

## Lesson 15: “The Imperative of Love”

1 John 3:11-15

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**1 John 3:11-15** (New English Translation; NET) For this is the gospel message that you have heard from the beginning: that we should love one another, not like Cain who was of the evil one and brutally murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his deeds were evil, but his brother's were righteous.

Therefore do not be surprised, brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. We know that we have crossed over from death to life because we love our fellow Christians. The one who does not love remains in death. Everyone who hates his fellow Christian is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

**THE GOSPEL FROM THE BEGINNING**

We have come to the half-way point in our study of 1 John. This is true in the sense that it is almost exactly half-way through the text (check your Bible). But it is also true in that John begins verse 3:11 with the exact same phrase that he used in 1:5, after the four-verse introduction to the letter: *“This is the gospel message.”* [The New English Translation captures this accurately] And in both instances it is the gospel message heard *“from the beginning.”* In 1:5 we look back to verse 1:1 to see this. (*“What was from the beginning ...”*) And in 3:11 it says it directly, that this was the gospel message *“from the beginning.”*

What is “the beginning?” Well, it is the beginning of the sharing of the gospel message of Jesus Christ, when He Himself taught us that by word and example that “God is Light” and we are to love one another.

**John 13:34** *A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*

In 1:5, the gospel message we have heard from God from the beginning is that God is Light, with no darkness in Him whatsoever. And John goes on to teach that our confidence as Christians rests on our walking in His Light with total transparency.

- We are to acknowledge and confess our sin and sins (1:8-10).
- We are to acknowledge and confess that Jesus alone is our Advocate with the Father and our provision for sins (2:1-2).
- And we are to obey and abide as practical indications of our walking in His Light (2:3-6).

In 3:11, where we find ourselves considering today, the gospel message we have heard from God from the beginning is stated: *“that we should love one another.”* And John goes on to say that there must be no hatred in this love (v. 15). “Black and white” - love or hate – that is John’s manner of teaching.

Please know that John is not saying here that the gospel of salvation is to love one another. That would be a false gospel. Rather, he is saying that the practical expression of our salvation is love. In Chapters 4 and 5 of his epistle he will make it abundantly clear that our confidence in salvation is based on a correct acknowledgment and reception of Jesus as Savior, Messiah and Lord. That is the true gospel!

**METAPHOR, TO THEOLOGY, TO PRACTICAL**

I want you to note that John began this epistle writing in the metaphors, of light and darkness. Then halfway through chapter two, he moved to writing in theological terms, of righteousness and sin. It was the same “black and white” message, only expressed differently. The metaphor of Light was changed to the godly actions of righteousness. And the metaphor of darkness was changed to the rebellious actions of sin. Christians will walk in God’s Light and practice righteousness. Non-Christians will walk in darkness and practice acts of sinfulness. Black and white – one or the other.

Now John has moved to write the same “message from the beginning” in practical terms of love and hate – and specifically, love of fellow Christians versus hatred of Christians. Essentially, John has now defined walking in God’s Light and practicing deeds of righteousness in the super-practical and easily-understandable demonstration of LOVE. The Christian ethic, in a word is LOVE. Jesus taught that the two greatest commandments are to “love God” and “love others.”

Remember, that this “love” is a very specific, supernatural love, that the Greeks had a special word for, namely “agape.” So this Christian ethic of love is selfless, sacrificial and unconditional. To God, it is expressed in selfless, sacrificial and unconditional worship. To others it is expressed in selfless, sacrificial and unconditional acts of kindness.

So it is that from 3:11 on, we will find John focusing on the truth that GOD IS LOVE, climaxed with this teaching specifically stated in 4:7 and 4:16.

## THE NEGATIVE EXAMPLE OF CAIN

Verse 11 is a verse that at first read is easily acceptable by virtually all. There are few people, Christian or otherwise, who would not agree that we should love one another. That is why it is so important to recognize that this love John is talking about is selfless, sacrificial and unconditional. It is not only special, it is supernatural. John will go on to teach that only a born-again believer can love in this way (4:7-8).

Then John brings in the negative example of Cain. Cain was the first child ever to be born – the first person to be brought forth from the womb. What a commentary on the original sin nature of the human race, that Adam and Eve’s first child was a hater turned murderer. We read the account in Genesis 4.

