

Module 13: 1 John 3:11-18 (Part 1)

1) Observations and Observational Questions that guide Interpretation

- a) Read 1 John 2:28-3:24 for context.
- b) What words do you see as important, either because they are repeated often or they are part of a key teaching in verses 3:11-18?
- c) What title do you suggest for the paragraph starting in verse 3:11?
- d) Transition (11)
 - i) “For” is the connecting word.
 - ii) Last phrase of verse 10 introduces this subject (of a lack of love) as an additional way beyond unrighteousness to identify an unbeliever.
- e) “Message” (*aggelia*)
 - i) Message, announcement, news. A proclamation, command, order.
 - ii) 2 times in NT, both in 1 John (1:5; 3:11)
 - iii) 1:5 – announcement that God is light
 - iv) 3:11 – command that we should love one another
- f) “From the beginning”
 - i) Last of the 8 times used in 1 John (1:1; 2:7; 2:13; 2:14; 2:24 (2x); 3:8; 3:11)
 - ii) 7 times referring to when the gospel started being preached
 - (1) “What was . . .” – heard, seen, beheld, handled
 - (2) “Which you have had . . .” – old commandment
 - (3) “Him who has been . . .” (2x) – Jesus
 - (4) “You heard . . .” (2x) – abiding gospel message
 - (5) “You have heard . . .” – message of love for one another (3:11)
 - iii) 1 time (probably) referring to when the devil first sinned: (3:8) “The devil has sinned . . .” – Son of God came to destroy the devil’s works
- g) “Cain”
 - i) Maker: fabricator (literally, smith)
 - ii) 3 times in NT: Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:12; Jude 11.
 - iii) The only OT reference found in 1 John.
- h) “Slew, slay”
 - i) 10 times in NT: 2x in 1 John 3:12 and 8x in Revelation
 - ii) *Sphazo* – to slay, slaughter, butcher; to put to death by violence; mortally wound.
- i) “Surprised”
 - i) *Thaumazo* – to wonder, marvel
 - ii) 3:13 – present, active, imperative
 - iii) This is a command to stop being surprised – don’t yield to the natural reaction when they are the innocent object of unprovoked hatred. John does not condemn the initial feeling of amazement, but believers must not give way to such a feeling of surprise and self-pity. (Hiebert)
- j) “Brethren”
 - i) *Adelphos*
 - ii) 14 times in 1 John.
 - iii) Only one time as a direct address, here in 3:13.

- iv) A contrast to “children” or “little children” used elsewhere by John to refer to his beloved flock.
- v) Why did John use the term brethren here?
- k) “If”
 - i) First-class conditional: when
 - ii) Not a future possibility, but a present reality.
 - iii) The conclusion (do not marvel) is presented before the condition (if the world hates you). This adds emphasis to John’s command not to marvel.
- l) What other observations do you see? (Words, grammar, construction, history, content, etc.)

2) Interpretation

Just as the previous verse ends by saying that the one who doesn’t love his brother is not of God, we know this to be true because this is the very teaching that the disciples have heard from the time Christ began articulating the gospel. This teaching is that we, just as John and his disciples, ought to be in the habit of loving one another.

In contrast, this is not at all like what Cain would do, he who belonged to the devil, and he who brutally slaughtered his brother. Why did Cain butcher him as an animal? He did so because his own deeds were extremely bad, while in contrast, his brother’s deeds were righteous and pleasing to God. Abel’s righteous living infuriated Cain.

John then addresses his readers, seemingly in a less affectionate way than normal by referring to them as his brethren, instead of using the previously familiar terms of children and little children. As such, he identifies himself with them as a fellow brother in the Lord, equally responsible to love one another and equally susceptible to the hatred of unbelievers. John commands his brethren emphatically to stop being astonished after their initial reaction when animosity comes from those in the world.

3) Applications

- a) Do you agree with John’s black and white characterization of people based on whether or not they love believers? Is there no middle ground or exception?
- b) Have you ever witnessed the results of anger like the rage Cain felt toward Abel? Are Christians immune to this unrighteous anger? Have you yourself ever felt murderous anger? If so, how did you handle that situation?
- c) What are the two commands for believers (found in verses 11 and 13)? How are we to love one another? How do you find yourself evaluating the behavior of your coworkers, classmates, neighbors, and relatives?
- d) What other application do you have?