

*A woman was surprised at church one Sunday when another woman who had often snubbed her, went out of her way to give her a big hug before the worship service. It caught her off guard, and throughout the service she wondered what had caused a change of heart in this person.*

*Well, she got her answer at the end of the service when the pastor instructed the congregation, “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.”*

If that’s all there is to loving one another – just giving someone a hug or a warm fuzzy feeling; that would be pretty easy, but we know that love is a little more difficult and demanding than that.

Last week, the Apostle John told us about God’s great love for us – a love that is out of this world, a love that sent Jesus to a cross, a love that moved God to adopt us and to call us His very own. For those who believe, in His great love, we are called children of God – that’s who we are and John explained that we need to act like who we are. In light of God’s great love for us, we must not betray that love by living in sin against Him.

Now, this morning John turns his focus from God’s love for us to our love for one another. If you recall, John has already talked about loving one another back in Chapter 2 – describing our love for one another as a piece of evidence of our salvation, but this time he approaches the subject from a slightly different perspective.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **1 John 3** and we will pick up from where we left off last week beginning with **verse 11**. John tells us,

**<sup>11</sup> For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; <sup>12</sup> 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 brother’s were righteous.**

**Love one another.** From the beginning, that message from God has not changed – it runs throughout the Bible, but before exploring what love is in his letter, John starts by telling his readers what love is not – and he drops the name of **Cain**, which takes us all the way back to the front of our Bibles. In **Genesis 4**, beginning with **verse 1**, we are told,

<sup>1</sup>Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, “I have gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord.”

<sup>2</sup>Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. <sup>3</sup>So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. <sup>4</sup>Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; <sup>5</sup>but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. <sup>6</sup>Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? <sup>7</sup>If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

<sup>8</sup>Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

Cain, the firstborn of Adam and Eve, was a farmer, while Abel, his younger brother was a shepherd, and there came a time when the brothers were to make an offering to the Lord.

Now, we are not told the nature of this offering – whether it was to simply be their very best – an offering from the heart, or they were to make an animal sacrifice due to sin their parents had introduced. Whatever it was, both Cain and Abel likely knew what God had required of them, and Abel took God at His word, he believed that God knew best, and by faith Abel gave his offering. Cain, on the other hand, thought that what he had to offer was good enough for God, he would worship God on his own terms and in his own way – he disobeyed, and he brought whatever produce was at hand from the ground.

Cain knew what God required, and if it was an animal sacrifice, he could have made some effort to capture a worthy animal, he could have bartered with his younger brother and traded produce for an animal, but no – in rebellious and faithless self-reliance, Cain brought a veggie tray. Cain’s heart was not right.

God accepted Abel’s righteous offering, but Cain’s was rejected and he became jealous and resentful of his brother. God personally reached out to Cain so that he might repent, but he did not – instead, Cain was angry with God and took it out on his brother, and said in effect – “Well God, if you want blood, I will give it to You” and we know the rest of the story. Cain, in his anger and hatred, killed his younger brother Abel.

So, John said don’t be like Cain – for **he was of the evil one**, and you might be thinking to yourself, “Well I’m not like Cain, I’ve never murdered anyone” and I

guess you can give yourself a “pat on the back” for that, but I would suggest you wait because John has a little more to say.

Beginning with **verse 13**, John continues and says,

**<sup>13</sup> Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. <sup>14</sup> We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. <sup>15</sup> Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.**

Just as Cain hated his brother Abel – the world will hate us, to include much of the “religious” world. Remember, it was the religious leaders – people who claimed to follow and represent God who hated the Son of God. So, it should not be surprising that the world hates us, but what is surprising is the hatred between those who claim to be Christian brothers and sisters. For John, that’s surprising – because as evidence of being born again – of passing out of spiritual death into spiritual life, we should be loving our brothers and sisters in Christ even though there may be times when it is difficult.

