

# 1 John 3:12 Commentary

PREVIOUS

NEXT

CLICK VERSE

To go directly to that verse

[INDEX FOR ALL VERSES ON 1 JOHN](#)

[1 John 3:1](#)  
[1 John 3:2](#)  
[1 John 3:3](#)  
[1 John 3:4](#)  
[1 John 3:5](#)  
[1 John 3:6](#)  
[1 John 3:7](#)  
[1 John 3:8](#)  
[1 John 3:9](#)  
[1 John 3:10](#)  
[1 John 3:11](#)  
[1 John 3:12](#)  
[1 John 3:13](#)  
[1 John 3:14](#)  
[1 John 3:15](#)  
[1 John 3:16](#)  
[1 John 3:17](#)  
[1 John 3:18](#)  
[1 John 3:19](#)  
[1 John 3:20](#)  
[1 John 3:21](#)  
[1 John 3:22](#)  
[1 John 3:23](#)  
[1 John 3:24](#)

## FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND HIS CHILDREN

Click chart to enlarge

Charts from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission  
Another Overview Chart - [1 John](#) - [Charles Swindoll](#)

BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP		BEHAVIOR OF FELLOWSHIP	
Conditions of Fellowship	Cautions of Fellowship	Fellowship Characteristics	Fellowship Consequences
Meaning of Fellowship 1 Jn 1:1-2:27		Manifestations of Fellowship 1 Jn 2:28-5:21	
Abiding in God's Light		Abiding in God's Love	
Written in Ephesus			
circa 90 AD			
From Talk Thru the Bible			

## STUDY GUIDE

### 1 JOHN 3

What is this? On the photograph of the Observation Worksheet for this chapter you will find handwritten 5W/H questions (Who?

What? Where? When? Why? How?) on each verse to help you either personally study or lead a discussion on this chapter. The questions are generally very simple and are stated in such a way as to stimulate you to observe the text to discern the answer. As a reminder, given the truth that your ultimate Teacher is the Holy Spirit, begin your time with God with prayer such as Psalm 119:12+ "Blessed are You, O LORD; Teach me Your statutes." (you can vary it with similar prayers - Ps 119:18, 26, 33, 64, 66, 68, 108, 124, 135, 171, etc) The questions are generally highlighted in yellow and the answers in green. Some questions have no answers and are left to your observations and the illuminating/teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. Some qualifying thoughts - (1) Use "As is" - these are handwritten and will include mistakes I made, etc. (2) They may not be the best question for a given verse and my guess is that on some verses you will think of a far superior 5W/H question and/or many other questions.

Dr Howard Hendricks once gave an assignment to his seminary students to list as many observations as they could from Acts 1:8. He said "So far they've come up with more than 600 different ones! Imagine what fun you could have with 600 observations on this passage. Would you like to see Scripture with eyes like that?" (P. 63 [Living by the Book](#) - borrow) With practice you can! And needless to say, you will likely make many more observations and related questions than I recorded on the pages below and in fact I pray that the Spirit would indeed lead you to discover a veritable treasure chest of observations and questions! In Jesus' Name. Amen

Why am I doing this? **Mortimer Adler** among others helped me develop a questioning mindset as I read, seeking to read actively rather than passively. Over the years I have discovered that as I have practiced reading with a 5W/H questioning mindset, it has yielded more accurate interpretation and the good fruit of meditation. In other words, consciously interacting with the inspired Holy Word of God and the illuminating Holy Spirit has honed my ability to meditate on the Scripture, and my prayer is that this tool will have the same impact in your spiritual life. The benefits of meditation are literally priceless in regard to their value in this life and in the life to come (cf discipline yourself for godliness in 1Ti 4:8+.) For some of the benefits - see Joshua 1:8+ and Psalm 1:2-3+. It will take diligence and mental effort to develop an "inductive" ([especially an "observational"](#)), interrogative mindset as you read God's Word, but it bears repeating that the benefits in this life and the rewards in the next will make it more than worth the effort you invest! Dear Christian reader let me encourage you to strongly consider learning the skills of [inductive Bible study](#) and spending the rest of your life practicing them on the Scriptures and living them out in your daily walk with Christ.

Although Mortimer Adler's advice is from a secular perspective, his words are worth pondering...

*Strictly, all reading is active. What we call passive is simply less active. Reading is better or worse according as it is more or less active. And one reader is better than another in proportion as he is capable of a greater range of activity in reading.* (Adler's classic book [How to Read a Book is free online](#))

[John Piper](#) adds that "Insight or understanding is the product of intensive, headache-producing meditation on two or three verses and how they fit together. This kind of reflection and rumination is provoked by asking questions of the text. And you cannot do it if you hurry. Therefore, we must resist the deceptive urge to carve notches in our bibliographic gun. Take two hours to ask ten questions of Galatians 2:20+ and you will gain one hundred times the insight you would have attained by reading thirty pages of the New Testament or any other book. Slow down. Query. Ponder. Chew.... (John Dewey rightly said) "People only truly think when they are confronted with a problem. Without some kind of dilemma to stimulate thought, behavior becomes habitual rather than thoughtful."

