

(1 John #19) Cain-Like or Christ-Like

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of loving one's brethren as a sign of spiritual life and a proof of regeneration, and warns against the dangers of hatred and murder in the heart.

Duration: 37:49

Topics: "Cain"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of showing love and compassion towards fellow believers in the body of Christ. He explains that love has always been a central aspect of the Christian faith and should not be neglected. The speaker highlights that love is not just a feeling, but something that should be actively demonstrated through actions and genuine care for others. He concludes by urging listeners to cultivate and nurture the fire of love in their hearts, both within the church and beyond, as a sign of their spiritual life and transformation.

Transcript

In our studies in this first epistle of John, I think we have had good reason already to see that the Apostle paints his word pictures in black and white. He never mixes his paints. You find no grey in the entire epistle.

Things are either black or white. His categories are very, very clear. You will notice that things either belong to light or darkness, according to his terminology.

Things are either from God or Satan. They can be classified as either truth or error. They are either righteous or unrighteous.

Such a contrast from what we are accustomed to and acclimatized to in our modern world, where we spend most of the time in a kind of dull grey moral atmosphere. Nothing is black, nothing is white. Everything is a kind of shaded in-between, not so here.

And this apostolic habit of seeing things in their stark, unvarnished nakedness as either black or white, appears again in this second application of the social test of love that John would apply to all those who profess to be Christian. He does not equivocate and he does not, let me repeat, mix his colors. Men are, he says, either lovers of the brethren or murderers.

That will take your breath away as it took my breath away the first time I read it this week. We may even want to quarrel with him. But he says quite categorically that really, in our attitude to the Christian church, to the body of Christ, we are either lovers of the saints, lovers of the brethren, to use the more normal language, or we are virtually murderers.

There is no in-between here, apparently. Now, John has introduced this subject, you notice, with verse 10, the end of verse 10 in 1 John 3. You might like to have your Bibles open with you. By this, he says, it may be seen who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil.

Now, that's black and white. Whoever does not do right is not a God, nor he who does not love his brother. That introduces us to our theme today, which begins then with the following verse, verse 11, and proceeds to verse 18.

It is again the social test of love for the brethren. John is addressing Christians, and he's concerned here particularly with the way that Christian people, members of the body of Christ, should get on one with the other. It isn't sufficient, says John, to tolerate one another.

We must, if we are children of God, we must realize that God would have us love one another. We must be lovers of the brethren. Nothing else will do.

Now, let me stress, of course, in passing on that John is not taking away from what he has said about the need for righteousness. Last time, we saw that he stressed the importance of habitual righteousness. Not simply doing occasionally that which is right, but a habitual mode of righteous living.

But now today, he comes and he tells us something which we need to see alongside of that, namely this. As well as living on the plane of righteousness, a life of consistent righteousness, we must live a life of consistent love for one another. He's got some very challenging things to say.

He moves, of course, from one aspect of truth to another quite simply, because as one of the commentators says, obedience is righteousness in relation to God. Love is righteousness in relation to our fellow Christians. Righteousness simply means doing what is right.

What is right in relation to God is that I should obey Him, always, under all circumstances. What is right in relation to the people of God, my brothers and sisters in Christ, is that I should love them everywhere, all of them, at all times. And so we come then to the second application of this importance test of love.

Do we love one another? There are three main things that John has to say here. We'll look at them in turn. First of all, verses 11 and 12, love and the Christian revelation.

Now, we'll read them in a moment, but let's divide this down, let's subdivide it just a little. The first thing that John says about love and the Christian revelation is this. Love has been part of the message from the very beginning.

Look at verse 11. For this, he says, is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. What he has in mind, of course, is this.

It's the charge that he's introducing something novel, something new into the Christian faith. Not on your life, says John. It's been there from the beginning.

I've not added anything. When I am demanding of you people, he says, you should love one another under all circumstances. I want you to be quite sure of this.

It's there. It was in the original message that Jesus taught his disciples. It was in the message as the apostles formulated it and took it into the world after Pentecost.

It's there from the very beginning. We're reminded of our Lord's words in John 13, 34, and 35, where he told his disciples that they must love one another even as he loved them. And he commands them in John 15 and 12 that they must love one another.

