

**SERIES: Authentic Christian Community/1 John, Wk. 3**

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**Message Title: Believe and Love Pt. 1**

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I was driving home one day and meandering through the back roads, and there was a 1972 Volkswagen Super Beetle, sitting in a pasture with a “For Sale” sign on it, calling to me. (*Laughter*) I went home and talked to Patti and we thought, “Let’s go for it”. So we bought it and we spent the last year basically remodeling this thing — redoing it from the bottom up. It was so rusted out that we took the body clear off the chassis, and started from scratch, and built it all the way back up. Last month was the great unveiling and for the most part it’s been okay. But the engine was having some trouble continuing to run — it would lose power and it would idle funny and it would die. Now the charm of your new Volkswagen Bug, for Patti, kind of wears off, when you’re dying in the intersection, and everyone is honking. (*Laughter*) So you know, I did need to get this fixed. I had trouble figuring out what’s going on, and then I started to find crud in the fuel filter. I figured out the gas tank was corroded, and it was putting crud in the fuel, and that, then, was getting stuck in the line, and that would cause it to do that.

Now I suppose you could manage the problem: you could clean up the carburetor; you could clean out the fuel line, change the fuel filter — probably once a week! But all you’re doing is managing the crud, until you finally get to the source of the problem. And to get to the source of the problem, the car needed a new tank. Strangely enough, that is what we’re talking about today. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 John, Chapter 3.

John’s been working really hard, to say we aren’t in the process of just managing our crud, but we’ve actually had the tank replaced. What’s happened is radical! We have the seed of God; we have the nature of Jesus; we have the Spirit of God. When we are born, we are born with a corroded tank. That’s the result of *original sin*. There’s junk in our tank and it continually messes up our system. We can try to manage that along but, until you actually get to the source of the problem and experience a rebirth — a new creation, a new nature — you’re never really going to make much progress. So John is trying to separate out the false teachers from those who have experienced this radical transformation. What he is trying to do, is separate out the false teachers, who say they know God, but they live immoral lives; they’re very unloving; they lack compassion, and that’s very different than the nature of Jesus. And so there’s this divide between what’s true and what’s not true.

We pick it up in Verse 11:

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

Now I mentioned the very first week that John tends to talk in cycles. Now I didn’t say *circles* but *cycles*, and what I mean by that is, he’ll address a topic; he’ll move on; and then he’ll come back to the topic and expand on it. So in Chapter Two, we talked about love. We talked about love as an old, new commandment. It’s been around from the beginning, because it’s the essence of the life of God, but also there’s a new commandment - there’s a new side - as of the

death, burial and the resurrection of Jesus, He empowers us to live that out in a whole new way. So, we talked about that at length, and I'm not going to go back through all of that, other than to just remind ourselves that we defined love —not as an emotion. The Bible doesn't define love as an emotion. You can't command somebody to feel good about somebody else. It just doesn't work that way. It's an act of the will; it's to lay down your life for someone else. It's to think of someone else as more important than yourself. That's the essence of love. So he reminds us, from the beginning, this is what has defined life.

Verse 12:

**not as Cain, who was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.**

John goes all the way back to the beginning of the story and there's this great divide. There's this divide between Abel, who chooses to surrender to God and live life God's way, and his brother Cain, who chooses to be his own god and live life his way. Now I think it is worth noting, that in the beginning of the story, as far as we know from the text, there were only four people on the face of the planet: Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel. There were no gangs; there were no bad neighborhoods; there were no bad schools; there wasn't an alcohol and drug problem; there weren't bad movies. There weren't any of the things that we tend to blame today — and Cain slaughtered his brother. That's actually the language that's used there. Why did he do that? Well the text tells us **...Cain was of the evil one.**

Now he just came off the discussion that we talked about — of the difference between a child of God and a child of the devil. We are born with a corroded tank, and there's all kinds of junk in our tank that makes us very selfish. At the end of the day, the corrosion — the crud that's in our tank — is utter selfishness. That is our default setting; that's who we are. We talked a couple of weeks ago about the world's operating system. Once you're cut off from a relationship with God, then you have to become your own god, and you have to make yourself significant. You have to give yourself value. The nature of the system requires you to be selfish; there is no other option. So every day is a choice between you and me, and I can't think of someone else as more important than myself, because what's at stake is my significance; what's at stake is my value. Therefore I have to be selfish; the system requires that. So the crud in my tank is utter selfishness, and that defines everything that I do. So that's, in essence, what John is saying was true of Cain. Cain was selfish to the core, because he was a child of the devil, and that defined his life. He was **...of the evil one and slew his brother.**

Most of the translations avoid the term *murder* or *kill* because the Greek here is very graphic. Literally, it means to cut his throat, to slaughter, or to butcher. This was not an accident; this was Cain slaughtering or butchering his brother. It's a very violent picture. Why did he do that? For what reason did he slay him? Because **...his deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous.** Cain's deeds were evil. Both Cain and Abel came before God, but Abel came, surrendered to worship God, and Cain came, being his own god, and God called his deeds evil.