*"Asking questions is the key to understanding."*

--Jonathan Edwards

That said, below are the [5W/H questions](#) for each verse in this chapter (click page to enlarge). This is not neatly typed but is handwritten and was used for leading a class discussion on this chapter, so you are welcome to use it in this "as is" condition...

--	--

**1 John 3:12 not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous:**

**Greek** - ou kathos Kain ek tou ponerou en (3SIAI) kai esphaxen (3SAAI) ton adelphon autou kai charin tinos esphaxen (3SAAI) auton hoti ta erga autou ponera en ta de tou adelphou autou dikaia.

KJV 1 John 3:12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

BGT 1 John 3:12 ο καθ' ὃν ΚΑΙ ὁ πονηρὸς ἐσφάξεν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ· καὶ χάριν τίνος ἐσφάξεν αὐτόν; ὅτι τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ πονηρὰ ἦν, καὶ τὰ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ δίκαια.

NET 1 John 3:12 not like Cain who was of the evil one and brutally murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his deeds were evil, but his brother's were righteous.

CSB 1 John 3:12 unlike Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

ESV 1 John 3:12 We should 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.

NIV 1 John 3:12 Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.

NLT 1 John 3:12 We must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because Cain had been doing what was evil, and his brother had been doing what was righteous.

NRS 1 John 3:12 We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

NJB 1 John 3:12 not to be like Cain, who was from the Evil One and murdered his brother. And why did he murder his brother? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's upright.

NAB 1 John 3:12 unlike Cain who belonged to the evil one and slaughtered his brother. Why did he slaughter him? Because his own works were evil, and those of his brother righteous.

YLT 1 John 3:12 not as Cain -- of the evil one he was, and he did slay his brother, and wherefore did he slay him? because his works were evil, and those of his brother righteous.

MIT 1 John 3:12 We must not be like Cain, who representing the evil one, took his brother's life. What was his motive in murdering him? He did so because his own deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

GWN 1 John 3:12 Don't be like Cain. He was a child of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did Cain murder his brother? Because the things Cain did were evil and the things his brother did had God's approval.

BBE 1 John 3:12 Not being of the Evil One like Cain, who put his brother to death. And why did he put him to death? Because his works were evil and his brother's works were good.

RSV 1 John 3:12 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.

NKJ 1 John 3:12 not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.

ASV 1 John 3:12 not as Cain was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

**Wuest** - not even as Cain was out of the Pernicious One, and killed his brother by severing his jugular vein. And on what account did he kill him? Because his works were pernicious and those of his brother, righteous. ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used by permission)

- **not as Cain, who was of the evil one:** Ge 4:4-15,25 Heb 11:4 Jude 1:11)(**of:** 1Jn 3:8, 1Jn 2:13,14 Mt 13:19,38
- **And slew** - 1Sa 18:14,15 19:4,5 22:14-16 Ps 37:12 Pr 29:27 Mt 27:23 John 10:32 15:19-25 18:38-40 Acts 7:52 1Th 2:14 1Pe 4:4 Rev 17:6
- **and** - Mt 23:35 Lu 11:51 Heb 11:4, 12:24
- [1 John 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## CAIN'S NEGATIVE EXAMPLE OF LOVE

John now explains what it means to love one another, first from a negative example the prototype of which was Cain (1Jn 3:12-15) and then from a positive perspective, the prototype of course being Christ (1Jn 3:16-18). Note also the context - 1 John 3:8 "the one who practices sin is of the devil" and here John gives Cain as an illustration of one who is **of the devil**. This is similar to John 8:44, which says

"You (JESUS ADDRESSES JEWS WHO HAD "PROFESSED" BELIEF IN HIM BUT NOT SAVING BELIEF) are

of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. **He was a murderer** (LIKE HE DID TO ADAM AND EVE AND LIKE CAIN) from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

**Not as Cain, who was of the evil** (poneros) **one and slew** ([sphazo](#)) **his brother. And for what reason did he slay** ([sphazo](#)) **him? Because his deeds were evil** (poneros), **and his brother's were righteous** ([dikaios](#)) - Note that 1Jn 3:11 ends with we should love one another and in 1Jn 3:12 John gives us the negative example of love - "We should love one another, not as Cain..." **"Not as Cain** (only OT reference in John's 3 epistles) - **As** introduces a term of comparison (specifically a simile), which should prompt a question like "What is the similarity the author is seeking to show us?" He is giving us the first Biblical example of **NOT** loving one's brother, explaining that the reason Cain did not love Abel is because he was **of the evil one** and his **deeds were evil**. Believers are of the Holy One and our deeds should be good (godly, God honoring).