Now, says John here, it's there from the beginning. And if it is there from the beginning, my good friends, you and I cannot, cannot like a liberal, come to the Bible and say, now this doesn't please me. I must therefore whittle it down a little bit or tone it down.

We can't do that. It's there, and we have to apply it to ourselves, ruthlessly to ourselves, and graciously to one another. Over and above that, however, Jesus stressed that we must love everybody.

I would like us to see John's reference here in the larger context of the New Testament. Jesus says we must love our neighbor as ourselves. And Jesus says we must love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our mind and with all our soul and with all our strength.

Now, we recognize that. A neighbor is anybody, not just a fellow Christian. A neighbor is any man who has need.

He may be an outright pagan. You remember the parable of the Good Samaritan. And Jesus stressed that.

You and I have a duty to men, whether they're Christian or not. We are in duty, bound to love them in the sense that we should do what God requires done for them. And even before that, we have a love that we must exercise that is Godward.

But here, here, it is the love of one Christian, not for another Christian, but for the whole body of Christ. It is contained then, this message, this thrust, is contained in the original message, in the original Christian revelation. But now John goes forth, goes forward in his reasoning, to contrast that demand of the message with its opposite, which, as we've already indicated, he terms as murder.

He contrasts this basic and original ingredient in the divine revelation with the opposite which he forbids. Look at the next verse. We should love one another, he says, and not be like Cain, who was of the evil one, and murdered his brother.

First part of verse 12. We should love one another and not be like Cain. Here is a forbidden course.

We are not to be Cain-like. As we shall see in a moment, we are to be Christ-like. Christians are forbidden, then, to do anything that might savour of following in the footsteps of Cain, who murdered his brother.

The reason, of course, is quite simple. We don't belong to the same father as Cain. Cain was of the evil one, says John, and because he was of the evil one, he hated his brother, who was of God, spiritually.

Now, this antithesis to love really takes us by surprise, doesn't it? The antithesis to love of the brethren is murder. It even gets under the skin. None of us want to acknowledge that, however much we lack in love

for the body of Christ and the church, none of us want to agree that our fault is so black.

At worst, it's but a kind of grey shade of misdemeanour. It's nothing as serious as this. How can John the Apostle say that if we haven't love for the saints, we are really following in the footsteps of Cain, that we have murder in the heart? Well, of course, John is thinking of hate in terms of what it becomes.

You see, hate, fundamentally, is just the desire to get away with someone, get rid of someone. If you hate someone, you don't want to sit next to that person. Should there be someone, God forbid, should there be someone in this church this morning that you hate, if you came down and you saw that person in the pew, you'd go to the other side.

You don't want to be near. You don't want to talk. You don't want to pray with that person.

You don't want to get too near. Hate is the desire to get rid of someone, and when hate comes to full bloom, it becomes murder. Murder is the act of getting rid of someone, getting someone out of the way that I do not love.

Now, you see, John wants us to see it in those black and white colours, because he wants us to see where the absence of love and where hate leads to. Very few of us, in our hearts, could possibly remain on that plane of simply not loving anyone. We want to get rid of them.

We want to be without them. And ultimately, says John, that is murder. Murder in the heart.

We may not have the courage, of course, to take that life away. We might not have the opportunity. But the fact of the matter is, this in our hearts, we want to get rid of them.

And we keep away, and we sever connections. Hate is the attitude of soul which leads to the act of murder. Jesus, of course, taught his disciples that murder and hate are very intimately related.

You have a passage like Matthew, chapter 5, verses 21 and 22, which make this very, very evident. You remember these words. You have heard that it was said to the men of old, you shall not kill.

All right. Don't take away a life, don't murder, don't kill. And whosoever kills shall be liable of judgment.

But now, says Jesus, but I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment. Anger is as serious as murder, he says, because anger so often leads to murder. It is incipient murder.

It is murder in embryo. Angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment. And whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council.

And whoever says, you fool, shall be liable to the hell of fire. John, linking anger and hate in this context wants us to get the challenging point that they are the first fruits of what develops into something that Jesus speaks of as deserving of the hellfire. Love of the people of God, then, is and always has been an integral part of the Christian revelation.

