

Blood and Plaque

1 John #7

1 John 3:11-18

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

The circulatory system within you and me is one of the most intricate, yet spectacular things God ever created. It delivers nutrients and oxygen to all of the 36 trillion cells inside of you. Blood circulation starts when your heart relaxes between heart beats. The blood flows from the upper two chambers of the heart (the atria) to the lower two chambers (the ventricles). The left ventricle then sends your blood through your arteries. As it travels through your arteries and capillaries, it drops off oxygen and nutrients to your 36 trillion cells while picking up carbon dioxide and waste products and dropping them off into your veins so that your blood can make it back to your heart to be refreshed. Without this process occurring all day every day, life isn't possible. But because it occurs all day every day, life is possible and our existence is, in and of itself, a miracle that only the Divine Cardiologist himself could orchestrate.

But both our Divine Cardiologist and our Medical Cardiologist would be the first to tell us today that there is one dastardly threat to that whole intricate and spectacular circulatory process. That dastardly threat is the buildup of plaque on the interior walls of the arteries. When plaque builds up moderately, the blood has a hard time getting nutrients and oxygen to your 36 trillion cells. When it builds up completely, you have yourself a blockage and it can't get them there at all. And the result is often cardiac arrest.

Dear friends, love is the circulatory system of the Christian's existence. It's love that gives the body of Christ the nutrients and oxygen it needs so that each part of it can function as it should. It's love that allows us to have life and to have it more abundantly. And it's love flowing through the arteries of actions and the capillaries of truth that makes it possible, as the chorus says, to say with a grateful heart: "this is the air I breathe." When love functions as it should in your life and mine, the body functions with vitality. But if there is plaque buildup in our spiritual arteries, the odds are high we are headed for cardiac arrest. And that plaque buildup always comes in the form hatred, bitterness, jealousy, and wrath. If we don't give our Divine Cardiologist an opportunity to unblock that blockage, it can sabotage our existence and life itself.

1 John 3:11-18 is an important passage in 1 John. It is a contrast between love and hate, between blood and plaque. He shows us what love in action and in truth looks like. And he shows us what hate looks like. Here's why: He wants our spiritual circulatory system to function as Jesus intended it to function. And it cannot function as it should if you if the Divine Cardiologist doesn't make you aware of your plaque buildup. Turn there with me and you'll see the contrast.

¹¹ For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ¹² Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil, and his brother's were righteous. ¹³ Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵ Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. ¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

The Plaque of Hatred:

1. The Way of Cain (12; 15)

Refer to Him as a Saint: (1) I heard of a man years ago who had a twin brother who passed away in search of a minister to do his funeral. He had a hard finding one because, while living, his brother was a despicable individual. (2) But he finally found a minister to do his funeral with one condition. Somewhere in the eulogy he had to refer to his brother as a saint. (3) The minister figured the business deal was worth it, so he said: "the man who lies before you was a treacherous, dastardly, and despicable individual. But compared to his brother, this man was a saint."

Where Cain's Hatred Started: (1) It started with a comparison. God accepted his brother Abel's sacrifice but did not accept Cain's. We can speculate as to why. But John tells us the source of the problem in v12: "because his own actions were evil, and his brother's were righteous." All of the worst parts of humanity can be traced back to that little seed of envy, wrath, jealousy, and rage that starts by comparison. Cain was furious at his brother because he did not get what he wanted out of God.

What It Led To: (1) It led to murder. Love is the most used word in this passage. Murder is the second: "Cain belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother" (v12); "why did he murder him?" (v12); "anyone who hates is a murderer" (v15). The play is intentional. Love is defined by "laying down." Murder, on the other hand, is defined by "cutting down." And it all started with comparison.

What It Means for Us: Verse 15 tells us clearly. "Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer." People often speak of the difficulty of the OT in comparison to the NT. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus took the law and made it more difficult. According to the Law of Moses,

murderers are liable to judgment. Here though, similarly to Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, John says that hostility towards your brother in Christ makes you liable to judgment. It makes you a murderer. We are murdering our spouses, our children, our parents, our brothers, and sisters in Christ when we fail to love them with a godly, sacrificial love.

App: The implication is clear but not comfortable. When we display this and refuse to show proper love, we should ask ourselves if we are really born of God because hatred is plaque of death that produces spiritual cardiac arrest.