**John Piper** explains "According to Genesis 4:18, Cain murdered his brother Abel after Abel's sacrifice of the first born of his flock was accepted by God, while his own sacrifice of the fruit of the ground was not. According to Hebrews 11:4 Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God because it was done in faith. Cain's sacrifice evidently was not. And Cain's lack of faith led to hatred for his brother which rose and rose until it finally issued forth in murder, a brutal murder. The Greek word literally means to "cut his throat" and could be translated "slaughtered" or "butchered." And for John that murder was evidence that Cain was of the evil one. Cain, sharing the nature of the devil, who, according to Jesus in John 8:44, "was a murderer from the beginning." ([Love: A Matter of Life and Death](#))

**James Montgomery Boice** - Love between Christian brothers suggests hatred between brothers as its contrast. So John turns to the example of Cain and Abel. (Borrow [The Epistles of John Expository Commentary](#) page 112)

**W E Vine** - the contrast between the children of God and the children of the devil, having been followed by the mention of that which characterizes those who really belong to the former, leads to a typical case and the first instance of hatred to one's brother. ([Collected Writings](#))

**Henry Mahan** - Let us not be like Cain, who took his nature and got his motivation from Satan and killed his brother. This was the first instance and example of hatred of the brethren. What was the cause of this hatred? What moved him to hate and kill his brother? Abel attributed everything to God — all mercy, righteousness, forgiveness, acceptance and all grace. Cain attributed everything to himself. The controversy was over salvation by grace alone or by works! Cain hated his brother on this account. While his brother looked to God alone for salvation, Cain sought acceptance on the basis of his righteousness and works. So carnal men today hate those who find righteousness in Christ alone. ([1 John 3 Commentary](#))

**Vine on not as Cain** - the contrast between the **children of God** and the **children of the devil**, having been followed by the mention of that which characterizes those who really belong to the former, leads to a typical case (example of Cain) and the first instance of hatred to one's brother. The eighth verse, 1 Jn 3:8, recorded the beginning of the whole history of sin. **Cain** showed his spiritual connection with the Evil One by the slaughter of his brother. Sin, which passed into the human heart (cf Ro 5:12+) through man's willful yielding to the suggestion of him who "sinneth from the beginning," took this form in Cain's case in spite of the divine warning (Gen. 4:6,7), and gave evidence of his moral relationship with the Evil One (see John 8:44). The title "**the Evil One**" is the same as in 1 Jn 2:13, where see +. The word [sphazo](#), "to slay," occurs here only in the New Testament. Originally it signified "to cut the throat"; later it came to mean "to slay violently." ([Collected Writings](#))

The application to the believer's life is that those who do not love us, hate us the way Cain hated Abel, possibly even to the point of killing us. Many believers in America are totally unaware of the martyrdom (Satanically influenced murder of saints just as Cain's hatred prompted him to slay Abel) - if you are one of those who are unaware, take a moment to click on the Voice of Martyr's map that gives details of ongoing persecution of believers today -- you may be shocked even though John says in the next verse "**Do not be surprised... if the world hates you.**" ([The Voice of the Martyrs Prayer Map](#)).

#### Related Resources -

- [Who was Cain in the Bible?](#)
- [What was the mark that God put on Cain \(Genesis 4:15\)?](#)
- [Of whom was Cain afraid after he killed Abel?](#)
- [Why did God accept Abel's offering but reject Cain's offering? Why did Cain then kill Abel?](#)
- [Why wasn't Cain's punishment death \(Genesis 4:14\)?](#)
- [Cain - International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#)

**Of the evil** (poneros) **one** - **Evil one** in context refers to the devil in 1Jn 3:8+. The Greek word is poneros describes the devil as pernicious and actively opposing all that is good and godly. **Cain** was of the seed of the serpent and manifested enmity toward Abel,

the seed of the woman (Ge 3:15+). Cain in the present passage is an illustration of the **one who practices sin** in 1Jn 3:8+. **Of the evil one** means "out of" (preposition = ek = out) not in the sense that the **evil one** gave birth to Cain (cp "seed" Ge 3:15+), but in the sense of Cain being under the devil's authority and influence (cp Acts 26:18+ where Satan's "dominion" = exousia = the right and the might). John's description of the **evil one** exerting his influence on Cain reminds us of Paul's teaching on spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6 where he describes the **"fiery missiles of the evil one"** (Eph 6:16+), which are to be extinguished by taking up the shield of faith, something that Cain clearly did not do.

**The evil one** (*ho ponēros*) is the specific phrase used to describe Satan in Mt 5:37,39; Mt 6:13; Mt 13:19; Lk 11:4; Jn 17:15. **Evil one** in First John - 1Jn 2:13-14, 3:12, 5:18-19

**W E Vine** - Cain showed his spiritual connection with the Evil One by the slaughter of his brother. Sin, which passed into the human heart through man's willful yielding to the suggestion of him who "sinneth from the beginning," took this form in Cain's case in spite of the divine warning (Gen. 4:7), and gave evidence of his moral relationship with the Evil One (see John 8:44+). ([Collected Writings](#))

*In both Jewish and early Christian writings Cain serves as a model for those who deliberately disbelieve.*

-- W Hall Harris

**Hawley** - If we hate someone, we wish he or she were dead, and the Lord sees the inner desire as equal to the outward act that would result from it (cf. Matt 5:21–22). Therefore, those who hate are murderers.

**Slew... slay** (4969) ([sphazo](#)) means to kill, as in Ge 4:8 "Cain rose up against Abel his brother and **killed** him." It is interesting that **sphazo** is the usual expression in Classical Greek and the Septuagint to describe killing for sacrifice!

**And for what reason did he slay** ([sphazo](#)) **him?**: Vine says "the form of a question is used in order to stress the evil character of the murderer, and to contrast the character of Abel. The "And" stresses the question itself (for other instances see Luke 10:29; John 9:36)." ([Collected Writings](#))

As **Strauss** says "The first murderer learned to kill from Satan. An evil man who hates and kills is demon controlled. **Ed**: I might not go quite that far as it implies demon possessed. They are certainly strongly influenced by the demonic beings.)

