

## A MESSAGE OF LOVE IN A WORLD OF HATE

1 John 3:11-18

**Intro:** I have called this passage a “message” because that is what the Holy Spirit called it, and what the Apostle John called it because he was speaking by the Holy Spirit. The only other time this word is used in the entire NT is in 1 John 1:5:

5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

It is the word from which we get the Greek word for angel, and as we have learned from Revelation 1 and 2, an angel is a messenger. That is why the word angel can refer to pastors because they are messengers of God. But they are not messengers of anything they want to say; they are messengers of the Word of God.

So when the Apostle John said in our text, “This is the message that ye have heard from the beginning,” he was not a truth that was arrived at by the wisdom of men, or by some kind of research. He was speaking of a direct revelation from God, which is really what the Bible is. It is true that the Bible was written by men, but they were in every way moved by men who were moved upon by the Spirit of God.

In neither case, 1:5 or 3:11, was he making either statement for the first time that they had heard it, but he was reminding them of truths that were foundational in Scripture, and which they needed to remember. “From the beginning” can mean from the beginning of his ministry to them, as Bishop Westcott believed, or it could mean from soon after they were saved. Therefore it was very important for them to remember, in this case, “that we should love one another.”

It hardly needs to be said that it does need to be pointed out these two verses indicate truth that we only know by revelation, and so the Apostle was pointing to truths which are not only important in themselves, but they indicate how very important they are, and also that they embrace the total message of this epistle. Their use is what we can call “attention-getters”!

On one occasion when the Lord Jesus was asked by a Pharisee what was the great commandment in the Law, I am sure that the Lord surprised him by mentioning two laws that were in the Law, but not one of the ten com-

mandments, but the Lord answered him, saying,

37 . . . Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:37-40).

God has always sought the love of His people, and has always willed that they would love one another. In addition husbands were to love their wives, and parents were to love their children. But when we come to our Lord's words to the apostles in the Upper Room, we read these words found in John 13:34 and 35 as the Apostle John enlarged upon what the Lord had called the second commandment:

34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Now this was what the Apostle John was thinking about when he wrote this epistle toward the end of the first century, and just shortly before His death which was the supreme manifestation of His love for them, and God the Father's love for them. See Romans 5:8, "But God commendeth His love toward us . . ." There are many ways in which we can show that we are the Lord's disciples, but none is greater than the love that we have for each other. The Apostle Peter wrote much earlier than the Apostle John and he exhorted the people of God "above all things have fervent love among yourselves" (1 Peter 4:8).

After saying what he did in verse 11, the Apostle John cited an example from the beginning of the Bible which illustrated what he was teaching in his epistle. He cited one of the worst crimes that was ever committed in OT times. Cain, the first son of Adam and Eve, killed his own brother. But looking into that murder, we can see that Abel was a true child of God. So he not only killed the son of his parents, but he killed his brother who was obviously a child of God. And to make matters even worse, Cain killed Abel because he was jealous of his brother's devotion to God and his obedience to God. Cain brought to God the fruit of the ground which he obviously did in rebellion against God. Cain's sacrifice was evil; it was sinful.

Both men were raised in the same home, by the same parents, and they both received the same teaching. But it took effect with Abel, but Cain obviously had shoved it all aside. And although they were brothers, Abel belonged to the Lord; Cain was a part of the world, the evil system of which the Devil is called in 2 Corinthians 4:4, “the god of this world.” This is the same world about which the Apostle John had shortly before in this epistle had issued the strongest warning and had exposed so completely how thoroughly evil it is. If the Apostle John were writing about the world today, he would not have to change a single thing that he wrote in 1 John 2:15-17. The world is still the same that it was then, and it will always be the enemy, hating everything that has to do with God and Christ and with holy living.

Now the teaching that the Apostle John was seeking to establish is stated in verse 14. But notice that he made this statement very personal for all true believers: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” But in the latter part of the verse, he turns to others who do not love those who clearly are not in the family of God. The Apostle John had no doubt about where he stood. Even though he was an apostle, he was just like the rest of the Lord’s people, a sinner saved by the grace of God, and he knew that he loved the Lord’s people. He enjoyed being with them. He wanted to be like them. He was looking forward to being with them and like them forever!

Some people today make it very clear that they want to live in a world where there are no Christians, where there is no Bible, where no one talks about sin, or God. If you don’t prefer Christians, even love them, it is because you are abiding in death, spiritual death, with no hope of eternal life.