Now, the wording in this passage prompts an interesting question. If you notice in **verse 14**, John speaks about *not loving*, and then in **verse 15**, he changes the wording a bit and equates *not loving* with *hating* – and here’s the question: **Is it possible for me to not love you but also not hate you? In other words, can I just be neutral about you?**

I think for many people, that’s what they desire, they just want to be neutral about one another, but it doesn’t appear that John allows for any middle ground here – at least I don’t see it. As a normal manner of life – as a practice, either you love your brothers and sisters or you hate them. Like many stances in the Bible, such as life or death, light or darkness, good or evil, truth or a lie, it’s either/or. Even Jesus said, “*He who is not with Me is against Me.*” There is no middle ground – not loving is hating, and then John takes it to another level and says “**Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer.**”

So, John goes from not loving, to hating, and now to murder. **How can John make that huge leap?** Well, maybe he remembered what Jesus taught. In **Matthew 5**, beginning with **verse 21**, Jesus said,

**<sup>21</sup> “You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and**

*whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.*

I think we can all agree that as an outside act, just from the damage of taking a life – hatred is not the same as a murder. I think it is fair to say that Abel would have rather been hated by Cain than murdered by him. I think we are all on the same page with that, but Jesus wasn't merely looking at an outside act, He was also looking at the heart, and from that vantage point, the inward intent is the same. In God's sight – who's eyes judge the heart, hatred is the moral equivalent to murder – the condition of the heart is the same for both, and the only difference between the two is the actual taking of a life.

So, according to both Jesus and John, those who hate are murderers *at heart*, and eternal life is not abiding in them, and just for clarification, John is not saying that anyone who has committed a murder cannot inherit eternal life. If that were the case, then the Apostle Paul, who was involved in stoning Stephen, is utterly lost. Instead, John is talking about those who practice hatred – he's talking about those who have a lifestyle of willful and habitual hatred towards others, and for those who live like that on a consistent basis – it's evidence they are not born again.

Now in stark contrast to hatred, John describes love as demonstrated in the person of Jesus Christ and modeled by true children of God. Beginning with **verse 16**, John says,

**<sup>16</sup> We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. <sup>17</sup> 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?** <sup>18</sup> Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.**

I suspect that most of us know **John 3:16** by heart, **but how many of us pay attention to 1 John 3:16?** It's the same John who wrote both passages, and here he makes an important connection between them – it's one thing to experience the blessing of **John 3:16** – knowing that Jesus willingly and sacrificially laid down His life for us, but it's another thing to share in that blessing by following **1 John 3:16** and willingly and sacrificially loving our brothers and sisters like Jesus loved us.

Now, it's doubtful that anyone of us will be asked to physically lay down our lives for someone, but in less dramatic ways, all of us are to demonstrate love to those in

need. Maybe it's in sharing our material possessions as John mentioned, maybe it's in serving one another in a practical way, or maybe it's in the giving of our time and talents and energy. Whatever the case, true love can't ignore others, it can't pass others by without concern, and it must be more than just mere talk – it must show itself.

*I want to read this story from Beth Moore where she describes something that happened to her. She said,*

*“I was in the Knoxville airport with all waiting to board planes: I had the Bible on my lap and was very intent upon what I was doing. I'd had a marvelous morning with the Lord. I say that because I want to tell you it is a scary thing to have the Spirit of God really working in you. You could end up doing some things you never would have done otherwise. Life in the Spirit can be dangerous for a thousand reasons not the least of which is your ego.*

*I tried to keep from staring, but he was such a strange sight. Humped over in a wheelchair, he was skin and bones, dressed in clothes that obviously fit when he was at least twenty pounds heavier. His knees protruded from his trousers, and his shoulders looked like the coat hanger was still in his shirt. His hands looked like tangled masses of veins and bones. The strangest part of him was his hair and nails. Stringy grey hair hung well over his shoulders and down part of his back. His fingernails were long. Clean, but strangely out of place on an old man.*

*I looked down at my Bible as fast as I could, discomfort burning my face. As I tried to imagine what his story might have been, I found myself wondering if I'd just had a Howard Hughes sighting. Then, I remembered reading somewhere that he was dead; so, this man in the airport—**an impersonator maybe? Was a camera on us somewhere?***

*There I sat trying to concentrate on the Word to keep from being concerned about a thin slice of humanity served on a wheelchair only a few seats from me. All the while my heart was growing more and more overwhelmed with a feeling for him. Let's admit it. Curiosity is a heap more comfortable than true concern, and suddenly I was awash with aching emotion for this bizarre-looking old man. I had walked with God long enough to see the handwriting on the wall. I've learned that when I begin to feel what God feels, something so contrary to my natural feelings, something dramatic is bound to happen. And it may be embarrassing. I immediately began to resist because I could feel God working on my spirit and I started arguing with God in my mind.*

*“Oh no, God please no.” I looked up at the ceiling as if I could stare straight through it into heaven and said, “Don’t make me witness to this man. Not right here and now. Please. I’ll do anything. Put me on the same plane, but don’t make me get up here and witness to this man in front of this gawking audience. Please, Lord!”*

