

**1 John**  
**Love as a Sign of Life (Part 1)**  
**1 John 3:11-24**  
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*Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher*  
*Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas*

Well, let's turn again to the letter of 1 John as we continue our journey through this magnificent letter written by the Apostle John. This letter of 1 John, the theme of it is put in a crystal-clear way in chapter 5, verse 13, when John writes this, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." John wrote this letter, not to those who followed the false teachers, to those false believers who left, but rather he wrote this letter to the genuine believers who still trusted in the biblical Jesus and the biblical gospel to assure them that they had, in fact, eternal life.

John gives three tests of eternal life, and he repeats those three tests in three cycles or three movements throughout this letter. After the opening prologue in the first four verses, the first cycle of these three tests begins in chapter 1, verse 5, and runs through chapter 2, verse 27.

We're studying the second cycle or the second movement of those same three tests. It begins in chapter 2, verse 28, and runs through chapter 4, verse 6. It follows the same order of the three tests as the first cycle; it begins with the test of "Obedience to Jesus Christ and His Word." We've just finished that section; it begins in chapter 2, verse 28, runs through chapter 3, verse 10.

Today we begin the second section, "Love for God and His people." It begins in chapter 3, verse 11, and runs through the end of the chapter. And then the first six verses of chapter 4 will bring up the test again of "Faith in the Biblical Jesus, and in the Biblical gospel." So today then, we begin to study the second test in the second cycle or movement; it is the test of "Love for

God and Love for His people.” As I said, it begins in verse 11 of chapter 3, runs through verse 24.

And this time, John focuses almost exclusively, not on loving God, although he'll mentioned it in passing, but rather on loving God's people. Let's read it together, 1 John 3, beginning in verse 11. Let me read the entire passage that we'll be working our way through over the coming weeks, so we get the flow of the context. You follow along, 1 John 3, verse 11.

For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brothers were righteous. Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 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? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and (we) do the things that are pleasing in His sight. This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. The

one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given to us.

Let me summarize those verses with this simple statement; here's really the theme of those verses, "True Christians are no longer filled with hate, but are marked by genuine love for one another." But how exactly is it that loving believers confirm that we have eternal life? How does that work? Well, as John presents the test of love for a second time in this letter, he makes several crucial conclusions about how love and the absence of love confirm, in fact, the true condition of the professing Christian's heart. He helps us understand whether we're really Christians, true Christians, or whether what we're calling and what he identifies as false Christians, those who say they belong to Christ but have never been born again—their hearts have never been changed. How do we know? And the answer is by the presence or the absence of love.

So, let's look at the conclusions that he gives us here. The first conclusion he makes in this passage is that loving believers are "Required by the Lord's Command," it is required by the Lord's command. This is the message of verse 11. In fact, you'll notice that the first line in verse 11 introduces proof of what John says at the end of verse 10. Go back to verse 10. "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God," that's test number one. And here's test number two, "...nor the one who does not love his brother." The person who does not love his brother is not of God.

Now look at verse 11, "For (Because here's how we know that, because) this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." Now, "This is the message" points forward; it points to the statement at the end of the verse, so we could shorten it

like this. “This is the message that we should love one another.” Notice John says this message is one which all believers “have heard from the beginning.” He means, you have heard this message, if you're a Christian, you've heard the message to love one another from the time you really first heard the gospel. The gospel and this command to love come together because it is fundamental to the Christian faith. It's what Jesus and His Apostles taught. Look down at verse 23, “This is commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, (There's the gospel.) and (What else did we learn when we learned the gospel?), and (that we should) love one another, just as He commanded us.”

Look at chapter 4, verse 7, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” In fact, notice verse 19, “We love, because He first loved us.” If we have experienced the love of God, if we have come to understand His love for us in Christ, then we reflect and mirror that love by loving others. It goes together; the Gospel comes with an implied command to love others.

Turn over to John's second letter, 2 John, verse 4. He says:

I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment *to do* from the Father. Now I ask you, lady, not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have from the beginning, that we love one another.

