

1 John 3 – Part O

1 John 3:11-15

^{1Jn 3:11} **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.**

In approaching [1 John 3:12](#) and the mention of Cain who slew his brother Abel, it is important to first stand back from this passage to appreciate the overall message that John is giving in this section from [1John 3:11](#) through [1 John 5:3](#). This is a section on a believer's love for God and their corresponding love for their fellow Christian believers. So whatever John says about Cain is somehow connected to that specific theme of the believer's love for God and for other Christians. Obviously, there is implanted in this real life example something that clearly relates to the believer's life and specifically to the issue of how they love God and other Christians. Christian love is foundational to what it even means to be a Christian. A believer's life is to be characterized by both a practical righteousness and abstinence from sin, as well as a heartfelt love for other believers and those who are not saved. For the last 2 ½ chapters John has said over and over that true believers do not live in sustained and habitual sin. It is a governing and controlling attribute of their life. In the next two chapters, John will continually say that genuine Christians will truly love other believers. It will be their normal and consistent way of life.¹ So, the life of a true believer will always be marked by righteousness and love.

In order to address the specific event with Cain that is mentioned, it is important to understand who Cain actually was. He was the first son of Adam and Eve. From a biblical perspective, that gives him a very prominent place in Scripture. In [Genesis 5](#) we are told that Adam lived 930 years. He had three sons that were mentioned in Scripture – Cain, who was the first born, then Abel who was born second, and Seth who was born when Adam was 130 years old ([Genesis 5:3](#)). [Genesis 5:4](#) says that after Seth was born that Adam simply “**had sons and daughters**”. So Cain and Abel were the two sons born first. It can only be assumed and not verified from Scripture, but it seems very likely that Adam, who was incredibly intelligent and had walked with God and had had fellowship with God, had shared much with his sons about what had happened. There is no timeframe given in Scripture for when Cain and Abel were born or what Adam may have communicated to them. It seems likely, however, that both Cain and Abel knew a great deal about God. Adam may have been the most intelligent person that has ever been born, and it should also be assumed that both of his sons were incredibly intelligent. I doubt there was any real sickness that plagued them. Everyone spoke the same language at that time. They lived in what would be considered a very fruitful and luscious garden where food was plentiful and easy to obtain. So, for the most part, life should have been fairly easy and enjoyable.

The story of Cain killing his brother is given in [Genesis 4](#). Abel kept sheep and Cain was more of a farmer, what [Genesis 4:2](#) calls a “**tiller of the ground**”. In due time, both Cain and Abel brought an offering to the Lord from their labors, and both should have been acceptable to the Lord if offered properly. However, God did not accept Cain's offering, and that made Cain extremely angry. So, God

talked with him and told him in v7 that if he simply did well that his offering would be accepted. Then God told him that if he did not do well that sin would be lying at his door and that he should rule over it. The first question that has to be answered is why did God not accept Cain's offering? The answer is given to us in [Hebrews 11:4](#) where it says,

Heb 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

The implication in this verse is that Abel's offering was given "by faith" and that was what made it a "more excellent sacrifice" than Cain's sacrifice. In other words, Cain did not give his offering to God in faith or "by faith". In our terminology we would say that Cain was simply going through the motions, but there was no heartfelt conviction in what he was doing. He was simply going through the motions. Now, it is important at this point not to lose sight of the fact that Cain was the first born son and probably had been given incredibly detailed spiritual information about God, about sin, and about reverence to God for all that He had provided. Many of the commentaries indicate that Cain's offering should have been an animal sacrifice, but there is nothing in the Genesis text that actually demands that it had to be an animal. That is not to say that there was not a sacrificial system, but if there was the Scriptures do not indicate it. Obviously the Scriptures do not provide any guidelines such as are given in Exodus and Leviticus. Certainly Adam had communicated high levels of spiritual truth that he had acquired in his initial fellowship with God, as well as lessons that he had learned through the tragic mistake that he made when he ate the forbidden fruit from the garden. There was no television, no Internet, and no libraries to go to, so in all likelihood, Adam being as intelligent as he was shared what he knew with his children. There probably were not a lot of distractions that had been yet developed, so being a family and spending time together was most likely normal, and during those times it can be reasonably assumed that Adam shared important spiritual issues with his sons. If that is true, then Cain certainly knew some vital truths about God and His expectations.

