

A Family like Cain, a Family like Christ

1 John 3:10-18 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. ¹¹ ¶ For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, ¹² not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. ¹³ Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. ¹⁵ Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. ¹⁶ By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Every now and then, some study will be done on the family. Some question will be on the researchers' minds: how do single-parent homes affect the emotional health of the children. How do distant fathers affect the masculinity of their sons. How do the amount of hours spent at home, or at day-care affect the IQ - or any number of possible research questions. Sometimes the findings are interesting, sometimes not. Most often, they tell us things we really knew anyway. One of the things which social studies keeps revealing, as if we didn't know, is that loving parents most often raise children who are also loving. Affectionate parents produce affectionate children.

That principle holds true on a deeper level too. If your spiritual parent is loving, you will be too. If your spiritual parent is malicious, you will be too.

Previously, John told us of two families that exist in the world: God's family, and Satan's family. Jesus told us that as well: people are born into Satan's family simply by being born, but we are born into God's family by grace. If we receive Christ, we can become part of His family. John began to tell us what the family traits of both of these families are. He highlighted one in verses 4-10: people in God's family practise righteousness and sin less because God's seed lives within them. They are like God positionally, and coming to resemble Him in practice. People in the Devil's family practise sin and lawlessness as a lifestyle, because they are alienated from God.

John now moves on to another family trait of both families. God's family loves; Satan's family hates. As a habit, people in God's family love one another. As a habit, people in Satan's family hate others. To help us identify these two families, John gives us two icons, two symbols of these families. The symbol of Satan's family is Cain, and the symbol of God's family is Christ. You can either belong to a family like Cain's, or to a family like Christ's.

John is once again going to help us to identify which family we are in. He wants us to look at the traits in each family and find out which we are in. Because whatever position we have, will work its way out into our practice. If we are in God's family, then we have passed from death to life, have eternal life and are in Him – so we will love one another. If we are in the devil's family, we do not have eternal life dwelling within, we abide in death, and we will hate others. This is bigger than even things like unity and love, it is about whether or not we have eternal life.

Let's examine this passage to see the two families in the world: Cain's Family of Selfish Malice, and Christ's Family of Sacrificial Mercy.

I. Cain's Family of Selfish Malice

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. ¹¹ ¶ For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, ¹² not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. ¹³ Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.

¹⁵ Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this: whoever does not make a lifestyle, a practice of righteousness is not of God, and whoever does not love his brother is not of God. The first negative looks back at the previous verses, the next negative looks forward.

The message that Christians have heard and known from the beginning of their salvation **is that we should love one another**. Unlike Cain, not like Cain. Cain is the opposite of what true believers are to be like. **Cain was of the Evil One**. What does that mean? It means he was a child of the devil. He belonged to Satan's family. He is the physical, living illustration of the invisible Satan. Cain is what Satan's malicious family looks like.

What did Cain do? **He murdered his brother.**

Genesis 4:1-11 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD." ² Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. ³ And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. ⁴ Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, ⁵ but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. ⁶ So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? ⁷ "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." ⁸ ¶ Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. ¹¹ "So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

Cain and Abel both went to worship. Note that. Cain was a worshipper, he wasn't an atheist. But he was of the devil. They both went to present an offering, and God did not respect Cain and his offering. Why not? We're not told exactly, but the book of Hebrews says that Abel offered in faith. Faith is a response to God's revealed will, so God must have revealed to Cain and Abel that a sacrifice was the way to approach Him. He would have taught them both how to kill that sacrifice, since even Abel, who kept sheep, would not have been killing them, because at this time, man still only ate vegetable food. But it is as if Cain decides, "No, I will come on my own terms, the work of my own hands, I will change the terms and conditions, and God had better be pleased with me." God isn't. God is pleased with Abel. So what rises up in Cain's heart? Envy, jealousy, hatred. And when he has the opportunity, he rises up against his own brother Abel and murders him.

John says, **Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother**. The word here for 'murder' is not the normal word for murder. It is a word which means 'to slaughter', to 'cut the throat'. When Cain killed Abel, he cut his throat as if he were an animal. John MacArthur suggests that it was as if Cain was saying to God, here, you want a sacrifice, here's a sacrifice. You want something slaughtered, here's something slaughtered.

