

August 27, 2017  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: 1 John  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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## LOVE LIKE CHRIST OR HATE LIKE CAIN? 1 John 3:11-18

We have heard of love/hate relationships. That paradoxical-sounding theme is the story line of novels and movies, and the confusing and sad reality of some marriages. Maybe you have heard it expressed like this: “When it’s good, it’s really good and when it’s bad, it’s really bad.”

Yes, that does sound like the sad reality of many relationships in the world. We Christians would never be guilty of having such mixed-up emotions, would we? Actually, the love/hate relationship shows up several times in the Bible. Joab accused David of loving those who hate him and hating those who love him when he was whining about Absalom’s fate (2 Samuel 19:6). The psalmist (maybe David himself) brought up the idea a couple of times in Psalm 119. He said he hates the double-minded but loves God’s law and that he hates falsehood but loves God’s law (Psalm 119:113,163). Solomon wondered how long the naive would love foolishness and hate knowledge (Proverbs 1:22). He concluded that the person who hates wisdom loves death (Proverbs 8:36). Solomon even concluded that in life there is a time to love and a time to hate (Ecclesiastes 3:8). Isaiah reminded us that the LORD loves justice and hates wrong (Isaiah 61:8). Jesus warned us not to try to serve two masters because we will love one and hate the other (Luke 16:13).

Sometimes it is difficult for us to reconcile these two extremes. In this morning’s message, we touched on the conflict between God loving the world so much that He sent Jesus Christ to pay for our sins, and yet He clearly states through David that He hates all evildoers (Psalm 5:5). As we would expect a man after God’s heart to do, David concluded, “*Do I not hate those who hate you, O*

*LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?” (Psalm 139:21). He penned in a song, “I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols . . .” (Psalm 31:6a).*

What is the Christian to do? Think more carefully and you will discover two truths. First, God cannot possibly sin in His response toward sinners who turn against Him, despise Him, and reject His word. Therefore, the hatred God expresses is righteous and perfect indignation, an aversion toward those who practice sin, people who cover themselves with unrighteousness.

The second truth regards David’s responses. Notice that he freely admits that he hates those who hate God. He never wrote that he hated people who hated him. Several times David prayed to God about the people who hated him personally. But he didn’t talk about trying to gain revenge and pay them back with hatred.

Now we find in John’s letter to Christians in the church at Ephesus an explanation of the love/hate relationship Christians must deal with. It is very natural for us to hate. Okay, let’s temper that emotion just a bit. It is very natural for us to strongly dislike certain people. Can we, like David, have an aversion toward people who despise God? Yes, and justifiably so. But is it possible to also develop a strong aversion against a Christian brother? That too is possible and is not justifiable.

We must note at the outset of our study that John’s teaching regards our fellow-Christians. When he uses the word “brother” in our text, he is not talking about the brotherhood of man. He means the family of God, other Christians, redeemed people who have been brought into the Church through faith in Christ just like the rest of us. We are special people – people who God has set apart to Himself. Therefore, John wrote, “*By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:10).*

There is a difference. That difference is made obvious by practicing righteousness. What does righteousness look like? One important aspect of righteousness is our love for fellow Christians. We need to work at it because our default mode is aversion toward others.

## Love Like Christ.

In the beginning, Christ taught love for brothers. Ultimately, that is what John meant by, *For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another (v.11)*. Love for each other is the message heard from the beginning. The little word “for” that opens this section of John’s first letter is very important. It helps us see that what John will teach us now flows naturally out of the previous passage: *“By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother” (1John 3:10)*.

In that verse John established that an important test to help us know that we are born again is if we are doing righteousness. Part of doing righteousness is loving the brother. John stated that truth five times in this letter and once in 2 John.

It is the same message we have heard from the beginning. First, that means that from the time the believers in the church at Ephesus first heard the gospel, they heard the message about brotherly love. It was the message of the apostles who Jesus had taught. Go back to the opening words of this letter and read, *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us – that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1-3)*. Notice all the plural personal pronouns in that statement. The pronouns refer to John and the other apostles who learned from Jesus how to love brothers.

This was the same new commandment that Jesus taught the apostles. *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34)*. John is simply reiterating a second test that was established from the beginning of the Christian’s new life, going all the way back to Jesus. In fact, much of what John says in this text is from other Scriptures.