2. The Way of the World (13)

How the World Responds to Light: (1) If you ever wish to see how the world responds to light, I challenge you to do something while you are on an airplane in the middle of the night. (2) Decide you want to read and turn your reading light on. Regardless of where you fly, the response is the same: why in the world is this cat turning on the light? (3) When light shines, the world will not applaud. It will gnash their teeth.

Don't Be Surprised If the World Hates You Implication #1: (1) John gives his audience a prohibitive command in v13 that's forceful: "Don't be surprised if the world hates you." (2) That implies we are often surprised when we do the right thing because it's the right thing before God and the world doesn't applaud. It's almost as if John's audience wanted the world to applaud. The world didn't applaud for Jesus, or the apostles, or the church in Rome, or Corinth, or Galatia, or Ephesus, or Philippi, or Thessalonica. They are not going to applaud for you.

Don't Be Surprised If the World Hates You Implication #2: (1) We are Abel's in a world of Cain's. If there was 2 ways to salvation instead of one, the world would want 3. If 3 then 4. If 4 then 5. The world will rage at God and his Abel's because darkness doesn't rejoice in the light. And righteousness will always expose darkness, even without saying anything.

Don't Be Surprised If the World Hates You Implication #3: (1) Because we are Abel's in a world of Cain's we have no spiritual basis for justifying behaving like Cain while identifying as Abel. If we know we have passed from death to life by love. We know we have not by hate. It's that simple.

App: How we treat each other reveals where we stand. It reveals that there's plaque that needs to be removed, or that the blood is circulating as it should. It reveals whether we have passed from death to life or remain in death.

Blood of Love:

1. The Way of Christ (16-17)

Diamond Jewelers Marketing Slogans: (1) If you listen to the radio while driving for more than 15 minutes, the odds are great you'll hear an advertisement from a company selling diamonds. They are all good at marketing them too with clever slogans. (2) Unleash your inner sparkle. Unlock the world of unparalleled beauty. Because a diamond is forever. (2) The shape of love isn't in the form of a diamond. It's in the form of a cross.

The Way of Christ Has a Standard: (1) We see that standard in v16. Jesus "laid down" his life for us. He did the opposite of Cain. That's why Christ is the standard, not saying Christ is the standard when we are acting like Cain. (2) Therefore, we "ought," John says. The word for "ought" here isn't a suggestion. It's an imploration based on Jesus. We love sacrificially because Jesus did. (3) That's important because now the human tendency to compare is put on the right course. Jesus is the standard. Not others. That will never change.

The Way of Christ Has a Measure: (1) That measurement is in v17. If anyone sees a need and has no compassion, how can the love of God be in that person? (2) That's an interesting verse because it implies: God puts us in a position to see a need. And God calls us to respond to what we see.

App: God uses each of us as if there were only one of us.

2. The Way of Christ's Children (18)

The Requirement for Graduating from Vacation Bible School: (1) This is the time of the year for Vacation Bible School. (2) In certain parts of the country, you can't graduate from VBS without learning: I am a C. I am a C.H. I am a C.H.R.I.S.T.I.A.N. (3) The word Christian comes from two Greek words: "Christos" meaning "anointed" and "tian" meaning "little." Put them both together and you have "little anointed ones," "little Christs," characterized by the actions and the truth of Christ.

The Way of the Christian #1: Words are not enough. In fact, here in v18 words are prohibited. John says "let us love" not with words or speech.

The Way of the Christian #2: Love is a verb. It has actions that accompany it. And just like it was for Jesus, sometimes those sacrificial actions will cost you and even wound you, just as they did for Abel and Jesus. But it's the only way for Christ's children to behave.

The Way of the Christian #3: Love is based on truth. The truth might be hard to swallow. It might be easy to swallow. But love, by definition, cannot delight in evil. It has to "rejoice" in the truth.

The Way of the Christian #4: We cannot fully love in truth and deed without the love of Christ dwelling inside of us.

App: "God and love are synonymous. Love is not an attribute of God, it is God; whatever God is, love is" — Oswald Chambers. So must we be also, as "little Christs." Love is the circulatory system that makes the Christian's body function and work as it should.