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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

April 24, 2022

Whoever Does Not Love Abides In Death

1 John 3:11-15

Prayer: *Father, we again thank you just for the opportunity that we have to come together each week, and as Eric said we still have the freedom to do that and we're grateful and thankful for that. We just continue to pray that you would bless us in that way. We continue to thank you for the gift that you've given us of your word and of your Holy Spirit. And so this morning before we open up your word, we pray for the presence of that Spirit, guide us, direct us, open our eyes and our ears and give us the ability to make this of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Our text this morning is in 1 John. This is our fifteenth message from 1 John. This is *1 John 3:11-18*. Our text this morning begins with these words. It says: *For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.* John's letter was written to people who lived in a wicked culture during wicked times. John is basically setting out what differentiates born again believers in Christ from lovers of this world. And he goes on to say the essence of the proof that we've been born again

involves, number one, the conviction of guilt, where we become aware that we've broken God's law; the confession of sin, where we agree with God; and the cooperation of the spirit, where we put our conviction and confession into practice. John then describes on a practical level what conviction without confession means. That's conviction without the agreement on our part with the Holy Spirit. And we'll see first how that kind of conviction can become perverted and how those who don't know Christ or the power of the Holy Spirit often respond to the call of their own consciences.

And second we'll see what it means to encounter a conviction that persuades, how conviction works with someone who is in the kingdom who agrees with God's Holy Spirit. And we'll see how God's conviction has the power to persuade us to do what is right and pleasing in his sight. And finally we'll see how conviction through cooperation with the spirit plays itself out practically.

And so this morning we're going to take a look how John develops the idea of conviction for believers and how it gets twisted by non-believers. So we'll see conviction that perverts, conviction that persuades, and conviction that is practice.

And John speaks first about a conviction that actually perverts, and he starts out by describing the very first child of Adam and

Eve who was of the evil one. It's a person who went by the name of Cain. Verse 12 of our text this morning, John says: *We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother.* See Adam and Eve's first offspring responded to conviction by perverting that very conviction and becoming a murderer.

The story is told in *Genesis 4*. It says this, it says: *In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."* Now Cain said to his brother Abel, *"Let's go out to the field."* While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, *"Where is your brother Abel?"* *"I don't know,"* he replied. *"Am I my brother's keeper?"*

What basically John's saying here is let me give you an example of someone who represents just what can happen when you pervert the conviction of the Holy Spirit. I mean we're looking at the very

first post-fall household and we have two adult children. We have Abel who gets the gospel in the very best way and Cain who perverts it in the very worst. And they're obviously both raised in the same household and they're both getting the same understanding of who God was and what his requirement for acceptance was and God clearly states that he was pleased with Abel's sacrifice and not pleased with Cain's. Some folks make a big deal out of the fact that Abel's sacrifice came from his flock and because Abel offered a blood sacrifice and Cain one of grains, well maybe Abel's was therefore acceptable and Cain's was not on that basis. But God clearly accepted and was pleased with grain offerings as well. *Leviticus 2* says: *"When anyone brings a grain offering to the LORD, their offering is to be of the finest flour. They are to pour olive oil on it, put incense on it and take it to Aaron's sons the priests. The priest shall take a handful of the flour and oil, together with all the incense, and burn this as a memorial portion on the altar, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the LORD."* Well the book of Hebrews in the New Testament tells us that it wasn't the substance of the sacrifice that made the difference to God, rather it was the faith behind it. *Hebrews 11* says: *By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. So God was quite clear that Abel's sacrifice was faith based while Cain's in some way was not. And then God convicts and God's*

conviction is incredibly gracious. This is what he says in verse 6. He says: *Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."* And so he tells Cain what was unacceptable and then God himself warns about the dangers of ignoring his conviction. Cain chooses to ignore God's advice to master the enemy's temptation and instead he commits the very first act of murder and then he lies directly to God. *Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied.* Well of course he did know. In fact the actual translation is much, much worse. The actual translation states that Cain had slit Abel's throat. On top of it all he insolently suggests that God has no right to ask him about Abel's well-being. *"Am I my brother's keeper?"* he says?

