

# The Way of Cain and the Way of Christ – 1 John 3:11-18

**Introduction** – Some would argue we have come to the second half of the epistle, the second main clause echoing the first (1:5). Others would argue we are spiraling around again on the ethical subject of love and assurance (2:7-11). In any event, the recent arguments are going in this way: you are not assured of being in Purity if you are not pursuing Purity (3:4-10), you are not assured of being in Love if you are not pursuing Love (vv 11-18). Assurance comes as we walk in the light, abide in Christ, pursue holiness, and love one another. But other things come from following the way of Jesus.

**The Way of Cain** (vv11-12) – Purity and love, while distinct, are connected to one another as well. While we are not told the details of why Cain's offering was not accepted (Gen 4), John focuses on what happened between Cain and Abel because of the evil works of Cain and the righteous works of Abel. There is a necessary antipathy between light and darkness, between righteousness and unrighteousness, the city of God and the city of man, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. These are always engaged in total war.

**The Blood of Abel** – Jesus speaks of the blood of Abel as the first blood shed by the unrighteous (Luke 11:51) and this comes from envy over the acceptance the righteous are receiving from God while warning, correction, and admonition are being given to the unrighteous (Gen 4:6-7, Matt 27:18, Acts 7:51-60, Acts 13:45). When John describes the slaying of Abel, he uses the Greek word *sphazo*, which means to butcher and can have the connotation of a grisly, sacrificial offering – “a slaying wed to piety, murder laced with prayer.” The way of Cain is to seek one's own self-justification while reacting in anger and revenge against those whose lives reveal God's acceptance of them – and to do so often in the name of righteousness and religion.

**The Marvelous, Murderous Hatred of the World** (vv13-15) – This is why the world hates you and always will (v13) and yet we have to be reminded not to be surprised. We smell like death to those who are perishing (2 Cor 2:16) and Jesus told us the world would hate us like it hates Him (John 15:18-25). And we have to remember that our culture is a culture of murder and death. Our culture hates inconvenience, is very selfish and self-righteous. Therefore, while walking in darkness, it is doing so with confident sophistication. Our murderous culture hates giving life to others if it costs them too much. Our world sets up abortion clinics so it can *sphazo* the innocent. It sets up government agencies so that communities do not have to deal with the needy personally. It hides the disabled and dying from its midst. They are inconvenient, they cost too much, and they have the smell of death, the judgment of the world, on them.

**A Community of Life** – And this is where the church is to be a city on a hill, a light shining in darkness. It begins when we are a people who love one another and are pleased to be inconvenienced for the sake of others. In equating the hater and the murderer, John is faithfully reflecting the teaching of Jesus (Mat 5:21ff). This is no exaggeration; it shows God's supreme concern for what goes on in our hearts as well as our hands. Hatred is the wish that the other person was not there, did not cost you something in time, treasures, or relationship. Hatred is the longing to see the other person go down, lose some blessing, cease to bother, or cease to exist – and so it is murder in the heart. Loving one another is no trivial thing; it is critically important. It is a matter of life and death.

**The Way of Christ** (vv16-18) – We want snazzy, hip novel, new ways to show the world that Jesus matters (or maybe to show them that we're cool too). We ought to be able to answer the question “*what is Jesus like?*” with “*come and watch the church, how we live with one another*” (John 13:34-35). In 16a we see the definition of Christ's love, and in 16b we see the command to follow His model. We often think we'll rise to the occasion when the big moment of giving our lives for Christ arises, even after a life of self-centeredness. And so v17 demands that we test and train ourselves in the little things, the humdrum daily decisions of life.

**Heart and Hands in the Matter** – There is a Christ-given empathy, when we abide in Christ, which causes us, like Christ, to be pleased to be inconvenienced for the joy of others to the glory of God. When the love of God overtakes a people, families and homes are radically transformed. And so are cultures of death, greed and envy. They will hate us, for they hated Jesus. But just as Christ's love transforms, so our love will transform to the glory of God. That love begins first among the brethren (Gal 6:10) and then it will overflow to the world around us.