

Death and Love 1 John 3:11-24

Introduction:

It didn't take long for the effects of sin on the human race to hit rock bottom. Adam and Eve ate a fruit – a seemingly simple act – yet it was one that expressed defiance, disobedience and even rebellion against the Lord. In the next generation they saw what that seemingly trivial deed actually meant when Cain killed Abel his brother.

The difference between what Adam did and what Cain did was only one of degree, not of kind. They were both intentional acts of sin. We're going to read the story of Cain before we start.

Read story of Cain and Abel Gen. 4:1-16

The problem with Cain's problem is that it isn't only Cain's problem. It's a problem that each and every one of us has. Sin, in one of its many self-centered rebellious forms, comes naturally to us; self-sacrificing love does not. Disobedience comes naturally. Rebellion comes naturally. Hatred comes naturally. The self-sacrificing love of Christ is *supernatural*.

We will probably never murder anyone; neither did Adam. But the truth is, sinners that we are, the jarring rebellion that motivated Cain's heart is far more at home in our hearts than the love of Christ.

God in His love wants to take away the malice, envy, hatred and murder of Cain, and fill us with the self-giving, self-sacrificing love of Jesus.

Outline:

- I. The Negative Example of Cain 3:11-15
- II. The Positive Example of Jesus 3:16-18
- III. Facing Two Obstacles 3:19-24

Read the whole passage but beginning with **verse 10** to lead into it.

I. The Negative Example of Cain 3:11-15

According to some worldviews, Buddhism among them, our basic problem is ignorance. In short, all of our suffering is caused by cravings, attachments or desires. These cravings or desires stem from ignorance; ignorance must be countered by enlightenment.

The Bible, by contrast, sees our main problem not as ignorance, but rebellion. Adam wasn't ignorant; Cain wasn't ignorant. Disobedience toward God – rather than ignorance – has led to broken relationships, malice, envy and hatred toward one another ever since.

Cain's murder of his brother provides the earliest example. John wants us to understand what hatred can do when it's left unchecked.

3:13 **Do not marvel** This same dynamic is in operation today. Abel did the right thing and Cain hated him for it. Jesus did the right thing and was crucified. If we do the right thing, we can expect to face the hatred of the world.

3:14 **We know** Love provides evidence. An unexplainable inner motivation to love other believers in Jesus is a tangible sign **that we have passed from death to life.**

3:15 **a murderer** In this verse, John is merely agreeing with the teaching of Jesus. Most of us will never literally kill anyone. Let's not think that gets us off the hook. From the ESV:

Matthew 5:21-22 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.*

The difference between our anger and hatred and Cain's murder of Abel is only one of degree, not of kind. The same sin and rebellion against God that he expressed in the murder of his brother is far more at home in our hearts than the love of Christ.

“I will permit no man to narrow and degrade my soul by making me hate him.”

– Booker T. Washington

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Now John moves from the negative example of Cain to the positive example of Jesus.

II. The Positive Example of Jesus 3:16-18

3:16 Not surprisingly, John holds up Jesus as our ultimate example. If we want to know what love looks like, look at what Jesus did for us by dying for our sins.

Paul elaborates on this very concept:

Romans 5:6-8 ⁶For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

3:17-18 This is the kind of love that God is calling us to. We may never have an occasion to truly lay down our life for others as Jesus did, but we can look for ways to serve others and perhaps give them what they need.

We shouldn't think that the standard John sets up is simply too high and lofty for us. The goal is to love in deed and in truth. Not simply in word or in tongue.

Saying "I love you" can be very important. Showing someone how much you love them through personal self-sacrifice on their behalf is something else again.

Dr. Kenneth Moynagh was a missionary doctor for many years in Rwanda. In addition to practicing medicine he wrote a bit of poetry. In one of his poems he takes the fruit of the Spirit passage in Gal. 5:22–23 and uses it as a starting point to meditate upon Christ work in us.

*Joy is Love exulting and Peace is Love at rest;
Patience, Love enduring in every trial and test.
Gentleness, Love yielding to all that is not sin.
Goodness, Love in actions that flow from Christ within.
Faith is Love's eyes opened the living Christ to see;
Meekness, Love not fighting, but bowed at Calvary.
Temperance, Love in harness and under Christ's control,
For Christ is Love, in person—and Love, Christ in the soul.*

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We looked at the negative example of Cain and the positive example of Jesus, but now John turns to two potential obstacles we have to face in letting Christ gain full control over us.

