

# Family Traits

John 3:11-24

Sermon 3/6 in a Series on 1 John

What does it mean to be righteous? This is the question that was on John's heart and mind when he wrote the third chapter of his First Letter. As we grow in Christ, St. John says we will have traits that show we belong to the family of God. At verse 23 he writes “we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.” John says that as we learn to live this way we will grow in righteousness.

In verses 11-24 St. John teaches us about righteousness by looking at three kinds of relationships. He would say the first two kinds of relationships are unrighteous and the third kind of relationship is righteous. According to these verses we can relate to other people at three levels:

- i) At a level of hatred that is comparable to murder (11-15)
- ii) At a level of love that doesn't put words in action (16-17)
- iii) At a level of love that leads to action (18-24)

1) A level of hatred that is comparable to murder (11-15)

a) The Devil's relationship with us: (11&15)

Relationship level number one is the worst possible scenario. John uses Cain as an example of this level of relationship... Cain's relationship with his brother was filled with so much hatred he murdered his own brother. How could a brother kill a brother? Because of who Cain belongs he exhibited the family traits of his father is the evil one...the devil.

Jesus talks about belonging to the devil's family when he is responding to the Pharisees and religious leaders he says in John 8, “You belong to your father the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him.” (8:44).

This is the Devil's level of relationship with us... he was a murderer from the beginning! It was the Devil's influence in the life of Cain that caused so much envy and jealousy he actually murdered his own flesh and blood!

Well certainly none of us are murderers! We could never become as angry, and hate someone like Cain did. Murder is that one clause everyone uses to get into heaven or to justify their worthiness....well I've never murdered anyone. Jump down to verse 15; Anyone who hates his brother.. add in sister...is a murderer...and a murderer certainly will not inherit eternal life.

Now we need to pause and think for a minute about the kind of hatred described here. St. John in interpreting the Cain and Abel story says at verse 13 that Cain's deeds were evil and his brother's righteous and that Cain was able to make a distinction between his own behaviour and that of his brother's. However rather than this leading to Cain's reform it intensified his hatred towards his brother. He hated what Abel represented and so his life became obsessed with a hatred for Abel. Genesis says as much when God speaks these words to Cain: "sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it." What an apt way of describing the power of hate. It wants to master us because the power behind hate is the devil. As children of God John would say to us there is no place in our vocabulary for this kind of hate.

Within St. John's teaching there is a theme woven throughout that the world is blinded and impelled by darkness and so hates the light. Since Jesus is the light, the world hates Jesus. In so doing it hates God. It also hates Jesus' followers. To live in the light as Abel did was to be a target of Cain's hatred. This is why he says at verses 12-14 that we are not to be surprised if the world hates you... why because the world hated Jesus. Sometimes we are surprised when the non-Christians dislike us or try to make life miserable for us. This is not something strange...John writes the words of Jesus in his gospel.. if they persecuted me...they will persecute you... But what should startle us is when there exists hatred and unresolved animosity between those who are fellow believers. If this attitude is not checked it can master us and lead to a kind of hatred that poisons the church.

So the first and saddest level of a relationship is a level of hatred toward one another. The second level of a relationship that John address is a:

2) A level of love that doesn't put words in action (16-17)

Jesus is the perfect example of Love! In fact John says this is how we know what love is! Jesus laid down his life for us! Jesus is our example, not anyone else. We can look good if we compare to other people's love. While we were still sinners Christ died for

us...he took our place for our sins...don't ever ever get tired of hearing that incredible act of love for you and me! Jesus is the example of true love, Cain is the example of counterfeit love.

Verse 17 is a level of love that is the opposite of Jesus' love. Notice the vivid contrast with Jesus' example in the previous verse "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Jesus was willing to lay down his very life but the person in verse 17 is not even willing to lay down part of his material possession for the sake of a fellow Christian."

There is a common theme running throughout the New Testament that is highlighted here. To show the love of Christ means living each day with an awareness of others and helping them when we are able. When we learn to live this way we are exercising the principle John refers to when talking about Jesus sacrificial love. It is the willingness to surrender that which has value for our own life, to enrich the life of another. If such a minimum response to the law of love, called for by such an everyday situation, is absent, then it is idle to pretend we are within the family of God.

Fine words will never take the place of fine deeds; and no amount of talk of Christian love will take the place of a kindly action to someone in need, made at some personal expense or with some self-sacrifice. this is why John would say that love without action is not the love of God. It can be very easy to talk about love, and call ourselves a church of love... But true righteousness is accompanied by practical kindness and generosity that shows the love of God.

A person does not have to murder in order to sin; hatred is murder in his heart. But a person doesn't even need to hate his brother to be guilty of sin. All he has to do is ignore him, or be indifferent toward him, or ignore his needs or avoid listening to his hurts.

Having discussed relationships at a level of hatred that is comparable to murder and at a level of love that doesn't put words in action John then looks at the level of love true Christians ought to have for one another.

3) This is a level of love that leads to action (18-24)

There is so much here...but I thought I'd focus on three key words in these last seven

verses. Love expressed in action, involves, truth, prayer and love. This is God's love..this is Christ centered love. It is putting actions to our words.

Verse 18 he says...let us love with action in truth. We obey our Heavenly father because we love him! We love others in truth. True believers put love into action that is real...its not a show, it flows out of the heart, its is sincere. In fact John says God knows our heart, he knows everything verse 19 says, he knows the attitude of our heart. Is your love for your brothers and sisters truthful? sincere? If you're a true child you will love others because of your real love for God. It will be a truthful, sincere and real love.

Love in action involves loving truthfully and sincerely, but love in action includes prayer. Verses 21-22 bring us back to prayer. A true child of God will bring prayer requests before the Lord that will be answered! Why? Because the love they have for God and others in their heart is real.

It is truthful. It is sincere! Again its always tough to understand verses like this that say we will receive anything we ask for, because there are a lot of things I ask for, and I'm sure you do too, that we don't receive. So you always have to look at the context of passage. John writes because we obey his commands and do what pleases him...that's the condition of answered prayer. If that is true we will only ask for things in accordance with God's will. I don't always understand why God allows pain or sickness or disappointment...but I know he does...I know he does in the lives of good people who are true Christians & our asking to be removed from them doesn't always happen.

The key in the context here is obvious though...John is talking about prayer for others...prayers of sincere love for your brothers and sisters in Christ. A true child of God prays...prays for his brothers and sisters and prays to be a sincere lover of people. This gets to the heart of this verse's meaning. If we prayerfully desire to be Christians in whom love leads to action God will answer these kinds of prayers. Providing both opportunities to exhibit this kind of love the power to carry through.

And a third key word I'd like to pull out of this text in the last two verses is the word Love. (read 23-24) A scribe asked Jesus to name the greatest commandment of all, He replied, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." Then he added a second commandment: "though shalt love thy neighbor as thyself", But John summarizes even that into one

commandment here in vs. 23. And those who obey his commands show evidence of being the true children of God they live in Him and He in them. Jesus is not talking about salvation, he's talking about fruit-bearing. The moment you receive Christ you become a child of God. But abiding in Christ living a spirit-controlled life is a moment by moment responsibility of the His Children! When a believer walks in LOVE he will obey God's commands and seek out God's will.

As we learn to live this way we will be a righteous people showing the family traits of our heavenly Father. Why? Because as John says at verse 23 "we will be believing in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and loving one another, just as he has commanded us."