1 John 3:11-18: “The Contrast Between Love and Hate”¹
By Rev. Brian T. Cochran

Introduction
What is love? There are so many songs that speak about love: “Love makes the world go round,” “Love lifts us up where we belong, “All you need is love,” “What the world needs now is love sweet love.” And we could list thousands of more songs that speak about love. But what do we mean when we talk about love? Often people speak of love as an emotion. Wikipedia describes love in the following way: “Love is any of a number of emotions related to a sense of strong affection and attachment. The word love can refer to a variety of different feelings, states, and attitudes, ranging from generic pleasure to intense interpersonal attraction. This diversity of uses and meanings, combined with the complexity of the feelings involved, makes love unusually difficult to consistently define, even compared to other emotional states.” Notice all the emphasis on emotion. What we find in the Bible is something quite different. We find Jesus Christ who demonstrates the essence of what love is. And the way in which He displays love is foreign to the world. It goes much deeper than emotion, sentimentality, and infatuation. John points us to Christ this morning to tell us what true love is and how it is different from hate.

Last week John contrasted the children of God and the children of the devil by explaining that God’s children practice righteousness as a way of life whereas the devil’s children practice sin as a way of life. This week he continues with his thought by contrasting love and hate in these two opposite children. One commentator summarizes our passage in the following way, “Hatred characterizes the world, whose prototype is Cain. It originates in the devil, issues in murder and is evidence of spiritual death. Love characterizes the church, whose prototype is Christ. It originates in God, issues in self-sacrifice, and is evidence of eternal life.”² And so, with this basic summary in mind let’s consider our passage in greater detail as we consider our theme for this morning:

Theme: The Contrast Between Love and Hate
1. The Hatred of Cain and the World
2. The Love of Christ and the Church

1. The Hatred of Cain and the World
Once again John calls his churches back to the public message that they had heard from the beginning (v. 11). This is the opposite of the message of the false teachers which was a new and private revelation. John’s antidote to the lure of the false teachers is to remind Christians of the Word of life who was from the beginning and was made manifest in the flesh. He came with the message of life in his name for all who believe in Him and the command to love God and love one another. This is the basic Christian message and what these false teachers were espousing was a new religion that had no life, no light, and no love. The basic message of Christianity does not change. And an essential part of that message was that we should love one another.

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Christ told his disciples in John 13: John 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” In our passage, John is teaching what Christ had taught him, namely that it is evident who the children of God are in their love for one another. As one commentator put it, “Love is not an option for a Christian; love is not to be held hostage by our changing emotions. Love is an attitude that we cultivate and a pattern of behavior that we embrace.”

But before John goes on to speak about love, he first speaks about hate in the children of the devil with Cain as the prototype. Notice v. 12, 12 We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. John says that Cain was a child the devil! Jesus said a similar thing to the unbelieving Jews in John 8: John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning.

Once again John speaks in stark polarities. Things are black and white for John, with no grey areas. In John’s epistle we find the following contrasts: the children of God and the children of the devil; love and hate; practicing righteousness and practicing sin; Christ and antichrist; confessing Christ and denying Christ; light and darkness; eternal life and eternal death; love for the Father and love for the world. Here we find that the prototype of the church is Christ, and the prototype of the world is Cain.

Remember with me then the story of Cain and Abel from Gen. 4. Cain and Abel were the sons of Adam and Eve. We find in Gen. 4 that Abel was a keeper of sheep and Cain was a worker of the ground. When it came time to bring an offering to the LORD, Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground and Abel brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions, and God accepted Abel’s offering but not Cain’s. And so Cain grew angry and even though God warned him not to let his anger rule him, he ignored God’s warning and his anger grew until he rose up and killed his brother. What a terribly sad incident!

John asks in our passage, 12 And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous. So Cain was jealous and envious of his brother for his righteous deeds. He didn’t like the fact that God accepted his brother’s offering and not his own. And why didn’t God accept Cain’s offering? Some commentators have tried to suggest that it was because Abel offered a bloody sacrifice which is what God required for the forgiveness of sins. But nothing in Gen. 4 even hints at this nor does the rest of the Scripture explain it in this way. In the Genesis 4 account we read that Abel offered the best of his flock, a firstborn and of the fat portions, while nothing is said about Cain’s offering in this way. The account implies that Cain kept the best portions of his harvest and offered to God the leftovers. And when we come to the New Testament, we find three references to Cain (one of which is in our text). In Jude 11 we read, “11 Woe to [the false teachers]! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain.” In Heb. 11 we read, Heb. 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts.