**Because** ([hoti](#)) - It is always worth a "rest stop" to pause and ponder the **terms of explanation (for, because, etc)**, asking what is God explaining? Many times (as in this context) the answer is very simple (in fact in this case God even asks the question for you!) and might lead you to think this is a waste of time. But beloved, pausing to ponder God's Word will never be a waste of time.

**Vine on Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.**- this expresses not so much the motive in Cain's heart as the nature within him; it was exhibited in his works in contrast to those of Abel, which revealed that he was righteous. The murder itself with its immediate motive, was the outcome of that nature by which Cain "was of the Evil One." The righteousness of Abel (Heb. 11:4+) incited Cain's jealousy. The Lord sought to arrest the course of sin in Cain's heart, that he might repent of his jealousy and carry his sin no further. Probably the best translation of Genesis 4:7+ is as follows: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted; (Cain could have even then gone and brought the divinely appointed sacrifice) and if thou doest not well (i.e., refusing to do the will of God, which was still possible for him), sin croucheth at the door (i.e., the sin of murder is like an animal ready to spring upon its victim), but thou shouldest rule over it." Instead of giving way to it and allowing it to gain the mastery over his heart, Cain ought to have subdued it. Instead of this he disregarded the gracious warning and allowed the sin to gain the mastery, leading him to rise up against his brother and slay him. Thus from beginning to end Cain's works were evil. This verse concludes the mention of righteousness in this epistle. It began at 1Jn 2:29. There has been a transition from the subject of righteousness to that of love at the close of this section (v. 10) and love now forms the central theme of the epistle. ([Collected Writings](#))

**His deeds** ([ergon](#)) **were evil** (poneros) - Remember that Scripture is always the best commentary on Scripture (**See Comparing Scripture with Scripture**), so let's look at some parallel passages to see if that helps us understand why Cain did what he did. First, notice that it wasn't that God had not given Cain a warning when He asked him "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen (see **context** = Ge 4:4-5)? "If you do well, will not [your countenance] be lifted up? And if you do not do well, **SIN** is crouching at the door; and its **desire** is for you, but you **must master** (Heb = mashal = have dominion, have authority over) it." (Ge 4:6-7+) **Sin** has **desire** and Satan ("a murderer from the beginning" - Jn 8:44) can shoot fiery missiles to "fan the flame" of the evil desire. John had just explained that the devil had sinned from the beginning (1Jn 3:8+), so one reason Cain practiced evil is because Satan, the "sin stimulator," was prowling around like a roaring lion and he pounced on Cain in a moment of anger, tempting him to extract revenge on his brother Abel. (1Pe 5:8+) Cain was vulnerable because he did not master the evil desire. And what was the root cause of Cain's hatred that led to murder? Hebrews says that "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks." (Heb 11:4+) Cain's basic problem was a defective, deficient faith which led to a disastrous disobedience. Genuine **faith** is

always linked closely with **obedience** (see the phrase "*obedience of faith*" in Ro 1:5+, Ro 16:26+) Beloved, **faith** that does not **obey** (as this case the commandment to love one another) is not a saving faith!

Cain's deeds clearly demonstrated his "spiritual family", specifically identifying him not as a child of God but as a child of the devil (1Jn 3:9+).

**James Smith** - Cain hated the righteousness of God as seen in his brother. The carnal mind of man would rather quench the divine light in bloodshed than acknowledge sin. Christ was the Righteousness of God, and men cried, "Away with this Man" (Luke 23:18). They loved darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil.

**John Piper** explains why Cain killed Abel - Not because Abel was evil, but just the reverse. According to the end of 1Jn 3:12, Cain murdered Abel **"because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous."** What was the motive for Cain's murder? Jealousy, envy. Jealousy is a common motive for hatred and for murder. In the movie Amadeus it was jealousy that moved Salieri to hate and to ultimately try to kill Mozart, jealousy over his superior musical gifts. But Cain's jealousy was not of this type. It was jealousy not over another's superior gifts, but over another's superior righteousness. It was the same jealousy that caused the Jewish leaders to crucify Jesus, the same jealousy that moved Saul of Tarsus to persecute Christians. John expresses it this way in John 3:19–20: *"And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because **their deeds were evil**. For everyone who does evil **hates the light** and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed."* The light of Abel's righteousness (by faith—Hebrews 11:4) and God's acceptance of him revealed the darkness and sinfulness of Cain's own heart. And that was very, very threatening to him. And unless the Spirit of God has made you a very humble person, your instinctive response in that kind of threatening situation will be like Cain's, to lash out against the one whose righteousness has revealed the bankruptcy of your own soul. That's what happened to Cain. The devil inspired **jealousy** within his heart; his jealousy gave rise to **hatred**; and his hatred issued forth in **murder**. **And John presents Cain to us as the model of the world.** The "world," that is, humanity aligned in rebellion against God, is Cain's posterity and it will continue to respond to righteousness in the same way he did. Therefore, says John in 1Jn 3:13, "Do not wonder that the world hates you." We should not be surprised if the world hates us as Christians. After all, the same devil who inspired Cain to hate and ultimately murder Abel has the world in his grip. ([Love: A Matter of Life and Death](#))