So as the story progresses, it appears that what Abel had learned created a genuine reverence for God in his life, and what Cain had learned had not created a similar reverence for God. So when God rejected his offering, Cain simply became angry with God and subsequently he became jealous of his brother Abel and eventually rose up and killed him without any justification whatsoever other than the fact that he did not like God's assessment of his personal life. In simple terms, Cain became mad and angry at God. He did not like God's evaluation of his life. He thought that what he did was fine and that God's judgment was wrong. It is amazing how often people become angry at God because of the consequences of their own personal sin. They do something that they know is disobedient and inherently outside of God's will, and then make God or other Christians to be their spiritual scapegoat. The reality is that the more ungodly a person is in their behavior, the more resentful they become of those individuals who are actually living a godly life.

Now obviously, this ties in with what John is communicating in his letter. The principle that can be gleaned from [1 John 3:12](#) and following is that a love for other people is directly related to a person's love for God. Stated another way, the less that someone honors God, reverences God, and loves God, the less that person will love other people. They will become fault finders, criticizers, complainers,

and nitpickers of others. They will call them names and make them look bad before other people. Why? Well, some of the insight from [1 John](#) is that they simply do not actually love God.

So from a practical perspective, each of us should be able to evaluate how much we actually love God by identifying how much we love other people, and especially other Christians. It seems, for instance, that if a Christian finds themselves becoming unjustifiably derogatory towards other Christians that the reason is most likely because they lack a genuine love and reverence for God. If someone is backbiting, or a gossip about other Christians, or always criticizing other Christians, what that should tell that Christian is that there is something strategically wrong in their personal love for God. In fact, what these next two chapters of [1 John](#) will tell us is that if we say that we love God, but hate our brother, that in reality we do not love God. For instance [1 John 4:20](#) says it this way,

1Jn 4:20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

[1 John 4:7-8](#) is just as strong when it declares,

1Jn 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ for God is love.

At a personal level, I am fully convinced that God brings different individuals into our life that will typically frustrate us and irritate us. They become His instruments to reveal particular spiritual attributes that we are missing in our personal Christian lives. The fact that they irritate us or that we do not like some particular feature of their life or how they may do things simply reveals that we are lacking particular qualities that God wants to develop in our life. So we see the person as an irritation and God sees them as a tool. The person annoys us, frustrates us, exasperates us, and could actually be considered as a kind of personal nuisance in our life. We all have experienced individuals like this in our life. There are Christians that we simply do not like as much as other Christians, but what we fail to see is how God wants to use that person in our life. For instance, [1 John 4:21](#) says,

1Jn 4:21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also.

Now just think about what that verse has said. John says that it is a commandment from God that if we love God that we must love other Christians. This is not optional, this is not something that is simply left up to our personal discretion, but it is something that God compels us to do. To bring all of this back into focus with the story of Cain, his obvious problem was that he simply did not love God, and the way that was demonstrated was how he treated his physical brother. So the way that we treat other Christians is simply a reflection of whether or not we truly love God. It is a barometer of where we really are in our spiritual maturity. If you were to ask me what would be the primary indicator of our love for other people, and especially other Christians, is what we say about them when we are not with them. For some strange reason, many Christians seem to think that the more critical they are of other people that the more spiritual it makes them appear. However, nothing could be any further from the truth. The spiritual reality is that the more critical and backbiting we become of other people when they are not with us is a genuine indicator of the fact that there is something seriously missing in our

love for God. The best thing that we could do when someone irritates us is to ask God what it is that is spiritually missing in our personal life. That would be the acid test.

