

but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. (Gen 4:3–5)

The obvious difference between the two is the inclusion of “firstlings” to describe the offering of Abel, something lacking in connection with Cain’s offering. Cain’s offering was not rejected because it was “from the ground” rather than an animal offering, for grain offerings are clearly an acceptable offering or sacrifice (cf. Lev 2). Rather, what the Genesis narrative emphasizes is that Abel brought from the firstlings (בְּכוֹר, *b’chor*) and from the best (מֶחֱלָבֶהֱן, *mechelvōhen*),¹ while Cain apparently did not bring the firstfruits nor from the best of the crop. Granted, this is presumed from the way the narrative is constructed, but this seems to be the most obvious reason that Cain’s offering was rejected. If this is correct, then the offering which Cain brought was a reflection of his selfish perspective, a self-centeredness which fomented hatred, which then resulted in committing murder, a striking out at the image of God in which mankind was created (Gen 9:6). Thus, John’s use of the Cain and Abel narrative reinforces his main point: the heart of the believer is characterized by seeking God while the heart of the unbeliever is self-centered.

13–14 Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.

Having demonstrated the character of hatred in the actions of Cain, and thus juxtaposed hatred against its opposite, the love of one’s brother, John now reminds us that the love of God which is to characterize the inner workings of the believing community is not something the world will offer to the believer. For even though a child of God may live a humble life of faith, acting righteously in the midst of an unbelieving world, even as Cain hated his brother because of Abel’s righteous deeds, so the world will inevitably hate the believer who is intent upon living righteously. John, in this text, is simply emphasizing the very words of Yeshua Himself.

If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before
it hated you. (Jn 15:18)

The Greek construction in the phrase “if the world hates you” is a

1 Note the NET translation: “But Abel brought some of the first-born of his flock—even the fattest of them. And the LORD was pleased with Abel and his offering.” (Gen 4:4)

“first class” conditional clause,¹ which thus has the sense: “When the world hates you.” John is not suggesting that hatred against believers may or may not be the response of the world. He is stating it as a fact, that hatred of the world will inevitably be the response of the unbelieving world toward the believer. This does not mean, of course, that this will always be the case. It means that as believers, we should not be surprised when those who have rejected God treat us with contempt. On the other hand, it is wrong to derive from John’s teaching in this pericope, that one who is hated by his unbelieving neighbors or acquaintances is so hated because they are more holy or sanctified than most other believers. Sometimes hatred from unbelievers is the result of foolish and ungodly behavior by those who profess to be followers of Yeshua.

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. – Having just referred to his readers with the endearing term “brothers” (i.e., fellow believers), John now uses the first-person plural “we” to identify with his readers. He too has experienced the hatred of the world, and though elsewhere in the epistle he addresses his readers as “little children” or “friends,” here (and only here) he uses the term “brothers” to identify with the issue of suffering for faith in Yeshua.

John once again states “we know” (οἶδαμεν, *oidamen*).² It is the truth of God’s word that enables us to stand and to remain faithful in our walk with the Lord, even in a world where we may be hated for our faith. And what is it, in this particular verse, that “we know”? It is that we have passed out of death into life, that is, through the promise of God and the gospel made active through the work of the Ruach and the completed work of Yeshua. And we are confident that we abide in the life of the risen Savior. Therefore, even though it is appointed to mankind to die, yet in Messiah Who has conquered death, we will live. Once again, John is reinforcing the very teaching of Yeshua.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. (Jn 5:24)

Speaking to Martha after her brother Lazarus had died, Yeshua said:

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me

1 εἰ followed by an indicative verb; εἰ μισεῖ ὑμᾶς ὁ κόσμος.