**John Stott** explains Cain's hatred noting that "Jealousy lay behind his hatred, not the jealousy which covets another's greater gifts but that which resents another's greater righteousness, the 'envy' which made the Jewish priests demand the death of Jesus (Ed: see Mt 27:18, Mk 15:10, cp reaction to Jesus' disciples in Acts 5:17-18, 13:45). Jealousy-hatred-murder is a natural and terrible sequence." (BORROW [The Letters of John page 144](#))

**I Howard Marshall** - The nature of brotherly love is illustrated negatively by the contrast with Cain who murdered his brother and positively by the example of Jesus Christ Who laid down his own life for us (1Jn 3:16). Each of these illustrations is followed by a corollary. Thus believers must not be surprised if they are hated by people like Cain, and they must avoid the feelings of hatred which are tantamount to murder. In the same way, the positive example of Christ's self-sacrifice leads to an appeal for a practical love which goes beyond feelings to costly sharing of one's possessions with the needy. In this way, the paragraph is both an appeal for love and an explanation of the nature of love by contrast with its opposite, hatred. (BORROW [The Epistles of John page 188](#))

We see a parallel passage in John 3:19-21+ which describes the contrast of the world's love of darkness and hatred of the light -

And this is the judgment, that the **light** is come into the world (cp Jn 1:4, 8:12), and men loved the **darkness** rather than the **light**; for their **deeds were evil**. For everyone who does evil hates the **light**, and does not come to the **light**, lest his deeds should be exposed. BUT he who practices (habitually, as the general direction of one's life) the truth comes to the **light**, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.

**Evil** ([4190](#))(**poneros** from **poneo** = work or toil - idea is that labor is an annoyance; cp nounponeria) means evil in active opposition to good. **Poneros** is not only evil in its nature but is vicious evil in its influence and thus is actively harmful (murder in the case of Cain!). A related word kakos is translated evil, but kakos speaks of bad in character, whereas poneros speaks of bad in effect!

**PONEROS IN 1 JOHN** - 1 Jn. 2:13; 1 Jn. 2:14; 1 Jn. 3:12; 1 Jn. 5:18; 1 Jn. 5:19; 2 Jn. 1:11; 3 Jn. 1:10

As **Cain** was of the family of the devil, **Abel** was of the family of God as indicated by his righteous deeds. As John wrote earlier "If you know that He (Father and/or Son) is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices (**present tense** = as the general direction of their life) righteousness is born of Him." (1 John 2:29+)

**Sam Storms** - Cain is said to have been **"of the evil one."** This was interpreted by some Jews in the first century to mean that Cain was *biologically* of Satan, i.e., he was the offspring of a sexual encounter between the serpent and Eve (this was supposedly the essence of the serpent's temptation of Eve in the garden). This is known as the *Serpent-Seed* doctrine. But surely John's point is



that Cain reflected the spiritual and moral characteristics of Satan, not that he was literally his offspring. Cain "slew" Abel, literally, he *slaughtered* or *butchered* him (cf. Rev. 5:9). Why did he slay him? Jealousy, envy, resentment. The righteousness of the Christian will always appear to the world as arrogant conceit (cf. John 15:18-20+). ([First John 3:10b-24](#))

**His brother's ([adelphos](#)) were righteous ([dikaios](#))** - Why were they righteous? Again let us allow Scripture to comment upon Scripture - in 1Jn 3:7+ John taught that **"the one who practices righteousness is righteous."** Abel's righteous deeds were the supernatural outworking of his righteous character. And how did Abel become **righteous** several millennia before Jesus died on the Cross to pay the penalty for our sins and pave the way for men to be declared righteous (cp Ro 1:16-17+)? Hebrews 11:4+ indicates that Abel was a man of faith and thus his righteousness was imputed (reckoned to his "spiritual account") by God on the basis of his faith, "even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe." (Ro 3:22+) While we do not know how much Abel understood of the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we know that he based his faith on the amount of "Gospel light" that had been revealed to him. There is no other way for a sinner in Adam's line (which we all are - see Ro 5:12+) to be reckoned righteous (cp Ro 4:3+, Gal 3:6)! And so the way of salvation in the Old Testament was the same as it is in the New Testament--by grace through faith in the Gospel message (which was preached in the OT - read Gal 3:8, Ge 12:3, 22:18 and compare with Ge 3:15 the so-called [protoevangelium](#)).

