

Refusing to Raise Cain

Heart to Heart, Part 4

1 John 3:11-18

For those who know the biblical narrative in the early chapters of the Book of *Genesis*, you may remember the tragic event in **chapter 4** where Cain took the life of his younger brother Able, becoming the first murderer in human history.

His name became a byword for trouble.

And to this day it still stands. In fact, I have met anyone who named their son in honor of the first-born son of Adam and Eve.

By the 14th Century, the phrase, *raising Cain* appeared in literature as an expression of summoning the spirit of evil – even of summoning the devil. In other words, you were raising evil or trouble by *raising Cain*.

Today, the expression, *raising Hell* is basically the modern equivalent to *raising Cain*. However, if you were to say to someone today – even someone unfamiliar with the Bible, “that your neighbors were *raising Cain* all weekend;” they would more than likely understand that your neighbors were having a raucous party, making a lot of noise, and – for the most part – doing all sorts of unholy things.

Several decades ago, Orson Wells produced one of the most often watched movies in history – *Citizen Kane*. Although he changed the spelling of the leading character’s name from Cain to Kane, his leading character was a man who over time became a ruthless, arrogant businessman who virtually destroyed all that was precious in life.

Citizen Kane was an obvious allusion not only to ruthless tycoons of his generation, but ultimately to Adam’s firstborn son.

And to this day, the mere mention of his name brings up something negative – something disorderly – even something sinful.

It’s interesting to me that the only Old Testament event referenced by the Apostle John in all of his letters is the Biblical account of Cain and Abel.

And John will effectively tell the believer that one of the marks of distinctiveness is the fact that Christians are unlike Cain.

So . . . to put it in contemporary language, the Christian’s life should not be one of raising Cain.

Turn in your copy of the Bible to First John chapter 3.

In **verses 11-18**, John will basically underscore three characteristics of Cain – and I am under the opinion that the Apostle John will make a number of allusions to Cain throughout these next few verses.

The first characteristic of Cain is:

1. The ultimate act of murder

Notice how John begins in **verse 11**. ***For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.***

Stop for a moment before we dive back into *Genesis* and the study of Cain and Abel.

John writes, ***This is the message which you have heard from the beginning.***

This specific word translated *message* appears in New Testament only 2 times – and both of them are in First John. He’s not referring to a sermon or a lecture but to the basic duty of every believer.¹

This is the obligation and distinguishing mark of every Christian. Perhaps you’ve been to a

dealership to purchase a vehicle and you were shown the basic, standard package – which amounts to a body with four wheels, 2 pedals, a steering wheel and seats; but if you wanted a stereo system, that was optional – it wasn't standard equipment.

Leather seats and a sunroof weren't standard; a built in GPS system wasn't either; an IT package where you could plug in your cell phone, your laptop, your hair curler and the microwave were all optional as well.

What John is saying here in *verse 11* is that loving one another isn't an option you can add to your life if you want to pay extra. It's the basic message of the believer's life.

In other words, love for each other isn't optional . . . it's considered standard equipment for the believer's life.ⁱⁱ

In fact, the present tense verb for love indicates that this is continual, habitual activity.ⁱⁱⁱ

Love isn't an optional convertible sun-roof you can open whenever the weather's nice – it's really more like the steering wheel that keeps you in the right lane.

Now what John does next is show us what it looks like to drive your life over a cliff.

These are the characteristics of Cain that lead to ruin – they are the opposite of what our lives should represent.

Notice again – *v. 11b. that we should love one another; 12. Not as Cain, who was the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil and his brothers were righteous.*

He couldn't stand his brothers righteous life.

And he slew him – John writes.

The word translated “slew him” occurs only here and in John's Book of Revelation – it's a verb that [speaks of] a violent death.

In fact, in the Greek Translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint – translated before the ministry of the Apostles – this word was used of cutting the throat or butchering sacrificial animals used in the Temple.^{iv}

It may very well imply that the very knife used by Abel to prepare his sacrifices as offerings to God was used by Cain to cut the throat of his brother in that violent struggle that led to Abel's death.

He hated him enough to end his life.

The characteristics of Cain include the outward acts of murder.

But notice next, it also includes the inward attribute of hatred.

2. The inward attribute of hatred

Simply put, Cain hated Abel. And he nursed his hatred for years . . . and the hatred in his heart eventually acted out in homicide.

In other words, murder is in the heart before it is ever in the hand.^v

Notice the progression in *verse 13. Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. 14. We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everybody who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*

That doesn't mean, by the way, that murder is an unpardonable sin. Murder, like any sin is exactly why Christ died on the cross – to pay the penalty for that sin and every sin. However, it is impossible for God to forgive the sin of murder if the murderer refuses to confess and repent of it.