2 John uses the phrases “we know” and “you know” a total of 23 times in 1John – 2:3, 5, 13–14, 18, 29; 3:2, 5, 14–16, 24; 4:2, 6, 13; 5:2, 15, 18–20.

will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Messiah, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world." (Jn 11:25-27)

And what are the marks of having this gift of eternal life through faith in Yeshua? One of the primary characteristics which John is emphasizing is that the believer demonstrates a genuine love for those within the believing community. We know that we have eternal life because we have been changed and thus we desire in the "inward man" to live for God's glory, which includes loving brothers and sisters who are followers of Yeshua.

It seems very possible that, once again, John has in mind those who have denied Yeshua and have left the believing community, who are active in seeking to persuade those who remain in the believing community to defect as they have. This may also involve persecution by those who have left, and by those who stand against the believing community. A willingness to come to the aid of fellow believers, even if this means being targeted for persecution, is at the heart of a true believer. The unbeliever shows his or her true colors when they abandon the believing community and refuse to help believers who are in need.

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

The opening phrase, "Everyone who hates..." could just as properly be translated as "Each one who hates..." for the adjective *πᾶς* (*pas*) which means "all," followed by a singular verb or participle (as here, *πᾶς ὁ μισῶν*), carries that sense. While John is clearly addressing the community as a whole, his words are intended to be applied to each individual.

The previous verses have encapsulated once again John's "either/or" perspective, leaving no "middle ground" or "gray areas." Based upon Yeshua's own words (Jn 5:24), John is emphasizing the reality of life vs. death. Since death is the result of sin having come into the world, the believer in Yeshua, having undergone a radical change through the work of the Ruach, is no longer living in the realm of sin and therefore no longer is marked by death, for he or she has been granted eternal life. Yeshua states that the one who has believed in Him has "passed out of death into life."

Moreover, the agenda of the devil is to destroy life, just the opposite of Yeshua's purpose, which is to give life.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that

they may have life, and have it abundantly. (Jn 10:10)

Thus, the act of murder, maliciously taking the life of another, is the most egregious example of death. Having just used the example of Cain as the first instance of fratricide (v. 12), and recognizing that the seeds of murder begin with the sin of hatred, John now applies that to the believing community as a whole. The characteristic of a believer's life, i.e., one who by faith in Yeshua has passed from death unto life, is love for others within the believing community.

That John is speaking of love for one's believing brother or sister is clear from the Greek, which includes the definite article: τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ, literally, "the brother of him." The point John makes is obvious: life is not to be possessed, but is a gift directly from the hand of the Creator. And since hatred is the first step toward murder, it is incompatible with the spiritual life produced by the presence of the Ruach, and therefore cannot characterize the one who is a genuine believer in Yeshua. Once again, John uses present tense verbs / participles when he describes one who hates or one who is a murderer, which emphasizes that such sinful behavior is the ongoing characteristic of the person.

...and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. – Cain, being the first murderer, and that of his own brother as well, stands forever as the prime example. But Judas likewise stands as one who displayed hatred and murderous actions toward the very One Who came to give life. Indeed, the Gospel text announces that Judas was partner with the devil in the scheme to betray Yeshua to those who sought to murder Him.

And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve. And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them. (Lk 22:3–4)

In John's account of the final Pesach meal which Yeshua had with His disciples, it was just after Yeshua named him as the betrayer, and thus Judas left, that Yeshua stated:

By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (Jn 13:35)

It seems quite clear that this central event in the life of Yeshua, one to which John himself was a close eyewitness, must have been in the Apostle's mind as he wrote these words in his epistle. Remaining with, and loving one's fellow believers was a significant mark of those who

possess saving faith and thus eternal life. Judas portrays just the opposite, for not only did he forsake those with whom he claimed to be his brothers, but as being partner with the devil, he participated in the murder of the very One Who came to give life.

Thus Judas is set forth as one who, though he walked and served with Yeshua Himself, did not have true faith and did not possess eternal life. And thus in Yeshua's high priestly prayer, offered in the garden before His crucifixion, we hear Him pray:

While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. (Jn 17:12)

Judas, therefore, is a prime example of one who proved his true character by persisting in murderous actions, and thus showing that he did not, in fact, possess eternal life.