**James Morgan** - From this passage [in Gen. 4:1-26], united with the remarks of the Apostle in the text, we may fully understand the mind of Cain. It was envy that first moved him to the unparalleled iniquity. His offering was rejected, while Abel's was accepted. He was mortified by the distinction, and would be avenged. It is very instructive to mark the progress of his mind under the influence of his envious feelings. The first notice is, 'he was wrath.' He met the unexpected disappointment with a burst of anger. It is then added, 'his countenance fell.' That fit of passion fell down into a sullen melancholy, musing by turns on the injustice of God, and fraud of his brother, as no doubt he considered them. But his gloomy apprehensions were not unchecked. God remonstrated with him, probably by the whispers of his own conscience, or it may have been audibly and visibly. He was called upon to give a reason for his malevolent feelings. A faithful remonstrance was addressed to him, 'If thou doest will shalt thou not be accepted?' At the same time he was faithfully warned, 'if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door,' which seems to mean, that it lay there ready to entrap and destroy him, as an enemy that waited for his halting. Even the special enormity that began to assume some shape in his mind, seems to have been set before him to deter him against indulging the dark forebodings that cast their deadly shade over his spirit. 'Unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.' But it was in vain. He allowed the wicked one to harass and harden his soul more and more. An opportunity offered to carry his design into execution. 'Cain talked with Abel his brother, and they were in the field.' We may well suppose he addressed him in terms of bitter accusation. His fierce recriminations were uttered in the silence of the solitary field.' That very silence whispered, now is the seasonable time to be avenged for all the dishonour God has done thee in the preference of this hated brother. No eye shall see it. No ear shall hear it, no tongue shall tell it. So 'he rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.'" What an instructive history! It is the progress of envy till it ended in fratricide. It began with anger, preceded in morose dissatisfaction, overcame the remonstrances of conscience, withstood the most solemn warnings, was goaded on to hatred and revenge, and seizing the favorable opportunity, terminated in murder." ([The Epistles of John. Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock Publishers, Inc., 1865](#)).

## GREEK WORD STUDY

**Righteous** (1342) [dikaios](#) from [dike](#) = right, just) defines that which is in accordance with high standards of [rectitude](#). It is that which is in right relation to another and so in reference to persons defines the one who is morally and ethically righteous, upright or just. **Dikaios** pertains to being in accordance with high standards of rectitude, and so describes one who is upright or fair. The meaning of the root word **dike** is based on the assumption that men expect a certain standard of behavior and if this is not attained judgment may result. It follows that the basic meaning of the adjective **dikaios** describes that which is proper, right, fitting, fair, righteous, just (acting or being in conformity with what is morally upright or good). From a forensic or legal viewpoint **dikaios** refers to one who is law-abiding (doing all that law or justice requires), honest and good in behavior and from a religious viewpoint one who is rightly related to God. Those who are truly **righteous** have God's verdict in their favor; they are acquitted and pronounced **just**. In simple terms this trait describes being in accordance with what God requires. The righteous man does what he ought. He is the person who conforms to the standard, will or character of God. For example, **Luke** describes **Zacharias** and **Elizabeth** (John the Baptist's parents) as "both **righteous** ([dikaios](#)) in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. (Lk 1:6+, see Luke 2:25+ "Simeon... was righteous") They were rightly related to God and because of that right relationship, they walked accordingly. Again we see **righteous character** is associated with **righteous conduct**. That's what Paul is calling for in those men who would lead God's church. Practically speaking **dikaios** describes one (Abel) who is in right relation to God and to men.

**Slay** (4969)(**sphazo**) (sometimes spelled **sphatto**) means to kill, slay, slaughter, to butcher. "From Herodotus sphazo is also used for the profane slaying of a man. It is a vivid and grisly expression for murder. Various nuances may be caught: gruesomeness, undeserved fate, criminality, murder of kin, massacre after taking a city... slaughtering men is often mentioned in lists of vices." (TDNT) **Liddell-Scott** = "to slay, slaughter, properly by cutting the throat." **A T Robertson** - "to slay, to butcher, to cut the throat (Latin = *jugulare*) like an ox in the shambles." Of slaying the sacrificial animals (Lxx of Lev 1:5, 11, etc which are a shadow the Cross and in Lev 16:11, 15 describes the slaying of the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, again a shadow of Christ's work on the Cross.). **Sphazo** often a violent death is in view and described the especially heinous crime of killing one's family member. Sphazo was also used to describe the way a wolf falls on its prey and kills it! **Strauss** says **sphazo** is a specialized word which means to butcher or slaughter by cutting the throat. **Louw-Nida** note that it means "to slaughter, either animals or persons; in contexts referring to persons, the implication is of violence and mercilessness - 'to slaughter, to kill.'" As a reflection of this nuance, the translation "brutally murdered" has been used in the NET translation.

In the **Septuagint** the first use describes Abraham and Isaac on Mt Moriah -

"And Abraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to **slay** his son." (Ge 22:10)

**Comment** - How fitting that the first use describes Abraham's son whom loved, a clear foreshadowing of the Son of God Whom the Father loved. Both were willing to sacrifice their sons, but God provided a substitute ram for Abraham's son (Ge 22:11,12,13), while His Son would be the Perfect Sacrificial Lamb (Jn 1:29).

**Sphazo** is used in the **Septuagint** of Ezek 23:39 - "they had **slaughtered** their children for their idols, they entered My sanctuary on the same day to profane it." Sphazo described the slaying of the prophets of Baal in 1Ki 18:40. **Sphazo** is used in the Septuagint of Ex 12:6 to describe the slaying of the Passover lamb which is very fitting in light of the fact that Rev 5:6, 9, 12, 13:8 all use sphazo to describe the slain Lamb of God! Jesus died like a lamb dies -- He was slaughtered! Indeed, His was a violent death.