Cain's jealousy turned into malice, and his malice manifested itself in murder. Verse 15

⁵ *Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*

Stop and think about malice and murder. We know that Jesus told us that murder begins in the heart:

Matthew 5:21 ¶ " You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' ²² "But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

But how? Well, think about Cain's hatred. What did he hate? He hated the fact that his brother had been accepted and he hadn't. He saw his brother as showing him up. He saw his brother as a kind of living testimony to his own unbelief. As long as Abel was there, Cain was shown up. That filled his selfish heart with a rage that simply wanted to remove Abel. That's the heart of malice: If only you didn't exist. If only you were not around. If only you were gone, then I would have my way. Then I would not be embarrassed by you. Then I would not be shown up.

Hatred wells up in us because of desires. And if you are in the Devil's family then your selfish desires control you. They are your identity. You can do nothing except pursue your own way. And guess what happens when you pursue your own way, and others pursue their own way.

James 4:1-2 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? ² You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

We want things, and other people get in the way. We love ourselves more than any other person, and if any person gets in our way, we want them gone.

The only difference between hatred and murder is that a murderer has followed through on his desire to get rid of the person he hates. He has the opportunity, and the ability to get rid of the person he hates, and thinks he won't get caught, or maybe doesn't care if he is, he is so intent on getting rid of the person. But if what burns in your heart is a strong desire to see people removed, disappear from your life – beware, that is the heart of murder. And according to John, ***no murderer has eternal life dwelling in him.***

The heart of Satan is murderous. He wants to get rid of anyone who gets in his way:

John 8:44 "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.

Now John doesn't mean that no murderer can be saved. No, he means, no saved person continues on as a murderer. You do not continue to live a life of malice and hatred. A person who is so thoroughly controlled by his own desires that he fantasises about the removal of others from his life, and wishes them dead and gone, and does so as a lifestyle, this person is not manifesting what it means to have eternal life. The person who lives like this, according to John, still lives in death. Look at verse 14: *He who does not love his brother abides in death.*

Pity them, dear believer. Do not hate them. Pity the life of being filled with venom, hatred, malice, evil thoughts, resentments, jealousies. They are always criticising, always resenting others getting in their way. There is murder in their eyes. It is a life in the grave. It is a life filled with the stench of

rotting corpses, a life of utter darkness, of total blind self-centredness. Pity them. Pray for their salvation.

John asks the question of Cain, why did he murder his brother? ***Because his works were evil, and his brother's were good.*** That's just what verse 10 told us: children of the devil practice unrighteousness, and do not love their brothers.

A long history of war exists between the family of Satan and God's family. Satan's family hates and persecutes God's family. Why? Because God's family reveals them. God's family shows them up. This is nothing new. Remember King Saul with David? Once David was cheered and loved, Saul hated him. And what did he try to do? He tried to remove him – to murder him. Steven, in his sermon to the leaders in Jerusalem, gave them an extended history of how people like them were always persecuting the righteous:

“Acts 7:52 “Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? “

Or think about Jesus:

John 15:19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. ²¹ "But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. ²² "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.

People in Satan's family hate you once you are in Christ's family. They don't mind if you are good. They don't mind if you are moral. But once you are in Christ, they know you are separate from them. They know there is a real difference between you and them. And your life shows them up. It reveals their motives as unworthy, their ethics as flimsy, their righteousness as filthy rags. So they are not filled with joy at you, but with malice. So John says,

Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.

And to that, we can also ask, what do you expect from Satan's family? Do you expect them to understand you? Do you expect them to reward you? Do you expect them to welcome you? Do you expect them to cheer you and honour you for your faith? Do you expect them to marry you? You left their family. You have taken on a new life.

2 Timothy 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

There will be hatred from Satan's family towards God's. And as the end times approach, the war between the two families will escalate. The differences will become clearer. The area of grey between the two will fade, and it will become clearer: you are either in God's family through Christ, or in Satan's.

There shouldn't be hatred in return. That's exactly what Jesus taught regarding loving your enemies. Pity them. Pray for them. Bless them. Share the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for them. Perhaps He will grant them repentance, and they will come to life, and step out of the tomb of self-centred malice.

But then the focus shifts in this passage to those in God's Family. Those in God's family have a

totally different position, and experience and practice. Let's look at

II. Christ's Family of Sacrificial Mercy

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.