John states that "no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." This negative statement indicates that which is positive, namely, that in principle, eternal life abides now in those who are truly born again.

He who believes in the Son has eternal life (ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον); but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (Jn 3:36)

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Yeshua Messiah whom You have sent. (Jn 17:3)

Note that John 3:36 uses the present tense, "has eternal life," not "will have eternal life." And the words of Yeshua in John 17:3 help us to understand what present participation in "eternal life" means. We participate in eternal life, which is granted to us by God Himself, through the fellowship we have with the Ruach and thus our growing relationship with the Father and with Yeshua. Eternal life is abiding in Him even as He abides in us. As Kistemaker remarks:

...the Christian possesses eternal life already in principle (see, for instance, John 3:36; 17:3), and later when his glorified body and soul are reunited, he will enjoy eternal life in complete fullness.¹

Once again, John states that his readers know this fact. And how do

¹ Kistemaker, *1John*, p. 309.

they know it? Because they know that the Scriptures prescribe capital punishment for murder (Gen 9:5–6; Ex 21:12; Num 35:16, 19–21) and they also know the words of Yeshua when He taught:

You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. (Matt 5:21–22)

Here, Yeshua combines the spirit of hatred with murder, for in this Sermon on the Mount, He is teaching us that if one truly wants to keep oneself from disobeying the commandments of God, he or she will put away the evil intentions which might lead to such disobedience.

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.

If one seeks to know exactly what constitutes or defines the love which John enjoins upon all who confess to be believers in Yeshua, the obvious answer is that the zenith of such love was demonstrated by Yeshua Himself, Who “laid down His life for us.” Once again John places himself within the community to which he writes by using the plural pronoun “we.” Fulfilling the role of a teacher and shepherd, he reminds his readers that, together with him, they have learned the truth about what constitutes real love. By love, John is not describing a sentimental emotion but that which involves practical, life-to-life action which brings about the betterment of the one loved, without any sense that the one loving will gain something for himself or require something in return. This kind of *agapē* love is perfectly and supremely demonstrated by the self-giving sacrifice of Yeshua for those whom He would save.

Most of the English translations use the phrase “laid down His life,” a worthy translation of the Greek verb *τίθημι* (*tithēmi*), “to place or put in a particular location” (BDAG), for it emphasizes “giving up” that which belongs to oneself and doing so for the sake of another. John enjoins the same perspective for us, for he writes “we ought (*ὀφείλω*, *opheilō*) to lay down our lives for the brethren,” making his admonition a moral imperative. The Greek verb *opheilō* could just as well be translated as “to be obligated.” If then we are under the moral obligation of love, even to give our lives to save the life of another believer, a giving which is clearly the greatest that one could offer, then surely we should

be moved to help our fellow believers in all other possible ways. Once again, the conclusion is obvious: there is no place for hatred among those who, confessing to believe in the Messiah Yeshua, make up the body of the Messiah.

Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life
for his friends. (Jn 15:13)

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?

It seems very likely that John has the commandments of the Torah in mind when he writes this. Note, for instance, Deut 15:7–8.

If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any
of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving
you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand
from your poor brother;
but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall gener-
ously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks.
(Deut 15:7–8)

If this is true within the community bound by physical family ties, how much more is it true within the family of God. For that which binds believers together is the very life of God, a life that is eternal and was purchased at a great price.

Here we are confronted once again with the dual summation of the Torah, i.e., to love God with all of one's heart, soul, and might, and to love one's neighbor as oneself. How does one love God with all of one's heart, soul, and might? By keeping His commandments. And how does one love one's neighbor as oneself? By keeping God's commandments. Thus the Ten Words begin with commandments which have their focus God-ward, and conclude with commandments that relate to one's neighbor. The idea that some have taught, that the "law" has been replaced by the commandments to "love God" and "love one's neighbor," have overlooked the fact that from God's perspective, loving Him and loving one's neighbor is acceptable only when such love conforms to His revealed definition of what actually constitutes love.