So, the Gospel comes with the command to love. We're not saved by loving, we love because we're saved. It's an evidence of that reality—having experienced God's love, in salvation, we love. If a professing Christian fails to love, it shows he's not a Christian at all. Why? Because his life contradicts the very gospel message that he claims he has come to believe. And

although we're commanded to love everyone, including our enemies, what John wants us to understand here is that the greatest test of eternal life is loving, notice what he says, "one another," one another. He means our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Verse 10, he says, he has to "love his brother." Why is this? Why is it so important?

Well, it's because Christ Himself emphasized loving our fellow disciples in His own teaching. He made this very clear. Go back to John's Gospel; John's Gospel, chapter 13. This is in the Upper Room Discourse; and in the middle of that, Jesus says in verse 34, John 13:34:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you. (Jesus raises the standard of what this love is He's expecting. It's) ...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 (Not in the general sense, but specifically.) if you have love for one another."

This is how they'll know; it'll become obvious. Go over to chapter 15, verse 12, "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you." Verse 17, "This I command you, that you love one another." So, this command to love our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ is not an option; it is required, and it is required by the clear commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's interesting when you work your way through the rest of the New Testament, you discover that true faith in Jesus and love for fellow believers go hand in hand. Take for example, Ephesians, chapter 1, verse 15, Paul writes, "...I...(have) heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints." Colossians 1:4, "...we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints." I love 1 Timothy 1:5, you

know, I teach you the Word of God; the other elders teach you the Word of God, other gifted men and women teach you the Scripture, why? What is the goal of my teaching? What's the goal of the other teachers you listen to? It couldn't be clearer, 1 Timothy 1:5, Paul writes, "...the goal of our instruction is love, (The goal of our instruction is love.) from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." The reason God's given gifted men and women to teach in His church is so that all of us would love, love God, love others. That's the goal of the instruction. It's not so you can accumulate more information. It's not so you can win on a Bible Quiz or a debate, you know, at work. The goal of our instruction is love. Once we come to know God's love in Christ, we love God, and we love one another. Why? Because He first loved us.

I love the way Marshall puts it in his commentary. He writes this, listen carefully, "A person cannot come into a real relationship with a loving God without being transformed into a loving person." Let me read that again. "A person cannot come into a real relationship with a loving God without being transformed into a loving person. And we especially love our Christian brothers and sisters."

And this makes perfect sense when you think about it. I mean, if Christ loved us when we were His enemies, if He died for us when we were set against Him, it is impossible for us not to love our brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we now share the same Father, the same Lord, the same Savior. So, it's required, this love for believers is required by our Lord's command.

But this raises an interesting question, and that is, why does a love for fellow Christians as opposed to say, a love for people in general or for our enemies, why does a love for fellow-Christians factor so strongly in the test of eternal life? Well, John goes on to explain.

It's because secondly, a love for believers is “Absent from an Unbeliever’s Heart.” This is why it's such a good test. As we'll see in a moment, unbelievers can love in certain ways, but unbelievers don't love believers. That's why it becomes such an acid test of the reality of our faith. I mean, the world talks a lot about love. John Lennon and Paul McCartney wrote:

There's nothing you can do that can't be done.

Nothing you can sing that can't be sung...

All You Need Is Love. All You Need Is Love.

In the 1960s, Hal David and Burt Bacharach recorded a song that says:

What the world needs now is love, sweet love.

It's the only thing there's just too little of.

What the world needs now is love sweet love?

No, not just for some, but for everyone.

That's a great lyric line. And the world loves to talk and sing about love. But all the world does is talk about love. Look down in verse 18, that's why John says. “Little children, let us (as opposed to the world) not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and in truth.” Don't just talk about love; that's what the world does. It loves with its words, with its tongue. It's like the T-shirt that says, “I love mankind. It's people I can't stand.” That's funny, but sadly very insightful and true. You know, it's easy to post online about how much you love this group and that group and this other group, and we all need to love, and then be hateful to the people in your life. That's the reality. That's the way it is.

