

1 John 3 – Part M

1 John 3:11-15

¹Jn 3:11 **For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another,** 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. ¹³ **Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.** ¹⁴ **We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother abides in death.** ¹⁵ **Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.**

In beginning this particular section of Scripture which starts in [1 John 3:11](#) and ends in [1 John 3:18](#), John is clearly developing a new test. Beginning in v11, John will deal with the issue of what it means to love God and to love one another. What John is going to say is that the absence of genuine love towards other believers is incompatible with the New Testament message. The way that John declares that is by saying in v11 that **“this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another”**. This is not something new, but rather a moral issue that has been clearly and previously addressed in the New Testament. In fact, John uses the phrase **“love one another”** five times - [1 John 3:11, 23, 4:7, 11-12](#), more than in any other book of the Bible.

The phrase **“we should love one another”** is in the present tense subjunctive mood which means that it is something the believer should be constantly doing, but the subjunctive mood makes it a possibility only. Any believer may at times be unloving, uncaring, and unforgiving. Those times in my life when I have been that way are terrible memories. Why is that? Basically, it is because God did not make us that way. It is utterly foreign to God's nature and to the life of Christ that is in us. To not be loving is a contradiction of what it means to be saved – and that is John's point. What John is saying is that a believer's life will be characterized God's righteousness and an abstinence from living in continuing sin, but now he adds that loving and caring for one another will also be the norm for the true believer.¹ Without these characteristics in a person's life, John is boldly declaring that that individual simply is not **“born of God”**.

In approaching this passage, the first thing that we need to do is to properly define the word **“love”**. Please notice right at the beginning that some of the words for **“love”** are nouns and some of the words for **“love”** are verbs. Even though there are several Greek words for different kinds of **“love”**, both the noun and the verb forms in [1 John](#) come from the same root. The noun form is *“agape”* and the verb form is *“agapao”*. Both speak of the nature of God and how His love was demonstrated for us when He offered his Son as a living sacrifice our sins. Both refer to the love which God exercises toward Christians, so when we speak of God's love, it is the way that God has chosen to relate to us. It is also important to appreciate that this kind of love is what God wants to be in the believer's life. In Jesus's final prayer to His Father, He says this in [John 17:26](#),

^{Jn 17:26} **And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare *it*, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."**

The phrase **“may be in them”** is one of the obvious goals for the Christian life - for God's love to become fully integrated and assimilated into the believer's personal life. The reality is that a Christian can never fully display and reveal Christ in their life if they lack God's love. If our Christian life is

unloving and cold towards people, then we have no meaningful witness. Just think how little we enjoy people when they are unloving and very self-absorbed in what they want rather than what God desires for their life. Unfortunately, we live in a culture that is over-absorbed with the individual, absorbed with having our way, absorbed with meeting my needs, absorbed with getting what I want, absorbed with doing it my way, and absorbed with being loved the way that I want to be loved. However, none of that is reflective of God's love, and in the end it will only leave people more miserable and more dissatisfied. Some of the most miserable people in the world are those people who are never satisfied until they get what they want. Jesus expounded it this way in [Matthew 16:25](#) when He said these amazing words,

Mt 16:25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

This verse is repeated six times in the gospels alone. What Jesus is saying in that verse is that the more that a person gets and does what they want to do, the more miserable and dissatisfied they become, and the kind of life that God truly wanted them to live is what they actually lose and forfeit. Why is that? How can I make a statement like that? On the surface it certainly seems that the more that a person gets of what they want that the happier they would be. However, that is an illusion. True happiness and contentment is never an issue of getting what we want and having things our way. In fact, always getting what we want is the guarantee that we will never be satisfied. That is exactly what this verse is communicating. One of the practical lessons that comes from a verse like this is that the Christian life is never about the individual or what the individual wants. To put it in even simpler terms, the Christian life is never about me. It is always about reflecting Christ in our life. It is always about letting Christ live in us. It is never about me and what I want and how I want to do something. This has got to be one of the hardest and most difficult lessons to learn in the Christian life.

Now, there is a truth concerning God's love that is important to understand and appreciate. With true biblical love God provides man what he needs, not what he wants. Too often individuals think that love is measured by someone giving them what they want, but that is never the case with God's love. In fact, God would never give one of His children something that He knew would not benefit their life. For example, we often hear children that do not get what they want, so they pout, and walk away mumbling under their breath "*If you really loved me, you would do this for me.*" However, God would never give any of His children something that He knew would ultimately not be beneficial for their life. So, at the outset we have to keep in mind that the kind of love that we are going to address is the kind of love that would only give a believer what they truly need.

Another vital area of God's love is found in [2 Thessalonians 3:5](#) which says,

2Th 3:5 Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

The word "**direct**" means to guide someone toward something specific.² It is a word that means to remove obstacles out of the way so that the individual can actually get to where they need to be. The last time that I was in Indonesia, I was at the airport in Jakarta and when I went to check in they said that my ticket was not valid because it had not been paid for. So when I went to purchase a ticket for my flight to Jayapura, my MasterCard was not accepted. I had called them to let them know that I

would be in Indonesia and to make sure that any charges placed on the card would actually go through and be accepted. I do this every time that I travel, but on this occasion it would not accept the charges. So immediately I got on the phone and called Brenda to contact MasterCard so that my charges could be accepted. It took nearly two hours and I almost missed my flight, but somebody at Capital One removed the obstacles so that I could get to where I needed to be.

