

THE COURSE OF HATE

by Ray C. Stedman

We are engaged now in studying, through the eyes of John, the beloved apostle, the two most powerful forces at work in the world today: love and hate. We have already looked together at the path of love. John has traced it for us as to its origin, its essence, and its evidence. Today we shall take the same passage, but now follow the course of hate.

As we meet, there is a very bitter and ugly war raging in the Far East. On both sides, the fine strong bodies of young men -- and all too often the bodies also of women and helpless innocent children -- are being torn by bullets and bombs, are being horribly burned by flamethrowers and napalm, and left to rot and decay in the hideous odor of death. Twice in this century the world has been engulfed by a tremendous cataclysm of hate and evil, of darkness and death, and the sickening horrors of war. Yet the forces that are at work that produce these modern slaughters are no different and no more violent or awful than those that were present in a meeting of two brothers in a field long, long ago, when one suddenly took his ax and with one swift blow caved in his brother's skull and crimsoned the earth with his brother's blood.

That is the scene John sets before us in the third chapter of this letter, beginning with Verse 11. The ax of Cain has now become a hydrogen bomb, but the motivation that sets either on its deadly swing is always the same. If we understand the act in the field long ago, we will understand the reason for the wars and the rumors of wars of our own day. John traces for us the intertwining of these two forces, love and hate, beginning with Verse 11:

For this is the message which you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, and 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 wonder, brethren, that the world hates you.
{1 Jn 3:11-13a RSV}

What is the origin of love and hate? Where did these two powerful forces come from? It is rather remarkable in this passage to note that in neither case do these forces originate in man. That is contrary to the way we usually think, is it not? We conceive of ourselves as having the ability to love, or the ability to hate. We think of ourselves as being the originator of these attitudes. But this passage reveals quite otherwise. Love, John says, springs only from God. It flows into the human heart from the Holy Spirit, and only God is capable of love. As we saw last time, when that flow of love which comes to all men, the just and unjust alike, enters the natural heart of man it is grasped and seized by a centrifugal force that centers around self. God's love, as expressed through natural man, is always self-centered love. It is only at conversion that love begins to flow out to any persons, as God intended it to do. Then it ceases to be exclusive and becomes inclusive, taking in anyone who needs love. John brings this out with the words, "this is the message which you heard from the beginning," and by means of that message we are taught to love.

Now, if it is true that love comes from outside man, it is also true that hate originates outside man. John makes this very clear. He says Cain was "of the evil one," which is a reference, of course, to the devil. By this John indicates that this powerful force of hate is always a devilish thing. It is hellish. Its presence in the human heart reveals a terrible fact. It reveals that the individual who is expressing hate has fallen into the silent remorseless grip of the devil. He is a slave of the devil's will.

We shall never understand these forces in life unless we understand them from this biblical point of view. We are told repeatedly in the Scriptures that it is here that we have the truth, the truth as it is in Jesus. It is in the coming of the Son of God that the fundamental foundational realities of life begin to be unveiled to us. If we disregard these revelations simply because they do not accord with the way we have usually thought, then we are blindly shutting our eyes to the truth. But if we heed them, we will have an understanding of life. Therefore, it is very important that we understand that love and hate both originate outside of man. Love comes only from God; hate comes from the devil. Hate is really love, twisted, diverted from its intended object and centered upon a false object. This is what the devil does with the life and the love of God. He diverts it, twists it, mutilates it; he changes it, and it comes out as hate. Therefore, anyone who hates is, as Cain was, in the grip of the devil, he is "of the evil one."

That is a rather sobering thing, is it not? But let us start with that significant fact. I am sure that Cain was very unconscious of the fact that when he hated he was in the control of another mind, of another purpose. He felt no different, he felt no premonition that something was taking over in his life. There was no sudden chill that ran up and down his backbone that made him aware that a sinister, evil spirit was possessing him, just as we feel no different when we hate. Yet, when his heart began to burn with hatred for his brother, there was a quiet takeover, with no outward evidence or visible sign or inward feeling to betray it.

We see the same thing in the Gospels. Remember that as the Lord gathered with his disciples in the Upper Room for the institution of the first Lord's Supper, after they had partaken of the Passover Feast, the Lord stood to break bread, instituting the very Supper that we are to celebrate today. John's Gospel says that as Judas sat at the table with the Lord, Satan entered into his heart. Now he did not feel any different. There was nothing that betrayed it outwardly, but there was within an open door through which the spirit of evil entered, and he was in the grip of a remorseless force from which he could no longer escape by an act of his will.