¹⁶ *By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* ¹⁷ *But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?* ¹⁸ *My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.

John says we believers, we are different. We know we are different. We know we do not continue to abide in death. We know that we have instead been transferred, been relocated from one realm to another. We have been taken from that tomb of selfishness and malice and hatred, to the living garden of life in Jesus Christ. We know this has happened to us in the past with ongoing results. . We know we have been regenerated, born again, infused with new life. To be regenerated is to be placed into the family of God, which was spoken of in verse 10.

John 5:24 " Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

How do we know this? What is the criterion? What is this thing in the present which lets us know that we really have been regenerated in the past? It is because we love the brethren. Loving the brethren is once again the sign of eternal life within. In chapter 2, John showed that it is the sign of being in the light, in fellowship with God.

1 John 2:7 ¶ Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. ⁸ *Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.*

Now he shows us it is the sign of being in the life, in relationship with God. And I want you to notice again that John is rooting your practice in your position. He says, because we are in this place, because we have this life in us, because we have already entered into the family, this practice of love results. Using that kind of thinking, he is going to show us that those saved by the gospel of God's love, inevitably produce love - like DNA. You could test my children, and written into their DNA, is some code that came from my DNA. And when God begets children, the love that He displayed in the gospel gets written so to speak in the spiritual DNA of His children.

1 John 3:11 For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another,
1 John 3:16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us.

Do you see that? How do believers know love, in a way that unbelievers don't? Believers know it through their experience of the gospel. Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. When we were sinners, with no other option but to face God's fiery judgement, Jesus Christ, the righteous, voluntarily placed Himself in-between us and God's judgement.

Think about the huge contrast between Christ and Cain. Cain rose up *against* his brother and *took* his life. Christ came down *for* his people and *gave* His life. This is the heart of love. Instead of my way, and trying to get rid of those who don't do it my way, there is sacrificial mercy. I will give up

my rights, my privileges, my possessions, my power, because someone, who doesn't deserve my love, needs it. Sacrifice is at the heart of love – deep, cutting, costing, burning sacrifice. The cost is exactly what gives the love its glory. Not theoretical, not sentimental – measurable, costly, worthy.

The heart of Satan is selfish and therefore malicious. The heart of God is sacrificial and loving. And we are then told that we have an obligation to love one another in the same way.

1 John 3:16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

But I want to suggest to you that what John is saying is that our power to love one another is not just because of the example of Jesus. Anyone can look at the example of Jesus and say they want to live in such a way. But looking at an example is not what produces the love from the inside out. The kind of love that springs up in our hearts for one another is a result of having experienced the gospel. We have experienced Christ's sacrificial love, because we have received Him as Lord and Saviour. We have been pardoned. We have experienced mercy. And so written into our spiritual DNA is the same kind of principle. If He laid down His life for me, I ought to lay down my life for other,. people who have experienced the gospel, love like the gospel.

Luke 7:36-47 Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. ³⁷ And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, ³⁸ and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner." ⁴⁰ And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." So he said, "Teacher, say it." ⁴¹ "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² "And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." ⁴⁴ Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. ⁴⁵ "You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. ⁴⁶ "You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. ⁴⁷ "Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."

The point of Jesus' parable is: Simon, you don't seem to have experienced mercy. You haven't asked God for it. You are still self-righteous. The result is, your love is cold, hard, closed and indifferent. This woman, on the other hand, has experienced great mercy, because her sins were great, so what is in her heart is great love.

The point is, God's family loves, because they have been the recipients of that love. It's internal and a sense of happy obligation rests upon them to repeat that kind of love towards their fellow believers.

And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

We ought to love one another in the same way. Not that we can atone for one another's sins, that's not the point. Not that we would all give up our physical lives for each other. But we are willing to

carry out this life of sacrificial mercy towards one another.

In a way, we get to act out the gospel with each other again and again. We get to display to each other, and to a watching world, what it means to know the gospel from within. I will die to my own needs, my own time, my own reputation, my own comfort, my own priorities, my own private time, and I will lay my life down who I am, what I am, what I have, for my fellow gospel-saved Christians. And because God knows our hearts, He warns us against two dangers in our love. The one is indifference, the other is insincerity.

In verse 17, we see the danger of indifference.