We are not to be like Cain, we are to love the brethren. Now, come to the second main thrust here in verses 13 to 15. Love and spiritual regeneration.

Love is of primary importance. Its vital and essential role was stressed from the beginning. It has always been central to the Christian revelation.

But now, says John, notice this. Its presence is an infallible mark of spiritual life, whilst its absence speaks convincingly of spiritual death. Now, we really are in a very challenging arena of Scripture today.

This is a very, very piercing, penetrating, challenging thrust of the divine Word. Let's divide it down into one or two main statements. First of all, verse 14.

Love of our fellow believers in the body of Christ proves the possession of eternal life. Let's read verse 14. We know, says John, that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren.

Have you seriously pondered that statement? Now, we know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren. Regeneration is beautifully described by John there. This is incidental, but it's very important.

Regeneration is a passing out of one sphere into another. It's an exodus out of Egypt into the promised land. It's a movement out of the territory of death into the territory of life.

This is what it means to become a Christian, is to be born again, and it's this kind of exodus, this new beginning, this coming out of death into life. But now, what are the evidences of such a regeneration? How can I know that I have been born again? How do I know? Well, John doesn't say that this is the only test. It isn't.

There are others in Scripture, but John says that this is one test. One feature that infallibly proves a person to be regenerate is that he loves the people of God. He loves the brethren.

Now notice, he doesn't say loves some brethren. He doesn't say loves one or two that are very sweet to him and very responsive to him. That's not what he's getting at.

But John says he loves the brethren as the brethren, the community as community, the church qua church, the body because it is the body of Christ. He loves the brethren. Now I'm sure that within the fellowship of Christian people, you and I have friends with whom we're very intimate, and we find that we can get nearer to them, perhaps, because they know us and we know them a little better, and we can be very intimate with them.

John doesn't condemn that. But that's not what he's talking about. What he's talking about is this.

We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren as brethren. For this sole reason we are the children of our Father. They are indwelt by the same Spirit.

They are subject to the same Lord. They've been bought with the same blood. They're going to the same inheritance.

They are ours in the bundle of the one eternal life. We are ours. We belong.

This is not a liking, but this is a loving. We all have our likes and our dislikes, but over and above that, says John, we love the brethren. We love them because they are our brethren in Christ, with all their warts and oddities and, you know, all the world's a bit crazy, except me and me.

Even he's a bit crazy sometimes. Do you not tell your wife or your husband that occasionally? Or your friends? But here it is. Isn't it challenging? Tell me, my friend.

In all the world, who are your people? Where do you find your element? To whom do you belong? Where do you find yourself at home? In any foreign city? In any territory? Do you find that the people of God are your people? Can you say with the servant of God in the Old Testament, thy people shall be my people? We belong. We belong. A bond binds us together, and it's the bond of love.

Now, in order to make the point as challenging as possible, John says, do not wonder, brethren, he says, if the world hates you. We shouldn't wonder, he says, if the world hates us. You see, he's been telling them to practice righteousness.

I should say telling us to practice righteousness, as well as the people addressed here. He's been telling us to live on a plane of practical righteousness every day, consistent righteousness. Well, all right.

What will happen if we live on that plane? This, the world will hate us. It is not true. It's not true to fact.

We should not expect the world to respect us more and more if we are godly and Christlike. The world, being what the world is and related to God as the world is, the world will react to us as it reacted to the Christ of God, His only Son. You and I cannot, cannot expect the world to love us if we, out of love for God and His people, are loyal to Him.

We cannot. The world will ultimately hate us. Now, says John, there's no wonder to that.

You shouldn't be surprised at that. Marvel not that the world hates you. Righteousness in the sense will always provoke hostility from sinners.

But by sheer contrast, he says, you notice he brings, he will get this across, by sheer contrast to the predictable hatred of the world, we may count upon the love of all those who have passed out of death into life. And in order to stress it, he adds this in the second part of verse 14, he who does not love, that is, the brethren, he remains in death. Now, that's a categorical statement which is a tremendous challenge.