As you know, I love football. I grew up playing high school football. Not very well, mind you, but still enjoyed it. And bear with me here, but in some ways, it seems to me that an NFL stadium is like a microcosm of the world. Over the last couple of seasons with the well-intentioned goal of combating racism, NFL teams have put slogans on the back of the players' helmets. If you watch football, you've seen them. Two of the most prominent ones are "Choose love" and "Stop hate." It's great, true, wonderful. But those slogans have a way of showing up at the most inopportune times. I mentioned to you a year ago I was watching a game, and I watched two players go at each other after the play was over. I mean, they were trying to kill each other on the field. And as the camera zoomed in, on the back of one player's helmet was "Choose love," and on the back of the other player's helmet was "Stop hate." And I thought, what a powerful lesson of how the world thinks about love. It's in general terms, it's not that person facing off from me across from the ball. But those slogans also show up in the background when 100,000 people are yelling, shouting obscenities, booing, throwing things, sometimes at the opposing team, sometimes at the ref; and if it's in Philadelphia, at their own team. I'm sorry if you're from Philadelphia, but I'm just saying.

The truth is unbelievers can love others at a certain level. Jesus said this in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, chapter 5, verse 46. Jesus said this, "...if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" Jesus was saying, "Listen, unbelievers can love others, but why do unbelievers love others? Well, let's admit that sometimes when it's really self-sacrificing kind of love, it's part of the residual, but marred image of God that remains in fallen man. But more often than not, the love unbelievers have for others is in reality, completely self-serving. If you doubt that just watch like an episode, and



one is all you need, of “Say Yes to the Dress.” You know, it's all about what I get out of this relationship and this marriage; it has nothing to do with self-sacrificially loving someone else.

John Broadus writes, “In loving his friends, a man may, in a certain sense, be loving only himself, a kind of expanded selfishness.” Unbelievers only love those who love them, when there's reciprocal love, when there's something in it for them. By the way, this is why an unbelieving spouse or an unbelieving family member may love a Christian. It's not because they are a Christian; it's because of that reciprocal, self-serving kind of love; and when it's selfless, it's a reflection of the residual image of God.

Jesus goes on Matthew 5:47, “If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?” Jesus’ point there is that if you only engage in warm personal relationships with those who are like you, then you're no better than idolatrous pagans, they do that, they hang out with people like them. So, unbelievers then express love, don't miss this, they express love to those who are like them. That is exactly why unbelievers do not love believers. An unbeliever may love a Christian for various reasons, but never because he is a believer.

And John sets out to prove that, and he does so in verse 12, with “A Specific Example,” the example of Cain. John includes this reference to the story of Cain as evidence that failing to love somebody who is righteous, someone who knows and loves God, failing to love someone like that is a clear mark of being a child of the devil. Instead of loving his righteous brother, Cain was driven by hatred of him, which eventually led him to murder. By the way, this is the only reference in John's Letters to an Old Testament event, and he assumes that we're familiar

with the biblical record in Genesis, chapter 4, verses 1 to 8. He uses Cain here to make two points about unbelievers. One of the points is implicit, and the other point is explicit.

Let's start with the implicit point. The implicit point here in verse 12, is this. "Unbelievers are Filled with Hate." He begins verse 12 by saying, "not as Cain." Although he doesn't fully express his thoughts here, John's meaning is obvious. He's saying, "Let us who claim to be Christians not be like Cain." Cain is a perfect example of an unbeliever who did not love his brother. Why? Verse 12 goes on to say, because he "was of the evil one." Cain was of the devil; he was an unbeliever. It's referring to his spiritual relationship with the devil. He was in the words of verse 10, a child "of the devil."

Now how could John be so sure? Well, we can be certain that Cain was a member of the devil's family because he manifested his father's traits. Do you remember what Jesus said in John 8:44, "You are of your father, the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a (What?) murderer from the beginning." Cain's action was just like his father. It was murder, verse 12. His attitude was hatred. Go down to verse 15. He hated and what was behind that hatred? Just like Satan, it was self-centered self-interest.

That's what was behind Satan's fall. We've looked there, I won't take you back to Ezekiel 28, but when you study Ezekiel 28, you find that Satan, created to be one of the covering cherubs, probably the prime minister of heaven, in pride, became completely self-absorbed, self-centered. He wasn't content to serve and worship His Creator. He wanted to live for himself, for his own advancement, for his own glory; he became completely self-centered.

Now, listen carefully what happens when self-interest and self-centeredness are frustrated? What happens? Anger, hatred, and attacks on the one who's frustrating your desires? That's

exactly what Satan did. Satan became filled with anger and hatred toward God. If you doubt that, just read the Genesis 3 account, and the exchange between Satan and Eve. Every word he says drips with anger and bitterness toward God his Creator.