III. Facing Two Obstacles 3:19-24

John isn't simply telling us to do things without thinking them through – holding up an example of Jesus, saying "Here, do this," and leaving us to flounder and fail. He's been where we are, and knows the kind of things that can stand in the way of the radical love he is asking us to show one another.

- A. The obstacle of a heart that condemns us 3:19-22
- B. The obstacle of incomplete obedience 3:22-24

A. The obstacle of a heart that condemns us 3:19-22

3:19 Through this passage, John is encouraging us to do all the right things. If we're not careful, it will be used by the enemy to accuse us. We haven't done all the right things, so what are we supposed to do with that fact?

The continuous testimony of both Scripture and experience tells us that we are engaged in a process of spiritual growth. The **conviction of the Holy Spirit** encourages us to repent from the wrong things and now do the right things. The **condemnation of the devil** simply leaves us wallowing in our guilt, hopeless that God will ever have mercy on us again.

3:20 God knows your heart. He knows your sin. He understands your struggles. Jesus died to make you holy and He will not give up on you as long as you still have breath in your lungs.

3:21 Sometimes it takes an intentional exercising of our faith to overcome our condemning hearts. We have to simply believe that God accepts us on the grounds of Christ's love and death, rather than our own merit. Christ died for the ungodly. Feel free to approach Him.

And as we overcome the obstacle of a heart that condemns us, we will gain confidence as we approach the Lord in prayer.

Don't let your heart condemn you. God knows your sin better than you do. Receive the forgiveness offered through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

3:22 This is a transitional verse. It relates to the heart that condemns us, showing what can happen as we get past that condemnation, and it also points us in the direction of the next obstacle.

B. The obstacle of incomplete obedience 3:22-24

3:22 This verse indicates a direct connection between obeying God and receiving answers to prayer. This is something we can think about when our prayers seem to continually go unanswered. We can ask, “Is this a prayer that comes from a heart of obedience – or is it stemming from my own selfish motives?” Let obedience motivate your prayers. Let your prayers arise from an attitude of intended obedience.

3:23 Jesus was once asked a question:

*John 6:28-29 ²⁸Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?”
²⁹Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”*

Personal trust in Christ is just as important as the obedience stressed in the earlier verses in this passage. It is the starting point from which all true obedience flows. David Jackman explains it like this:

“A true Christian, then, is one who obeys both the commands, to believe and to love. In this world, such responses will always be less than perfect and tainted with sin, but the continuance in them is the all-important mark of genuineness.”

3:24 **the Spirit** John talks about the Holy Spirit quite a bit in this letter, but this is first direct mention of the third person of the Trinity. More mentions will follow.

This verse is directly related to what Christ said in **John 14:23**

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.”

The Holy Spirit’s ministry is to take the written Word of God and wake up our minds to its truth.

He then spurs our wills to conform with God’s will. He prompts us to repent and to believe the good news and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Don’t be discouraged because your obedience has been incomplete. Instead, determine to take the next step of obedience today.

John Wesley was known to pray, *“Lord, cure me of my intermittent piety and make me thoroughly Christian.”*

Wesley’s prayer is reminiscent of the man in Mark 9:24 who said, “Lord I believe; help my unbelief!”

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Conclusions:

We've looked at two examples:

- the negative example of Cain
- the positive example of Jesus.

John has also shown us that we need to get past two obstacles:

- the obstacle of a heart that condemns us
- the obstacle of incomplete obedience

So there are several things we need to do now:

1. Weed out the hatred in our hearts.
 - a. Think of people who have made you bitter or angry over the years. Deliberately give those negative emotions that you feel over to the Lord.
 - b. Ask God to fill you with love toward these very people. Keep at this until you can genuinely think of these people without any feelings of malice, anger or hatred.
2. Practice genuinely self-sacrificial love.
 - a. Who needs to feel some love from you today or this week? What's especially key here is that – as much as possible – there not be a self-serving motive in it for you.

That is what will make it as close as can be to the love of Christ – an obedient love.
 - b. Think how you can express that love in a way that will mean the most to that other person even if it's difficult for you.
 - c. Doing this will be a genuine act of obedience to the Lord.
3. Don't let your heart condemn you. God knows your sin better than you do. Simply confess your guilt to Him. Receive the forgiveness offered through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.
4. Don't be discouraged because your obedience has been incomplete. Instead, determine to take the next step of obedience today.
5. Finally, don't be discouraged by all the unanswered prayers you've offered up to the Lord. Look for ways to pray in complete agreement with God's revealed will. Pray those prayers – and don't stop until you get answers.

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