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## HATRED OR LOVE?

1 John 3:11-18

By

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1 John Lesson 16

## Hatred or Love? 1 John 3:11-18

A woman was surprised at church one day when another woman, who had often snubbed her, went out of her way to give her a big hug before the service. She wondered what had initiated her change of heart.

She got her answer at the end of the service when the pastor instructed, "Your assignment for next week is the same as last week. I want you to go out there and love somebody you just can't stand" (adapted from *Reader's Digest*, [4/02], p. 48).

If loving others were only as easy as giving a hug to someone you don't like, we all could excel in love. Just hug them and move on! But, love is a bit more difficult than that! It requires continual effort, because at the heart of loving others is putting the other person ahead of yourself, and that is always a huge battle. For this reason, the New Testament as a whole and the apostle John in this letter never tire of exhorting us to love one another.

John had seen the love of Christ demonstrated that night in the Upper Room, when Jesus took the basin of water and washed the disciples' feet. He then heard Jesus say (John 13:34-35), "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Then John saw the supreme demonstration of Christ's love when He willingly went to the cross to die for our sins. And so the "son of thunder" became known as the "apostle of love."

John has already reminded his little children of Jesus' old-new commandment (2:7-11). He will yet devote the major part of chapter 4 (verses 7-21) to this theme. In fact, six times in 1 & 2 John, he refers directly to Jesus' command that we love one another (1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5; plus the allusion in 1 John 2:7). In our text, John is in the second cycle of applying the three tests of authentic Christianity: the moral test of obedience to Jesus Christ (2:28-3:10); the social test of love for one another

(3:11-18); and, after a digression about assurance (3:19-24), the doctrinal test of believing the truth about Jesus Christ (4:1-7).

If we get weary of hearing over and over about the need to love one another, we should remember that John wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who knows our hearts. We need to examine ourselves constantly because our default mode is to revert to selfishness, not to love. In our text, John again gets out his black and white paint and does not mix them into shades of gray. He wants to expose the errors of the heretics in the plainest of terms. So he contrasts the world with the church. His message is,

The mark of the world is hatred,  
but the mark of the church is love.

That is a nice, clean statement, but as you ponder it you have to ask, “Is that *really* true?” I’ve known some wonderful, loving unbelievers and I’ve also known some real scoundrels in the church (not in *this* church, of course!). We’ve all met people who claim to be Christians, but frankly, you’d rather snuggle with a porcupine than try to get close to them! So, how do we square what John says with what we actually experience? Hopefully, that question will be answered as we work through the text (my sub-points are adapted from John Stott, *The Epistles of John* [Eerdmans], p. 144).

1. The mark of the world is hatred.

Sometimes to define a somewhat vague notion like love it is helpful to contrast it with the opposite, hatred. So John contrasts the love that we are to have for one another with Cain’s murder of his brother, Abel (3:11-12). Then, he states (3:13), “Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.”

John here reflects Jesus’ words in the Upper Room (John 15:18-19 [see also, John 17:14]), “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.” (Jesus believed in divine election, by the way!)

Not to doubt Jesus’ words, but rather to understand them, we have to ask, “Is this really true? How is the world marked by hatred, especially in light of all the nice unbelievers out there?” To answer these questions, we need to define our terms.

By *the world*, John means the unbelieving world, of course, which is under Satan's dominion in opposition to God. But, in particular, John was targeting those who had left the church and were promoting false teaching about the person and work of Christ. In 2:19, he said, "They went out from us, but they were not really of us...." In the doctrinal section that follows our text, he says that these false prophets have gone out into the world (4:1). They are the spirit of antichrist, which "is already in the world" (4:3). "They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them" (4:5).

When John speaks of *love*, he points us to the supreme example of Jesus laying down His life for us (3:16). Thus a helpful definition of biblical love is: *a self-sacrificing, caring commitment that shows itself in seeking the highest good of the one loved*. Jesus sacrificed Himself because He cared for us and He is committed to seek our highest good, namely, that ultimately we might share His glory.

Since hatred is the opposite of love, we may define it as, *a selfish, insensitive attitude that shows itself in disregarding others' good as I seek my own interests*. The essence of hatred is the self-centered bent of fallen human nature that says, "I'll help you if it helps me or if it's not too much of a hassle. But if it comes down to you or me, I'm looking out for me!" When we understand hatred as such, we can see that it characterizes the unbelieving world. The world is motivated by self-interest. Self-sacrifice, to the world, is crazy.

"But," you may be thinking, "what about examples of genuine love on the part of unbelievers?" While it may be true that most unbelievers are motivated by selfishness, we often see examples of unbelievers who sacrifice themselves on behalf of others. We see unbelieving parents who give themselves selflessly on behalf of their children. We hear of those who donate a kidney so that a family member, or even a perfect stranger, might live. We hear of soldiers who willingly die to protect their comrades. Don't these examples contradict John's words about the world's hatred?

I believe that such examples may be explained by the fact of God's common grace. Jesus said (Matt. 5:45) that the Father "causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." He said (Luke 6:35b), "He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men."