So, understand this; it's not just sin in some general sense that comes from the devil and comes into the world, but self-will, selfishness, self-centeredness, living for one's own self-interest; and when that's frustrated, hatred, and verbally assaulting others, remember Satan's called the "slanderer," and eventually murderer. All of those flow out from Satan himself. With Cain, it's like father, like son. Cain's self-centeredness, his anger, his hatred, and eventually his murder of Abel all originated in the devil, his father. He's of the evil one.

Now, verse 12 goes on to say, "...and (Cain) slew his brother." The Greek word that John chooses here is shocking. The word translated 'slew' occurs only here in the New Testament and in Revelation, primarily about the Lamb who was slain or slaughtered. That's the meaning of this word. In the Septuagint, this word is used of the sacrifice of animals, and there it is translated as 'to slaughter to butcher and to cut the throat.' In the New Testament, the noun form of this word refers 'to slaughter' when it occurs. Altogether, we're talking about the violent taking of another life. This word tells us that Cain's murder of Abel was merciless, it was cold-blooded, it was vicious, it was brutally violent; it was a grisly murder, he butchered his brother.

Where in the world did that come from? Look down at verse 15. It came from hate in his heart. And that's the point John wants us to get. Unbelievers are marked by hate for others. It's what Paul says in Romans 1, verse 29. He gives us a list, a litany of sins that characterize unbelievers, and one of them is stated like this, they are "full of...malice." The word 'malice'

means, “I am so angry, I am so hateful toward another person, that I have this consuming desire in my heart to hurt them. I just want to hurt them. I want to do them harm.” That's malice.

Titus 3:3 says, in context, talking about why we should show consideration to all people in spite of who they are or what they do. And he says this in verse 3, Titus 3:3, “...we also once were foolish ourselves, (He says, Listen, remember, we used to be just like them,” and listen to how he describes unbelievers.) disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy,” spending our life in wanting to hurt other people.

I remember the first time I really became aware of that in my own heart, before I came to Christ. I mentioned I played high school football. And I remember, I was never one who was going to take it outside of, you know, some acceptable venue. But I remember wanting to hurt somebody, not because they had done me wrong, really. But because that was the evil in my heart. I just wanted to hurt the other player. That's malice. And where does that come from? Envy! In the “...spending our life in malice and envy”.

And then he says “hateful.” That means we do things that arouse hate for us in others. In other words, we do hateful things, things that cause others to hate us. And we are “hating one another.” All unbelievers spend their lives “hateful and hating one another.” You said, “Boy, Tom, that sounds really cynical.” No, that's just true. Read Romans 3:9 and following where Paul describes fallen humanity, and he talks about the fact they destroy every relationship. The worst stuff comes out of their mouth(s). They're like vipers, killing everybody in their path. That's unbelievers. You say, “Is that the world we live in?” Listen, read what unbelievers write in their comments online; just go to the comments and read them. They're shocking! Listen over the lunch table to conversations between unbelievers about other co-workers or family and

listen to how they're filled with contempt and criticism. Their words drip envy and spite and malice and contempt. Look at their eyes when their selfish desires are crossed.

Listen, the people around us, most of them will never commit murder, but their hearts are filled with anger and hatred and malice, and their mouths spew out words that are filled with criticism and contempt and cursing and viciousness. Listen, the act of murder is only the logical conclusion of all of that. The unbeliever is filled with hate generally toward anyone who crosses his own self-interest. That's the implicit point.

But that brings us to the explicit point that John makes here and that's this, "Unbelievers Are Especially Filled with Hate for Believers." Verse 12 says, "...And for what reason did (Cain) slay (Abel)?" John asked this rhetorical question to raise the key issue, the issue of motive. What in the world prompted Cain to brutally butcher his brother? Verse 12 says, "...Because his deeds were evil, and his brothers were righteous." John points out the contrast here between the deeds of the two brothers, because of their deeds put into the spotlight, their distinctive hearts, their distinctive characters.