Love for brothers is such an important message because it is an indication of eternal life. Here is the second test to help us know if we are truly born again. The practice of loving “brothers” gives us assurance about eternal life. *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers (v.14a)*. The question is whether you or I have moved out of eternal death into eternal life. To live in sin, which is our natural condition, is to always be dying not just physically but spiritually. We are born spiritually dead, unresponsive to the truth of God and the work of the Holy Spirit.

When God saves us through His grace, He gives us life. The eternal life God gives at the moment of salvation is life that endures forever. Most people get that part pretty easily. However, eternal life is also a God-kind of quality of life that we enjoy now. We can know with certainty that we have that God-kind of life now. How? It might be good at this point to remember that the Gnostics claimed they were born again because they had been initiated into some kind of mystical special knowledge. In contrast to that uncertainty, John used the perfect tense verb to say, *“We have come to know in the past and having continuing results in our lives, that we have crossed over from death to life.”* Our certainty of eternal life is not based on a mystical, hard-to-explain-kind of knowledge. It is fact based certainty. What is the fact? *We love the brothers.*

In stark contrast to the genuine believer’s love for brothers is the lack of love for “brothers.” John said that such a practice is deadly. *Whoever does not love abides in death (v.14b)*. The person who is not loving fellow Christians has never crossed over from spiritual death to spiritual life. Those people are remaining in death. Which is the opposite of remaining in Christ.

The word *abide* or as it also means “remain” is a key word in John’s arguments in this letter. He has used it fourteen times up to this point. He taught us that people who are truly born again, remain in Christ (2:6), remain in the light (2:10), have God’s word remaining in them (2:14), have the Holy Spirit remaining in them (2:27) – to cite a few examples. In contrast, the antichrists, false teachers, Gnostics, separatists did not remain (2:19).

The looming question that flows from all this teaching about abiding is this: “How are you living?” The answer to that question gives confidence about eternal life or leaves doubt about the matter.

But how do I even know if I am loving the brothers? Christ demonstrated love for brothers. We know what brotherly love looks like. *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us (v.16a)*. Jesus taught this truth about brotherly love to the apostles. He told them, *“Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.” (John 10:15)*. The critical point in this statement is that Jesus did not lay down His life for us simply to give an example of brotherly love. He laid down His life as the price of atonement. We cannot copy that. The challenge is for us to sacrifice to help meet common needs for others. But not to pay for their sins. We cannot die to make men holy. In fact, we cannot make any sacrifice to give people freedom from sin. Only Jesus can pay the ransom.

But in laying down His life, Jesus demonstrated the ultimate expression of loving sacrifice for others. We just need to do it. Jesus laid down His life for us, *and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers (v.16b)*. Does God really require us to lay down our lives for each other as a demonstration of brotherly love? In all honesty, there just is not much call for this in 21<sup>st</sup> century Greenville. In Mindanao, which is about 500 miles south of our missionaries in Manila, Christians will very likely be called on to literally lay down their lives. For whatever reason ISIS has made that southern Philippine Island their stronghold. What would you or I do if put in that test?

But let's reason from the greater to the lesser. **If** a person **is** willing to lay down his life, would he not be willing to do lesser things also? And what would lesser things look like? The simple sacrifices of life look like faithfully attending the gatherings of the assembly in order to have opportunity to encourage through corporate worship. The sacrifice comes when such attendance and resulting encouragement are not convenient. When you have the choice of pleasing yourself or encouraging a fellow believer, which do you choose? Arguing from the greater to the lesser means that we buy up opportunities to meet in small groups to build each other up, to pray for each other. It means that we serve in any number of ways in the local assembly in order to facilitate spiritual growth. These opportunities for sacrifice are as common as teaching Sunday School and Junior Church, working in the nursery, ushering, showing up for work day, and on and on the opportunities continue.

At the end of this text is a very practical explanation of loving the brothers: *But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need (v.17)*. Making simple, practical sacrifices to meet a fellow Christian's need will go a long way to helping us know that we have eternal life. Such good deeds will never gain eternal life. They will always be the outgrowth of us already abiding in Christ. If we are living on the resources of Christ the vine, we will produce the fruit of Christ who laid down His life for us.

### **Don't Hate Like Cain.**

Cain murdered because Cain was of the evil one. *We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother (v.12a)*. Why warn Christians not to act like Cain? The warning is given because of the human's natural tendency to be like Cain. It seems interesting that there is no explanation of who Cain was, nor did John give any background information about the incident. John simply assumed all his readers know the story. Obviously, John was not writing to the average professing Evangelical of America because (as surveys indicate) many of them are so ignorant of the Bible that they think Sodom and Gomorrah were brother and sister. The Christians in Ephesus knew exactly what John was talking about.