And be careful here, even further – John isn't saying you get eternal life by loving other people; he's saying that the evidence of having eternal life is by loving other people – specifically your brothers – that is, those who are with you in the body of Christ.

But you don't love each other so you can go to heaven; you love each other as a demonstration that you are going to heaven.

He says here in *verse 14 – we have passed out of death into life.* Literally, we have already left the realm of death and we now belong to the realm of life

Hatred and murder belong in the realm dominated by Satan who is a murderer from the beginning (*John 8:44*).^{vi}

What John is basically communicating here is that we are most like Cain and the kingdom of death when we hate each other and we are most like Christ and the kingdom of life when we love each other.

And here's some surprising news – God evidently equates murder with hatred.

Which means God holds us accountable not only for the actions of our hands, but the attitudes of our heart.

Actions and attitudes can be equally destructive.

And hatred is one of the key characteristics in the world.

Back to that first phrase in *verse 13 – notice, Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.*

The Apostle John uses what Greek students call a first-class condition here – he isn't referring to *unlikely* hatred for the believer but *anticipated* hatred.

You could expand this phrase with that in mind so that the word "if" is expanded to "*and it will.*"

Verse 13 would then read, "***Don't be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you . . . and it will!***"

You mean someone can hate a believer as much as Cain hated Abel?

Absolutely!

Read your history books and today's newspaper.

But why?

Christians make the best citizens in a free world.

They keep their word, pay their taxes, mow their lawn – most of the time – help others, live lives of humility and deference . . . why?

For the same reasons Cain hated Abel.

The world hates the believer – in varying degrees and expressions – for at least three reasons:

a. First, because of the way the Christian lives.

The believer's life intuitively represents a condemnation on those around them.

The life of purity invites respect on the one hand, but secret jealousy and conviction on the other.

The way a Christian lives literally exposes the corruption of the world around him.

Not only that – the world hates the believer, secondly,

b. Because of the gospel the Christian believes.

- Our gospel is one of sin and redemption.
- Our gospel is both condemnation and justification.
- Our gospel is both danger of hell and the promise of heaven.
- Our gospel is exclusive and allows no other gods, no other paths.
- Our gospel is not one of many faiths, but only one true faith.

- Our gospel condemns every other religion as false, and offers no other way to God the Father but through Jesus Christ alone.

Travel around the world today – to Iran, Pakistan, South Asia, North Africa, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Laos, Uzbekistan, China and the Sudan and discover the reality of the news you will never hear – that those who convert to Christianity do so at the peril of losing their own lives.

As a church family, we are currently supporting one family who is involved in secretly training pastors from one of these countries – and these pastors risk their lives and the lives of their family members if they are caught.

Read the biography of Hudson Taylor and his stunning recollection as he traveled through the land of China – that he never established a church without first experiencing a riot – villagers who would only come and inquire under cover of darkness – like Nicodemus who came to Christ at night in order to save his reputation – and possibly his life (*John 3*).

The gospel confronts everything as false and foolish and flawed as well as eternally dangerous.

The world hates the believer because of the way the Christian lives; because of the gospel the Christian believes;

c. Thirdly, because of the future the Christian inherits.

Motivated by devilish hatred, that can only be explained in terms of collaboration with the forces of darkness, the world acts as Satan's pawn to imprison, torture, discredit, and even kill those who, in the words of Jesus Christ, *will one day inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5) Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:10).*

Listen, Satan is just not a good loser.

And he knows his future imprisonment will last forever. The world hates the believer for the same three reasons Cain hated Abel:

- Abel's obedient life was a rebuke to Cain's disobedient life.
- Abel's offering pointed to the coming blood sacrifice of the Redeemer, the only way to approach God, while Cain's

offering pointed to the works of self-made religion and the best efforts that man could offer.

- Abel's relationship with God was authenticated by the word of God and Cain was left out . . . and he nursed his hatred until it turned into mankind's first case of homicide – premeditated murder, of the first degree.

And keep in mind that Cain was not an atheist. He was deeply religious.

We're told in *Genesis 4:3 that in the course of time they – Cain and Abel – brought their offerings.*

Thomas Manton pointed out that this phrase, "in the course of time" referred to an annual sacrifice. They literally came at the end of a year's time.^{vii}

This practice had resulted from the atoning sacrifice made by God on behalf of their parents, Adam and Eve, who had sinned against God and had been clothed by animal skins as a result of an atoning offering made on their behalf years earlier.

Thus the practice began.

Sacrifices were not the creation of mankind; they were the illustration of the gospel of the innocent animal dying on behalf of the sinful, repentant, worshipper.

