

1 John 3:11-15 (NKJV)

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.

I have had a couple of experiences with people where I was very surprised. And I was surprised in a very specific way. I regarded these people as lovers of God and lovers of God's people. But I encountered outbursts of pure, unmitigated hatred from these people toward people I knew to be true believers.

I was shocked to see this because, for years, I had seen what had appeared to be love and concern for the brothers. But in each event, something happened that pushed these people past what they could achieve by human good intentions and drummed up good will. They were tested at the core. And the test revealed hatred toward fellow believers, not love.

In each case it looks to me like the path they eventually followed showed that they truly were not believers.

Our text today explains these types of responses. It removes any mystery about the results. But it goes about it an opposite way than we would be inclined to approach it.

We are prone to describe the outcome of a person **by the decisions** that they make. In other words, people **become** what **they decide to be**. We point to their decisions and say, if they would have only decided differently, they would have had a different outcome.

Scripture describes it backwards. It says that **if they had been born from a different source**, they would **decide differently**. The **spiritual nature**, the **source of their life**, determines the life. First John continually comes back to this. The tests of what **we do** only display **that which we are**. And the answer to realizing that we truly are **flunking these kinds of tests** is not, try harder. The answer is, **call upon God for salvation**. Cry out to God for a miracle. Pray for a new nature to be given to you as a result of the salvation of God.

We have to understand this to **properly understand** our passage this morning. It drives us to a question.

What is fundamentally different between a believer and a non believer.

Is it that a Christian decides to do loving things toward believers and a non believer decides to display lack of love toward believers? Well, sort of but not quite. When we ask **that question** we are looking at **the symptoms**, but not the cause. John goes to the heart of things.

So what is fundamentally different between a believer and non believer?

A non believer is

of the wicked one

abides in death

is a murderer

A believer

has passed from death to life,

is not as Cain *who* was of the wicked one

has eternal life abiding in him.

Do you notice something about these descriptions? None of them are determined by the decisions that a person makes. They are the **cause** of the decisions that people make.

The fundamental difference between believers and non believers is not caused by what **they do**, but by **what they are**.

We learn all through the new testament that being precedes doing. What we **are** causes what **we do**. The water is flowing out of the spring. The spring determines the quality of the water.

Now, let's look at this list of the characteristics of an unbeliever again.

A non believer is

of the wicked one

abides in death

is a murderer

You and I are surrounded by people who do not know Christ. Would any of us conclude, by their day to day behavior, that this list is true of them? I doubt it. Oh, there are some that we would say this of. If we worked in a prison or in law enforcement we might say, yes, I have seen lots of people that this is easy to see in them. But for most of the people who have not chosen to follow Christ, this seed is not so clear. Many are far nicer than we are. They gravitate toward doing kindnesses for fellow human beings. They often even do self sacrificing acts.

So is scripture wrong? Is this not really the core of all those who do not believe in Christ?

Include if needed

I want to clarify some terms here. When I speak of a believer, I am not speaking of a religious person who goes to church and claims to follow Christ. I am speaking of a person who has heard both **the bad news** of the Bible and **the good news of Christ**. They have believed that they were born in the state of sin, like Romans clearly tells us. They have come to realize and believe any goodness **we think we might have to earn any favor** from God is like Isaiah describes as filthy rags, useful for nothing. And they have understood that there is not a single thing they can do to save themselves. There is no good thing they can do to earn anything from God.

These believers have also heard and believed Christ's claims, that He came to save people just like them. He came in order to take upon Himself the wrath of God that we all deserved. Christ suffered the punishment of God for our sins on the cross, in order that **we could be declared innocent of that sin** in His courts. And then God raised Him from the dead to declare that this really was true. It was legitimately accomplished. It wasn't just some idealistic claim.

A Christian is a person who has believed by faith that this is true and they are wholeheartedly trusting Christ for the results of what He did on the cross. They are counting themselves dead to the slavery of **sin making them do stuff**. And they are living with their primary focus being on Christ and the reward that He will provide by relationship with Him now and an eternal home where all the harm of sin will be removed and we will have fellowship with Him and His family forever.