Now, moving forward to verse 15, hatred of the brethren proves the presence of spiritual death. Let's take up that strain. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

John's very logical here. The apostle has already shocked us, as we've noted, by speaking of the alternative to love of the brethren as murder, incipient murder at any rate. He now returns to explain himself just a little.

He doesn't want us to get that image out of our minds. He wants it to soak in a little. He wants it to sink.

He wants it to shock us. He wants it to pierce. Hatred of God's children points to murder in the heart.

Just as a lustful look, you remember Jesus' words, he that looketh after a woman to lust after her has already committed the adultery, he says, in the heart. Now, don't let's miss this. He's looked and he's looked to lust, not just seeing a person pass by on the street, that's not it, not a casual look, but he's looked with the intention and the desire, and his heart has gone out after it, and in his mind he's committed it.

God looks at the heart, says the Bible, and not simply at the outward action. Now, just as that is true of adultery, so also it is true of murder. God looks at our attitude toward one another, and when he sees an attitude of remoteness to the sense and of aloofness, this speaks of, yes, I have to say, this speaks of murder in the heart.

That heart condition needs changing. It is desperate, because that person cannot know that he has passed from death unto life, even if he has. He may be but a newborn bird, and he hasn't grown yet, and he hasn't cast off the works of darkness as he may, and he may need the food of the Word and the fellowship of the saints to bring out what is there.

All right. He may be a Christian, a very young Christian, or a carnal Christian, but he can't know that he is. Christian certainty he cannot have, Christian assurance he cannot have, even if he is a baby in Christ.

Any assurance that he has will be presumption if it is in the absence of love for the bread. You know, it is very easy for us to call presumption assurance. Murder in the heart means the absence of eternal life, as John goes on to say.

And you know, he says, that no murderer has eternal life dwelling in him. Now, I don't need to expound that. It's very obvious, isn't it? The man who takes away the life of one of God's creatures, which is contrary to his commandments, that man cannot have eternal life, the life that Jesus had living in his soul, abiding in him.

It's inconsistency, John. The two things don't make sense. Now, let me say one word here.

This does not mean to say that a murderer cannot become a Christian, cannot be forgiven. This does not mean to say that a man who has committed murder has no place in the kingdom of God. For the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin.

But what it does mean is this. There must be repentance and faith. There is no eternal life for a murderer as murderer, but as a penitent sinner who flees for refuge to the cross of Christ and who clings to him and pleads for his mercy and depends upon him.

You remember that terrible list that Paul addresses to the Corinthians? Don't you know, he says, that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? And you think when he's going on giving us the list, it's a little bit shocking. You wonder where are we going to get to. Do you remember how he puts it? Do not be deceived.

Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. Where are we getting to? Do you notice the next verse? And that is what some of you were. Oh, there's music in that statement.

Because he goes on to say this, that is what some of you were, but you were washed. You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God.

In other words, you belong to one or other of these categories, but you're washed. So when John speaks so strongly about murder, he does not mean to say that a murderer cannot find his way into the Christian fellowship. He can, by the grace of God, if he repents of his sin, turns to the Savior, he too can be received and can become a brother beloved of the Savior.

Love and the Christian revelation, love and a person's regeneration, and lastly, love and its realization in life, verses 16 to 18. John here gives us, first of all, the identification of the kind of love that he has in mind. He identifies it.

By this, he says in the first part of verse 16, we know literally the love. Not just love generally, but by this we know the love that he laid down his life, that is, Jesus laid down his life for us. Love is one of the most abused words in our vocabulary.

It's become so terribly debased that you can have a common song which goes something like this in one of its lines, everybody loves somebody sometimes. You know that? No, you don't, but you may have heard it. Everybody loves somebody sometimes, or you know what I listen to now.

There were various kinds of loves in John's day too, and because of that, John feels that he's got to distinguish. He's not talking about what is currently recognized as love. He says, no, no, no.

By this you recognize the love that I'm talking about with a definite article. Later on in this epistle, in chapter 4 and verse 10, John will even distinguish, he will even sharply distinguish between the Christian's love for God and this divine love expressed towards us. Whilst in the words just quoted from 3.16, by this we know love, he actually puts a definite article alongside of the word in order to stress the unique quality of the love that he is talking about or writing about just here.

