, "Go back to the beginning of history and realize that hostility from the wicked toward the righteous has been woven into the fabric of life itself therefore you who are now righteous in Christ, those of you who have the Spirit of the living righteous God animating and directing your life, understand that that's going to be a magnet for the hostility of the world that hates Christ." Your righteous life is going to become a magnet for hostility to come against you. This is woven into the nature of the way that things are. It started with Cain and it continued all the way to the cross and the animosity of the world was there against our lovely Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, and now that he has ascended up into heaven and continues to give birth to disciples, nothing has changed. That animosity of the wicked is

continuing on therefore what John is saying to us is, think about the nature of spiritual life and realize that nothing has changed. The wicked still hate the righteous and therefore they will act upon their hatred in subtle ways and in overt ways. It's not without reason that Fox's Book of Martyrs is a thick volume as he recorded the persecution of the world against the church as people spilled their blood in faithfulness to Christ. It's not without reason, beloved. Don't be surprised by it.

Here's what I want you to see and I think it needs to be said to the evangelical church today in a particularly clear and cogent way: why is it I continually ask myself this, why is it that Christians seem surprised when there is media and political and personal bias against them? What do you expect by a demonic empire, the world, by people who are wicked, who hate Christ? What do you expect to have happen? Why is it that we're surprised by their inconsistencies? Why is it that we're surprised when they lie against us? Why is it that we're surprised when laws of the land become hostile toward us? This isn't surprising. And when you realize that it's not surprising, when you realize that this is to be expected, then, beloved, you don't have to get so worked up when it occurs. You realize, "Oh, this is to be expected. This is part of the outworking of the clash between the devil and Christ and I'm on Christ's side therefore I'm going to be the recipient personally and collectively as a group, we're going to be the recipients of this kind of hostility."

Listen, you can spend, and I really think that Christians more and more now have to make a decision about how they're going to live and respond to a hostile world here; you have to make a decision, are you going to spend your life chasing down every act of injustice that comes against the cause of Christ? Are you going to chase down and get upset and worked up about every headline that reminds you once again that the world does not like Christ? That the world hates the Bible? That the world misrepresents what we teach? Are you going to get worked up about that every time? Are you going to spend your life chasing every one and trying to answer every single charge, false accusation that comes against the cause of Christ? If you are, look, you're going to have a miserable life. You're going to be upset and worked up because it's never going to stop. Do you see that? It's never going to stop. It started back with Cain and Abel and it hasn't stopped since and you're not going to stop it as you cry out against it. As you get worked up about it. That is a futile way to live, to chase down the politics of our age, to chase down these injustices and cry out against the political unfairness of it. That's a waste of time and it's not what we are called to do. Jesus said that, "They will know that you are Christians by the love that you have for one another. They will know that you're my disciples if you love one another." You see, in the black hostile backdrop is simply the contrast that we see that motivates us – watch this – motivates us to be all the more committed to loving one another within the body of Christ. We expect it and we accept it. I accept the fact that the world is going to misrepresent us.

Verse 13, look at it with me again. Don't be surprised if that happens. Don't act like that's a strange thing if the world hates you. Of course it does. The question is – oh, follow me here – the question is: in light of that reality, in light of the hostility of the world against Christians, what is it, how then do we live is the question? Do we try to combat every

single bad thing that happens? Every unfair accusation? Do we counter all of it and spend our life chasing our tails? It's never going to end. Then what do you do to live? It's right here. Verse 11, "this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." Verse 13, "Don't be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you." Don't be surprised. The word "surprise" indicates that you're astonished at something, like it's something mysterious. This isn't a mystery. This is plain as day as to why it happens. They belong to the devil like Cain did. By that hatred, the world is simply manifesting the realm of spiritual death in which it lives when it opposes the realm of spiritual life.