You see the same thing in the story of Ananias and Sapphira, those early Christians who became jealous of the spiritual privileges that Barnabas and others were enjoying and decided to claim a holiness for themselves that they did not really possess. They wanted the reputation before other Christians that they, too, were fully dedicated, wholly committed Christians and had given all their property unto God, as the others were doing. But, you remember, they kept back a part of the proceeds without saying a thing to anyone. When they came before the Apostle Peter, who was filled with the Holy Spirit, do you remember what his question was? "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" {cf, Acts 5:3}. It is possible even for Christians to come under the grip of the devil. This is the first great revelation that the Scriptures give us of the course of hate: It begins with that evil, sinister being whose whole life and ministry is opposed to God and who silently takes over the heart of anyone who consents to give way to envy or jealousy.

As we know from the Scriptures, the natural man, the unregenerate man, the man who is not yet born again, the man or woman who still remains in the life into which he was born, continually lives in this unrealized control by Satan. The epistle to the Ephesians makes that very clear. "We all once walked," the apostle said, "following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air" {Eph 2:2 KJV}, under his control, not realizing it, not aware of it at all, but nevertheless under the silent remorseless control of an evil spirit. This is why hate is always so close to the surface in the life of the natural man. Any rebuff, any crossing of his will brings it right out. A burning spirit of anger or of hatred comes bursting to the surface immediately, because this is the nature of the evil spirit who is at work in the children of disobedience.

Civilized man often recognizes much of the evil that comes from hatred. In our world today many thinkers and philosophers are genuinely concerned about human events and are aware that the fountain

from which much of the world's unrest springs is hatred. They are concerned about the evil, harmful, hateful results that come from the exercise of this passion and so they attempt to control it. But the natural man is unable to come up with anything that really answers this burning evil in his life, or that can control it. All he does is to attempt by education to limit the manifestation of hatred, or by moral restraint to keep it suppressed and bottled up inside. Of course, all he succeeds in doing is merely to change the name on the door. Hate becomes at best, indifference or avoidance of another person. The best that an unregenerate person can do in handling this force in his life, if he hates anybody, is to come to the place finally where he says, "Well, I won't have anything to do with him. Let him go his way, and I'll go mine." That is the highest level to which unregenerate man can rise. At worst, hatred becomes disguised under other words -- contempt, disdain, prejudice, and other evil names which are nothing but synonyms of hatred at work among men today. Thus, we learn that a skunk by any other name still smells, and though we do not call it hatred, it is still the same thing. You can sprinkle the perfume of a finer word or a better label on it, but it still remains the same ugly thing and it still produces the same ugly results in human life.

Now let us look deeper at what this powerful force is. John reveals the origin of hate -- it is from the devil, he says -- but he also lets us know its essence, i.e., its character, its nature. "Why," he asks, "did Cain murder his brother?" The answer is very startling. Was it because Abel was a bad person? Was it because he did something evil to Cain, and Cain was but revenging himself? No, no. It was because Abel was good that Cain murdered him! It was because he was doing proper, rightful, helpful things. That is why Cain murdered his brother.

Why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. {1 Jn 3:12b RSV}

Think of that! Cain murdered his brother because his brother was good, not because he was bad. What do you think Cain would have answered to the question, "Why did you murder your brother?" I have often wondered, did Cain ever stop to ask himself that? Perhaps sometime later, after the whole thing was over, in some moment of self-examination, did he ever say to himself, "Why did I do that? Why did I murder my brother?" I am sure if he did that undoubtedly the answer he gave would have been very much like the answers we give to justify our attitudes of hate and dislike of other people. Probably he would have answered on the emotional level, something like, "Oh, I couldn't stand him anymore. He was so pious, so smug. He was always showing me up, and I couldn't stand it anymore." That is the kind of excuse we often give, is it not, of our attitude toward another. Or perhaps he would have resorted to some form of self-defense. Perhaps he said, "Well, he was a threat to me, to my reputation. The world was simply not big enough for us both. It was either him or me, so I got rid of him."