Well, Cain is the very first example of how conviction can be perverted, so much so that both Cain and Abel become symbols of the very best and the very worst responses to faith. And God also tells us in our text this morning why Cain did what he did. In verse 13, John says: *And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.*

Now at first glance that response sounds like an answer to the

question of what and not why. I mean it's pretty obvious that Cain's deeds were evil and his brother's righteous but God gives it as to the answer as to why Cain murdered Abel because Cain did what was evil and Abel did what was righteous. What he's saying is Cain's actions defined his character. And Cain is our very first example of someone acting against their conscience and how those actions can transform our character as well. You see, God has given every single human being an inner sense, something that's internal that tells them what is right and what is wrong. *Romans 2:15* says: *They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.* And to the extent that this inner voice is lined up with God and his word it's accurate and it shows us the difference between right and wrong but we all know that consciences can be seared and bent and twisted by culture as well. And we've certainly seen the outplaying of Isaiah's prophetic warning when he said in *Isaiah 5: Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.* I mean Christians do battle every single day with the culture over this very thing. I mean we fight for what's right because we all have inside of us something very different than animals do. You remember last week, just last week I spoke about grizzly bears eating baby elk alive. I'm quite certain that

there's no grizzly bear that has ever done that deed that's ever lost a moment of sleep or feels any regret or guilt over that action. It's just not a part of an animal's moral constitution but it is of us humans. I guarantee you that right now in Ukraine Russian soldiers are doing things that will end up haunting them for the rest of their lives regardless of how hard they try to deny it. And that's because God has placed within us a sense of what is right and wrong that is absolutely unavoidable. The problem is people react to that sense in multiple ways that are either positive, you know, their conscience convinces them to do the right thing, or negative, they simply ignore their conscience and do the wrong thing; or perverse, they respond negatively and then take that bad feeling that God has placed in them and they respond with bitterness and anger towards those they perceive to have created that feeling in the first place.

Take Cain, for example. God doesn't lay out what it is that Cain had done but for some reason clearly known to Cain, his sacrifice was not acceptable. And so God speaks to his conscience and he reacts badly. It says: *So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.* So Cain is sullen and downcast when God told him he could do better. And then he warned him about giving in to sin. But Cain responds to that bad feeling by lashing out not at Satan who's tempting him and not at God who's convicting him, but at Abel

who's simply acting righteously. I mean you want to know why people lash out at people in ways that seem mystifying, why they pervert conviction? I think God says right here, they receive input from their conscience pointing them away from sin that they choose to ignore, but when they can't discharge that bad feeling within them about the wrong thing that they're doing and so they respond with bitterness and anger and sometimes even rage towards what they see as the source of that feeling, and it's usually the victim and the right thing that he's doing. As John says about Cain's response to Abel's sacrifice: *And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.* I wish I could say that Cain was the exception but he's not. Certainly murder is the exception but lashing out at people trying to do what is good and right has become the hallmark of many cultures. And ours is no exception.

John also had this to say about people who respond to the light with bitterness and hatred, he said this in *John 3*. He said: *This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.*

You see, it's the love of darkness that produces fear and loathing

of the light and those who love the light as well. You know today I call that the Tebow effect. I mean, I've mentioned before the amount of bitterness and rancor and hatred that's directed at Tim Tebow, it makes no sense at all to me. I mean this is a guy who's gone out of his way to be respectful and kind and caring and compassionate, especially reaching out to people who are marginalized and weak and yet people seem to delight in publicly hating on Tim Tebow. I think that God tells us, I think God tells us right here exactly why in *John 3*. He says: *This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.*

I just think we're surprised at the vitriol and the push back that Christians get because we've become so enured to the evil that so completely surrounds us. When your country murders 3,000 unborn children a day, when your schools are fighting over whether or not teachers can sexualize kindergartners, when your entertainment goes out of its way to normalize perversion and even your sports are riddled with gender conflicts, you are officially living in a moral cesspool. Evil deeds proliferate in a culture that has thrown off any and all biblical constraints, so much so that we grow used to what used to be seen as abominable. And John tells us next exactly what we can expect if we want to do the right and the biblical thing. This is what he says, he says: *Do not be surprised,*

brothers, that the world hates you. This same pathology that we see in Cain is typical of how the world operates. I mean it doesn't just disagree with us, God says it hates us, and it hates us, frankly, because its deeds are evil.

