

## **“Who Do You Serve?”**

### **I John 3:10-15**

Last week we looked at John’s challenge to no longer let sin be a habitual part of our lives. There are people who commit themselves to sin, just as one commits himself to God. John refutes the idea that Jesus’ forgiveness has now given us more reason to allow sin to remain in our lives, so that God can show more and more of his goodness.

But we saw that Scripture makes it very clear that God will judge us based on how we live our lives, and on how we stray away from a life of sin. Why? Because God hates sin with a passion. It violates his nature, his plan, and his purposes. Sin is illegal in the eyes of God, and should be viewed the same by those who are His children.

John pointed out to us though a vital principle in regards to living a righteous life. He told us that those who sin show that they lack knowledge of God, just as those who separate themselves from sin show that they have an understanding of what God thinks and expects. If people really understood the reality of who God is, how God feels or how it places them in a position of judgement then I am sure that they will change. But people choose to ignore these facts, hoping that in the end that it will be different.

Heaven and Hell are real. The judgement of God is real. And there will be one day when we experience either his love or his wrath. Satan would like nothing more than to make one deny this reality. He wants to keep us in a place of danger, whether we know it or not. Through his lies he wants us to remain in sin, either stating that it is okay, or that it isn’t bothering anyone.

John continued on and told us that as children of God we can find freedom from a life of habitual sin. We can find it, not simply in our own effort, but in the power of God and his ability. But those who choose to remain bound by sin will find themselves in danger. In **Hebrews 10:26-29** we saw a warning to those who trample on the Son of God and who treat his blood as if it were common or unholy.

This warning is not exempt from professing Christians. In fact, in Hebrews we read:

*Dear friends, if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received a full knowledge of the truth, there is no other sacrifice that will cover these sins.*

Christians are not allowed to live in habitual sin. God does not give us permission to live that way. But when we are serious about dealing with our sin problem God does stand there with open arms to forgive.

This morning John continues in **I John 3:10** and now begins to tell us what it means to belong to God.

*So now we can tell who are children of God and who are children of the Devil. Anyone who does not obey God's commands and does not love other Christians does not belong to God.*

## **1. We are Disciples or Students**

The term children here can also be translated as a pupil who learns from, one who mold their mind based on ones teaching, thus taking on the same characteristics as the teacher. A child of God allows God to teach them, to mold their minds, and thus take on His character. The same is true with a child of Satan.

What is it that we fill our minds with? Do we fill them with the commands and expectations of God, or do we fill them with mindless, useless, destructive ideas and situations that cause our minds to dwell upon areas that do nothing but hinder our obedience to God? Who is our teacher?

John tells us that we can see who our teacher is and gives us two indicators: Obedience and love. In verse 11 John now begins to elaborate on these two indicators and says:

*This is the message we have heard from the beginning: We should love one another.*

Notice that in verse 11 John gives us a command that we are to obey. And that command is to love one another. I believe that it could be said that obedience and love are connected.

## **2. Obedience and Love are Connected**

Later on in II John 1:6 John tells us:

*Love means doing what God has commanded us, and he has command us to love one another, just as you have heard from the beginning.*

Jesus said in **Matthew 6:24**:

*No one can serve (obey) two masters. For one will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*

*"If you love me, obey my commandments." **John 14:15***

*"All those who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and live with them." **John 14:23***

Many people cannot walk away from their sin simply because they love it too much to give it up. They love their sin yet their love for God is lacking. This fact is related to

who we allow to become our teacher – God or Satan. Why is it that every time Christians find themselves in sin that they sense such great disappointment, guilt, or conviction? It is because they are still trying to serve two individuals who are contrary to each other.

John continues on in **I John 3:12** and gives us an example of this conflict. He says:

*We must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one, and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because Cain had been doing what was evil, and his brother had been doing what was right.*

### **3. The Example of Cain and Abel.**

In **Genesis 4:3-8** we read of this account:

*At harvest time Cain brought to the Lord a gift of his farm produce, while Abel brought several choice lambs from the best of his flock. The Lord accepted Abel's offering, but he did not accept Cain's. This made Cain very angry and dejected. "Why are you so angry?" the Lord asked him. "Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you respond in the right way. But if you refuse to respond correctly, then watch out! Sin is waiting to attack and destroy you, and you must subdue it." Later Cain suggested to his brother, Abel, "Let's go out into the fields." And while they were together there, Cain attacked and killed his brother.*

We don't know for sure why God did not accept Cain's offering, but scripture can point out to us a couple of things. In **Hebrews 11:4** tells us:

*It was by faith that Abel brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did. God accepted Abel's offering to show that he was a righteous man. And although Abel is long dead, he still speaks to us because of his faith.*

It was Abel's trust and belief in God that made his offering more acceptable.

#### *a. The Faith of Abel*

How can we see one's faith and trust in God? Through how they live – their obedience. Obviously, Cain lacked obedience and faith in God and it showed. I think we have here an example of Faith verses Obligation. Cain was just going through the motions, while Abel had a legitimate love and belief in God.

