

1 John 3:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

Analysis

For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. John appeals to apostolic teaching as the foundation for brotherly love. "The message that ye heard from the beginning" (hē aggelia hēn ēkousate ap' archēs) refers to the gospel and Jesus's foundational commands delivered from Christianity's inception. "From the beginning" echoes 1:1 and 2:7—this isn't novel teaching but original apostolic doctrine.

"That we should love one another" (hina agapōmen allēlous) uses agapaō, the self-sacrificial love demonstrated supremely in Christ. This isn't sentimental affection but costly commitment to others' good. The present subjunctive indicates continuous action—ongoing, habitual love. "One another" (allēlous) is reciprocal—mutual love within the Christian community.

This command wasn't peripheral but central to Christian identity. Jesus called it His new commandment (John 13:34-35) and the mark by which the world would recognize His disciples. Paul echoed this (Romans 13:8-10, Galatians 5:14). Love fulfills the law and evidences the Spirit's work. John's insistence that this message was heard "from the beginning" counters false teachers who promoted novel doctrines divorced from apostolic teaching and who separated theology from ethics, knowledge from love.

Historical Context

Jesus gave the "new commandment" to love one another on the night before His crucifixion (John 13:34). Though loving neighbors was commanded in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18), Jesus's command was new in its foundation ("as I have loved you"), its community (the church), and its standard (Christ's sacrificial death). The apostles consistently taught this from Christianity's earliest days.

First-century Greco-Roman culture valued honor, status, and patron-client relationships. Christian agape love was revolutionary—loving equals, not seeking advantage, sacrificing for others' good without expecting return. This radical ethic distinguished Christians from surrounding culture and authenticated their message. When Gnostic teachers promoted esoteric knowledge over practical love, John recalled believers to foundational apostolic teaching.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does viewing love for other Christians as a command 'from the beginning' (not optional extra) change your priorities?
2. What's the difference between sentimental feelings and the biblical love (agape) commanded here?
3. How can you tell whether you're loving fellow believers according to this command or merely maintaining superficial friendliness?

Interlinear Text

ὅτι αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγγελία ἦν ἡκούσατε ἀπ'
For this is the message that ye heard from
G3754 G3778 G2076 G3588 G31 G3739 G191 G575

ἀρχῆς ἵνα ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους
the beginning that we should love one another
G746 G2443 G25 G240

Additional Cross-References

John 15:12 (Love): This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

2 John 1:5 (Love): And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.

1 John 4:7 (Love): Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

1 John 4:21 (Love): And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

Ephesians 5:2 (Love): And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

1 Peter 4:8 (Love): And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

1 Peter 3:8 (Love): Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:

1 John 1:5 (Parallel theme): This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

1 Thessalonians 4:9 (Love): But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

1 Timothy 1:5 (Love): Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned:

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