

1 John 3:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

Analysis

Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. John equates hatred with murder, echoing Jesus's Sermon on the Mount teaching (Matthew 5:21-22). "Whosoever hateth his brother" (pas ho misōn ton adelphon autou)—the present participle indicates habitual hatred. "Is a murderer" (anthrōpoktonos estin)—literally a "man-killer." Hatred is murder in embryo; given opportunity, it produces the actual deed (as with Cain).

This shocking equation reveals sin's inward nature. God judges the heart, not merely external actions. Hatred violates the sixth commandment's spirit even without committing the physical act. This exposes the depth of human depravity—we're all guilty before God because our hearts harbor murderous hatred even when circumstances prevent acting on it. It also demonstrates love's importance—the absence of love (hatred) equates to spiritual murder.

"And ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (kai oidate hoti pas anthrōpoktonos ouk echei zōēn aiōnion en autō menousan). The present participle "abiding" indicates a permanent state. Habitual hatred demonstrates absence of eternal life. This doesn't mean a Christian who momentarily hates loses salvation, but that one characterized by hatred was never regenerated. Eternal life produces love; its absence indicates eternal life's absence.

Historical Context

Jesus's teaching radically internalized the Law, showing that its demands go beyond external compliance to heart transformation (Matthew 5:21-48). The Pharisees prided themselves on not murdering, but Jesus exposed their murderous hearts. John applies this to Christian communities—you cannot claim to know the God of love while harboring hatred for fellow believers.

The early church's emphasis on love distinguished it from surrounding culture. Roman society accepted hatred of enemies as natural and virtuous. Stoic philosophy promoted apatheia (absence of passion). Christianity's call to love even enemies and especially fellow believers was countercultural. John's stark teaching that hatred equals murder and excludes from eternal life underscored love's absolute necessity in Christian life.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does understanding that hatred equals murder in God's sight expose your own sinfulness and need for grace?
2. What hatred do you harbor in your heart toward fellow believers that needs to be confessed and forsaken?
3. How can you cultivate love for those you're tempted to hate, knowing that habitual hatred indicates absence of eternal life?

Interlinear Text

πᾶς	ὁ	μισῶν	τὸν	ἀδελφὸν	αὐτῷ	ἀνθρωποκτόνος	
Whosoever	G3588	hateth	G3588	brother	him	a murderer	
G3956		G3404		G80	G846	G443	
ἐστίν	καὶ	οἴδατε	ὅτι	πᾶς	ἀνθρωποκτόνος	οὐκ	ἔχει
is	and	ye know	that	Whosoever	a murderer	no	hath
G2076	G2532	G1492	G3754	G3956	G443	G3756	G2192
ζῶν	αἰώνιον	ἐν	αὐτῷ	μένουσιν			
life	eternal	in	him	abiding			
G2222	G166	G1722	G846	G3306			

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 21:8 (Parallel theme): But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

Acts 23:14 (Parallel theme): And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.

John 8:44 (Parallel theme): Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

Matthew 5:28 (Parallel theme): But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.