But what are the facts of this story? As you turn to the Genesis account of their encounter in the field together, we are told only a few things about them but the few things we are told are very crucial. Both of them, we are told, brought an offering to the Lord God. They were both religious men, and both of them brought an offering: Abel of the firstlings of his flock, a lamb out of his flock, while Cain brought the fruits of his field. He was a farmer and so he brought a gift of grain or fruit to God. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are told that it was "by faith" that Abel offered his offering unto God {Heb 11:4}, and faith is always an obedient response to a command or a promise of God. Abel offered his in obedience to what God had asked; Cain did not offer his by faith, and therefore he refused to offer what God had asked. He did that deadly thing which so many millions are doing today -- he devised his own religion. He said, "I have my own way of serving God," and he came up with his own plan for an offering and brought the firstfruits of the field. When it was rejected, he was angry. The account tells us "his countenance fell" {Gen 4:5}, i.e., he began to pout and sulk and was angry and sullen, stewing within himself because God had not accepted that which he had brought.

Even then, according to the account, he was not judged by God. God does not lash out with a lightning bolt against him, but there is a word of warning brought to him. God says to him, "Why does your countenance fall?" Why are you angry? Do you not know that a sin offering is lying at the door?" {cf, Gen 4:6-7}. "You can go back and bring the right offering. I'm not going to wipe you off the face of the earth because of your disobedience. You can still repent, you can still change your mind. You can go back and bring the right one." But even with that word of warning, there is absolutely no change in the heart of Cain, and he continues to stew and to burn against God. At that moment he fell into the snare of the devil, as so many times you and I have fallen into the same snare when we have allowed some fancied sense of injustice to burn within our hearts and to upset us. Because we feel that we are not treated fairly, we begin to burn against God. At that moment the silent control begins. The invisible sinister force takes over, we become "of the evil one." The result in Cain's case was the deadly swing of the ax and the gush of his brother's blood.

Now why? It was because Cain was angry with God. He refused to accept God's evaluation, God's judgment of what was right and wrong. He was angry at God's ordering of life. He was angry because God would not play according to his rules. In other words, he wanted to be God, himself and he was angry when God refused to let him exercise the sovereignty which only God can have. In his mind, twisted now by the devil, all of this seemed to focus upon his innocent brother. All of his anger at the invisible power of God, the invisible Person of God, became focused in a visible object, his brother. So, in blind delusion, he struck him down and did him to death. That is a revelation of the nature of hate. It is directed at a human object, but it is always an attack upon God. It is a rejection of the rule of God.

I was interested in reading this past week of Billy Graham's crusade in London. Among other things recounted there was his reaction and his marvel, his astonishment, at the strength of the opposition they met in London. He said he marveled at the unreasoning opposition that was against him there. Men seemed determined to believe that his converts would all fail, and that he, himself, was running a religious racket, out only to make money, and that it was all a big show. They were utterly blind to logic, impervious to the facts, and deaf to every explanation. They were simply determined to believe that it was all a big farce. Why is that?

Well, John says, "Do not wonder, brethren, that the world hates you." Hate is a deeper force than we usually think it to be. It is more than a mere psychological reaction of one human being to another. It releases sinister powers into the human stream. It brings dark powers into control of human minds and human hearts. It twists and distorts, deludes and blocks, so that when we act we act in utter delusion, completely out of line with reality, out of accord with the facts. What we do, therefore, is always folly, foolish, senseless, without any reason behind it.

Many years ago, Joseph Parker said, "The man who preaches repentance sets himself against his age, and will be mercilessly battered by the age whose moral tone he changes. There is but one end for such a man. Off with his head! You had better not preach repentance until you've pledged your head to heaven." That is what Billy Graham found in London.

"Do not wonder," John says, "that the world hates you." The nature of hate is such that it is an attack against God himself. Remember how David discovered that after the murder of Uriah, the Hittite? He coveted this man's wife, committed a foul act of adultery, and, in order to cover his tracks, had the husband sent in to battle and put in the front ranks and thus contrived to bring about his murder. After months had gone by, and his guilty heart had not repented, God in grace sent Nathan the prophet to stand before him and trap him with a little story. When David fell into the trap, and judged himself, the prophet turned and said to him, "Thou art the man!" {2 Sam 12:7 KJV}. There follows then the repentance of David; he wept before God for days. Out of that experience was born the fifty-first Psalm which echoes the situation into which David fell. In that Psalm David cries out the great truth he had

learned, "Against thee, O God, thee only have I sinned," {Psa 51:4 KJV}. That is always what hatred is: an attack against God. Now throughout this account John reveals that the outcome of hate is murder, and he adds a very striking word in Verse 15:

Any one who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. {1 Jn 3:15 RSV}

The latter part of that makes clear that he is aiming this particularly at the Christian. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer. Does your heart burn with hatred toward another today, or has it this week? You just cannot stand him (or her). You wish he would go away and leave you alone; you do not want him around at all. Well, then, if the circumstances are right, and the penalty could be avoided, you would murder him if you could! That is what this reveals. All that keeps you from it is a fear of reprisal from God or man. If some way you could get away with it, hatred would always, invariably, flash out into murder -- as it did in that first scene between Cain and Abel. Wherever hate is, murder is always the possibility and, in the eyes of God, it is as good as done. God reads the heart, he does not need to wait for the actions. Jesus taught this. These are not the words of the so-called harsh God of the Old Testament, this is what the Lord Jesus himself taught in Matthew 5, the Sermon on the Mount:

You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire." {Matt 5:21-22 RSV}

Anyone who hates is a murderer already, and only lacks the proper opportunity or he would accomplish the deed. Now what does it reveal when a Christian hates? Let us be honest, and admit that it is all too frequently true. Christians hate one another, and show hatred toward each other and toward others outside of Christ. But John tells us, "You know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him," i.e., the eternal life which Christ has given is no longer in control of that individual, it is no longer "abiding" in him.

We have already seen that this relationship of abiding is an additional one to that of the indwelling of God's life. It does not mean that the person ceases to be a Christian when he hates, but he ceases to act like a Christian. He is no longer being the Christian that he has become. Eternal life is no longer abiding in him and he has slipped back, temporarily, into the control of the devil. He is acting out of the evil one. You see something similar in Verse 17, where the Christian who is indifferent to the needs of another no longer has God's love abiding in him. It is not that love is not available to him; but that it does not abide in him. Thus, the apostle brings us to the reality of the situation of hate. If we hate someone we have become the temporary slave of Satan. We are God's child doing the devil's work, and we need to face it on that level.

Now, what is the answer to this? What is the way to control hatred? Well, for the world in general, it is very clear, is it not? There can be no answer, there can be no effective control of this force, apart from the regenerating work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the cross of Calvary. It takes the power of God to break the power of hate, and only God can do it. That is why there is no ultimate hope for the control of wars and strife and anarchy and trouble, apart from an acceptance on the part of individuals everywhere of the redeeming grace of God. That is why we Christians are quite right when we tell people they can never solve their world problems at the peace tables, or the conference tables, and negotiate an ultimate control of warfare. That can never happen. This force is ingrained too deeply into human life to submit to that kind of superficial treatment.

But what about with Christians? How do you handle this problem of hatred? What do you do about it?

Do you resort to the folly of trying to suppress it, push it down, repress it, hide it, cover it over, bite your lip, don't say anything, but go away with your heart burning, seething, miserable, unhappy? You are still under the control of the evil one and, sooner or later, he will take you farther than you want to go. The only control is what we find all through the Scriptures, and what you find here in the Epistle of John. Judge this thing. Deal with it as God sees it. Call it what it is -- hatred -- originating from the devil, a devilish thing at work in your life and heart. Then confess it, agree with God about it, tell him so. Of course, you will receive, then, the answering power of love from the Son of God who dwells in your heart. The fount of the Holy Spirit is ever ready to pour out, in place of hatred, words of love and appreciation, approval, and acceptance. There is no other answer. Until we live on these terms, we have not begun to demonstrate the life that is in Jesus Christ. Oh, the power of love -- wonderful power to attract and to draw men irresistibly to contact and encounter with the Living God. But that love can never be manifest where there is a protection, an excusing, a justifying of the spirit of hate. That is why the exhortation comes, "Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth." How we need that word today!

Prayer:

Our Lord Jesus, like those disciples of old, we gather now with thee about the Table in the Upper Room to remind ourselves anew of that manifestation of love supreme, a poured-out life, a life laid down on our behalf. Like those disciples we pray that our troubled hearts may be drawn to thee to understand anew the power of love over that of hate, the need to be open and honest and severe with ourselves in these areas, not to protect, not to justify, not to excuse these attitudes, not to pass them off or to blame them on some human being, but to remember that every manifestation of hate is a direct attack against thee, and thy rule, and thy love in our life. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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