Now basically what we're talking about is this: when the light shines into the darkness, the light exposes our *rats* and, at that moment, either we deal with the rats or we extinguish the light. Abel's behavior exposed Cain, and Cain was left with a choice: either he's going to change his behavior, or he's going to put out the light. And his choice, obviously, was to extinguish the light.

Now that's the very same story as the story of Jesus. In the First Century, the religious leaders had everyone convinced that they were the most righteous among them, and everyone believed that until Jesus showed up. When Jesus shined the light of true righteousness into the darkness, the rats of the religious leaders were exposed and, at that moment, they either had to deal with their rats or extinguish the light. Jesus is like the ultimate curve-wrecker. Remember when you were in high school and the hard class is chemistry, and algebra, and all these classes? While most of us are slugging it out in the 80's, there was always somebody that would ace the test and wreck the curve—and nobody liked them. Jesus was the ultimate curve-wrecker. Everything was fine until He shows up, and reveals the true standard of righteousness — and the Pharisees were busted, and their conclusion is, “We must extinguish the light!”

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The Jewish teachers believed that Cain and Abel's story was a foreshadowing of the future of the world — that there would be those who will surrender to God as God, and there will be those who will be their own god, and be dominated by this selfish crud in their tank. And life is going to be defined by those who choose to be their own god, having their stuff exposed by the light, and they're going to resent that; they're going to hate that, which is exactly where John goes in the text.

Verse 13:

**Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.**

Now, again, the word **hate** is not necessarily a strong emotion; it's the contrast to love. If love is ultimately a willingness to think of others as more important than myself, then hate is being selfish to the core — using and abusing people, dominating people in order to gain my own significance and my own value. Now John is just simply repeating what Jesus said. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that, “*The world hated me; the world's going hate you. The world persecuted me; the world's going to persecute you.*” This is really important to remind ourselves. I think sometimes we get it in our heads that if we are really good Christians, the world will love us. Jesus was perfect in every way and they executed Him. And He said, “This is the way it's going to be.” This is the Cain and Abel story. When the light of righteousness shines into the darkness, people in darkness are going to resent it. Sometimes people don't like us, because our behavior is really bad, but other times, when we're just seeking to do the right thing, people will respond to that; they'll react to that; they hate that and you wonder, “What did I do wrong?” Sometimes you're doing nothing, but simply exposing what's in the darkness, and people resent that. And that's what John is talking about here. I think he's referring to the false teachers. There's this divide and we should expect that; it goes all the way back to the Cain and Abel story.

**We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.  
He who does not love abides in death. (Vs. 14)**

Now we've been talking about how radical the language of Salvation is. This isn't just changing out the fuel filter. This is radical! At the core of my being, something has changed, in order that there might be a way that the crud gets out of the fuel line. He says you **...have passed from death into life**. That is as radical as it gets. He doesn't compare someone who's dead with someone who's alive. He says you were dead. Every single one of us was born spiritually dead, and it's through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus that we've gone from death to life. The fuel tank has been changed; there's a new fuel that defines us, and he says the outflow of that — of such a radical change — would be a life of love. Those who continue to hate, those

who continue to be selfish to the core, are not abiding in this new life. Obviously it's evidence of the old life.