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So the main difference between Cain and Abel is that Abel had faith in God’s promises while Cain did not. Cain’s offering did not arise out of faith, rather he was greedy for gain and so he offered up leftovers to God when God deserves our very best. Thus God could not accept his offering, because without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). Abel understood all of this and had faith in God’s promises and it was reckoned to him as righteous. This then is what provoked his brother Cain to kill him. Notice v. 12, \textit{12 Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous.}

Jealousy, envy, anger, hate, murder, this is what characterized Cain. It’s a good thing that there aren’t too many Cain’s today right? Wrong. John tells us that the world is still filled with people who are just like Cain: \textit{13 Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.} Hatred and murder still exists today.

Sadly, it was reported last week in the \textit{Leader Post} that Regina has already had three murders in 2010. Now many read such stories of murder and think, how could anyone murder another person? But what John teaches us this morning is that murder goes much deeper than mere external actions. He says, \textit{15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer.} Jesus taught this as well: \textit{Matt. 5:21} ‘You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ \textit{22 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.”} Jesus and John teach us that God doesn’t just abhor external murder, but that he also abhors the very root and cause of murder which is envy, hatred, anger, and desire for revenge. All these things are hidden murder in God’s eyes.

If there have been three murders so far in Regina this year, I wonder how many murders there have been in the hearts of the people of Regina so far this year? As fallen sinners in Adam we can so easily slip into anger and hatred and jealousy. It might be because someone just cut us off while driving. It might be because someone at school has embarrassed us. It might be because one of our co-workers so often succeeds in the places that we fail. Anger and rage can easily flare up over sports rivalries. We even lash out in anger at our own family members over whose turn it is to use the computer or the television or whose turn it is to do the dishes.

Indeed, sinful anger is crouching at our door and its desire is to rule over us, but we must rule over it. John says, do not be like Cain. Do not let anger enter into your hearts. Do not feed the desires of the flesh but starve them. Hatred, anger and jealousy are characteristics of the family of Cain, the world and the devil.

And the thing that the world hates the most is when its evil deeds are exposed and seen as unacceptable in God’s eyes. You see people can accept each others deeds as good, but ultimately what matters is what God thinks of a persons deeds. And apart from Jesus Christ, all of our deeds are tainted by sin. The prophet Isaiah says that all of our best works are like filthy rags. And so as a child of God, you will be hated the most for your confession of Christ, because the message of Christ exposes the world’s evil deeds. You see it is pretty easy to get along with the world apart from our confession of Christ. But no matter how well you get along with a person, the moment you start confessing Christ is the moment you will no longer be getting.
along. For no matter how humble and loving you are in your approach, the law and Gospel will offend others because the law exposes a person's sin and the Gospel says that Christ is the only way to be saved from sin. And because of these things the world will hate us.

But this shouldn’t surprise us John says. And Jesus told us the same thing: John 15:18 ‘If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but 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. And so if you are a child of God who confesses Christ, you will inevitably be hated by the world, and you may even be killed like Abel for your faith. But if this discourages you in any way, you need to be encouraged that the world is passing away with its desires, but the one who does the will of God abides forever (1 Jn. 2:17). If you look to Christ by faith, you will be resurrected to glory with Christ. To be a child of God is not always good in a temporal sense, but it is the ultimate good in an eternal sense. And one of the chief evidences that we are children of God is that we bear the opposite fruit of Cain and the world. Notice with me then, The Love of Christ and the Church.

2. The Love of Christ and the Church

John says, 14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. The evidence that we are children of God is that we bear the fruit of love in our lives. There is not just to be an absence of hatred in our lives as God’s children, there is also to be the presence of love in our lives. We may at times sin in our anger or lash out in rage, but these things are contrary to the Spirit that we have been given in Christ. These things are being put to death within us as we walk by the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

And so the prevailing characteristic of a child of God is that of love for others. And if you want to know what love is and if you want to be motivated to love others, John points us to Christ who is the supreme example of love: 16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. Love is not merely an emotion that you fall in and out of, love is laying down your life for someone. Love in its essence is self-sacrificial. Love is the opposite of Cain. Hatred culminates in taking another's life. Love culminates in giving up ones life so that another might live. This is the love of Christ.