The related noun **sphage** (from sphazo) is used in Acts 8:32 of Jesus "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO **SLAUGHTER**; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT" and of believers in Ro 8:36 "We were considered as sheep to be **slaughtered**."

John sees Jesus in glory and our Lord still has the evidence of His Crucifixion...

And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if **slain** (sphazo in the perfect tense), having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.....12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was **slain** (sphazo in the perfect tense) to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." (Rev 5:6, 12+)

**NET Note** on "as if slain" - This phrase **does not** imply that the Lamb "appeared to have been killed" but in reality was not, because the wider context of the NT shows that in fact the Lamb, i.e., Jesus, was killed.

**Comment** - And to substantiate the **NET Note** interpretation, **slain** in Rev 5:12 has no "as if," but is stated as a fact. The use of the perfect tense in both descriptions is significant because it conveys the fact that there has been a past completed act [crucifixion] which has ongoing or permanent effect In other words, Jesus' scars will endure throughout eternity! In short there is a scarred Man in Heaven throughout eternity future Who was not present from eternity past!

**One more point** - Luke has a passage that is mind boggling - Jesus declares "Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that **he will gird himself to serve**, and have them recline at the table, and **will come up and wait on them**." (Lk 12:37) Many (including myself) interpret this as a prophecy that Jesus Himself will gird Himself and serve us one day in the future! Oh my! If this doesn't cause you to bow down low, nothing will. And when He serves us the bread, guess what we will see? You guessed it, those scars in His hands! Amazing grace indeed! **Spurgeon** writes "This always seems to me to be one of the most remarkable of our Lord's utterances while he was here upon the earth. His whole life was one of condescension, which was never more clearly manifested than it was when he, the Lord and Master of all, took the position of servant of all, and washed his disciples' feet; yet he here tells us that, if he finds us watching when he comes again, he will once more take his place as our servitor." **Warren Wiersbe** agrees that "the remarkable thing in this story is that the **master serves the servants**! In Jewish weddings, the bride was treated like a queen and the groom like a king; so you would not expect the "king" to minister to his staff. **Our King will minister to His faithful servants** when He greets us at His return, and He will reward us for our faithfulness." (BEC)

**TDNT** on the secular use of **sphazo** - Meat Offerings to the Olympian Gods. The word **sphazo** means "to slay," "to slaughter," "to kill," "to murder." Strictly it refers to the slaying of animals, especially in sacrifice. Ritual slaying takes place after prayer. Experts do it



only when the animals are large or those making the offering are of high rank. Inclination of the head supposedly denotes consent. The ox is struck from behind, the neck is then bent back, the throat is slit, and the blood pours out. Boars may first be stupefied. In the case of smaller animals slaying is by cutting the throat with the neck bent back... Animals. Most slaughtering has ritual connections in antiquity. Domestic slaughtering includes simple ceremonies and the dedicating of parts to the gods. Yet a purely secular use of sphazo does occur. Indeed, the term is used for the wolf's slaying of its prey.

**Sphazo** - 10x in 9v - NAS Usage: slain(7), slay(2), slew(1).

1 John 3:12 not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

Revelation 5:6+ And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if **slain** (**perfect tense** = past completed action = the Cross; with permanent effects or results), having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.

9 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were **slain** (aorist = past completed action = the Cross), and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was **slain** (**perfect tense**) to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."

Revelation 6:4 And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would **slay** one another; and a great sword was given to him.

9 When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been **slain** because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained;

Revelation 13:3+ I saw one of his heads as if it had been **slain** (**perfect tense**), and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast;

8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been **slain** (**perfect tense**).

Revelation 18:24 "And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been **slain** (**perfect tense**) on the earth."

**Sphazo** - 72v in the Septuagint -

Ge 22:10; 37:31; 43:16; Ex 12:6; 22:1; 29:11, 16, 20; 34:25; Lev 1:5, 11; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33; 6:25; 7:2; 8:15, 19, 23; 9:8, 12, 15, 18; 14:5f, 13, 19, 25, 50f; Lev 16:11, 15; 17:3-5; 22:28; Nu 11:22; 19:3; Dt 28:31; 1Sa 1:24; 14:32, 34; 15:33; 1Ki 18:40; 2Ki 10:7, 14; 25:7; Ezra 6:20; Ps 37:14; Prov 9:2; Isa 14:21; 22:13; 57:5; Jer 19:7; 41:7; 52:10; Ezek 16:21; 21:10; 23:39; 34:3; 40:39, 41f; 44:11

---

## Horatius Bonar - THE WAY OF CAIN

"And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord."—GEN. 4:16.

"Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."—1 JOHN 3:12.

"Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core."—JUDE 11.

AS "the way of Cain" is spoken of by the apostle Jude, as specially the way of the last days, let us inquire what it was. It was evil, not good. He is an open and defiant sinner; and in him sin takes its full swing. He is the first child of the fall, and the offspring of the fallen, he is no common transgressor; he runs no ordinary career of wickedness; he rushes to the extremity of evil. He is given as a beacon, yet as a true specimen of man, of the human heart even in the most favourable circumstances. He came into the world, not like Adam, full-grown, but a child, and therefore with the least possible amount of evil. He is the child of believing parents; for Adam shewed his faith by calling his wife, and Eve shewed hers by the way in which she received her first-born. He had a most godly brother, and was one of a pious household; brought up within sight of Paradise, and from childhood taught the knowledge of the true God, and the woman's seed. He was exposed to no outward temptation; he had no companion in sin; he walked the broad way alone. He was warned, no doubt, against the serpent and his seed. He was more than once spoken to directly by God. He had every possible advantage, in the absence of evil and the presence of good. Much might have been expected from him; yet he turns his back on God, on Paradise, on the altar, on the sacrifice, on all that is good and blessed.