Love is one of God's gifts that He has not withdrawn completely from unregenerate people. It should serve as a witness to them, to point them to the source of it, because, as John will point out (4:7), "love is from God." But, the fact that God has not completely withdrawn His grace from this rebellious world does not contradict John's generalization, that the world is marked by hatred (see Rom. 1:29-31; 2 Tim. 3:1-2).

John says five things about hatred in our text, which are in direct contrast with God's love that is to characterize the believer:

A. Hatred is typified in Adam's firstborn, Cain (3:12).

This is the only explicit Old Testament reference in John's epistles, and the only proper name, except for references to Christ or God. I think that John chose Cain because he was the first person born on this earth under the curse of sin. His hatred toward his brother typifies the self-centered, evil bent of the fallen human heart. While our self-centeredness seldom goes to the extreme of murder, the roots are there.

Hebrews 11:4 says that Abel offered a better sacrifice by faith. Since faith is always a response to God's revelation, we must assume that God had revealed to Cain and Abel the proper kind of sacrifice that He required. Abel obeyed by faith. Cain, in defiance and disobedience, brought an unacceptable offering. When his brother's offering was accepted and Cain's was rejected, his envy began to seethe. Even though God confronted Cain and exhorted him to repent (Gen. 4:6-7), Cain ignored the warning. As a result, he slaughtered his brother (the Greek word used means to slit the throat or to butcher).

John assumes the doctrine of original sin in 3:14, when he states that we have passed out of death into life, but the one who does not love abides in death. People do not begin as neutral or basically good and then decide either to choose or reject God. People are born into this world in a state of spiritual death (Eph. 2:1). They need the new birth in order to pass out of death into life. The only other time that phrase appears is in John 5:24, where Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." So John begins

with Adam's firstborn, Cain, who typifies the hatred of the fallen human race.

B. Hatred originates with the devil (3:12, 15).

Cain was "of the evil one" (3:12). John's reference to the murderer (3:15) recalls Jesus' words in John 8:44, where He states that the devil "was a murderer from the beginning." So if we think that either hatred or love finds their roots in the human heart, we have not gone deep enough. Hatred finds its source in the devil, whereas love originates with God. This is not to blame the devil and absolve sinful people of responsibility for their sin. But, to harbor hatred is to oppose God and put yourself in league with the devil! Therefore, we need to be quick to judge our own hearts when we see these selfish attitudes rearing their ugly head.

C. Hatred divides people and may result in the taking of life (3:12, 15).

At best, hatred becomes indifference or avoidance of another person, causing separation and distance in relationships. At worst, selfishness and hatred become murder (James 4:1-2). In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:21, 22; see also Matt. 15:19) Jesus said that anger is tantamount to murder in God's sight, because all murder begins there. While we cringe when we hear of someone murdering someone else, we often tolerate the roots of this sin by excusing our anger as justifiable. We need to see our own selfish anger as hideous and yank it out by the roots!

D. Hatred is motivated by personal sin (3:12).

John asks, "And for what reason did he slay him?" It was not because Abel was a scoundrel doing evil. Rather, Cain's deeds were evil and Abel's were righteous. The root of Cain's slaughter of his brother was that Cain was in rebellion against God. So, while hatred may be directed at other people, invariably the hateful person is at odds with God. He needs to confront his own sinful heart.

Thus hatred is typified in Adam's firstborn, Cain, It originated with the devil. It divides people and may result in murder. It is motivated by personal sin or rebellion against God.

E. Hatred is the evidence of spiritual death (3:14, 15).

A person whose life is marked by selfish hatred of others shows no evidence of new life in Christ. That is the meaning of John's words in verses 14 & 15. He is not saying that no murderer may be saved. Paul was a murderer before he was saved, and both David and Moses murdered men after they were saved. As in 3:9, here John uses present tense verbs that point to the overall direction of a person's life. A person whose life is marked by a pattern of selfishness, envy, jealousy, strife, and hatred gives evidence that he remains in spiritual death.

While John's words are an evidential test of a person's spiritual condition, they are also an exhortation to those that profess to believe in Christ. As believers, we have to battle the hatred that stems from our own selfishness. While on the one hand, spiritual growth results inevitably from spiritual life, on the other hand it does not happen without our constant effort. Whenever the deeds of the flesh rear their ugly heads, we must put them to death and replace them with the fruit of the Spirit (Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:19-23).

Thus, John shows that the mark of the world is hatred—the self-centered, “look out for number one” mentality, which if unchecked, results in murder. In stark contrast, he says that...

2. The mark of the church is love.

John draws a sharp, point-for-point contrast between the hatred that marks the world and the love that marks the church. Whereas hatred is typified in Adam's firstborn, ...

A. Love is typified in God's firstborn, Christ (3:16).

Verse 16 literally reads, “By this we have experientially come to know love, that That One laid down His life for us.” The cross is the supreme demonstration of what real love—God's love—is. There is hardly a passage in the New Testament that speaks of God's love that does not also speak of the cross. The most familiar is another 3:16, John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” (See, also, Gal. 2:20; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 5:25; 1 John 4:10.) If you want to know what God's love is like, look at Jesus, the Righteous One, who willingly sacrificed Himself on behalf of the ungodly.

