

Love Reveals Life

1 John 3:11-15

Introduction

The apostle John continues to paint a stark contrast between *the children of God and the children of the devil*. He does so by weaving together timeless truths we find in both the OT and NT.

The heresies John is seeking to expose and oppose market themselves as new insight. The false teachers advancing these new doctrines view themselves as superior intellects with a higher knowledge than the simpletons that hold to the Christianity preached by Christ and the apostles.

As you read John, you start to realize that from century to century the devil's tactics are largely the same. In part because they work so well with so many. Even more because *Satan and his children do what they do in keeping with their character. The same is true of God and His children. They do what they are.*

John has already underscored that the life patterns of the children of God are righteous because God their Father is righteous. Sinning bothers them. The devil's children, still enslaved to darkness, make a practice of

sinning, because the devil does the same thing. Righteousness irritates them.

This reality naturally leads to John's observations in our passage this morning. Righteousness and love go together. We would expect this because love expresses itself through righteous deeds. Sin and hatred go together because hatred expresses itself through sinful deeds. Such deeds are intrinsically harmful.

The false teachers wanted to disconnect practical actions from doctrinal beliefs. They were big on knowledge but dismissive of actions and what they reveal about one's true character and identity.

John argues that the gospel of Jesus Christ won't let you do that—never has, never will. What you believe, what you are, and what you do are woven together.

11 For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. **12** We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. **13** Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. **14** We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever

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.

1. The Unchanging Message of the Gospel (11)
2. The Contrasting Evil of the World (12-13)
3. The Definitive Distinction between Life and Death (14-15)

1. The Unchanging Message of the Gospel (11)

¹¹ For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

The message—John began his letter talking about what the apostles had proclaimed. Jesus was at the center of their gospel message.

In chapter one he uses these very words— "this the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you." What was the message? "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

In chapter 2 John reminds us that the commandment to love one another is an old one, even though Christ reiterated it and demonstrated what it looks like in real life.

1 John 2:7

Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard.

1 John 2:9-10

⁹ Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.

Matthew 22—Christ identified the greatest commandment and the second greatest on which hang all the law and the prophets.
Deuteronomy 6—Love God with all your heart mind and strength.
Leviticus 19—Love your neighbor as yourself.

John 13:35

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

1 John 2:24

Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.

That we should love one another is therefore not some new idea. It's old. We've heard it from the beginning. Any version of

Christianity that ignores or distorts this teaching is not really Christianity. It's not from God. It's a lie from Satan.

When Paul confronts the church in Corinth for how carnal they had become in their prideful factions following favorite preachers and prideful glorying in particular gifts over others, he reminds them that he and other preachers were just servants, just messenger boys—God is the one that gives life and growth. He reminds them that every gift of the Spirit is for the benefit of others, that there is an excellent way to use them—the way of love.

He makes the case that how they use the gifts is more important than the gifts themselves, that even biblical knowledge that does not produce loving action is worthless.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

¹ If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Paul describes what genuine love looks like:

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

We live in an age that loves talking, protesting, philosophizing, pointing out the flaws of everyone but ourselves, and demonstrating that what and how we think is better than what and how other people think. But ours tends to be a culture of talk without walk. There's nobody so wise in his own eyes than the one knows a lot but has actually done very little. He knows what's true because he read about it, heard a podcast on it, learned it in school, or is convinced by how twitter is trending. One of the best things that can happen to such a person is to be thrown into the deep end of real life to learn the difference between theory and reality.

The gospel truth John is teaching is not just some new idea or theory.

The message of the gospel has never been trendy. Nor is it just tradition. It is constant, consistent, unchanging reality. And it is actively practical.

The New Covenant is rooted in the Old. The changes it brought were predicted by the Old.

The morality it preaches is the same.
Human identity is the same.
Human need is the same.
Human hope is the same.
Beware the fake gospels that says otherwise.

No wonder John keeps talking about abiding—
staying, remaining.

Let me encourage you to watch your intake of
ideas. Thousands of voices compete for your
mind and heart. Make sure God's Word is
your chief teacher.

Remember from Psalm 1 that the blessed
(happy) man meditates in God's law day and
night rather than walking in the counsel of
the ungodly. Be that man. Be that woman. Be
that teenager.

When you find your mind and heart being
drawn into alienation, polarization,
demonizing others, hostility, cynicism,
slander—stop! Turn your thoughts elsewhere.
Say and do what builds others up rather than
tearing them down. Love one another.

2. The Contrasting Evil of the World (12-13)

¹² We should not be like Cain, who was of the
evil one and murdered his brother. And why
did he murder him? Because his own deeds
were evil and his brother's righteous. ¹³ Do
not be surprised, brothers, that the world
hates you.

John demonstrates what these concepts look like in real life by taking us back to the historical account of Cain and Abel. Christianity is not a philosophy. It is rooted in historical realities. First-hand testimony to what God has said and what God has done. It impacted the lives of real people in real-life, hard knock situations. That's why gospel truth properly translates into real-life living patterns. Yes, it will stretch you intellectually, but it will not stop there. It will change you practically.