So, let's look at it. First of all, he says, "Cain slaughtered Abel, because his own deeds were evil." (Paraphrase.) You say, "In what sense were Cain's deeds evil?" Well remember, he's an unregenerate, fallen man. So, his heart was capable of expressing any conceivable evil, just like yours is apart from grace, just like mine is apart from grace. So, we don't know what sins may have been in Cain's life, but we do know one sin specifically. And that was anger and rebellion against God. Genesis 4 assumes that these two brothers knew what God expected of them when it came to sacrifice. God had somehow revealed His will to them; I believe probably through what God Himself did when He killed an innocent animal in response to Adam and Eve's sin

and clothed them with the skins. There was a powerful picture there. And there's a reason, by the way, that while eventually in the Law, grain offerings could be offered all through until the Law, what kind of offering was offered? There was an animal sacrifice.

And certainly, Adam and Eve would have told both of their sons about what happened to them in the garden. These boys knew about the fall, they knew about the expulsion from Paradise, they knew about the flaming sword that guarded the way to the tree of life. And they understood that God could only be approached by sinners through sacrifice.

Abel brought the offering of animal sacrifice that God had demonstrated in Eden and now required. And by the way, I think that becomes clear in Hebrews, chapter 11. In Hebrews 11:4, it says this, "By faith (And faith always responds to the Word of God. By faith,) Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous." You see, Abel understood that he was a sinner in need of reconciliation with God, and the only way a sinful person can ever approach a holy God is through sacrifice. The ultimate sacrifice that the Lord Jesus would provide pictured in those animal sacrifices.

Cain, on the other hand, disobeyed God, and he insisted in his rebellion on bringing the sacrifice he wanted to bring. There's such a powerful lesson there. Friend, can I just say to you, that if you're seeking to be right with God this morning, if the way you think you're going to make it to heaven, is through your own goodness, through your own efforts, through your own work, through your own merit, rather than through the sacrifice that God Himself has appointed, the death of His Son on the cross, then today, you are offering the sacrifice of Cain. Cain's sacrifice was actually a defiant act of rebellion. And if you doubt that, just read the interchange between him and God in the rest of Genesis 4. This is not a humble, submissive heart. This is a heart

hardened against God, rebellious against God. Cain's evil disobedient actions revealed his evil heart. So, Cain slaughtered Abel because his own deeds were evil. But notice verse 12 also says he hated Abel and killed him because his brother's deeds were righteous, which showed Abel's righteous heart. Abel's righteousness created a sharp contrast with Cain's sin and rebellion. At its root, Cain's real problem, his heart problem, was envy or jealousy. It was his own self-interest; that's where it began. And in Romans, chapter 1, verses 30 and 31, envy is linked there to murder, and the truth is envy or jealousy, when my self-interest is crossed or thwarted, that often leads to murder. Joseph's brothers are a great example.

In Genesis 37:4, "His brothers saw that their father loved him more than he loved them; and so, they hated him and could not speak to him on friendly terms." So, envy or jealousy led to hatred and hatred led to angry, contentious speech. And that, in turn, led to murder.

Genesis 37:18, "When they saw him from a distance and before he came close to them, they plotted against him to put him to death." Same thing is true with the Scribes and the Pharisees toward Jesus. You remember in Matthew 27, verse 18, when they brought Jesus to Pilate, Pilate knew what was motivating them. Matthew writes, "(Pilate) knew that because of envy, (the Jewish leaders) had handed Him over." Jesus had crossed their self-interest, and now they're angry and they hate Him, and they have murderous thoughts, and those murderous thoughts translate into action. James 4:1 and 2 says, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust (You desire, you have this self-interest, and you're not able to see it fulfilled, and) so (What?) you commit murder." You say, "Well, I've never murdered anybody." Okay! James says, "You are envious and cannot obtain;" so your self-interest is crossed, and maybe you don't murder. So, what

happens instead? “You fight and quarrel.” John Stott writes, “Jealousy, hatred, murder is a natural, terrible sequence.” Jealousy, hatred, murder.

So, here's how sin unfolds in the heart. It begins when I have a total self-centeredness; I want what I want, and nobody should get in the way of it. And when they do get in the way of it, it evokes my envy, my jealousy, and that turns to anger and wrath. By the way, there are two Biblical words in the New Testament for anger in case you're giving yourself a “Get Out of Jail Free” card. There are two kinds of anger. One of them is outbursts of anger. You just blow up, and there are people who spend their lives like volcanoes, blowing up over everybody around them.