Thus, to love one's neighbor means: [1] to guard his life ("you shall not murder"), [2] to guard and protect the family relationships which belong to my neighbor ("you shall not commit adultery"), [3] to guard the possessions which belong to my neighbor ("you shall not steal"),

and in summary [4] to be content with what God has given me (“you shall not covet”). It is only when we are obedient to God’s commandments that we are enabled to love our neighbor as ourselves.

...and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him... – The need that John has primarily in mind relates to the physical needs of one’s neighbor. This is clear from the opening statement of our verse, “Whoever has the world’s goods...” (ὅς δ’ ἂν ἔχῃ τὸν βίον τοῦ κόσμου). The Greek word translated here as “goods” (βίος, *bios*) can also carry the sense of “life and activity associated with it.” Secondly, the Greek word *bios* can have the sense of “resources needed to maintain life, means of subsistence,”¹ and this is surely what our context demands. But note that in the previous verse we are exhorted by the Apostle to be willing to give our *life* (literally “our soul,” ψύχη, *psuxē*, i.e., “ourselves”) for our brother, and thus it only follows that we should be willing to give *resources to maintain life* to our brother who is in need. Of course, this requires wisdom to determine and know what is a true need and what is not, and this is where community is so helpful. John surely has community in mind as he is giving us these exhortations.

The phrase “closes his heart against him” (κλείσῃ τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτοῦ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ) is literally “closes his inward parts against him,” where the idiomatic use of “inward parts/intestines” refers to the seat of one’s affections. Once again, the language of Deut 15:7, “you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother,” may well be that which undergirds John’s admonition in this verse.

...how does the love of God abide in him? – The conclusion is obvious. If God has given so abundantly to us, not only supplying our needs but also giving us an abundance, then surely out of gratefulness to Him we should be willing to give to a brother or sister to help them in their time of need. To withhold love from someone within one’s own community of faith is to question whether the one who fails to love has honestly appreciated the love of God in Messiah Yeshua. True appreciation of God’s love will be demonstrated in loving one’s brother. The commands to love God and to love one’s neighbor are so clearly united that one cannot honestly exist without the other. We may reflect upon the answer Yeshua gave to the lawyer who sought to test Him with the question “which is the great commandment in the Torah?” Note that the question is cast in the singular “the great commandment,” but Yeshua answers by listing two. The conclusion is that the two are, in actuality, one.

1 BDAG, “βίος.”

And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND." This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." (Matt 22:37–39)

Those who seek to relegate the Torah to a by-gone era, teaching that Yeshua set it aside in favor of the commandment "to love God and neighbor," have missed the point. The manner in which we love God and love our neighbor as God intends, is to do so by keeping His commandments. As Yeshua stated: "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Lk 6:46)

18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

This is now the fifth time we have seen John referring to the people of his community as "little children" (cf. 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7), and we are to be reminded that this is a term of endearment. In admonishing them to love one another, he does so in expressions which bespeak his own love for them. Once again, John the elder stands as a good example for all who fulfill leadership roles within the body of Messiah.

Regardless of the era or culture, fallen humankind is given to expressing words of love or kindness which are not accompanied by loving actions. John reminds us here that love is not expressed merely in words or by the tongue, though words of encouragement and comfort can be very useful. But words alone do not constitute what love demands. James exhorts in a similar fashion:

If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. (James 2:15–17)

Note that James, like John, teaches that the true character of faith in Yeshua is love that works, not just speaks.

How often in our times do we see the words exchanged in marriage vows offer hope for love that endures, only to be set aside and broken like pieces of porcelain on a stone floor. Why? How does the marriage relationship start with such beautiful promises and end in despair and hatred? The love that was promised, and in some measure even carried out, could not flourish in a situation in which always taking was not