**Genesis 4:1-11a** *Now the man 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.” Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. 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. 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.”*

*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. Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” He said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground. Now you are cursed ...”*

Here we learn that the brothers had two different occupations. No sin in that. Then we learn they were both worshippers of God. No sin in that, though Cain’s might have been less out of love and more out of duty. Then we learn God accepted Abel’s, but not Cain’s and Cain because angry and depressed. I’m impressed that it appears God tried to encourage Cain to make his offering right. Just like God to offer a second chance, and encourage to do the right thing.

The writer of Hebrews offers a brief, but helpful comment on this story.

**Hebrews 11:4** *By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.*

Here we learn that both the offering itself (“a better sacrifice”) and the attitude behind the offering (“that he was righteous”) and the way it was offered (“by faith”) is what made the difference. By this we confirm that sin occurred in the heart of Cain before the murder, and the murder became the evil expression of his envy turned to hatred.

And in our 1 John passage, 3:12, we learn why Cain murdered his brother – “*because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous.*” Apparently the improper sacrifice offered by Cain was only the expression of an already sinful heart. Cain was a child of the devil, spiritually speaking, and Abel was a child of God. Jude confirms this in his brief comment about Cain.

**Jude 11** *Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.*

Cain is used in Scripture as a type of the “sons of men” rather than “sons of God.” He is the original non-Christian.

John moves quickly from the example of Cain’s murder to the hatred that provoked it. It was hatred, rather than love that brought about the murder. And just as Cain hated his brother because of Abel’s

righteousness, the world of non-believers will hate the righteousness of the followers of Christ. And John remarks that this should not surprise us.

## OUR CONFIDENCE IN LOVE

Non-love (hate) provokes nasty results. And this negative example of Cain should inform us as to what hate really is, as non-love.

You remember Paul taught about agape love in 1 Corinthians 13. Looking at 1 Corinthians 13, we can read it with John's take of hate being non-love.

Vs. 4 - lack of patience while waiting for another to come around is a form of hatred

Lack of kindness to a fellow-believer is a form of hatred

And kind of jealousy, or arrogance is also a form of hatred

Jumping down to verse 7: not being willing to bear with another's personality is a form of hatred

And failing to believe the best of another believer is also a form of hatred

No wonder John writes that consistently loving our Christian brothers and sisters is a confident sign of our being a born-again believer (verse 14). And likewise, a lack of this supernatural love is a sure sign of non-belief. Black and white: consistent agape love = Christian, and consistent non-agape love is hatred = non-believer. And hatred is akin to murder, he says in verse 15. This is consistent with Jesus' teaching in his Sermon on the Mount.

**Matthew 5:21-22** *You have heard that the ancients were told, "You shall not commit murder" and "Whosoever commits murder shall be liable to the court." But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court ..."*

John is making a strong case for the "Imperative of Love." This consistent, selfless, sacrificial, non-conditional love is essential both to our salvation and to our confidence that we are saved.

This love is not just a good idea, it is a "life-giving" idea. And this love is not to be an act of self-effort, for it is not the "fruit" of the flesh, but the "fruit" of the Spirit.

**Galatians 5:22a** *But the fruit of the Spirit is love ...*

And I like to think of all those other-mentioned fruit of the Spirit as specific ways that love is demonstrated.

Love is demonstrated in our joy and peace. Love is demonstrated in our patience and kindness. Love is demonstrated in our goodness and faithfulness. And love is demonstrated in our gentleness and self-control.

## CONCLUDING CHALLENGE

Remember, you can't just say you love a fellow believer, but don't like him or her much. That surely is not Christ-like. Your love must be expressed in actions that are part of showing affinity towards. And if you struggle – then pray that the Holy Spirit within you would bring forth the fruit of love, expressed in action.

I so appreciate Paul's simple and straightforward teaching on this:

**Romans 13:8** *Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.*

And let's be honest - those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ often hurt us more than "outsiders" and are the more difficult to love. I wish it were not so, but it so often seems the case. That means we must rely on the love of the Spirit within us all the more to give us the will and the way to love.

So "walk in God's Light" and "practice righteousness" by fulfilling "The Imperative of Love." And by so doing, you will have the confidence that you have "*passed out of death into life.*" (1 John 3:14)