Cain and Abel and their parents before them had been offering an annual sacrifice to God – a precursor of the High Priest's annual sacrifice on the Day of atonement in the Tabernacle and then later in the Temple; finally culminating with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ the Lamb of God.

Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel and every Old Testament believer after them accepted the gospel message of atonement and they brought their sacrifices, picturing – pointing – to the coming suffering Savior (Isaiah 53).

Cain and Abel didn't come up with the idea of piling stones on top of one another and killing and burning an innocent animal on top of it.

Atonement wasn't their idea, it was God's idea – God would be approached only through the shed blood.

Now there are three issues that need clearing up in order to understand the murder of Abel and how it might relate to the world in which we live.

First, you need to understand that Cain didn't kill Abel after the first time they'd offered a sacrifice.

They'd been following their parents and offering their annual sacrifice for years.

In fact, Old Testament scholars put the clues together and place Cain and Abel somewhere in their early 100's when the tragedy occurs of Abel's murder.^{viii}

Cain's rebellion against God's prescribed method of worship through atoning sacrifice had been building for years.

The murder of Abel in *Genesis 4* did not follow their first appearance before the altar. They had sacrificed perhaps a hundred times before.

Secondly, you need to know that Cain didn't get stuck with the short end of the stick.

Moses recorded in *Genesis 4* that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground, which he had evidently harvested, and Abel brought the firstlings of his flock which he had obviously raised.

And the Lord rejected Cain's offering and accepted Abel's.

Abel obviously had an unfair advantage . . . poor Cain; he had chosen the wrong career.

John the Apostle here in *verse 12* makes it clear **that their deeds** – a reference to their offering – were distinctive. Cain's offering was *evil* – that is, it represented the effort of his own hands – and Abel's offering was *righteous* – or right – that is, it followed God's prescribed approach through an atoning sacrifice.

The third thing I want to point out is that God graciously and clearly warned Cain of his growing rebellious heart.

Moses records in *Genesis 4* that after rejecting his sacrifice of vegetables, God warned Cain of the danger of his sinful pride.

You can imagine the scene.

Adam, Cain and Abel are there at the altar where it had stood for centuries – remember, Adam will live nearly a 1,000 years. They have come to the place, more than likely, just outside the gateway into Eden, which was now guarded by cherubim – warrior angels holding a flaming sword (*Genesis 3:24*).

Old Testament scholars conjecture that it would naturally be at this very place where Adam and Eve were exiled; the place where the curse was delivered as well as the promise given of a coming Redeemer; the place now guarded by angels – it would be at this place where Adam and Eve, and then their sons with them, would come and offer their annual sacrifices.

And how would they know if God accepted their offering?

I would agree with others that God accepted their offering just as He often accepted the offering of many Old Testament saints – by sending fire from heaven.

- When Aaron, the High Priest, offering is sacrifice in *Leviticus 9*, God sent fire from heaven and consumed the offering on the altar.
- When Gideon offered a sacrifice to God in *Judges chapter 6*, God responded by sending fire from heaven.
- When Elijah battled the false priests of Baal in a duel of true and false religion, God responded to Elijah's offering by sending fire from heaven to lick up the water around the altar and consume the offering (*1 Kings 18*).
- In *1 Chronicles 21*, David offered sacrifices to God and God answered by sending fire down from heaven.
- Finally, when Solomon dedicated the Temple to God, we're told in *2 Chronicles 7* that fire came down from heaven and consumed all the sacrifices they were offering.

Both Cain and Abel had seen the fire of God fall from heaven on their sacrifices – validating their offering as acceptable – and they had seen it happen for years now.

Only Cain had had enough.

The Serpent who deceived his mother had been obviously delivering to him the same lies – “God won't care what you do . . . do your own thing . . . has God really set up such a rigid standard of acceptance . . . Can't any religious act be acceptable if it's sincere . . . I mean, you're using an altar . . . you're bringing a sacrifice . . . you believe in God up there . . . you've come at the appointed time . . . God will take note of all those good things and overlook all those tomatoes.”

“Besides, it's about time you stopped getting one of Abel's animals for your sacrifice and bring your own blue ribbon squash . . . surely God won't be so closed minded!”

And Cain said, “Yeah . . . exactly!”

But fire never fell on his sacrifice . . . and Cain slunk away in shame and burning anger.

You see, God really is closed minded.

The gospel isn't one of many options . . . it is the only way mankind will ever approach and worship God.

You want to reach God? You want forgiveness from sin? You want eternal life? God has provided all that for you.

In fact, John writes here in *verse 16*. ***And we know love by this (here's how we know the love of God – here's how we can have a foundation of fellowship with God – and here's how we can approach God the Father – He – God the Son – laid down His life for us . . .***

The aorist active verb – ***He laid down*** – refers to a deliberate and voluntary act. The crucifixion wasn't a mistake. Jesus wasn't a martyr. He willingly sacrificed Himself, and it was all according to the predestined plan of God (*Acts 2:23*).