It is a special love. God's love for us is a love for the worthless, and we do not deserve it. As Paul says, God commends His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, and he goes on in the same context to speak of us as enemies and hostile.

God loved us like that, but this love is to be distinguished from God's love for us. Our love for the brethren is a different kind. It's the love for those who belong to us in the body of Christ.

It's the love of those whom God has made fellow earth with us in His kingdom. It's the love of those who have the same spirits and the same destiny and the same Lord. The love of Christ in His death is that of a crucifixion to self-interest, and we should show our love for one another in a willingness of mind and of soul to be crucified, to be hurt, to be denied in order to bring profit and blessing to the people of God.

Now, I'm sure this has got much to tell us in our day and generation. There are people of God who are suffering this morning all over the world. How much do we care? But come nearer at hand.

Come right back home. These things are happening in the distance, and I say we ought to know something about them and to be doing something about that. But wait a moment.

There may be people of God that are suffering right here on our doorstep, even within our fellowship. How concerned are we? The identification of love, now the reproduction of love, of such a love in a Christian's life is made explicit. It says, John, we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Yes, says John, love should do that. Not just think about them, not just pray for them. I'm not minimizing the value of prayer.

My good people, ever in my life, I appreciated what prayer means. It is just now. But says John, we ought to lay down our lives for them.

This is what love ought to be. It's not just a handshake, but where there's need, we should be willing to sacrifice ourselves for the well-being of the body, for whom, for which Christ died. Now, having helped us in clear identification of love, urged us to see to its reproduction in our own lives, John concludes the passage with the exhortation to love the brethren as he puts it, in deed and in truth.

I like that. Listen to these verses. But if anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet shuts his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, he says, let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and in truth, in deed and in truth, recognizing that we may be readily required to lay down our lives for the brethren.

John, oh my, was a wise character, wasn't he? John knows what we will say in terms of reaction. All right, yes, I might do that if the occasion required it. I do love the brethren, I do love the people of God, and if it was necessary, I would do that.

Says John, wait a moment. That may never arise, though it may. We are living in momentous days, challenging days, and it may be required of some of us yet before we're through this life.

But says John, wait a moment. There's a situation right at hand. Here is someone who has this world's goods.

He's got plenty, and a little extra. And he sees his brother in desperate need, his brother Christian. And he sees him.

Not just a passing glance, but he knows what's going on. He's penetrated the camouflage. The Christian may not be showing it, may not be wearing his heart on his sleeve, but this man sees through.

And then, says John, using a very graphic word, he shuts up, may I quote from the King James Version, his bowels of compassion. The Greeks used to believe that love arose from the bowels. Love is something you feel.

Love is something in the depths. Love is something that makes you sick. Love is something that hurts.

But this man, says John, he shuts it off, just like you switch off the lights. Or you turn off the water tap. You switch it off.

He shuts it off. In other words, he doesn't let the compassion of the Savior flow through him, use his hands, use his possessions, use what he has to the alleviation of a man, the brother for whom Christ died. Oh, says John, let us love, he says, not in word, but in truth and in reality.

It is with this that I close. I don't need to spend a moment in closing today to apply it. The application is so evident.

My good friend, you and I, do we not? We need to attend to the fire of love in the hearth of our hearts. We need to quicken it, and we need to purge it, and we need daily to have the Spirit of God poured in upon us, that the fruit of the Spirit in us, in terms of love for the brethren, in the first place, going beyond the bounds of the church after that, but first of all for the brethren, may be an evident thing that we may know that we have passed out of death into life. We may never be charged by the Holy Spirit of harboring in our hearts what could ever become the murder of a brother.

Let us pray. Blessed God, our Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word. We thank Thee that even though it hurts us, it only hurts to heal.

Times without number, we have squirmed under it and have tried to wriggle our way out of the implications of it. O teach us, we pray Thee, with the psalmist, to say that Thy law is my delight. Give us a joy in obeying, the joy that comes to Thy children in knowing that even if it be pain for us, it is glory to our Lord.

We ask of Thee that we may be known as a people who care more for Thy glory and Thy good and the well-being of Thy church and the body of Christ than for ourselves. We ask it in His holy name. Amen.

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