

## Arrows Out

### 1 John 3:11-18

May 4 & 5, 2013  
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For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 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? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:11-18)

1 John is a small letter with enormous things to say to the church as a whole and to Christians. It is especially uncomfortable for people trying to masquerade as Christians. As our country becomes more secular, masquerading Christianity is increasingly difficult. However, there are still masses of people who want just enough Christianity to feel good about their chances in eternity but not so much that it actually makes a difference in their lifestyle. 1 John keeps hammering away at comfortable Christianity by making absolute statements in the categories that masquerading Christians don't want touched—their moral lives and their responsibility to love others. 1 John forces us into polarities: light and darkness; love and hate; children of God and children of the devil. There isn't any fence-sitting or faith-straddling. He forces us to ask, Which side am I actually on? It's not about what I say but what I do; not as the condition of salvation, but as the evidence of it.

John draws a big line of distinction in this passage by showing the difference between hate and love as seen in Cain's murder and Jesus' sacrifice and how all true Christians love others in sacrificial ways.

The passage is held up by two poles: love and hate; and love and deeds.

#### Love and Hate

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. (1 John 3:11)

John refers back to this core principle they heard at the beginning of their Christianity. We should love one another. Of all the emphases John's pastoral ministry had, this was the center. Love one another. He is known as the disciple of love. He calls himself "the disciple Jesus loved" in his gospel. More than any other New Testament writer, he emphasizes love as a hallmark of true Christianity.

If John was your pastor, he had a long teaching series on love. I got on the Apostle John's blog and saw the series he did: Love is a Verb; Love Makes the Church Go Round; Really Crazy Love. That's tongue in cheek, but love was the key for John. Of course, not just for John but throughout the New Testament. So now, faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13). John was the pastor of love and his people would have been very familiar with the theme. John then draws a comparison

between what Cain was famous for and what Christ was famous for. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. (1 John 3:12)

Genesis 4 tells us the story of the two sons of Adam and Eve. Cain was the oldest. Abel was the youngest. They represent the first generation after humanity's fall into sin and immediately sin's destructive power is seen. Genesis 4 describes Cain and Abel making an offering to God. This is well before the giving of the law which gave regulations for offerings to God. We don't know what they understood exactly but clearly offerings and worship were already part of their lifestyle. What we knew was that their hearts in giving their offering were dramatically different. Cain was a farmer and Abel kept the flocks. Both gave offerings to God. Cain gave vegetables. Abel sacrificed sheep. God accepted Abel's offering but not Cain's. Cain was upset. Why did God accept his brother's and not his? Evil stirred in his heart and he cast a jealous eye toward his righteous brother Abel. That jealousy became hate and the hate led him to murder Abel. We see a triad develop. Jealousy/Hate/Murder (see John Stott for more on this). Thankfully, it was the last time in human history that siblings would be jealous of each other.

John reminds his church of what Cain did and why Cain did it. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. (1 John 3:12) Cain's feelings toward his brother Abel represent the effects of hate on human relationships. As Marshall points out, "All hate is embryonic murder" (Marshall, 1 John, p. 190). Hate is the opposite of love. As we will see, love self-gives for others' lives and does what is best for them. Hate takes the other's life and does what is worst for them. Hate wishes the other person was not there (Ibid, p. 190). Hate is the seed behind all murder, though not all hate leads to murder. But they are intrinsically related.

Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (1 John 3:13-15)

Cain was the archetype for a sinful humanity. Hate, not love. Death, not life. Takers not givers. Murderers not martyrs. Doesn't this explain why the world's default setting is against what Christianity stands for and against those who are identified as Christians?

Think about why Jesus was killed. What was it that drove the murderous intentions of the Jewish leaders? It was complex, no doubt. There was politics involved. But at its core, they hated him. For what? All that healing and all those miracles and bringing people back from the dead. Those are really good reasons to hate someone, right? What was it really?

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. (John 3:19-20)

Darkness hates the light. Satan hates God. Cain hated Abel. The Pharisees hated Jesus. All that is needed for darkness to stir with hate is for light to shine a little.