So, just to make it clear, believers are not people who are better than those who do not believe in Christ. They do not see themselves as morally superior. In reality they seem themselves as being, by nature, morally corrupt. But they have called upon Christ to save them from who they really are. And they are trusting that Christ has done it. An odd thing about Christianity is that the **one requirement** to receiving salvation from God's hand is to realize and admit that you could not possibly deserve it.

And while scripture does not have good things to say to those who do not know Christ, who are not His, and have not believed in Him. It continually holds out the offer to every person who has never come to Christ to come to Christ now. He offers you salvation right now if you will respond to His call and receive from Him the salvation He offers on His terms.

end

SO, let's look at Cain to see how scripture describes the core of those living in unbelief.

Genesis 4:1-9 (NKJV)

¹ 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?"

Now, what are we told about the biggest difference between Cain and Able? It is found in 4 and 5. It was **their relationship to God**. Both were brothers. Both had honorable employment. Both brought offerings. But Abel pleased God and Cain did not. Abel had a positive relationship with God and Cain had a negative one.

So why did Cain **hate** Abel? It was based upon his relationship with God. Knowing that Abel pleased God and Cain did not drove Cain mad. He could not stand it. He had to be thinking, who does Abel think he is? How can he think he is so tight with God and I am not. Then John gives us the inside scoop. It is because of **who Cain was**. Cain was **of the wicked one**. Cain was a **child of the devil**. Cain was an **unbeliever**. Cain was **lost**.

And as a side point, look at his excuse. Ignorance. Isn't that a favorite excuse when we are caught in our sin? "I didn't know". "You can't really hold me guilty". "I didn't know". It is **so often used** and **so seldom deeply true**. In this case it was not true at all.

Now, does the world we live in normally get angry about **goodness** for the **sake of goodness**? There is lots of evidence that it does not. When charity work is done in cities for the **sake of humanity**, it is often applauded. When the world **fight**s hunger for the **sake of humanity**, it awards medals. When programs are run to cause citizens to function at a higher moral level, these are seen positively. I remember when there were big concerts held, maybe in the 80's or 90's for charity concerns. The world came together for that. Those old geezers may remember that song, "We are the world." And the world ate that stuff up like it was candy. The artists were held up as heroes for not charging another million dollars for what they were doing. They did it for free.

But what is certain to make at least a significant portion of the population to rise up in adversity and sometimes outright hatred? Just bring in **the name of Christ**. Minister to human need in the **name of Christ** with the **message of Christ** and you will soon see a different side of this human respect for charity. Why is that? It is because the person in the state they were born in **does not have a negative proclivity to either moral goodness or badness for the most part**. But what it does react to is a **declaration that there is a God, that one true God has spoken, and that one true God manifested Himself on earth as Jesus Christ, and one must submit to His absolute rule**. God has a right to tell you what to do in every area of your life and, if you do not receive Christ you are condemned, no matter how good you think you are. That goes against every grain of a person for whom God is not at work in their lives.

Romans 1 points out that we, in our natural state, would rather do anything than receive that message. We will come up with all kinds of false gods to serve, but we, in our old natures, do not want to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

And why that distinction? Why not hate good in **any** of its forms? Why single out **Christian** good? Because you **tend** to hate who your **biological** dad hates. But you **always** hate who your **spiritual** dad hates. Cain was of the Wicked One. The devil was his spiritual father. That is the explanation John gives. Paul in Romans gives us a wider understanding of what to expect in regard for the world's regard for the Christian message.

Romans 12:17-18 (NKJV)

17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

So Paul holds out a reality that it is not likely that **everyone** that does not follow Christ will outwardly **hate us believers** all the time. There may be civility. And we should not stir up hatred unnecessarily. But hatred is sure to come if we are standing for Christ. It is a certainty. Because the prince and power of this world is in charge of his children. And he hates us. So he will inspire hatred in his children as well.

To the degree that we openly represent Christ, to that degree we are likely to be hated.