But the other kind of anger is clamming up. This is the person who says, “I'm angry and I'm not going to speak to you to show you just how angry I am. I'm going to pretend you don't exist.” That's anger too. Both of them are sinful. So, envy or jealousy produce anger or wrath, those kinds of responses; and then anger and wrath lead to hatred and malice. So, if I let that brew and build in my heart, then that becomes hatred. “I hate that person; I want to hurt them.” And then hatred and malice produce, sometimes they stop at murderous thoughts, maybe all that happens is in your mind, you come up with ways to hurt that person. Or, maybe you're one of those people who would never carry out something with actions, but instead, you explode with violent, brutal words. You murder them with your speech. Or maybe you act out on it, not with murder, but in some other way you choose to hurt them. This is what sin looks like.

How does this pattern manifest itself with unbelievers' hatred of believers? Don't misunderstand; it's not, when I say it begins with envy and jealousy, it's not that unbelievers envy believers in the sense they want to be righteous like we are. Instead, it works like this.



The righteous character and actions of Abel evoked an intense jealousy in Cain's heart, not to be like Abel, but to be accepted by God the way he is. "I want that." Abel's righteousness highlighted his (Cain's) own sinfulness. It put him in a bad light, and therefore created, in Cain, a feeling of condemnation. Unbelievers feel condemned when believers just try to please God. I mean, think about Genesis 19; I've always thought about that. Unthinkably, Lot offers his two virgin daughters to that crowd in Sodom, and what's their response? "You're judging us." It's because their own sin is highlighted. That's how Cain felt because of Abel's righteous actions. And that feeling that Abel's actions were condemning him fed his anger, and his anger produced a vicious hatred which ultimately culminated in murder. So, Cain, then, serves as a specific example of an unbeliever hating a believer because his righteousness feels like a personal condemnation.

But the specific example of Cain leads John to "The General Principle." This doesn't stop with Cain; It applies to "The Whole World," verse 13. The antagonism of an evil person toward the righteous illustrated in the story of Cain and Abel, that's never stopped. Cain was just a prototype of all unbelievers.

Sadly, the true believer's righteous character and conduct still provoke the world's hatred. Verse 13, "Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you." The 'world,' meaning the world of lost people, the world of unregenerate people. The Greek word translated 'surprised' describes 'a reaction of wonder, of astonishment, of amazement.' And in the original language, the verb tense he uses and the negative he uses in Greek imply that the action of the verb has already been happening. So, John is really saying this, "Stop it, stop being surprised."

By the way, this is the only place in his letters where he refers to his readers as ‘brothers;’ hard to know why. Perhaps he switched from his familiar “little children” to “brothers” to remind them that all Christians are spiritual brothers with Abel, standing against the Cains. And it is to them and to us, John says this in verse 13, “(Stop being) surprised (brothers), if the world hates you.” Stop being surprised; stop thinking this is unnatural; this is perfectly to be expected. Now you'll notice the ‘if’ there again in the original. It's clear that John is not describing something that could potentially be true; rather, this hatred is a present reality. In fact, the leading Greek Lexicon translates the sentence like this, “Do not wonder that the world hates you, it's just true, it's the reality, don't be surprised by it.”

And this hatred is characteristic of the same world that hated and rejected Christ, and now they're showing it toward His followers. Jesus told us it would be like this. Go back to John's gospel; John, chapter 3, and look at verse 19.

This is the judgment, that Light (That's Jesus.) has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, (Why? Why wouldn't people respond to Jesus Christ?) for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light (Here it is.) for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

He's going to feel condemned; he's not going to want that, he wants his sin. He wants his sin and God if he can get God on His terms, but if not, he just wants his sin. He certainly doesn't want what Jesus is offering.

Go to chapter 15; John 15, verse 18, Jesus says, “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before *it hated you.*” And here's the key, verse 19:

If you were of the world, (If you still belonged, if you were like them, you're no longer like them. But if you were like them,) 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.” Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. Verse 22, “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, (That doesn't mean they wouldn't be guilty of sin. They wouldn't be guilty of the sin of seeing the truth incarnate and rejecting God's Son.) but now they have no excuse for their sin. (I've made it very clear. Verse 23,) He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well.