Verse 15:

**Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.**

Now what's he saying there? Is he saying that no murderer can experience God's salvation? And the obvious answer is, "Of course not!" No matter what you've done, God is willing to forgive. As a matter of fact, there are murderers, like Moses and like David and like Paul, that certainly have experienced God's salvation. What he's saying, is that hatred and murder are reflections of the same heart. So if you think about this like a gas line, there are parts along this gas line that are full of crud. It's in this same line and you've got crud all along the way. Now obviously, there is a difference between whether we hate someone — again, hate is to be selfish to the core; it's not driven by kind of these wild emotions. But if I hate someone — versus I kill someone — we understand practically there's a difference. I'm not going to go to prison for hating someone; I will go to prison for murdering someone. But the case John is making is: it flows out of the same heart — it's evidence that there's corrosion in the tank and it shows up in hatred. But push it to its logical conclusion, and it ends up in murder. Murder is the ultimate act of utter selfishness. If it comes down to something between you and me, then I'll kill you, in order to benefit myself. Now that's what he's saying. He's making the case that hatred is in the same line as murder. Therefore, if somebody is guilty of murder, track it back, then that's the heart of hatred. What I think he's doing — the logic of this — is he's saying the false teachers are selfish to the core. They don't care about anybody; they're grossly immoral; their lives are not in the slightest way defined by love and compassion. Therefore, even though they haven't murdered anyone, that's the fuel line that defines their life. They hate, and the ultimate end to that is murder. So then he turns it around and says: if someone were a murderer, wouldn't you say they aren't really experiencing the life of Christ? So track the fuel line back and you find then that's equally true of people who hate, people who are utterly selfish. It's the same heart; it's the same fuel line. So he's saying, just because these people haven't murdered someone, doesn't mean that they know God. If their lives are defined by this hatred, by this utter selfishness, it's the same heart; it's the same problem. And he's going to make an argument the same way, but to the opposite direction.

Verse 16:

**We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.**

So how do you **...know love**? Love is ultimately thinking of others as more important than myself, laying down my life for another—the ultimate expression of that. Whereas the ultimate expression of a bad heart would be murder, the ultimate expression of a good heart is, "I would die in your place; I would lay down my life; I would die instead of you." And so he's saying this is the polar opposite; this is the essence of God. Now I hesitate to use the word that Jesus *modeled* love for us. Jesus didn't model for us how to die. He died in our place. That's really important to understand. Jesus wasn't modeling love; Jesus is the essence of love. That's who He is; that's what defines Him. Therefore that was the natural outflow of His heart. He wasn't modeling something; that's just who He is. There was a need, and we were desperately lost in our sin. So, rather than us dying for our own sin, He offered to die in our place. That's the ultimate expression of love. But if you back that heart back, and we have this Jesus in us, we have His Spirit, we have His nature, then shouldn't we too live that way? **Shouldn't our hearts**

**be the same, so then we would be willing to think of others as more important than ourselves?** We'd be willing to lay down our lives for others. So he's saying the ultimate extreme to the selfish heart is murder. The ultimate extreme to the heart of love is to lay down your life for another — defining this dramatic difference between the children of God and the children of the devil.

Verse 17:

**But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?**

If I see a legitimate need, and I slam the door of my heart, and I just don't care, how can that be a reflection of the nature or the character of the seed of God in me? Now what is he saying here? Obviously you can push any of these texts to kind of an illogical conclusion. Because we could say, "If I have anything and somebody has need, then I should give it up." Fine, you don't *need* an iPod; you don't *need* an iPad; you don't *need* a computer; you don't *need* two pairs of shoes; you really don't *need* a car; you don't *need* air-conditioning. I mean you end up like at the end of *Schindler's List*, live in a box and give everything away. That makes no sense, and that certainly isn't what God is asking. I think it's much more Good Samaritan-ish. Where, if I'm traveling down the road, like the story of the Good Samaritan, and I see someone who's been beaten up and thrown in the ditch, I can't just walk away, as if that person isn't there. **Compassion would require me; love would require me, to do something.**

It's really important to remind ourselves that there are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of needs in the world today.

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I opened the message today talking about our 1972 Volkswagen Super Beetle. You know, when I bought that Beetle, I knew it was going to take a lot of work; I don't think I realized how much work. There were years of repairs, of painting over rust, of Bondo and fiberglass, and I began to realize either we're going to keep chasing these problems again and again, or I need to actually fix the problem. So we not only replaced the gas tank, I took the body off the chassis, and replaced so much metal, and basically started over, in order to fix the problem. You can't just paint over rust and think that solves the problem. It's going to return. I think as a culture today, there's so many ways, where we're trying to just paint over the rust to these deep and significant problems that we see in our culture. What John is trying to say is, **until someone is truly changed from the inside out, that there's no real lasting solution to the problem. So the solution is Jesus. In John's words, people need to pass out of death into life by experiencing the new life that Christ offers, that changes everything!**