Here's the account of Cain and Abel:
Genesis 4:3-15

³ In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. ⁶ The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it." ⁸ Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ And the LORD said,

“What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. ¹¹ And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹² When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.” ¹³ Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. ¹⁴ Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.” ¹⁵ Then the LORD said to him, “Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.” And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.

Notice God’s mercy toward Cain. God’s appeal to Cain was to do what was right so that he would have the same divine commendation Abel had. That would have been the right way to deal with his guilt. But rather than repenting and doing right, Cain tried to wipe out the one whose righteousness exposed his own wickedness.

Even in pronouncing judgment on Cain, God shows him kindness by placing a mark on him that would protect him from being murdered himself.

John goes to Cain's motive for murdering Abel—coming from his heart identity. Because his own deeds were evil and Abel's were righteous. His murder of his brother Abel demonstrated that he was of the evil one, Satan, whose wicked deeds express his natural hostility to what is good.

Cain never repented. He just went his own way. He followed his heart. The Genesis chapters that follow show that his descendants followed his pattern—trying to find satisfaction and fulfillment apart from God. The hatred of and alienation from those who called on the Lord continued to this day.

1 John 3:13

Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.

Enemies of God like to ridicule the faults and sins of His people. But what bothers them more than when Christians do wrong is when they do right.

We strive to do good to all people to shine out to them the excellencies of God, and we grieve when we fail to do so. But don't be surprised if the good that you believe and do is what outrages the world most. The world hates the light because light exposes the darkness. Righteous deeds expose sinful ones.

What is your heart toward other people, especially brothers and sisters in Christ? If you're sure you're a child of God, in what practical ways does your identity show itself in how you love others?

If this is what you truly are, don't be shocked when you suffer for it. Rather, be glad to suffer for doing right instead of for doing wrong.

If you are realizing that your life pattern is not one of love toward God's children and that your life is instead characterized by unrighteous living, there is yet hope for you. Listen to the invitations of the merciful God who appealed even to Cain. Stop making yourself king of your life. God is the real King. Christ has poured out His life blood to redeem you and bring you into fellowship with your Creator. But if you will not repent, be warned by God's words to Cain. Sin's desire is for you. Like a crouching wild animal, it will devour you. Instead, cast yourself on God's mercy to save you before it is too late.

3. The Definitive Distinction between Life and Death (14-15)

¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever 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.

We know.

Whoever.

Everyone.

You know.

No murderer.

These words underscore the clear difference between those who have life and those who remain in death.

Failure to love others marks you as still dominated by death. Love reveals life. Failure to love is hatred, and hatred reveals death.

It is the spirit of murder. The difference between murder and killing is the heart behind it. Someone can accidentally kill someone—no harm intended, no hatred in the heart. Murder rises from wicked, harmful thinking toward others. Malice and hatred are the spirit of murder.

That why Jesus teaches what He does in His sermon on the mount.

Matthew 5:21-24

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will

be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Whitewashing hatred toward a brother or sister with religious ceremony does not work with God. Nobody can be right with God while they have animosity in their hearts toward others.

To murder and destroy human beings shows hatred for the God in whose image they are made. Failure to love one's neighbor expresses lack of love for God whatever religious rituals you take part in.

John's words "we have passed out of death to life" also remind us that every human being but Jesus starts in bondage to death, to sin, to the evil one. But that does not have to be the whole story. There is hope. Some pass over out of death into life through faith in Jesus Christ. You know who they are by their love for the brothers.

Listen to Paul's instruction in Titus 3 about what this life of love looks like in the general community. And note how he ties the transformation from a life of hatred to a life of love to the power of the gospel at work in us.

Titus 3:1-8

¹ Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. ³ For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. ⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. ⁸ The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

So who are you? Who is your father? God or the devil? Where is your heart? Do you love people or are you neglectful, dismissive, condescending, malicious, or hateful toward them?

Jesus made a way for you to escape the darkness of your heart, the tyranny of the devil, and the grip of death itself.

Trust Him. Then love. Love reveals life.

Conclusion

1. The Unchanging Message of the Gospel (11)
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Discussion Questions

1. One of the markers that demonstrates that the Scriptures are the Word of God is the unity they display regarding the gospel. In what ways does this strengthen your faith and direct your daily lifestyle?
2. There is an unbreakable connection between truth, righteousness, and love. How does this help you detect what is false teaching and live in way you know is godly?
3. What are some common ways we can be drawn into unloving communication and behavior, and what have you found helps you keep from being sucked into such sins?

4. How does the connection between hatred and murder call for us to guard our hearts from lack of love for others?
5. In what ways does knowing Cain's motive for killing Abel (Abel's deeds were righteous and Cain's were evil.) help you cope with whatever hostility you may receive from the world for your doing right?
6. In what ways does God's interaction with Cain display mercy and offer hope?
7. At what level did Cain need change, and what does that tell you about the real cure for hatred in our own times? (Compare Titus 3:1-8.)
8. Since a lifestyle of love is the acid test of whether a person is actually born again, what are some other characteristics and practices in which people find false security?