But let us see more specially what the apostle calls “the way of Cain.” It is the way,

I. Of unbelief. Cain is the first specimen of an unbelieving man. His parents were sinners, but they believed. His brother was a sinner, but he believed. Cain is not an atheist, nor an altogether irreligious man. He owns a God, and brings his fruits to the altar. But he brings no lamb, no blood, nothing that speaks of death. He comes with no confession, no cry for mercy. He sees no need of the woman’s seed, no danger from the serpent; no preciousness, and perhaps no truth, in the promise of the serpent’s crushed head or Messiah’s bruised heel. He takes Satan’s side against God, not God’s against Satan; for all unbelief is a siding with Satan against God. God is not to him the God of grace, nor the woman’s seed the Saviour of the lost. He has a religion, but it is self-made, a human religion, something of his own; without Christ, or blood, or pardon. The love of God is to him mere indifference to sin. Rejection of God’s religion, and of His Messiah,—this is “the way of Cain.”

II. It is the way of apostasy. He turns his back on God, and will have none of Him. He is not like one of our dark heathen, ignorant of the true God. He knows Jehovah, and has heard His voice; but he turns away. He is an apostate (the first apostate) from the religion of his father; a scorner of the Messiah; he wants a Messiah of his own,—“a Christ that is to be”; not God’s Christ, but man’s. From what small beginnings apostasy springs.

III. It is the way of worldliness. Having forsaken his father’s God, he makes a god to himself; that god is the world. He goes far from Paradise, builds a city, becomes a thorough man of the world; becomes the father of the inventors of all curious instruments, leads the ever-swelling crowd in its race of worldliness and vanity,—with the cry, Onward, onward; progress, progress. They eat and drink, marry, and are given in marriage. All about Cain is of this present evil world. In our age what a spirit of worldliness is abroad; often not open wickedness, but simply worldliness, so absorbing the soul as to draw it quite down from the region of “the world to come.”

IV. It is the way of hatred. He begins with envy of his brother; goes on to hatred; ends in murder. He is specially jealous of his brother’s having found favour with God. Yes, strange, though he would have none of God for himself, he cannot bear that his brother should have it. Not the love of man or woman, but of God is the cause of the first jealousy and the first murder. He hates God, and all the more for loving his brother. He hates Abel, and all the more for being loved of God. He cannot lay hands on God, as he fain would do, but he lays hands on His favourite, and so takes his revenge. Yes, the way of Cain is the way of envy, jealousy, hatred, murder!

V. The way of God-defiance. He dissembles; he wipes his bloody weapon and his bloody hands, saying, What have I done? He lies; he pretends; he would hide his doings from God. He has beguiled his brother into a lonely field and slain him, thinking that none would rescue, and none see. He acts as the liar and the hypocrite in the very presence of God. The way of Cain is the way of hypocrisy, falsehood, and defiance of God. God asks him of his brother, his answer is not only a lie, but a brazenfaced piece of impiety: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Thus he mocks God; utters the language of irreverence and defiance:—“He is your favourite, why do you not keep him? I never pretended to keep him.” Here mingled fear, shame, audacity, defiance are manifested. He would fain deny the deed, but dares not. He trembles, and would fain conceal it. He puts on a defiant air and attitude, as if to brave it out before the all-seeing One!

Such is the way of Cain! Mark his doom.

1. Despair. No cry for mercy, but merely, My punishment is greater than I can bear. So is it in other ages. The sinner’s despair of mercy, or complaint against God for making his punishment so heavy, is the repetition of Cain’s offence and his doom. Why should a sinner despair on this side of hell? There is forgiveness to the uttermost; grace reaching far beyond the extremity of human guilt.

2. Banishment from God. He goes out from the presence of God, as if he could no longer bear that. He must away from Paradise, the birthplace of the race, the old seat of worship. But what is this to the eternal banishment? Cain has no rest, moving to and fro without hope or aim, a fugitive and vagabond, seeking rest, finding none. Sad curse! yet nothing to the eternal wandering!

3. Disappointment. He himself was his mother’s disappointment, for she thought she had gotten the man-child. So is he a disappointment to himself. From first to last we see in him a disappointed man, trying everything, succeeding in nothing; building cities, roaming from place to place, to soothe his conscience, and fill up his heart’s void. But in vain!

4. Fruitless worldliness. He is the heir of a barren world; for the whole world is his. He is possessor of a soil made unfruitful by a brother’s blood; tilling and sowing, yet not reaping. A weary man, toiling for that which is not bread; trying to wring water out of the world’s dry sands and broken cisterns. Such is the career of thou sands. Fruitless worldliness. A life of vanity; a soul utterly void; a being wholly wasted.

---