Now, back to all the apparent good people who surround us. When these people stand before Christ and Christ tells them that they are lost, these people will not just be sad. They will be angry. They will gnash their teeth. And that which is **truest of them** in their **heart of hearts** will be seen in that moment. Because in that moment, **reality** will be exposed. And all of the reasons to maintain civility will be gone. That will be the ultimate test of what people think of Christ, when Christ tells them where they stand in His book. The results will not be good.

The world around us, in our environment, is rarely tested. They are not pushed to decide to exhibit their loyalties. If tomorrow an Anti-Christ appeared and said you and your family can either starve, or you can reveal to us who the children of God are, we would see what is true.

The person whose life is centered on this life is **self** centered, it is a life of **self**-will and of selfishness. Self is god. That can take as many forms as there are people. But that is the core of what is going on. The pride of life can cause a person to see themselves in a way that causes them not to want to disappoint themselves. They may be willing to throw themselves on grenades for their squads. But it is because they view themselves as being honorable or heroic or they simply have a caring about people that comes naturally. They need to maintain that image they have of themselves. But they are operating from a **self** orientation.

That **self** orientation is true of their father as well. We pick up from scripture that the devil was one of the angels who continually worshipped God. But at some point he elevated self. He wanted to be regarded more highly, more specially. He thought that he should not be overlooked. So he broke away from God and began to elevate himself. Does that not look exactly what happened to Cain. That is the trait of all of those for whom God is not their Father, whether it looks that way on the surface or not.

It is not goodness that the world will hate. It is the true and absolute right that Christ has over them as King of Kings and Lord of Lords that they rebel against. And in one sense they cannot help it. It is in their spiritual genetics.

What else could be expected? That is why it is so important that we appeal to them, not to become better, but to call upon Christ for His salvation. That is what **we needed**. And God received **us**. That is what **they need**. And if they will call upon Christ, **Christ will receive them**.

Now let's go back to our original descriptions.

A non believer is

**of the wicked one
abides in death
is a murderer**

A believer

**has passed from death to life,
is not as Cain *who was of the wicked one*
has eternal life abiding in him.**

Do we see the amazing contrast here. A believer truly is a new creature, a new creation. This is way bigger than a human being making different choices.

The whole reasoning in this passage is that **the kids from the different worlds do different things**. Our obedience is never treated as something that we are generating. It is a response to something greater having already been completed. We are not told to **be better**. We are told to **act congruently** with who we already are. And we are also told that this end result is not just for those who are the **expert** followers. This is a family trait. This end result cannot be avoided.

The world's children will hate true righteousness because they hate the light. Christ's children will be righteous and they will love the brothers. And they will be hated.

These results are not created by the great effort expended. They are the natural outcome of the kingdom they belong to.

That is really the core understanding of this text. It isn't about **behavior** as much as it is about **identity**.

Verse 11 says this

¹¹ For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another,

Just about every epistle tells us the same thing. **Core** to being a Christian is loving other people who are born again. Why is that? Well Christ said it repeatedly. This was **His command**. We are to love His children. And does that not make complete sense if we consider who believers are? They experienced the same miracle we did. They were chosen by the same Father we were. They were just as **unqualified** for this position as we were. They

will be hated by the same people that we are. They have the same enemies as we do. They have the same master and Father as we do. They share the same heritage as we do. What's not to love? Oh yes, they might have the same proclivity to sin, to fail, as we do. But what is that among family?

And what is the alternative? The only real alternative is to expose ourselves as frauds, to display ourselves as the enemy's children. Why? Well, where does hatred of the brothers come from? Where does hatred of righteousness come from?

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.

Hatred of righteousness, the true righteousness of Christ, of being beloved of God, comes from the wicked one. And the **third** human being, the first human that was **born**, was a child of the wicked one. And He had a pure unmitigated hatred of his righteous brother. And why? Because what Abel did represented **who He was in Christ**. Abel was God's choice, God's child. And that was reason enough.

So do you want to hate a believer? Well, good luck with that. This passage is clearly telling you **what crowd you are falling into** and what you are **revealing** about yourself. This isn't exactly saying, try hard and stop hating believers. It is telling you, watch out what you are revealing about yourself if you are a Christian hater.