If you read the account of Sodom and Gomorrah you're going to find one thing that stands out and that's how used to, how accommodating Lot and his family was with the evil that completely surrounded them. That's exactly how evil works. It perverts the very ability that we have to perceive it. The actual events that occurred just prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah are so perverse as to seem unreal. I mean, remember the actual story, there's angels that come to rescue Lot and they're identified by the townspeople who then assault Lot's house intending to rape angels. Think about that for a second, I mean, these folks realize that these are unique strangers and then they decide, hey, let's rape 'em. This is wickedness beyond comprehension. But what's just as stunning is the inability of Lot and his family to recognize how perverse the entire culture has become. If we pick up on just the part of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah where Lot's outside pleading with his neighbors not to attack the angels, and then he gets pulled back into his house by the angels who are inside as the rapists pursue the angels, we get a sense of how completely out of it Lot and his family was.

This is from *Genesis 19*. It says: *And they -- that's the crowd -- said of Lot, "This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down. But the men -- that is the angels -- reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door. And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the door. Then the men -- again, referring to the angels inside -- said to Lot, "Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city, bring them out of the place. For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it." So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, "Up! Get out of this place, for the LORD is about to destroy the city." But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.*

They think Lot is joking. This is one of the most stunning statements I think in all of scripture, I mean, the townspeople are trying to rape angels in your house. They've been struck blind and that has not even persuaded them to stop. And Lot tells his family, they're pulling us out to destroy the city and his family thinks he's joking. What's the big deal, Lot? They just want to

rape your house guests. I mean this is how accommodating we can get when we are surrounded by evil. That's how filled with rage people get when they pervert God's attempts to convict them.

The bad news is, folks, we are also surrounded by profound evil. Evil that I fear is very similar to Lot and his family. ¹ *Corinthians 6* says: *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.* Well that's a pretty good description of the mainstays of our culture and politics. And just like Lot and his family, nobody thinks it's a big deal. I mean now lest you think that the church is made up of nothing but righteous Abels with no trace of redeemed wicked Cains, Paul goes on to say: *And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

You see, the church is the place where formerly unwashed, unsanctified and unjustified broken people gather to celebrate the fact that Jesus came to seek and save the lost. And how does he do that? By convicting them of their sin. I mean to put it in Jesus's own words, he says: *Just so, I tell you, there will be*

more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. It's also significant where Jesus said those words. Luke tells us: *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."* So he told them this parable. I mean, this was a gathering of tax collectors and sinners, a gathering that greatly upset these so-called good people, who couldn't believe that Jesus would actually hang out with riffraff like that. But John knew that the riffraff that the original disciples were because he was one of them. And he knew that they too consisted of tax collectors and sinners. But he also knew that a confrontation with the living God produced a new type of person, one who was sanctified, justified and now occupied by God's Holy Spirit. And he knew that that produced in them a profound difference, and that's point number two. You see, instead of conviction that perverts, God through his Holy Spirit brings genuine conviction that persuades. Jesus brings a whole new way of relating to God and each other and it involves something that was notably absent in Cain's conviction. It's the idea of love. Listen to what John says in *John 14*, our next verse. He says, we know that we have passed out of death into life because we've said the sinners prayer. Is that what it says? No, it says, we know that we have passed out of death into life because we got baptized?

Joined a church? No. He says: *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers.*

Well we saw in the case of Lot and his family how conviction that perverts enrages. Now what we just see today right now, how conviction that persuades has the power to change and redirect the course of our entire lives towards that which is pleasing to God. This is a conviction that connects only with someone who is in the kingdom, who agrees with God's Holy Spirit. And God says there are markers that demonstrate whether or not you are members of that kingdom, and it might not be what you think it is. Listen to what John says in our next verses. He says: *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever 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.* I mean I can't emphasize too highly because John does so as well. The fact that God says if you lack love for the brethren, you are not saved.

