

1 John 3:11-18

Dear Friends in Christ,

When you go to the doctor, even just for a checkup, one of the first things they do is take your temperature. If it's 98.6 you are considered normal. If it's elevated, 99, 100, the doctor starts to wonder if you have a virus or an infection. If it's 103, 104, you are very sick. If it's too much lower than 98.6 they might be checking to see if you have a pulse. What the thermometer says can tell a doctor a lot about your physical health.

Today John talks about what we might call a spiritual thermometer. On this thermometer 98.6 would indicate a state of perfect love. It would tell you that a person's heart had been warmed by God's love for them and that they were filled with love for others. At the bottom of the scale, zero, lack of heat, would be hatred. If someone's spiritual temperature was near the bottom of the scale it would indicate that they were still in death; still in the icy clutches of Satan.

John reminds us what the perfect spiritual temperature of 98.6 looks like. The only one who always had this perfect temperature was Jesus. We know about the way he showed his love. In love he devoted himself to serving others; so much so that on one occasion his family came to take charge of him because they thought he was not taking enough time of himself and his own needs. A spiritual temperature of 98.6 seeks not to be served but to serve.

Jesus showed his perfect spiritual temperature in many ways. He had compassion on the blind and the leper. He had compassion on the crowd of 4,000 who were hungry. He had compassion on the spiritual condition of the crowds who were like sheep without a shepherd because their spiritual leaders weren't feeding them good spiritual food. He had compassion on the widow from Nain who was following the coffin of her only son out to the cemetery as Jesus was passing by. He was deeply moved as he saw the terrible effects of sin on the world and the people he created. He couldn't help but want to see those effects of sin removed. For those I mentioned he provided temporary relief. He healed the blind man and the leper. He fed the 4,000. He taught the crowds from the word and proclaimed himself the Messiah. He raised the widow's son from the dead. But most importantly, he provided a more permanent solution. John reminds us **Jesus Christ laid down his life for us**. He had the Father take the punishment that we deserve for our sins and give it to him. He volunteered to suffer and die in our place so that we could live with him and be free of the effects of sin forever. And Paul reminds us in Romans, he didn't do this because we had done anything to deserve it. **While we were still sinners, Christ died for us**. That's love. That's a perfect 98.6.

Now, take your spiritual temperature by comparing it to Jesus' perfect 98.6. John says on the bottom of the scale is the example of Cain. We were reminded of Cain in our Old Testament reading. He committed the first recorded murder. When he was born Adam and Eve had hoped that maybe he was the promised Messiah. Some have translated Eve's words at his birth, **I have gotten THE MAN from the Lord**. But it became very clear that he was not the Messiah. When Adam and Eve had another child named Abel a rivalry developed. Abel was "the good child." His deeds were righteous. Maybe Cain even thought he was mommy or daddy's favorite. Then, one day Abel decided to offer a sacrifice to the Lord, and Cain did too; maybe just because he didn't want to look bad by not offering one. And somehow God made it clear that he accepted Abel's sacrifice, but that he had rejected Cain's. Instead of realizing that his spiritual temperature was dropping to a dangerous low and asking God to help him he let

his jealousy of Abel fester inside him. When God lovingly warned him that if he continued on his current path sin would master him, he didn't listen. Jealousy turned to hatred and hatred led to murder. In fact the word that John uses to describe Cain's murder of Abel is the same word that is used to describe what you do to an animal that is to be sacrificed. He slaughtered him. Cain's spiritual temperature had reached zero. His heart was cold and dark. He cared about no one but himself.

John says, **don't be like Cain**. But he makes it clear that he doesn't just mean "don't murder anyone." He reminds us to examine our hearts to make sure our spiritual temperature is not dropping. Why did Cain kill Abel? Because Abel was the good one. Abel's life was righteous. His heart was warmed by the love of God and he wanted to do what was right in God's eyes; even if he wasn't always successful. But his goodness ended up highlighting Cain's wickedness. That made Cain feel guilty and jealous. So, John would say, if you are feeling jealous of others, if you get angry because they seem to have it better than you do, if you are angry because others are praising them and you feel that makes you look bad by comparison; watch out! Your spiritual temperature is dropping. Sin is crouching at your door and wants to master you. Satan wants to keep you in his icy clutches of death.

John reminds us that we don't have to actually become a cold blooded killer like Cain to be in spiritual danger. He says **anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.**

Don't be like Cain. If you notice the signs that your spiritual temperature is falling, the signs of jealousy and anger and hatred toward others, listen to God's warning. Confess. Admit that these things are dangerous sins. Let your heart be warmed again by the fact that Jesus laid down his life for you and paid for those sins. It is only as we daily confess our sins and then are daily reminded by God's word of our forgiveness in Jesus that our spiritual temperature keeps from dropping and becoming colder and colder.

John reminds us that if Jesus laid down his life for us and by God's grace he has brought us from death to life and made us his sons and daughters, then **we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers**. Now, it's not likely that we will be called upon to do that. It's not likely we will ever be faced with a situation where we can say to a hostage taker, "keep me and let everyone else go." Or, "if you want to execute someone to make your point, choose me." But, John says, we can test our willingness to lay down our lives for our brothers; we can take our spiritual temperature and see how close we are to 98.6, by how we react to a fellow Christian who has a need. We heard earlier how Jesus responded. How do we respond?

John says **if anyone has material possessions**, that is, they have what they need to live in this world, they have basic necessities for themselves. **And they see their brother in need**, a person, especially a fellow believer that does not have what they need to live in this world, they are lacking some basic necessity that they could provide without themselves becoming needy, **But they have no pity on him**, they slam the door of their hearts and refuse to have compassion on this person. **How can the love of God be in them?** Their spiritual thermometer would register a zero.

Right now we are faced with such a thermometer. There have been the earthquakes and tsunami in Japan, the tornados in Alabama and in Missouri. What has your reaction been? If you feel no sadness or compassion, if you think "hopefully FEMA and others will help those people, but I'm not willing to spare anything I have for them" that's a pretty good indication

that our spiritual temperature is a lot lower than it needs to be. We are in danger of being like the priest and Levite who passed by the man who was beaten and robbed and left to die. We need a healthy reminder of the fact that all we are and all we have is a gift from God. We need a healthy reminder of what Jesus has done for us, that he laid down his life for us. For it is only the reminder of what God has done for us in Jesus that warms our hearts and helps us overcome the selfishness, jealousy, anger and hatred that live there by nature.

Finally, John reminds us that our spiritual temperature isn't just measured in feelings or in words. It is measured in actions and in truth. Or as James says, **faith without works is dead** because where there is faith there will be fruits of faith.

Each day we need to take our spiritual temperature. When we do we will find that it's never 98.6. It won't be perfect until we reach heaven. When we find that our temperature is dropping because of jealousy, or anger, or hatred, or just neglect of the word, we know the medicine we need. Don't be like Cain and ignore the signs of a serious problem. Acknowledge the problem and treat it with heavy doses of God's love, the reminder that Jesus Christ laid down his life for you. The more you hear that the more you will be willing to lay down your life for your brothers.