The reason Jesus’ love is so amazing is that he didn’t just give up his life for his friends he gave up his life for his enemies. While we were sinners Christ died for us. Later John tells us, 4:10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. God took the initiative with us in his love for us. Beloved we deserved the wrath of God for our hatred of God, and our selfish hatred of others. We were like Cain. And yet God did not spare his only Son. Even though he was righteous he treated him as though he was a murderous sinner so that in him we might become righteous and accepted in God’s eyes. We who can still so easily harbor anger, hatred, envy, jealousy, thoughts of revenge, have been given a new identity in Christ.
And so, if you hate your sin and want to love more, the first thing you need to remember is that Christ laid down his life for you. He is the supreme example of self-sacrificial love. He is the essence of love in the flesh. But before you can truly love others in a way that is pleasing in God’s eyes, you must first receive His sacrifice by faith. His death was not only an example for Christians to follow it was a propitiation for our sins as John told us earlier. In his sacrifice he satisfied God’s wrath for those who trust in him. And so, first you need to hear that glorious declaration that your sins are forgiven and you are no longer under the condemnation of God. You are righteous in Christ. His death was your death and your life is now hidden in Him. The foundation of love for others is faith in Christ. Accept God’s promise by faith and then, in view of God’s mercy and love, offer up our own life to God as a sacrifice of thankfulness which is holy and acceptable in God’s eyes (Rom. 12:1). Remember Abel’s offering was accepted because he had faith. So too will your sacrifice of love for others be pleasing to God as it arises out of faith in Christ and is covered in his righteousness. And so, the only thing left for you to do is to become who you already are in Christ. You are free to love others not out of fear of damnation or selfishness, but out of thankfulness to God. The love of God compels us to love others.

And how then shall we love? Self-sacrificially as Christ has loved us. John says, "16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers." Are you willing to die for your brothers and sisters? This is the quality of love that we are called to. It’s the opposite of Cain and the world. This is the kind of love that magnifies the love of Christ. And of course this is a very sobering thought, but we know that God never tests us beyond what we are able to endure and that his grace will be sufficient for us in all circumstances. And we can be thankful to God for the religious freedom that we have in this country, but there are countries that don’t grant the same level of religious freedom to their citizens. And so, this is a real scenario for some of our brothers and sisters. Therefore, we must remember them in our prayers and never take our own freedom for granite. Let us lift our brothers and sisters up in prayer who are losing the ir lives for the sake of Christ. Let us pray for their hope and boldness to proclaim Christ.

Now in case you sort of feel like you are off the hook, since most of us will probably never encounter such a situation where we are called to lay down our life for another, John gives us another application that applies to everyday life. He says, "17 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? Who here has ever seen a brother or sister in need? I think we all can raise our hands to that question. It may be that someone needs some help with baby-sitting, or someone may need help with moving, or someone may need a ride to church, or someone might need help with the dishes after potluck, or someone might need help financially who just lost their job, or the church might need help financially when various needs arise. There are so many ways in which we can love one another in a self-sacrificial way that I could stand here forever and apply God’s command to love one another. You might not be called to sacrifice your life for one of your brother’s and sisters, but you will be called on a regular basis to sacrifice your time, your money, and your resources to help a brother or sister in need.
John asks, 17 **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?** 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. Beloved, actions speak louder than words. And you know where actions truly speak louder than words? When you love someone whom you don’t really like that much. You who say that you love your brothers and sisters, what about the brother or sister whom you have trouble getting along with? Notice that John switches from the plural in v. 16 brothers to the singular brothers in v. 17. One commentator says, “The transition from the plural (‘our brothers’, 6) to the singular (his brother, 17) is deliberate and significant. ‘It is easier to be enthusiastic about Humanity with a capital “H” than it is to love individual men and women, especially those who are uninteresting, exasperating, depraved, or otherwise unattractive. Loving everybody in general may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular’.”

And so let us all examine our hearts this morning and ask ourselves how we are doing at loving those who are the hardest to love? You know, the one who always cuts you off in the food line at potluck, the one who always gossips about you, the one who never says hi to you, the one whom you have nothing in common with, the one who has no social graces, the one who may even be out to get you. Beloved, let us not merely love our brothers in general, let us love each and every brother and sister whom Christ himself has loved and died for. And let us love each one not merely in **word and talk, but in deed and in truth.**

**Conclusion**

This is what we are called to as God’s children, as brothers and sisters in Christ. The world is passing away with its hate filled hearts, but we are to love like Christ. And we know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love our brothers and sisters. And where we fall short, let us be thankful to God that if any of us sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one, and He is the propitiation for our sins (1 Jn. 2:1-2). Let us continually seek our refuge in the righteous blood of Christ our Savior. This is the message of the love of God in Christ.

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Bibliography


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5 This bibliography represents the regular works consulted throughout this series though not always quoted in every sermon. Stott’s commentary I highly recommend as the best balance between technical and pastoral commentary.