I mean, think about it. Jesus never did anything to invite people's hatred. Peter, in Acts 10:38 says, Jesus “...went about doing good.” Oh, and He never sinned against anybody individually, not once. And He preached a message that while it certainly included the message of judgment, it was a message that offered forgiveness, reconciliation with God. But they hated Him, and they crucified Him. Why? Because He condemned them by being who He was, and by speaking the truth. The world doesn't hate us, because we do something that inspires their hate, or at least let me say it shouldn't. If you're a hateful person, or if you're reckless, in how you say what you say, if you're not loving and caring, then shame on you, but by and large, the world doesn't hate us because we do something that inspires their hate. The world hates us because it hates righteousness and all of those who know God, because we're not like them anymore. They only love those who are like them. And the difference makes them feel like we're condemning them even when we never say a word. John Stott writes, “It is not just hatred, but hatred of

Christian people which reveals the world in its true colors. For in their hatred and persecution of the church, their antagonism to Christ is revealed.” That's why the world will always hate genuine believers. A genuine love for believers is not only required by our Lord's command; it is absent from the unbeliever's heart.

Now, what do we do with the passage we've looked at this morning? Let me give you two great implications. The first implication is a test. It's a test of whether or not you have eternal life. Let me just encourage you, can I ask you to do this in your own soul right now, genuinely? Stop and ask yourself this question, “Am I like Cain? Am I like Cain?” Are you marked by self-interest? Is that really what drives you, self-centered, self-interest? And when your self-interest is crossed, do you constantly, consistently get angry either in outbursts of anger or in clamming up in anger? And does your anger lead you consistently to hate others and want to hurt them, either in your thoughts, or by using vicious, cursing, name-calling, ridiculing, insulting words, or by acting out in ways intended to hurt the people you hate?

Now, let me get very personal about it. Just think about how you treat the people who live in your house or your apartment: your spouse, your children, your parents, your roommate. Do you consistently treat them like I've just described, where it's all about you, it's all about your self-interest. And when that's crossed, you blow up or you clam up, you hurl out insults, you tear them down with your words, you act toward them like you hate them, even if you don't pick up a weapon. Then understand this, you are not a Christian. You are of Cain; you are of the devil. You're one of his children.

Your only hope is the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you failed the test this morning, then let me encourage you to throw yourself on God's mercy; that's your only hope. It's to recognize you can do nothing, you have nothing; there's nothing you can do except plead with God to show you mercy and to change your soul. And if you'll do that in sincerity, turning from your sin, putting your faith in Jesus Christ, in His life, death, and resurrection, then God will do that even this morning.

There's a second application here. Not only is it a test, but it's an assurance. If you look at yourself, and you say, "Tom, you know, I'm not perfect, I do sin against the people around me. I hate it when I do, but I do. But when I look at my life, my heart truly is marked by a genuine love for others." If instead of nursing offenses against you, you are quick to forgive like you've been forgiven in Christ. If you speak in honesty and with words intended not to tear down and shred others but to build them up and to minister grace to them, you're quick to seek forgiveness when you sin against others and to seek it from the Lord as well. If, in your actions, you consistently seek the good of others, then be encouraged. You pass this test of eternal life! Because that's what the heart that's been changed looks like; we love the brothers.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for the clarity of your Word. Thank you for how it speaks so practically to the issues of our lives. Lord, I pray that you'd help all of us to take the test that's been offered here of love for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Lord, I pray for those who have to admit that they look far more like Cain than they look like Jesus Christ. Lord, I pray that you'd help them to take a long serious look in the mirror of your Word and that you would show them what they really are. Lord, if in fact, they're not in Christ,

Lord, make that clear and help them to run to you for the mercy and grace that's found in Jesus Christ.

Father, for the rest of us, thank you that when we look at ourselves, we don't see anything perfect. We hate our sin, we hate that at times we are unloving and ungracious; but Father, at the same time, that's not what marks our lives. What marks and distinguishes our hearts and our lives is a genuine, heartfelt concern for others. We want to love them as we've been loved, we want to care for them, we want to do them good. Lord, thank you for the assurance that this test brings. And I pray that you would minister it to every heart that truly knows you. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.