Cain's problem was that he was of the evil one and the Evil One is a liar and murderer. Jesus pointed out this same horrible truth to the very religious leaders who opposed Him. He warned them, *“You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44)*. In this statement, Jesus pointed out that Satan is a murderer. Satan is devoid of truth. Satan is a liar and the originator of lies.

To be “of” the Evil One is the exact contrast of remaining in Christ. When we are in Christ find our identity in Him, we find our resource for living in Him, and, therefore, we demonstrate His righteous character in life. The person who is of the devil demonstrates his character in life.

Being of the Evil One is not as catastrophic as it seems. It is really quite natural because the Evil One is self-centered. *And why did*

he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous (v.12b). Cain simply demonstrated focus and concern for self. Cain was angry because his choice of worship was not acceptable to God (Genesis 4:5). Cain's choice was contrary to God's will because he refused to do the "good" and "pleasing" thing according to God's plan (i.e. the meaning of *do well*) (Genesis 4:6). Cain did not submit to God's will because he had no faith in God (Hebrews 11:4). When the test came to bear, Cain's determined will was contrary to God's will and therefore "evil." Because Abel's desire was right before God, it made Cain look bad, and he killed his brother.

Cain demonstrated that murderers commit murder because they hate. That is a very common trait of the people in the world. John pointed out that the world hates the brothers. *Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you (v.13)*. Cain was a type of the citizen of the world system. His father was the devil as is true for everyone who is of the world. Everyone who is part of the world system is under the devil's influence. Paul taught, *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience (Ephesians 2:1-2)*.

John established this same truth throughout this letter. In chapter five we read, *We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19)*. The people of the world, the antichrists, those who went out because they were not of, all wanted Christianity to die. So John warned, *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1)*. *They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them (1 John 4:5)*.

Those people in John's day were just like pagans, false religionists, humanists, secularists of today. They live continually under the influence of Satan the original liar and murderer. Given the opportunity to express the true condition of their hearts, they express hatred toward us, the Bible, and God. Jesus said that is how it will be. He warned the apostles, *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18)*. "If the world warmly

embraces us, it is likely because we have warmly embraced the world." (Douglas Sean O'Donnell, "1-3 John," *Reformed Expository Commentary*, Phillipsburg, NJ, Puritan & Reformed Publishing, 2015, p.107). That is why Jesus also warned, *"Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26)*.

The problem is that hatred is tantamount to murder. John put it quite bluntly: *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him (v.15)*. These are all present tense verbs (hating his brother, we are knowing, is having eternal life . . .) that characterize a life. Jesus taught the connection. *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' 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" (Matthew 5:21-22)*.

The attitude in the heart renders us as guilty as outward acts. All unsaved people do not murder. But all unsaved people will express aversion toward God, His law, and eventually His people. Is it possible for a person to profess to abide in Christ but actually have an ongoing strong aversion to, a detesting, an abhorrence for real Christians? Not according to John's argument. Is it possible for a genuine Christian to develop an aversion toward a detesting of particular fellow Christians? Yes, and it must be dealt with.

Hatred can be very subtle. Could the refusal to help meet a brother's need be a hint of hatred in the heart? Such refusal is definitely not love. *But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him (v.17)?* Like Cain, too many professing Christians ask God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9). To ignore a brother's need is to say "I don't care about him or her." "I don't care" is more like hatred than sacrificing love.

A problem we face in America is that there really are very few legitimate needs. Most "needs" are actually desires, pleasures, conveniences, and such. Needs are basic health care, housing, clothing, food, and transportation. A cell phone or a laptop are not needs. Often we find people who actually do have these needs. But

most of the time they are not “brothers.” Too much of the time the people around us who suffer need, suffer such because they are of their father the devil and his path always leads to destruction and misery.

But what about genuine Christian brothers and sisters around the world? We do not have to contemplate that possibility very long to discover that the need is overwhelming. We as individuals and even as a local assembly cannot possibly meet needs everywhere. But are we doing what we can? God’s plan is for us to **do love** in truth. *Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth (v.18)*. Talk is cheap. Words are easily learned and carelessly repeated without meaning or purpose. Out of the heart flow deeds. What do our deeds say about us?

If we sat down with a piece of paper and took pencil in hand and wrote down all the sacrifices we make in a week, month, or year to benefit fellow Christians, what would the list look like? What does our list say about our walk with Christ? John’s argument stands unrefuted. *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers (v.14a)*.