Now from the way the Apostle John approaches the subject, he seems to be especially concerned about *Cains* who are in the local church. If the Word is being taught, and people are seeking to live for God, and time is given for prayer, the *Cains* are not going to be staying around. Cf. 1 John 2:19. So, as the saying goes, our strongest defense is a strong offense.

What an amazing verse is verse 15! The experience of Cain proves this statement to be true. John Calvin said “we wish him to perish whom we hate” (quoted by John Stott, p.142). How true this was in the case of the Pharisees who hated the Lord Jesus Christ. On one occasion our Lord said to them,

44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (John 8:44).

It is a warning to us all not to allow hatred for anyone to continue in our hearts. We have seen in our own country how hatred leads to murder and attempted murder. The seed of murder is in a person who hates. One thing you can say about a murderer is that for sure he is not a Christian. The Apostle John was not saying that a murderer cannot be saved. We know that our Lord prayed for those who were putting him to death. Stephen, the martyr, prayed as his enemies were stoning him to death, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60). As for Cain, we have no evidence that he ever repented and turned to the Lord. All he did was to complain that his punishment was greater than he could bear. Even then the Lord put a mark on him so that no one would kill him.

In verse 16 the Apostle John brings us back to the love of God, and says that this is what we understand about the death of our Lord for us. He died for us even though it was before any indication of repentance in us. And the longer we know the Lord, the more we realize how totally we are lacking of any reason that Christ would die for us. And so in thought we are back in the first verse of this chapter, saying, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us . . ." There it is that He would bring us into His family; here it is that our Lord would lay down His life for us. The Apostle Paul was expressing this kind of love for the believers at Philippi when he wrote to them, "Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all" (Phil. 2:17).

In going on to verse 17 Paul realized that not everyone was able to do all that might be needed in a particular case, but for those who had the means, and refused to help, we could only come to one conclusion: "How dwelleth the love of God in him?"

Although that was not the main reason that the Lord told the story about the good Samaritan, this could certainly be a second application of that illustration. The story is in Luke 10. The Lord spoke of a certain man who went from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by a group of thieves. They took his clothes. They injured him, and left him

in the road, half dead. A Jewish priest came along, saw him, and went on by him on the other side of the road. Next came a Levite who looked at him, so he saw the need. But then he, too, passed by on the other side. Then a Samaritan came along. He saw the wounded Jew, dressed his wounds, put the man on the animal he had been riding, took him to an inn, paid for him to be able to stay there until he got well. But then he left promising the inn keeper that he would return and take care of the injured man's expenses.

The priest and the Levite surely would have claimed to be a part of the people of God. But their behavior showed that there was something wrong in the hearts. But the Samaritan, who would have made no such claim. We can say that he at least outwardly appeared to be more of a man of God than the two Jews did. They had the name, but not the heart. The Samaritan had the heart even though he did not have the name.

I am concluding my message with verse 18 of 1 John 3. Again notice the tenderness of the Apostle John. Here we see the older apostle exhorting the people of God as "little children," not to love just in word or tongue, but in deed and in truth." It may be that he called them "my little children," because he was the one who had led them to Christ.

But the last verse of my text for this morning warns us against being hypocritical in our exercise of love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is absolutely essential that we love each other, but it is easy for us to be satisfied if it just amounts to words that we speak to each other, rather than coming from the depths of our hearts. In verse 18 John stressed the importance of making sure that our love is more than a matter of words. Words are important, but they must be backed up by what we do, and that we do it from the heart. Only the Holy Spirit can enable us to be genuine in our words and deeds. But we know the difference, and so does the Lord. And so let us pray that the Lord will enable us to make sure that our love for the Lord's people is real

There is an anecdote from history that has come into the records of church history by Jerome, one of the early church fathers. He had this to say:

When the venerable John could no longer walk to the meetings of the Church, but was borne there by his disciples, he always uttered the same address; that one commandment which he received from Christ, comprising all the rest, the distinctive feature of the new covenant, "My little children, love one another." When the

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brethren asked why he always repeated the same thing, he replied, 'Because it is the commandment of the Lord, and if this one be attained, it is enough' (Jerome).

This is why it seems to us that the Apostle John was giving the same exhortation over and over again. He did it intentionally. He stated it positively and negatively. He believed that it was the commandment of the Lord, and that if we are careful to make sure of this one thing, loving one another, then everything else will fit into its place. On the other hand, without this, there is hardly anything else that can be as it should be. Let us pray that the Lord will keep us from being hypocrites, but that our love for each other will closely follow the love that the Lord has for each of us, His people.