I mean moving from spiritual death to spiritual life is exactly what it means to be born again and the evidence of that is not a sudden new understanding of some theological doctrine. I mean, that's wonderful, that's critical, I'll be the very first one to say it's absolutely imperative that we understand what it means to

be born again. But there's something else that John insists must accompany our understanding. That's the love that we have for our brothers and sisters in Christ. And what he's saying is basically if you don't have a love for your brothers and sisters, you need to seriously question whether or not you're a Christian.

John MacArthur comments that -- quote -- "One sure mark of a transformed life is the desire to be with fellow Christians. That does not mean, of course, that Christians are to have no contact with unbelievers. But a professing Christian who prefers the company of the people of the world is probably still one of them." Now folks, I've had numerous people tell me over the years that one of the reasons they don't attend church or seldom attend is they just don't like people. Some have even gone so far as to say they don't particularly like the people who go to this church. I mean that's far more than a simple problem. It is an extraordinarily serious confession. Listen to what John is saying. *Whoever does not love abides in death.*

You might notice the next verse, there's two different levels that John is describing in these verses. He says, *whoever does not love abides in death.* And then he says, *everyone who hates his brother is a murderer.* I mean all John's doing here is he's removing any middle ground. I mean nobody wants to cop to hating anyone. That

sounds so extreme. But John is insisting on one level and one level only and that is love or nothing. And we all know we're not talking about warm fuzzies here. We're not talking about love as an emotion, it's not an emotion, it's an attitude. It's not what you feel, it's what you do. And what he's saying is if you don't love your brother in Christ, then you hate him. There's no such thing as a middle ground. There's no middle ground where you tolerate him while still harboring bitterness and anger and lack of love in your heart. And John goes even further by saying either you love your brother or you hate him and if you hate him, by the way, you're a murderer.

I mean here he's echoing Jesus's words from Sermon on the Mount. This is what Jesus said in *Matthew 5*. He said: *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."* You see in Jesus's mind both murder and adultery can take place in the absence of any physical expression of that at all. I mean if you have a mindset that's stopped only by circumstance and your fear of consequence, then you essentially can commit with your mind what you won't commit with your body. And again we're not talking about

a momentary outburst or a lack of control here. The verb form in verse 14, *whoever does not love abides in death*, in verse 15, *anyone who hates his brother is a murderer*, those verb forms indicate a present continuous ongoing state where you nurture in your own heart this deep bitter antagonism towards someone else. I mean I just don't know if we grasp the terrible danger that lies in bitterness, resentment or hatred towards a brother or sister in Christ. But John directly links hatred with murder by bringing up Cain as a warning to us all.

We've seen John saying in no uncertain terms what a grave spiritual danger refusing to love the brethren is. We've seen Jesus say the very same thing in the Sermon on the Mount, likening it to murder, and now we also have the same about refusing to forgive from the very words that Jesus gave the disciples as the model for prayer from the Lord's prayer. He said, *forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors*. Make no mistake about it, if you have a real struggle loving your brothers and sisters in Christ, it may just be because you are not a Christian; and the key word here is "struggle." I mean God is quite willing to forgive anyone who's willing to confess and repent of a bitterness in his or her heart. And he's promised that he will provide the ability to love that we may be lacking. But those who insist on nurturing and feeding a bitter heart filled with resentment give every evidence that the

Holy Spirit has never entered into them. Again, *whoever does not love abides in death*. And if you think God is being too harsh, maybe too judgmental towards people who are struggling to get ahold of their emotions, then you don't truly understand what God went through to rescue you. The very first part of the fruits of the Spirit is love and joy, then peace and patience and all of them flow directly towards a heart that is embittered towards someone else. And if there's no evidence of that healing having taken place, then it's time to question whether or not the Holy Spirit has ever entered into that person.