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

John is being logical here. The devil hates you. Those who live for this life and have never come to Christ are, by default, the devil's children. The devil's children will have a tendency to hate you when you explain where you stand. It is really that simple. You don't have to do anything wrong or obnoxious. Just exist and claim to be a Christ follower and explain clearly what that means and you will be hated. You will be telling them that I am right with God and you are not if you have not come to Christ. That is offensive. And that is the reasoning.

I think it is ironic that John says, "**do not marvel**".

We Christians often marvel at the most amazing things. Christ tells us over and over that this life will **not be easy**. He tells us there will always be **false believers** among the **true believers**. He tells us we will **face trials** and **temptations** of all kinds. He tells us we will be actively hated and often persecuted because of our faith.

And what do we do when any of that happens to us?

Why, we **marvel** of course. We say, I wasn't prepared for something bad to happen to me. I am shocked that God could allow this in my life. Does He not love me. "How could this happen", we say. The drama we create has got to have a bit of humor in it from where God sits. Yes. We can imagine God saying- "The book told them that this all would happen to them. But look at how this person is responding to this trial. Look at the shock and the outrage. I guess they really don't believe that **I meant what I said.**"

We marvel at the stupidest stuff. We should marvel that God has selected us. We should marvel at how we in America have faced so little of the persecution promised to believers in our lives. We should marvel that God has surrounded us by people who love us. And maybe we **do marvel** at that to some degree. But we usually **marvel far more** when that negative thing happens that God promised well ahead of time would happen to us.

If the world hates us, we shouldn't really miss a beat. We know that is inevitable. We should just take enough time to make sure we did not bring it about because we are just being obnoxious. But if we determine that we were being faithful, blow it off and move on.

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.

Here is another proof of salvation we can add to last week's sermon. It is exceedingly difficult, no, impossible, for a non believer to truly love someone whose whole identity is based upon Christ. For a while they might like the things done to them by a believer. Believers are often better friends to non believers than they can get elsewhere. True followers of Christ love sacrificially. But eventually that will wear off.

But a **lover of Christ** will always be drawn to **another lover of Christ**. That is the company we want to keep. Those are the people who we relate to at the deepest level. They get us and we get them. And that just cannot happen if there is not a miracle inside of us. That is essentially what John is saying. Our confidence goes **way up** when we can look at our lives and we can see that we have a track record of giving up our time, energy and resources to meet the needs of fellow believers. And on top of that, **we don't resent it**. We are **glad** we did it. We are **honored** to be able to have done it. It is what we **want** to do. We look at our lives and believe that such things are **what we are made for**. Because that is the very least of what we could have done for the wonderful things that Christ has done for us.

Oh your life might be messed up with sin. You may fail way more than you should. But do you see this? Do you see that your life is moving more and more in the direction of dying to yourself so that others can live? I can assure

you that this did not happen because you are trying hard. If you are laying down your life to meet the needs of other believers because of what Christ has done for you, that is rock solid proof that your faith is true.

The alternative is that you are looking at all these believers and you are **disappointed** because they are not giving you what you want, they are not treating you as well as you think you deserve, you can only find fault with them. Be careful of that attitude. It is not as far from Cain's as we might think. Look at your life closely. Maybe it is time to call on the Lord for salvation?

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

Jesus made the point that hate and murder are of the same family. Hatred is the child. Murder is the adult. They are all of the same kind. Here John pronounces the verdict. If you hate believers, you have all the characteristics of the devil. So if you are doing that, it is not that you are making some kind of strategic error. No. You are revealing what family you are in. You are revealing you are not one of those chosen for eternal life. You do not have salvation.

I have seen some of the most hateful people sitting in pews. When they speak of others, their faces get red and the devil lights their countenance. This is frightening. Because it means the devil is taking a place in the pew. We have got to make sure that this is not us. We have got to make sure that we regard fellow believers as scripture tells us to.

Oh, we are not perfect. We are all messed up. It is like, I think, Chuck Smith used to pray. Oh God. We know we are not good people. But we are your people. And as such we reflect the love of Christ when we look out for each other's benefit, even at the cost of ourselves.

When we do that, we show evidence that we are truly family.