

**Reading:** Genesis 4:1-8; 1 John 3:11-15

**Theme:** Don't Be Like Cain, but Jesus!

Last week we had an overview of v11-24 to help us to recognise the importance of this social test of loving other believers which John begins to open up on here. John mentioned this in 2:7-11 where it was as an outline sketch, but here in chapter 3 he starts to fill in his outline sketch and fills it in not with colours, but in black and white. In v10 he pointed us to the stark contrast of 2 spiritual families - children of God or children of the devil. Here in v11-15 he writes of hatred and love, life and death, murder and self-sacrifice. Let's begin to look at those verses in 1 John to see 3 things:

### **1. Let's start at the very beginning...** (v11)

John was writing to Christians who were being pressurised by new and novel teachings that were arising from mixing pagan ideas and religions with Christian truth. These false teachers claimed enlightenment, claimed superior knowledge and new revelations from God. John says in effect "*Hold on, let's go back to what you 1<sup>st</sup> heard and were taught!*" He had done this in chapter 1:1ff - truth, doctrine and now he does the same and he applies it - how to live. The facts had not changed, the message of the Apostles had not changed and those were relevant for the time he was writing in and are just as relevant for our time also, as are life applications of those things.

As the gospel does not change, for the truth about Jesus Christ is unalterable, so also their application to Christian conduct is still the same. We are wise and right to go back to the beginning, for it is a very good place to start! We are to go back to 1<sup>st</sup> truths and principles as we deal with situations in

our Christian lives. John says this here to these believers - that they and we are to look at foundational outworking of who we are as Christians and that we should love one another. The NT writers are fond of doing this - they remind us of what God has done for us, who we are and from that they say in effect *“Now then, do this...”* It is never *“Do this and become a Christian”*. It is never be good, be religious or loving and become a Christian. The message we are to proclaim to the world is *“Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour”*. Yes, we are also to say God has a way that is right and best for us to live, but the message of the gospel is needed and not a message of morality and we are never to confuse the two.

To Christians, to Christians alone, the message is proclaimed and has been proclaimed since the beginning of the gospel age, that we are to love one another. We need to see and to remember that as Christians! Do we try and excuse our lack of love; to cover our resentment; or scathing demolition jobs on people and their characters; or our indifference and coldness to others? Sorry to say it doesn't wash. We may claim to be many things, but if we are not truly loving other believers as Jesus commands, then we are actually denying all we claim to be. We need to go back, to start at the very beginning to examine our own lives and experience to see if we have truly passed from death into life. Let's move on and see that John develops tests within this test:

## **2. Do Not Be...** (v12-13)

In these verses John gives us 2 negatives before moving on to the positives as he begins a contrast of attitudes and actions

and will go on to show the positives in the following verses. In the **1<sup>st</sup> negative** John tells us we are not to be like Cain. Here is a stark contrast. The 1<sup>st</sup> two children of Adam and Eve (*they had many more - see Genesis 5:4*) were Cain and Abel. We would expect these 2 to get along - they were the only friends and playmates they knew at one time and they were brothers, but sadly, there came a time when Cain murdered (*literally "butchered"*) his brother Abel.

From the account of that incident we read in Genesis 4, it seems a straightforward case of jealousy, but in the Bible there are other comments to show it was not so simple. We are told Cain belonged to the evil one - not satanically possessed, but like him in his actions. Jesus said the devil was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). It means Cain was of the spiritual lineage of the devil and his actions came to reveal this. Cain resented Abel because Abel's actions were righteous and his own were wicked. It was not just jealousy, but a moral resentment and battle we have here. In fact, it was a question of faith in God, for in Hebrews 11:4 we are told it was by faith Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain, for it seems Abel had a trust and faith in God and what He had said and revealed.

True faith is not some sort of intellectual leap in the dark, for faith has an object - God; but not an unknown God, but the God who has revealed Himself, His holy demands and what He requires of us as moral creatures on earth. Faith is in one sense rational as it recognises who God is and His requirements and it is an informed acceptance of these truths.

It seems Abel recognised what God required in a sacrifice and he offered accordingly; trusting what God had said and this was approved of and God spoke well of His offerings (Hebrews 11:4). Cain had no faith, had sin crouching at the door of his life and instead of asking God for help and forgiveness, Cain carried on and out of his jealousy sprang hatred and murder and he butchered his brother and then denied it before God.

The sin of Adam and Eve brought tragic consequences in their family life as mankind was brought under sin and Satan's control. That is still our natural state and we, as believers, are warned, told not to be like Cain in our attitude and actions. Cain is also a picture, a type, the prototype of the world and its animosity and hatred to God and His people. By using the term "*the world*" in this context the Bible does not mean the earth, the natural creation, but humanity fallen into sin and now under the dominion of the devil, with a bias to sin and an innate and inbuilt resentment and even hatred towards God.