The other possibility is that someone just doesn't understand what it cost God to save them. And that's a real possibility as well, I mean, Peter was working through that very issue when he asked Jesus how many times he needed to forgive someone. The story's told in *Matthew 18*. It says: *Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. By the way, that usually goes over our head, what he's saying, that amount. To put it in -- that's about 3.4 billion dollars in today's money or about 200,000 hours*

of labor. Okay. So it's kind of a huge debt. He said, "And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii -- and that's \$5800 or four months' wages -- and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

So let's see, three and a half billion or approximately 200,000 hours of labor versus \$5800 or four months of wages. I mean to be

sure, the second debt, it's not nothing, it's a significant debt, but it's only when you compare to the original debt that Jesus paid for us that this response becomes absurd, and that's precisely what God wants us to understand. We have a stunningly small capacity to understand and grasp what it is that Christ did for us on the cross, but God knows precisely what it cost him. And he also knows the profound insult it is to be harboring bitterness and resentment for one debt when you've been forgiven one far greater in scope than you could ever even imagine. And that's precisely what John comes back to complete his argument in verse 16. This is what he says. He says: *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.*

So first we've seen a conviction that perverts. It perverts the understanding of what love and hate is for those who are not in the kingdom. Just like Cain did, they take the conviction of conscience and they twist it around so it becomes a point of anger and rage directed at others.

And secondly we've seen conviction that persuades. It's the same understanding of love for kingdom citizens as represented by the absolute necessity of overcoming the natural bitterness towards our brothers and sisters that can settle in our souls. We know the price that's been paid to redeem us. We know in no uncertain terms

that verse 14 says: *Whoever does not love abides in death.*

And finally we see conviction that practices. We want to explore just how that works itself out practically in the lives of believers. And again, John addresses that practicality by saying in our next verse, verse 17, he says: *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?*

John once again moves from theory to practice and he uses Jesus as our best example. See, Jesus saw the greatest need this world ever had even if no one at that time saw it along with him. Not even his disciples saw it. God was willing to leave heaven itself with all of the privilege and power that he owned there and to live a life of abject poverty and denial all the while living that life out flawlessly and then he took that perfect life to the cross where he offered it up in front of the entire universe hanging naked and bleeding out as a sacrifice to pay for your sin and mine. His sacrifice was flawlessly offered and accepted. And then he rose from the grave giving us the opportunity by faith to substitute his righteousness for our sin and so become righteous in God's sight by simply trusting in him as our Savior. Jesus saw that need and he met it at the highest possible cost to himself. He laid down his life for us. So John asks if we close our heart

to our brothers and sisters, how in the world can we make the claim that we too are laying our lives down? You know, Cain never heard God's warning. And he never heard it because he chose not to hear it, because he chose not to hear it, he couldn't be persuaded when he was told directly by God that *"sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."* And we rule over sin never by our power but by the power of God's Holy Spirit.

See, if you can't find it in your heart to love the brethren, you must cry out to God who alone can give you that power. Part of the sign that you're one of his is that you understand and are moved by his Holy Spirit to cry out for that power. I mean we live in a culture that long ago decided to throw out God's rules and basically make up our own. Rules much more suited to the perverse way that we want to live our lives. And we think of love in emotional terms as something that somebody has to earn, something that is not given and God says that's exactly backwards. If you are a child of God, the very first thing you need to learn is that you are above all an expression of the love of God. And therefore *whoever does not love abides in death.*

Part of avoiding the sin of Cain is actively responding when the Holy Spirit speaks to you about the necessity of loving the brethren. It's actively recognizing the danger of perverting

conviction by being willing to be persuaded by the Holy Spirit. And finally, it's not a matter of feeling love emotionally but acting on that love practically. And thus John concludes by saying in verse 18: *Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.* Next week we'll conclude this section of John. Let's pray.

Father, I just thank you for who you are. I thank you for this warning that you've given. And so often we tend to think what matters most is theology, and it's not; it's love. I don't mean to downplay the theological aspects of this, Lord, but if we lack love, we are just not one of yours. You say it over and over and over again. And so I pray right now, Lord, if there's anyone sitting here harboring bitterness and resentment towards a brother or sister, that you would be speaking right now, that they would be hearing. And Lord, we don't expect on our own to be able to have the power to overcome that, but I do pray that you would touch them with the understanding that they can appeal to you and you will supply that love, you will supply that power, you will give them that spiritual energy if they would but ask. And so I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.