Now, follow me: because we expect hostility from the world, because we understand this is the natural response of the world toward the people of Christ, we expect bias against us. When they wrong us, they are simply proving the point. For today here in this passage in this chapter and verse, I want to answer this question: why then does John give us this negative picture? When saying you should love one another, now let me talk about Cain and Abel and remind you that the world, don't be surprised if the world hates you. What is the connection here? This is extremely powerful and direction shaping for us as we live our lives. If the world will not love us, and it won't, if the world is going to be hostile toward us and lie about us and take our possessions as has happened in the past, take our lives as happens around the world even now, if the world is going to hate us, if the world will not love us, then do you see something really, really important? That means that it's really important, it's really vital for us to love one another; to look on each other and say the world is going to hate them and oppose them and that's a discouraging realm in which to live. Let me be the one who steps into their life and encourages them with my act of self-sacrifice. Let me be the one who steps into their life and shows them the love that they're never going to get from the world. The hatred of the world becomes a pressing motivating factor for us to love one another because we're not going to find love anyplace else.

So when you see the hostility and the bias of the world toward Christians, rather than getting worked up about that and distressed about that and calling your Congressman about that, rather than letting it push you in that direction of a futile fight that you cannot win because it was here long before you were on the earth and it's going to be here long until after you're gone, rather than having it motivate you into the realm of that kind of conflict with people who are not going to change apart from the Gospel of Christ, let it be that which motivates you. Bounce off of that, as it were, into the life of the body and love one another. And as the hostility becomes more open and fresh against us, then we ought to be all the more committed to loving one another and manifesting the joy of Christ to one another, to being the ones who come along and bind up the wounds of Christians who have been the recipients of that, applying the balm to their wounds, the love to their hearts, the prayers for the condition of their soul, and what we see from the world becomes that which motivates us to love one another all the more.

This is the plan of God, one aspect of the plan of God for how Christians achieve spiritual victory in the midst of a hostile world. It's because we love one another. We care about one another. We pray for one another. As you see this, you just see how simple love is in

the body of Christ. See a need, meet a need. God rewards even the simplest acts of kindness.

In closing, let's look over at 1 John 4:7, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love." Look around you as you walk out today and see the objects of the love that God wants you to manifest. We can triumph in the midst of this spiritual hostility. We can triumph in the midst of this hostile world. Part of the way that we do that is that we show one another that we're in this together.

Let's pray.

*Our Father, such profound issues as we go through life, such magnificent means that you have given us to overcome the world. Father, I pray for the brothers and sisters here in this room weighed down by the nature of life in this world, weighed down perhaps by the hostility of the world in the workplace, even more painfully the hostility that comes within family ties, family binds, even within a marriage relationship, Father. Lord, I pray that you would so bring to mind the love of Christ to that suffering discouraged Christian, so bring to mind the fact that you had mercy on them at Calvary at the cross when Christ gave himself for their sins, that their hearts would naturally be encouraged by the thought that whatever else is happening around me, my Savior loves me and gave himself up for me and I'm going to be with him in heaven one day forever. Father, let that thought be the start of a changed disposition and to replace discouragement with joy and cheer and confidence going forward.*

*As we think about those things on an individual basis, Father, lift our eyes beyond our own personal circumstances to look about at those around us, even those that are right here in this room, to see that we have the opportunity to serve one another with these simple acts of caring and kindness and that those are things that help one another navigate our way through in this hostile environment. Father, we pray for those that have wronged us in the past. We pray for those that are outside of the body of Christ. Father, it's not that we hate them in return. We are disposed toward kindness and grace toward them as well but, Father, if they won't hear, we will give our love to those who are in the body of Christ and give encouragement and grace to them.*

*Lord, we send out the invitation of Christ to sinners here today, those who are outside. Father, through your word, we invite them to Christ. Through your word, we invite them to repent and to put their faith in Christ, to turn away from the violent impulses of their own wicked heart and to come to Christ in repentance and task for salvation. Lord Jesus, you said, "If any man come to me, I will never cast him out." Father, may the invitation of Christ go to hearts now in a powerful and effective way. And even for the young people that are here, Father, those in their early teens, not even yet a teenager, Father, may the call of the Spirit of God on their heart be powerful and may they come to Christ even know.*

*Take a moment to meditate on these things. Take a moment to think through who you might be able to show love to. It's right within your circle of Christian friendships and relationships, and make a plan to act upon it now in response to the clear teaching of the word, the clear statements of the word, we should say. Father, give us opportunity to love one another and thereby manifest our love for you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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