1 John 3:17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

Here's a Christian, who has what his brother or sister needs. He then sees his brother having need. The word for sees suggests someone who contemplates over a long period of time. It is not a hasty glance, but something observed for a long time - the Christian who has seen and knows about the Christian who does not have. And John asks, how can the love of God dwell in him, if he shuts up his heart from him? The word for shut means to slam the door, to snap shut the lock. What does he do this on? On his compassion. On that part of him which is moved by need. He hardens, stiffens, and closes the door before he might be made to feel compassion or guilt. He becomes indifferent. His motto is "It's not my problem."

This is not a call to meet the need of every poor person you meet. The focus here is quite specific: your brothers and sisters.

1 John 4:20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

In a world of people who abuse goodness, beg when they are able-bodied, mooch off others, look to you to do what you they can do for themselves, it is easy to become cynical. A cynical heart is basically a heart with a closed door and a little hole through which to stare. Most things are dismissed. Most people are cranks. Everybody has an agenda. Everyone is trying to use you. You keep on 'seeing through and seeing through. The problem is that as you allow cynicism to set into your heart, the Dove is not settled any more. He is grieved by a hostile environment. Self-protection, suspiciousness, unkindness dominate. The Spirit does not dwell at home, because the home is not fragrant with childlikeness.

And I don't think the goal here is to limit the matter to physical, material needs. It is meeting the needs of your brothers and sisters at your own expense: Monetary needs. Groceries. Loneliness. Encouraging singles. Blessing a couple by blessing their children. Passing on a helpful book. Organising a get together of people. Visiting elderly, running errands for elderly. Helping one another find work. Making CDs. Help driving. Hospital visits. Accountability for someone battling a stubborn sin. Send an encouraging SMS / email. Help single parents. Pray for unsaved spouses. Marriage counselling. Rebuke. Help for homeschoolers. Encouragement for Moms. Creche. Strength for battling addiction. Encouraging word for the children/ helpful lessons. Clean up/ set up. Hospitality. Prayer meetings. Discipleship. Provide evangelistic resource. Staying for services. Having people over.

Hebrews 13:16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

I thank the Lord for the grace shown amongst us? Without being asked, and without broadcasting,

Christians meet needs! But why would John exhort us in this regard? Is it not because indifference to others is so natural to fallen hearts. If we do not actively fight that tendency in our hearts, we will become MFI Christians – my family and I. My family and I, it is all about my family and me. Other Christians – well, that's nice, and all very well to fellowship with them, but in the end it is my family and I. Certainly your family is your priority. But do you not know that your earthly family will soon dissolve, and the family you will have for all eternity will be those Christians. Jesus says what we do for them, we do for Him.

John also warns us against insincerity.

1 John 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

John is not saying we mustn't use our words in loving ways. He isn't saying loving verbally is useless. He is saying our love must go beyond nice intentions. Our love must be more than talking about love, or talking about how much we want to do for others. It must go from talk to action.

James 2:15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?

Many people are really in love with love. They love the idea of love. They love the idea of a loving church, but too often they are not willing to get specific and love the individuals. "Loving everyone in general may be an excuse for loving no one in particular."

God wants not just professions and sentiments. God wants compassionate, sacrificial, practical and ongoing love amongst His people. We should stop believing in merely the idea of love, and know that we are obedient only when we love in deeds. We must repent of a theoretical approach to love, where we love, love itself.

God wants us to know if we have eternal life within us by the attitude which dominates our hearts. Cain's family is malicious, murderous and indifferent. Christ's family is sacrificial and merciful in practical ways. And as you examine the habit of your life, you need to honestly decide which one you are in.

This morning I don't want to make a Pharisee of you. A Pharisee would do the right actions on the outside, but according to Jesus, *Matthew 23:28 Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

If you walked away from this message and determined you were going to be a nicer, more unselfish person, you might be no closer to God at all. In fact, you might get closer to hell, because a sense of self-righteousness might overtake you.

This morning the call is to the gospel. Have you been changed? Have you asked Christ to save you, to grant you new life? Have you understood the gospel, that a loving God showed you mercy in the sacrifice of His Son? Embrace that today! Embrace the gospel! Be passed from death to life! So the gospel will be written in your cells, it will be a fire in your bones for others.