I appreciated one author from the past pointing out that this text is a lot like the first John 3:16.^{ix}

The first ***John 3:16*** says – ***say it with me: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”***

And now, later in his life, John writes in what this author called the 2nd John 3:16 – here in ***1 John 3:16***, the same message – that ***He, Christ, laid down His life for us***.

The cross is all about a God who planned the way to reach us – not because He saw anything attractive in us, but because He wanted to save us by grace and secure a bride for His beloved Son. We were on the side of the opposition, we were guilty, hell-deserving, devil-embracing, self-loving, sin-cherishing people; repulsive to His pure and unsullied holiness and yet He loved us and Jesus died for us.^x

That's the glory and grace and gospel of ***John 3:16 and 1 John 3:16***.

A famous Welsh Hymn that played a significant role in the Welsh revival of 1904 sang:

*Here is love vast as the ocean,
Loving kindness as the flood,
When the Prince of Life, our ransom,
Shed for us His precious blood.*

*Who His love will not remember?
Who can cease to sing His praise?*

*He can never be forgotten,
Throughout heaven's eternal days.*

*On the mount of crucifixion,
Fountains opened deep and wide;
Through the floodgates of God's mercy,
Flowed a vast and gracious tide.*

*Grace and love, like mighty rivers,
Poured incessant from above,
And heaven's peace and perfect justice,
Kissed a guilty world in love.^{xi}*

Now God didn't just say He loved us, right? Talk is cheap. The Bible informs us that because God so loved the world he – gave. John writes here, ***He laid down His life for us.***

But John isn't finished – he goes on to make this incredible application – notice the next phrase in ***verse 16, "...and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."***

Self-sacrificing love isn't just for Jesus – isn't He great – that's how we expect Jesus to live! Oh, this is for us too?!

This is what it means to refuse the way of Cain.

You see, when you refuse to raise Cain – when you reject the actions and the attitudes of Cain – what you're doing is refusing the ultimate act of murder; you are confessing the inward attribute of hatred and, thirdly, you are resisting:

3. The outward attitude of indifference

Notice John's further illustration in ***verse 17. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart and against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18. Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.***

I can't help but believe John is still thinking of Cain, even in this illustration.

You remember when God came and asked Cain, "Cain, where is your brother, Abel?" and Cain responded with callous indifference and sarcasm, ***"Am I my brother's keeper?"***

Cain may have been using a play on words in his sarcastic response – "Am I supposed to be keeping watch over my brother like he keeps watch over his sheep?"

Who put me in charge of babysitting my little brother? That isn't my job!

The Apostle John says, "Oh?"

Notice, "whoever sees his brother in need."

John is referring to one Christian seeing another Christian in need – not that you don't help unbelievers, but it is especially critical that the church takes care of its own – especially in the days of John and even now around the world where Christians are suffering tremendous loss and deprivation.

Do you see your brother in need, John asks?

The word for ***see*** is from the Greek word that gives us our word theater (θεωρεω). In other words, John pictures us watching carefully some drama unfold as if we're in the audience and some needy believer walks out onstage.

And instead of responding with help, John writes, ***you close up your heart*** – your inner affections – you literally slam the door shut – you lower the curtain so you don't have to see them onstage anymore.

It's a lot easier to pray for the starving millions out there you don't see than it is to buy groceries for someone in your church family you do see.

One poet put it tongue in cheek when he wrote:

*To love the world, to me's no chore;
My greater challenge is the guy next door.^{xii}*

You want to avoid the indifferent callous attitude of Cain? Then accept the fact that you are your brother's keeper. That is, you are obligated to love and care for and help and pray for and serve and lay down your rights for and dedicate your time to and your ministry to and even your life, if so called upon by God.

We resist the actions and attributes and attitudes of Cain – by going back again and again to the cross, where our Prince of glory died. There our cold hearts are warmed again; there our hardened hearts are softened again; there our selfish hearts are opened again.^{xiii}

And raising Cain – which an ongoing threat in every one of our hearts, is battled back by the word of God and the Spirit of God.

Self-preservation is the law of Cain; self-sacrifice is the love of Christ.

We must daily dedicate ourselves, not to raising Cain, but reflecting Christ.

*Make me a servant, humble and meek
Lord, let me lift up, those who are weak.*

*And may the prayer of my heart always be;
Make me a servant, make me a servant,
Make me a servant, today.*

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/3/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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x Sam Gordon, Living in the Light: A Walk through 1, 2, 3 John (Ambassador, 2001), p. 130
xi Ibid
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