We see this in the world around us. Even in a supposed Christian nation. Why is Christianity so vilified? Why is the Christian worldview mocked as it is? They don't try and destroy other religions or cults or people that follow some other creed. But Christianity is berated on all sides. A few recent examples: Pastor Rick Warren's son tragically committed suicide and he

was skewered on social media. Why are high profile Christians like Tim Tebow treated like they are? Why he is scorned like he is? Why is holding to a moral universe on social issues like abortion or so called same-sex marriage derided so vehemently? Is it just a coincidence that it's always the Christian worldview that is mocked or is it simply affirming what Jesus said? Men love darkness and hate the light. Behind the rhetoric and faux intellectualism is a spiritual reality as old as Cain and Abel. Who does Abel think he is? Hate indicates spiritual darkness. Murder is a sign of someone walking in spiritual darkness.

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (1 John 3:15)

It would be easy for us to think, Well, I certainly haven't murdered anyone. I must be saved. Many people look for indicators of salvation in what they don't do. I don't do this, I don't do that; I must be a Christian! Spirituality defined by what I don't do. John won't let us do that. Love is not the absence of hate. Love is the presence of something else.

### Love and Self-giving for Others

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (1 John 3:16)

Sometimes Bible references help us remember. This is 1 John 3:16 and it's almost the same as the famous John 3:16. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son. God loved the world and that love produced self-giving for our good. 1 John 3:16 says, By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us. When John talks about love, it isn't in the abstract or ethereal. He isn't talking about sentimental love. He certainly isn't talking about empty love talk.

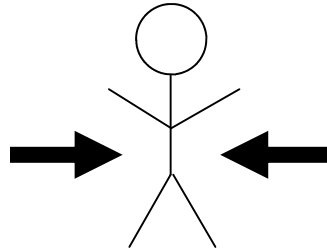
This is how we know what real love is, he laid down his life for us. There is a kind of love that indicates that we are Christians. It is a love that is the opposite of the world's hate. Hate is a taker. Hate is a murderer. Hate takes a life. Hate wants the worst for the other person. Hate wishes the other person wasn't here. Hate is darkness. Hate is evil.

But love...love doesn't take; it gives. Love doesn't do the worst for the other; it wants the best for them. Love will sacrifice its own good for the joy of the other. This kind of love is preeminently displayed in what Jesus did on the cross. O what love that is! Calvary love. God bleeding for us. God suffering for us. God dying for us. He laid down his life for us. He died for our sin and died for our shame and died for our eternal salvation. Don't talk about sentimental love that only loves in words and feelings. Go to the cross and see what real love is. Bloody. Selfless. Exhausting. Total.

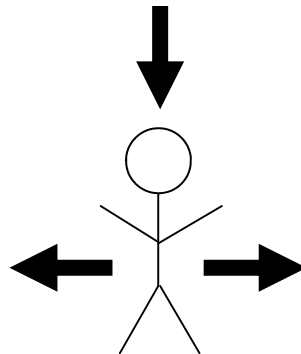
And then he adds, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (1 John 3:16)

The mark of a true Christian is someone who has embraced, by faith, love's ultimate expression in Christ's death for us. By God's design, this love in us becomes God's love through us. That's just the way he's made it. Is it so hard to believe God would engineer it that way? The God who made water turn into ice and larvae turn into butterflies and winter turn into spring, can't he engineer his love to turn haters into lovers? Turn takers into givers? Murderers into martyrs? God's love in us changes us fundamentally. The Spirit does this through regeneration. His love will produce that same kind of self-giving love as a character quality of the genuine Christian.

The unbeliever lives with self at the center:



But salvation is the experience of God's love which turns the taker into a giver:



The hater becomes a lover.

"So, Pastor Steve, what do I have to do to know I'm a Christian? What's the bare minimum?"

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? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:17-18)

It would be easy to affirm the central message here and think, "OK, don't hate or murder. Love. Sounds good. Let's go." John doesn't let us love in general. He takes us down to the street level. If anyone has the world's goods. If we have material means. And sees his brother in need. It doesn't say what kind of need and it doesn't say how he has come to need it. Circumstances? Tragedies? Personal choices? All it says is, brother in need. "Brother" I take to mean primarily a fellow Christian, but Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan draws a wide circle.<sup>1</sup>

If a Christian sees a fellow Christian in need and closes his heart to him, turns his back, feels no compassion for him in his distress, wishes him well without arrowing out to him—how does God's love abide in him?