Whereas hatred originates with the devil, ...

## B. Love originates with God.

John will state this directly in 4:7, but it is implicit in our text. Love in the believer comes from God. In 3:10b, John said that the one who does not love is not of God, implying that the one who loves is of God. In 3:17, he says that if we do not demonstrate practical love for those in need, the love of God does not abide in us. If you lack love for someone, first make sure that you are born of God. Then, ask Him for it.

Whereas hatred divides people and may result in murder, ...

## C. Love unites people and results in laying down our lives for others (3:16-17).

Jesus showed His love by laying down His life for us. Thus (3:16), “we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” That is a hard saying! Be honest—would you lay down your life for the people in this room? You can easily sit here and say, “Yes, I’d die for my fellow Christians.” But, the urge to save your own skin is pretty strong. Who can *truly* say in advance, “I’d die for my brothers?”

But John doesn’t leave us to sit around speculating about what we might do if persecution hits. He brings it down to everyday living (3:17): “But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?” Ouch! It’s easy to *say* that you would lay down your life for the brethren. But if you aren’t doing it inch by inch, in the little details of setting aside your selfishness to serve others, beginning at home (Eph. 5:25), it’s empty talk to say, “I’d die for my brothers in Christ!”

Self-sacrifice is *never* convenient. It’s always more of a hassle to meet someone’s needs than to ignore him. But, John’s point is the same as Jesus’ point in the parable of the Good Samaritan: We must not ignore others’ needs, but rather, sacrifice our time, energy, and money to help them out. This does not mean indiscriminately doling out money to those who are lazy or irresponsible (2 Thess. 3:10-12). We need discernment and wisdom to know how best to help a needy person. But we also need to be careful not to excuse our indifference by labeling the other person as lazy or irresponsible. Love unites people through practical deeds of self-sacrifice.

Whereas hatred is motivated by personal sin, ...

D. Love is motivated by God's love in Christ.

That's the point of verse 16. If God's love as shown on the cross abides in your heart, it will flow through you to others. If you're running short on love, stop and meditate on what Jesus did for you. If the servant who had been forgiven the huge debt had stopped to think about it, he would have forgiven his fellow servant the lesser debt (Matt. 18:23-35). Or, as John states (4:11), "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

Finally, whereas hatred is the evidence of spiritual death, ...

E. Love is the evidence of spiritual life (3:14).

John states (3:14), "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death." While this fruit of the Spirit never grows to perfect maturity in this lifetime, you should be able to see growth in love when you compare your self-centered life before conversion with your focus since you were saved. If you say that you know Christ, but continue to live for yourself, if you're unwilling to be inconvenienced or sacrifice yourself and your possessions to meet the needs of others, you need to examine whether or not you've truly passed out of death into life. If you have tasted God's love in Christ at the cross, the new direction of your life will be to grow in love for others.

## Conclusion

In verse 11, John says, "This is the message which you have heard from the beginning." He means, from the beginning of your Christian life you were taught to love one another. It's a basic truth that you should start to learn and practice from the first day of your Christian experience. God's love flowing through us to one another should so mark the church that it draws a sharp contrast between us and the world.

Ray Stedman (*Expository Studies in 1 John* [Word], pp. 264-265) tells the story of a Jewish man named Art, who was raised as an atheist. Early in life, he became a committed Marxist. At the close of World War II, he was in Germany with the American army and saw the gas chambers at the concentration camps. It filled him with

hatred, first toward the Germans and then, as he realized that this went deeper than nationality, at the whole human race. He came back to Berkeley and gave himself to education, but he came to see that it was not the answer. Education could not change hearts.

Finally, he resigned his position. His wife lost her mind and was put in a mental institution. Divorced, and without ties, he went out to wander. One rainy day in Greece, grubby and dirty, he was hitchhiking. No one wanted to pick up a seedy looking character like him. He had stood in the rain for hours when a Cadillac stopped. To Art's amazement, the driver did not just gesture for him to get in. He got out of the car, came around and began to pump his hand and welcome him warmly. He took Art's dirty rucksack and threw it on the clean upholstery. Then he drove Art to a hotel, rented him a room, and gave him some food.

Finally, he asked Art what he was doing and where he was going. All the pent-up heartache, misery, and resentment of a lifetime came pouring out of this young Jewish atheist, while the man sat and listened. When Art was through, the man said, "You know what this world needs? Those who are willing to wash one another's feet." Art said, "I never heard anything so beautiful. Why do you say that?" The man said, "Because that's what my Lord did." For the first time in his life, this young atheist heard a clear presentation of the gospel. He became a Christian and went on to devote his life to serving the Lord.

That unnamed man, quietly going about *being* a Christian, demonstrated what John says to us (3:18), "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."

### Application Questions

1. Practically, how would you counsel a Christian to deal with deep-seated bitterness, anger, or hatred?
2. Often we are blind to our selfishness. How can we grow to see it so that we can deal with it in a godly manner?
3. Is there a difference between loving someone and liking him? If so, what are the practical ramifications of this?
4. If we gave to everyone in need, we would literally have nothing left. How do we discern when to give and when not to give?

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