



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Hate Versus Love (1 John 3:11-18)

Brent Alderman / PO Box 2060, Annapolis, MD 21404 / brent.alderman@capitolcom.org / 240.818.3053

There are times as I spend moments with General Assembly members that I hear about details regarding relationships. It never fails to encourage me to hear stories of legislators and staff who clearly care for colleagues and others in the capitol community. As we all move through life, we constantly become aware of needs that others have or struggles they may be facing that offer opportunities to reflect love and care. Whether it is illness or the loss of a loved one or any host of things, we are never at a loss to find reasons to express love to one another.

Even the everyday burdens of life weigh heavily on us all. We all need to have love communicated to us. I pray that as you have opportunity to show that care for one another, you make the most of it and are appreciative when it is shown back to you.

But I also hear the opposite. The actual word “hate” is carelessly tossed around the halls in Annapolis as members share their true feelings for others in the capitol community. It rears its head in personal conversations, gossip behind backs or even in floor or committee settings. Petty bickering and one-upmanship lead to vitriol that damages relationships and makes the love we just mentioned impossible to shine through.

We have said it before, but the book of First John was written to the church, to the community of believers in Christ. Its first application is to those relationships. But the application of what John teaches about relationships can be applied to many settings beyond the Church – family, work, neighborhoods and more. Let’s take each verse in order in this text from 1 John 3 to understand the importance of discerning and practicing the difference between love and hate.

LOVE EXHORTED (V. 11)

1 John 3:11 - For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

The Christian teaching of love is central. It is also a key theme in this letter John wrote. The example of Christ as well as his teaching points us to the truth that putting others’ needs before our own is commanded and is crucial to healthy human relationships. Indifference, selfishness or outright hatred are not considered options for us when we think of those in our lives.

We have seen this over and over again in John’s letter. In fact, John could not have painted the picture any clearer than he does in the next chapter.

1 John 4:8 - Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

The very nature and essence of God is love. John has exhorted his readers all through this epistle to abide in, or remain in, God and his teaching. If that is happening, then love will be a natural fountain in the life of a believer who is being changed into the likeness of Christ himself.

HATE EXEMPLIFIED (V. 12)

1 John 3:12 - We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

The story of Cain and Abel is well-known, but also illustrates the attitude John is warning us against. After sin entered the human race in Genesis 3, it didn’t take long for the bitter root of hatred to develop. Scholars differ on exactly what was wrong with Cain’s approach when he brought a sacrifice to God, but the record is clear that God did not accept it.

Genesis 4:3-5 - In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

Was it because Abel brought a sacrifice of blood and Cain didn’t, or was it because Abel brought the best to give to God and Cain didn’t? These and other explanations have been given for why God “had no regard” for Cain’s offering, but one thing is clear: Cain’s deeds were evil and it led to the murder of his brother.

We’re told by John that Cain was of the evil one – controlled and manipulated by Satan himself. The spirit that results in hatred leading to murder has its origin and source in the being who rebelled against God and his ways before anyone else.

HATE EXPECTED (VV. 13, 14)

1 John 3:13, 14 - Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

John leads very naturally from identifying the evil of Cain’s heart (stamped with the approval of the devil) to the hatred that the world (also under the devil’s control) has toward those who follow Christ. John surely remembered Jesus’ words well, since he had heard them from his own lips.

Maryland

Hate Versus Love (1 John 3:11-18)

John 15:18 - If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

To listen to some followers of Jesus today, they either haven't paid close attention to this verse or have forgotten it. Especially in America, where we have certain religious liberties, Christians can believe that we should not receive any persecution or hatred at all. This verse not only tells us not to be surprised by hatred from the world around us, but it is to be expected.

The reason for this hatred is clear. Death cannot get along with life. Darkness cannot stand light. They are mutually exclusive, so the spirit of this world, under the power of the evil one, cannot be in harmony with the Spirit of God who is indwelling and changing those who love and obey him. So even as Americans, let's expect to be hated and to experience opposition as we live out our faith in this world.

The attitude of those in the early church in the face of hatred is such an encouragement. Persecution was not just expected; it was a reason to be thankful! Even after beatings and imprisonment, here is how they responded:

Acts 5:40, 41 – and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

HATE EXPLAINED (V. 15)

1 John 3:15 - Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

Several times throughout Scripture, God makes it clear that having a certain attitude is equal to the act that expresses it. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that simply looking at someone with impure thoughts was the same as committing adultery. Here, John equates hatred in the heart with murder.

Just a few verses earlier we saw the negative example of the first murderer, Cain. The feeling of hatred cannot exist in the heart of one who has been changed by the gospel of Christ.

The importance of our thought life cannot be over exaggerated. The sin in our mind is not only tantamount to committing outward sin, but it is the origination of those sins.

Matthew 15:19 - For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

Proverbs 4:23 - Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

In the New Testament, Paul provides specific counsel to apply to our thoughts.

Philippians 4:8 - Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

LOVE EXAMINED (V. 16-18)

1 John 3:16-18 - By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

Several weeks ago I performed the wedding of some friends and these were the verses I spoke about. As a couple begins the beautiful journey of marriage together, the truth John gives here has to be understood and practiced every day or the relationship will struggle at best, or worse, fail.

This examination of love presents Jesus as the ultimate example of expressing love the right way. Love is completely devoid of self-interest. The good of the one who is loved is primary in the mind of the one loving. That is what is so remarkable about God's love. Even when we had no desire for him, he sent his Son, Jesus, to bear the penalty for our sin (death) so that we might have the opportunity (by faith) to live.

Romans 5:8 - but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

So the contrast is undeniable and the condition of the heart reflects where each of us is spiritually. Hate may be the natural inclination of our sinful hearts, but the power of Christ can change us to seek the best for others as we learn what love is from the ultimate example of love.