*There I sat in the blue vinyl chair begging His Highness, “Please don’t make me witness to this man. Not now. I’ll do it on the plane.”*

*Then I heard it: “I don’t want you to witness to him. I want you to brush his hair.”*

*The words were so clear, my heart leapt into my throat, and my thoughts spun like a top. **Do I witness to the man or brush his hair?** No brainer. I looked straight back up at the ceiling and said, “God, as I live and breathe, I want you to know I am ready to witness to this man. I’m on this Lord. You’ve never seen a woman witness to a man faster in your life. **What difference does it make if his hair is a mess if he is not redeemed?** I am on him. I am going to witness to this man.”*

*Again, as clearly as I’ve ever heard an audible word, God seemed to write this statement across the wall of my mind. “That is not what I said, Beth. I don’t want you to witness to him. I want you to go brush his hair.”*

*I looked up at God and quipped, “I don’t have a hairbrush. It’s in my suitcase on the plane. **How am I supposed to brush his hair without a hairbrush?**” God was so insistent that I almost involuntarily began to walk toward him.*

*I stumbled over to the wheelchair thinking I could use one myself. I knelt down in front of the man, and asked, **“Sir, may I have the pleasure of brushing your hair?”***

*He looked back at me and said, **“What did you say?”***

***“May I have the pleasure of brushing your hair?”***

*To which he responded in volume ten, “Little lady, if you expect me to hear you, you’re going to have to talk louder than that.”*

*At this point, I took a deep breath and blurted out, **“SIR, MAY I HAVE THE PLEASURE OF BRUSHING YOUR HAIR?”** At which point every eye in the place darted right at me. I was the only thing in the room looking more peculiar than old Mr. Long Locks.*

*Face crimson and forehead breaking out in a sweat, I watched him look up at me with absolute shock on his face, and say, “If you really want to.”*

*Are you kidding? Of course, I didn't want to. But God didn't seem interested in my personal preference right about then. He pressed on my heart until I could utter the words, “Yes, sir, I would be pleased. But I have one little problem. I don't have a hairbrush.”*

*“I have one in my bag,” he responded. I went around to the back of that wheelchair, and I got on my hands and knees and unzipped the stranger's old carry-on, hardly believing what I was doing.*

*I stood up and started brushing the old man's hair. It was perfectly clean, but it was tangled and matted. I don't do many things well, but I must admit I've had notable experience untangling knotted hair mothering two little girls. Like I'd done with either Amanda or Melissa in such a condition, I began brushing at the very bottom of the strands, remembering to take my time not to pull.*

*A miraculous thing happened to me as I started brushing that old man's hair. Everybody else in the room disappeared. There was no one alive for those moments except that old man and me. I brushed and I brushed and I brushed until every tangle was out of that hair. I know this sounds so strange but I've never felt that kind of love for another soul in my entire life. I believe with all my heart, I—for that few minutes—felt a portion of the very love of God. That He had overtaken my heart for a little while like someone renting a room and making Himself at home for a short while. The emotions were so strong and so pure that I knew they had to be God's.*

*His hair was finally as soft and smooth as an infant's. I slipped the brush back in the bag, went around the chair to face him. I got back down on my knees, put my hands on his knees, and said, “Sir, do you know my Jesus?”*

*He said, “Yes, I do.” Well, that figures. He explained, “I've known Him since I married my bride. She wouldn't marry me until I got to know the Savior.” He said “You see, the problem is, I haven't seen my bride in months. I've had open-heart surgery, and she's been too ill to come see me. I was sitting here thinking to myself. What a mess I must be for my bride.”*

*Only God knows how often He allows us to be part of a divine moment when we're completely unaware of the significance. This, on the other hand, was one of those*

*rare encounters when I knew God had intervened in details – only He could have known. It was a God moment, and I'll never forget it.*

*Our time came to board, and we were not on the same plane. I was deeply ashamed of how I'd acted earlier and would have been so proud to have accompanied him on that aircraft.*

*I still had a few minutes, and as I gathered my things to board, the airline hostess returned from the corridor, tears streaming down her cheeks. She said, "That old man's sitting on the plane, sobbing. **Why did you do that? What made you do that?"***

*I said **"Do you know Jesus?"** He can be the bossiest person!"* And we got to share.

*I got on my own flight, sobs choking my throat, wondering how many opportunities just like that one had I missed along the way—all because I didn't want people to think I was strange. God didn't send me to that old man. He sent that old man to me.*

**Jesus said, "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."**

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