

Briefing Document: 1 John: Lesson 61

May 13, 2026

Executive Summary

This document examines the essential marks of a true Christian, focusing on the distinction between the "Children of God" and the "Children of the Devil." Based on 1 John 3 and the historical account of Cain and Abel, the central theme is the presence or absence of love. True believers are characterized by a capacity for fervent love, made possible through spiritual purification. In contrast, those who do not belong to God are characterized by a "murderous heart" and a resentment toward righteousness. The document details how religious rituals do not prove one's standing with God, as even the first murderer, Cain, was a religious man who worshiped God according to his own will rather than God's commands.

The Capacity for Fervent Love

A primary theme in the First Epistle of John is identifying the true characteristics of a Christian. Love is presented as an indispensable feature of a life that belongs to God.

- **A Divine Command and Privilege:** Believers are commanded to love one another. However, this is more than just a duty; it is a privilege. Through the Gospel, believers are given a special "capacity" to love God's people.
- **Purification through Truth:** This capacity is rooted in the salvation experience. As stated in *1 Peter 1:22*: "*Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart.*"
- **Stretching the Heart:** The Greek concept of "fervent" love implies stretching a muscle to its full limit. Believers are encouraged to reach out as far as their capacity allows, exercising love to its maximum extent.

The Contrast: Children of God vs. Children of the Devil

The teachings of John often present the world in "black and white" terms, creating a sharp contrast between two groups of people.

Children of God	Children of the Devil
Characterized by love	Characterized by hate
Respect others	Resent others
Sacrificial toward one another	Selfish and self-serving
Practice true righteousness	Practice evil works

The Example of Cain: Religion without Love

The account of Cain serves as the ultimate example of a life lacking love. Cain is the only Old Testament figure mentioned by name in this epistle.

Religious but Unrighteous

Cain was not an atheist. He was a religious man and a worshiper of the one true God. He knew God as the Creator, the Judge of his parents, and the one who promised a future Savior. However, Cain's religion was self-styled and based on his own accomplishments.

- **The Sacrifice:** God required an animal sacrifice, which served as a picture of the death required for sin. Abel obeyed this instruction.
- **The Rejection:** Cain brought the "fruit of the land"—the product of his own hard work—rather than what God requested. God rejected Cain's offering because it was an act of defiance and a reliance on personal works.
- **The Root of Hatred:** Cain's anger toward Abel did not stem from anything Abel said or did to him. Instead, Cain despised Abel because Abel was obedient and righteous. The unrighteous often hate the righteous because the lives of the godly expose the wickedness of the ungodly.

The Nature of the First Murder

The murder of Abel was not a spur-of-the-moment accident; it was a premeditated act of butchery.

- **Deception:** Historical texts and the context of the account suggest Cain induced Abel to go into the field with him with the intent to kill him.
- **Method of Murder:** The specific language used in the Greek indicates that Cain slit his brother's throat. This was likely an act of defiance against God, using the same method used for sacrificial animals to "sacrifice" his righteous brother.
- **Active Evil:** Cain is described as being of the "wicked one." This refers to an aggressive, active form of evil that seeks to pull others down into corruption.

Society, Government, and the Murderous Heart

The absence of love in the human heart eventually leads to a "murderous" disposition. While not everyone commits the physical act of murder, the Bible suggests that the inclination exists in all who are not converted.

- **The Role of Government:** Because the world is full of people under the power of Satan, God instituted government and capital punishment. The primary function of government is to protect the people and provide a "severity of consequence" to restrain evil.

- **The Threat of Anarchy:** When a government fails to punish crime or protect its citizens, society descends into anarchy. In such a system, evil people are "set loose" to destroy at will without consequence.
- **Modern Examples:** The document notes that modern society often displays a similar hatred for righteousness. This is seen in the polarization surrounding political figures who profess faith, the attacks on Christian organizations, and the failure of systems—such as in California—where tax dollars are used to provide prisoners with tools that allow them to continue engaging in harmful behaviors.

Conclusion

The call for believers is to understand the times and the nature of the people around them. As the world grows more openly hateful and "murderous" in its intent, the duty of the Church is to double its efforts to reach people with the truth of the Gospel. Love remains the defining mark that separates the children of God from a world governed by the "prince of the power of the air."

Greek Terminology Guide

Greek Word	Phonetic Pronunciation	Definition
Extenos	ek-te-nos ¹	To stretch or reach to one's full capacity; used to describe fervent, intense love.
Poneros	po-ne-ros ²	Actively and aggressively evil; a desire to be bad and to corrupt others.
Sphazo	sfah-zo ³	To butcher or slaughter, specifically by cutting the jugular vein or slitting the throat.

¹ Refers to stretching a muscle to its limit, describing how believers should love. ² Used to describe Satan and those who actively oppose good. ³ The term used to describe how Cain killed Abel, mirroring animal sacrifice.