John can write in v13 the **2<sup>nd</sup> negative** "*Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.*" Cain was the prototype of the world's resentment and hatred to believers. Just as Cain was self-centred, self-willed, wanting the 1<sup>st</sup> place and not going along in God's revealed ways, so also the world i.e. humanity in sin, will resent not only God, but those who serve and love Him. This is not saying that they are all evil, vile people. Thankfully God in His grace and mercy has given people consciences, His common grace at work and His restraining grace - through law, government etc. Yet we are not to be fooled, for even the nicest, most pleasant person who

is not a believer is still a sinner by nature and has this basic, even if latent, animosity in their hearts and minds against God and His ways and this only needs circumstances to bring it to the surface and it burst out in a ferocity we never even suspected.

As Christians we are not to be surprised at this and it may take the form of mockery, resentment, or even physical aggression. Some of you may have met with it in society, in work and even amongst your own family members. Sadly, it can spring up from those we least expect it from - our loved ones. Do not be surprised if we are serious about God, of loving the Lord Jesus and living the Christian life, that we find we are ridiculed, questioned, opposed even by members of our own family. We are to realise they are only displaying the same hatred and opposition Cain possessed, but thankfully not always to the same extreme as he did. Recognise its origin is also from the devil and is an outworking of his resentment against God and His working. We see this in Joseph and his brothers, David and his brothers, the Lord Jesus Himself and His brothers as well as the people of Israel towards Him.

If we have such hatred habitually in our lives, it should sound alarm bells, for it may indicate we are still in Cain's lineage and therefore a child of the devil and not a child of God. John goes on further and says it is:

### **3. A Question of Life and Death.** (v14-15)

We may feel we'd never murder anyone or be capable of doing so. John says here that hatred is murder in God's eyes and it is to be viewed the same by Christians. The action of

murder is more serious to the person on the receiving end of it. I'd rather you hate me then murder me - but in God's eyes the sin of hate is as serious as the sin of murder. So often we feel our emotions, desires, words and thoughts do not matter, but we are to consider how God sees us and these things, then we realise they are serious matters. As we have seen in the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus spoke of God seeing our hearts and minds and He viewed hatred as unfulfilled, heart murder, and lust as unfulfilled, heart adultery (Matthew 5:22-28). The Lord God Almighty sees such as the intention of our hearts if there were no restraints or consequences then we would do them. We need God's help to discipline our thought life and to think on the right things - as Paul says in Philippians 4:8 *"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."*

If we find ourselves constantly and habitually hating, despising, belittling other believers, maybe even excusing ourselves by suggesting or arguing they are not believers - *which is a crazy argument for it makes no difference as we are duty bound to love and care for all men and women as God's creatures, made in God's image with the eternal souls* - then we need to examine our own hearts and seek God's love to be shed abroad in our lives by repentance and a trust in the Lord Jesus as our Saviour.

Loving one another as believers shows we have passed from death into life. We opened up this a bit last week and noted the glorious transformation God brings about in our lives with

the gospel. Our loving one another as believers does not cause our salvation, but is an effect, an outworking of our salvation. We are to realise love is the 1<sup>st</sup> named of the fruit of the Spirit and no one can truly love another believer unless they are born-again of God Spirit. An evidence of God's Spirit having worked in a saving way in a person, is that they have time for those they once despised e.g. Saul of Tarsus hated believers, would kill and imprison them - he agreed in his silent assent to the murder of Stephen. When he was converted, saved, he immediately joined himself to the Christians in Damascus and then later on to those at Jerusalem. We read of the early church being one in heart and mind (Acts 4:32), of the apostles who owned the church as their own people (Acts 4:23).

The gospel message says even murderers can become a child of God and Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 gives a list of evil ones *“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? 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.”* Yet in the next verse says *“And 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.”* What an amazing God and Saviour we have! We would think it strange if someone said they were a Christian and carried on being a murderer, a thief etc. and this includes someone who kept on hating - for that is incompatible with being a Christian and indicates they are

either still spiritually dead having no spiritual life, or in a poor spiritual condition.

It is difficult for us as we often fail to see God's grace in a person, also forget about our relationship with them and God or forget who we are as believers. We are not to be like Cain and the world, or to make out we are still remaining in death and have no hope of eternal life, but are to live to show we have life in Christ and have His eternal life given us and own God's work in us in this very searching test of loving our brothers and sisters in Christ.

One of the things that struck me as I was preparing was John's phrase in v13 "*my brothers*" or "*my brethren*" - it includes the ladies also - "*brothers and sisters*" - here was John, the last of the apostles and he viewed these hurting ones as his brothers and sisters, wanted them to recognise each other as such and therefore special to one another because they were all special to God.

Our loving our fellow believers is to be a comfort and encouragement to us that God has worked in us and He is helping us by the work of the Holy Spirit to be more like Him. As to what this love is we will see as John in v16 goes on to smash our little ideas and tell us how we are to love, but that is for next time!