Now that is what Jesus Christ does for the believer. He opens up their heart to the truth so that he can direct them and focus the believer's heart on what it means to love the way that God loves. He teaches us the truth so that the obstacles that prevent our life from being productive and godly can be removed out of our life. The result is twofold. First, the believer learns to love God more, and secondly, he learns to love other people more. Those are the two greatest commandments given in Scripture – to love God and to love our neighbor. The problem is that when a person genuinely lacks the love of God, they find it very difficult to endure trials, struggles, and temptations in their life. The reason is because they think that God is unloving and unconcerned when those kinds of difficulties are placed in their life. They find it easy to be critical of other people that may be a part of those trials. However, nothing could be any further from the truth. It is the sustaining grace of God during difficult and stressful times that is the very evidence of God's love for us. It is the very evidence of the fact that God is strengthening the believer and enabling them to withstand all of the trials and struggles that they face. God is giving spiritual direction and substance to the believer's life.³ Listen to how Paul stated some of this in [2 Corinthians 5:14](#),

^{2Co 5:14} For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;

Most of the translations use the word “**compel**” or “**constrain**”. It is a present tense verb that means that Christ is always pressing us by His love and constraining us in a certain direction.⁴ The Holy Spirit is exerting pressure on our life by the difficult circumstances in order to allow our life to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ so that the love of God can flow through us personally. In the context of what we have been addressing so far, if the issue is always about us having to have things our way, then the love of God will actually be hindered from flowing through us. A practical example of this would be when something is said to us or done to us that we simply do not like. The normal response is to speak our mind and to say what we want to say in order to counteract what has happened to us that we did not like. In a negative way, we feel compelled and constrained to speak our mind and simply say what we want to say. However, that is generally the exact opposite of what the Holy Spirit would constrain us to do. He would compel us to not speak our mind, but rather to allow those circumstances to work into us the love of God and allow that love to respond in a Christlike way. Listen to how [1 Peter 2:20-23](#) expresses this truth,

^{1Pe 2:20} For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God. ²¹ For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ²² “*Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth*”; ²³ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;

Christ is our example. When reviled, threatened, spoken against, or demeaned, God simply wants us to respond by committing ourselves to Him. It really is a very simple principle to follow – do not react, but simply commit ourselves to God who will do what is right.

In [2 Corinthians 5:14](#), it is important to look at what Paul says should actually “**constrain**” and “**compel**” the believer. It is not what Christ taught, or His example, or His ministry, or even the life that He lived, but rather it is the love of Christ that “**compels**” the believer.⁵ We look at the amazing love of God and how it was demonstrated, and it should overwhelm us. It is something that is so generous and so forgiving that it defies explanation. That is what God wants us to look at so that we can be changed to be like that. [2 Corinthians 3:18](#) says how this works,

2Co 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The more that the believer concentrates on Christ, the more the believer is transformed. The problem that we have is that our tendency is to look at what we want and immediately the spiritual transformation in our life is hindered. The tendency is to short-circuit God’s work in us because of our personal self-interests, goals, and ambitions. The way that the believer is “**transformed**” is simply through their commitment to become like Christ in everything that they do. The word for “**transformed**” is “*metamorphoo*” and it means to change into another form. It means to undergo a change that finds its expression in the believer’s character and conduct.⁶ So Paul’s encouragement is very simple – just imitate what Christ would do, just allow your life to be governed by what Christ would do.

Both the verb and the noun form of the word “**love**” express the essential nature of God. In fact, both [1 John 4:8 and 16](#) state that “**God is love**”. It means that God is full of sacrificial love. God loves the individual when they do not actually deserve to be loved. God loves the individual when they are unworthy of being loved. We know from [John 3:16](#) that God loves the world. Even when we were lost and living in utter rebellion toward God, He still loved us. The only way to determine the reality of God’s love is by the action that it performs and accomplishes towards individuals other than itself. For instance, God demonstrated His love toward us when by a deliberate choice made in eternity past He determined to sacrifice His Son so that we might be saved. There was no merit in anyone that would have deserved that kind of sacrifice on God’s part, yet it was the very nature of God to do so, and so Christ became the perfect expression of God’s love.⁷ [Romans 5:8](#) says it this way,

Ro 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The word “**demonstrates**” means to prove. It is a word that commends something as being worthy. It means to declare, to show, to make something known and conspicuous.⁸ I.e., God revealed the nature of His love when He asked His Son to sacrifice His life so that we could be saved. The point in all of this should be obvious that if God makes His love both known and obvious, then the same should be said of those who are His children. Our love for God and for other people, either lost or saved, should be something in our life that is readily obvious.

ENDNOTES

¹ Akin, 154-155.

² Zodhiates, 849-850.

³ Practical, *direct*, electronic page.

⁴ Practical, *compel*, electronic page.

⁵ Practical, *compel*, electronic page.

⁶ Vine, 1160.

⁷ Vine, 692-693.

⁸ Zodhiates, 1344.

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