How many of us find ourselves treating our Christian walk the same way? We respond because we have to instead of because we want to. But there is another portion of Scripture that I think applies here in the story of Cain and Abel. It is found in **Proverbs 21:27**:

*God loathes the sacrifice of an evil person, especially when it is brought with ulterior motives.*

*b. The Ulterior Motives of Cain*

Genesis tells us that Cain was an evil man. Why did he react when God rejected his offering and yet accepted Abel's? Cain might of felt upstaged by his brother, or embarrassed, or unappreciated, or maybe even jealous of his brother. One thing is for sure that it didn't seem like he was concerned whether or not he was obedient to God or not. I don't think God was even part of his thinking when he made his offering. We know that he had an ulterior motive because of his response in killing his brother.

Many Christians have ulterior motives instead of simply loving God and obeying him. They try to strike a deal with God in hopes of greater blessings, or at least a back row seat in heaven. But God does not accept such a sacrifice.

But God warned Cain about the attack of sin that can come in and cause problems. God told him to subdue it or control it. Sin has a way of showing up and making us say things, or do things, that we know is not good for us. God's word to us is to control it. In **Romans 6:12** Paul tells us:

*Do not let sin control the way you live, do not give in to its lustful desires.*

Cain didn't control himself and killed his brother anyway. His arrogance is seen in **Genesis 4:9** when God asks Cain where his brother is. He responds:

*"I don't know! Am I supposed to keep track of him wherever he goes?"*

The Apostle John is telling us in I John 3:12 that obedience to God will result in love, yet the submission to ulterior motives, ungodly ideas, self-centered needs will result in evil and unrighteous behavior. Being a Christian is not just about being obedient it is also about having a heart for God and his people. Cain went through the motions of being obedient by bringing a sacrifice, but it was his lack of faith and love for God and his brother that caused him to fall.

John continues on in verse 13 and tells us:

*So don't be surprised, dear brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.*

Just as Cain's hatred for his brother drove him to kill him, so there will also be hostility to the Church, the body of believers. Cain killed his brother because he was jealous and dejected.

The same can be true of us. The way we live, the blessings of God, the peace and hope that we have does make others jealous and make them feel dejected as well. Insults are hurled at us because we are growing in God and are a constant reminder of other people's

shortcomings or lack of growth. Just the term Christian brings some sort of inadequate feeling for people.

The whole idea of the church causes one to reject its authority simply to ease their guilt. People do not like us because there are, or should I say there should be, things in our lives that they wished they had, but they aren't willing to work for it. God is telling them to control or subdue their sin but they go ahead and let it control them.

John continues in I John 3:14-15 and says:

*If we love other Christians, it proves that we have passed from death to eternal life. But a person who doesn't love them is still dead. Anyone who hates another Christian is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers don't have eternal life within them.*

#### **4. Love Proves That We Are True Christians (Children of God)**

Jesus said in John 13:35:

*Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.*

Love should spark our obedience and obedience will bring purity. Love shows us who we follow. It shows how much we are self-centered and others-centered. It tests our actions, what we say or do. Love is a gage to help us monitor how we are doing in our Christian growth. The more we see the better. The lack of it the more work we have to do.

#### **Conclusion**

This morning John tells us that we are disciples or students. We learn, we mold our minds based on teaching that we embrace. We become like the teacher we follow. But who is that teacher? Is God teaching us or do we spend more time in the classroom of the adversary? We can tell by simply looking at our obedience and love. Do we love the things this world can give us more, or does our love for God dictate what we do.

John gave us the example of Cain and Abel. We see that Abel's faith and obedience to God made his sacrifice acceptable. Cain's sacrifice on the other hand was done with ulterior motives. Cain went through the motions of being obedient by bringing his sacrifice, but it was his lack of faith and love for God that caused him to fall. His ulterior motives stirred up sin. God warned him not to let sin control him, but Cain rejected the warning and found himself in trouble.

John is warning us this morning. We need to get our heart right with God. We may look good on the outside and look as if we are spiritually all together, but God wants our hearts to belong to him. He wants us to respond out of faith and love and not out of

obligation. I remember watching a kid's movie called *Jungle to Jungle* where a child was asking his father what the word obligation meant. The Father answered, "It means that you have to do something that you don't want to do." Is that how we view our Christian walk? If so, we need God to change our perspective.

But John also told us not to be surprised by how the world will hate us. The Christian Church is suppose to be a constant reminder of what the world in general is missing. As we allow ourselves to grow in God, our growth will remind or highlight areas in other people's lives in which they will need to grow. Human nature hates to be told what to do, and therefore people will dislike what they see.

Finally, John begins to tell us how our love for others proves that we have experienced the changing power of God, thus making us His children. Love helps us to gage how we are doing in our walk with God. It tells us where we are strong and where we are in need of help.

Who or what do we follow this morning? Who or what do we study? Is it TV, humanistic ideas, greed? Who or what is influencing our character? My prayer today is that we will let it be God.