God's kind of love doesn't move away from need; God's love doesn't arrow inward, it arrows outward. Jesus saw the widow burying her son and felt compassion. He saw Martha and Mary weeping and he wept with them. He saw the masses of people and felt compassion for them. Even sinners caught in their sin, like the woman caught in adultery, Jesus' heart never "closed" to them. It did the opposite. It wanted to meet the need. It arrowed out to them. That's agape love. That's divine love. When God's love is in us, it does the same

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<sup>1</sup> See Gal. 6:10

thing. It arrows out to the need. Compassion leads to action. Maybe we call that "compaction." Compassion in action. Compaction. How is your compaction? Outward arrows.

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. (C.S. Lewis as quoted by Daniel Akin, 1, 2, 3 John, p. 160.)

This is what John calls "love in word or talk." Lots of people talk about loving and you've probably heard sermons about loving one another. So we are courteous to others as we leave church and that's about it. How do you know who actually loves? Words? Words are cheap. Words are easy. Lots of people talk about love and compassion and mercy ministry. It aggravates me to no end when I see politicians who are supposedly advocates for the poor and marginalized in society but then their tax returns are made public and they personally give a paltry amount in charitable donations. They will give other people's tax money but not their own.

Is it so different in churches? It's easy to hide behind thoughts like, "Our church gives," or "Our church ministers," or "Our church is doing Mission Them." We are about outward arrows and I am a member of an outward church.

But then your neighbor has a need or someone in your world is hurting. That is the moment. What do you feel? Does your heart close or open? Do you arrow outwardly or inwardly? These moments, more than a thousand sermons on loving, say more about where we are spiritually. Do we talk or do we do? Which way do our arrows orient?

I do think this is something we can grow in as we mature as Christians and few of us would say we love enough. However, is the heart there? We're also talking about drive-by compassion moments. The once-a-year kindness moment that makes me feel better but I-don't-want-to-actually-get-involved-with-people kind of love. Pagans and cults do that.

### [The Downward Arrow of God's Love is the Key](#)

The Christian message is not to go out and try harder. The point of this message isn't to go out and try to love more. This is and must be rooted in the gospel of God's love to us. The outward arrows from my life show that I actually get the gospel. I get this amazing love of God in Christ. I get how I don't deserve it. I get God's unmerited love to me. When the downward arrow is believed and treasured, when it humbles me, when God's grace amazes me, it changes the direction of the arrows of my life off of me and toward others. This frees me from bitterness and anger and victimization. I am free to love others in the way God has loved me. It is this kind of love that Jesus refers to in John 13:35, By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. This creates powerful and visible expressions of the gospel. This may mean forgiving a betrayal; sacrificing some purchase to meet a material need; a willingness to step into people's messy lives; the hospitality of home or car or whatever. These are examples of practical love; street level love; in truth and deed kind of love.

Take a moment and do a little self-inventory. When was the last time you sacrificed time, money, or personal energy to involve yourself in the messy, practical needs of another Christian or anybody? Would we all agree there are many needs around us?

Here is an example. This past year a family in our community was in a car accident. The mom was hurt and one of her children hospitalized. As a result of the injuries and time it

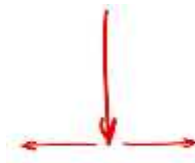
took to recover, she lost her job. To further complicate matters, her ex-husband lost his job and the child support payments stopped coming in. This woman happens to work with a Bethelonian. He suggested she reach out to our church which she did. Our benevolent team provided some assistance and two women began to meet with her for the purpose of helping her with life and spiritual matters. They got her a Bible and were praying with her.

The woman writes this: "...after I left our meeting, my hopes and feelings started to change a little. You will never understand what a difference this has made in me and my children's lives. I have met so many wonderful people and I will never forget the little bit of peace and sunshine that has been put back into our lives. Things are still difficult, but mentally and physically I am feeling stronger every day. Please let me know if there is ever anything that I can do to volunteer to show my gratitude. I have been attending services at the Cedar Lake campus and hope to become a member soon."

That's a great way of loving people into the kingdom of God. What do you suppose those two women feel when they see this single mom and her family coming into our Cedar Lake campus for church? It's a rush. It's like a high. It's a blessing.

How about it in your life? Has the vertical love of God created a kind of love for others that moves past just words to actual involvement? If not, why not? I'll bet you know of some need. You maybe have even prayed for it as a half-measure to appease your conscience about actually getting involved.

Take the step. Walk across the room. Make the call. Write the check. Extend the hand. Offer your help. Get involved. Arrow down means arrows out.



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