When thinking about what it means to live a self-centered, selfish, and self-willed life (which is the opposite of God’s love), [1 John 3:12](#) reminds us of what actually happened to Cain. Cain had little reverence for God. In fact, [1 John 3:12](#) actually says that “**Cain was of the wicked one**”. In that same verse God says that “**his works were evil**”. The word “**evil**” is the Greek word “*poneros*” means that it is evil in both its effect and its influence.² In other words, it is a word that indicates that it wants to do harm to someone. It is often translated as “**malicious**” or “**wicked**”. It is the word used for “**evil spirits**” that want to do harm to you. It means that it is an aggressive kind of evil that actively opposes that which is good.³ Cain simply had his own agenda and how he was going to work things out. He liked his personal religion that he had developed for his life and he was perfectly satisfied that his religious efforts were all that were needed. If he only wanted to go to church once a month, who was God to question what he did? If he really did not spend any meaningful time with God, who was God to question his priorities? Who was God to think that he was not his own self-made man and able to make legitimate spiritual assessments? We know from Genesis 4 that Cain became jealous of his brother and eventually killed him. Cain revealed how angry he was with God and how utterly unrighteous he was by killing his brother. The more ungodly a person is in their behavior and the more disobedient they are to the Word of God, the more they will criticize and slander those who are obedient.

However, what does not seem to come out of the particular rendering in v12 for the word “**murdered**” is what it actually means. It is the Greek word “*esphaksen*” and means to butcher, to slay, literally to cut the throat.⁴ Strong’s says that it carries the meaning to slaughter and to maim violently.⁵ The Greek Interlinear actually uses the word “**slaughtered**”. It is the word used in [Revelation 13:8](#) describing Christ,

Rev 13:8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

[Revelation 6:9](#) speaking of those martyred during the Tribulation says,

Rev 6:9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

What Cain did was very violent and sadistic and probably could be compared to what happens with ISIS and how they murder their victims. The result of what Cain did was that God actually placed a curse on him for it. What God is clearly saying in this passage is that if someone is like that, then they simply are “**not of God**” (v10). Now, that should be obvious to everyone. However, it all began when Cain became irreverent to the things of God. So, we have to ask the questions – are we like this, are we irreverent towards God and His Word? Do we have a sarcastic tongue and a critical spirit of other Christians? Is this something that is characteristic of our life? Are we constantly finding fault in the lives of other believers and then criticizing them to other people behind their back?

Please appreciate that the Scriptures are not telling believers that they cannot be discerning in spiritual matters. There will always be times when actions, lifestyles, attitudes, and many other negative

attributes in people's lives need to be addressed. The Scriptures are full of reproof, correction, admonitions, and rebukes. In fact, it declares that reproofs are the way of life. We learn when we are corrected, and we learn when a brother or sister admonishes us in an area of our life that needs a reprimand. The area, however, that needs to be controlled and that becomes the genuine evidence of our Christian love for other believers is that we do not have a backbiting spirit or a spiteful tongue regarding them.

The whole point of most of the next two chapters is that genuine believers are not continually selfish and self-willed, but they truly love and care for other people. Certainly we all fail in this area of our life, and miserably at times. We have all been selfish. We have all been self-willed. We have all said things about other believers that we should not have said. We have all lacked self-control of our tongue. At times we have all placed our interests and priorities above the interests of other people. The issue, however, is not that we have, but rather that that is not the prevailing characteristic of our life in the same sense that continuing to live in open and blatant sin is not a prevailing characteristic of our life. The obvious problem that Cain had was not that he was jealous of his brother, but rather that he had no reverence for God. The way that is demonstrated in our life is through our reverence for and obedience to the word of God. [1 John 5:2](#) says it this way,

1Jn 5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.

ENDNOTES

¹ Akin, 154-155.

² Strong, 1325.

³ MacArthur, 132-133.

⁴ Akin, 155.

⁵ Strong, 1400.

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