

LOVE STILL MORE
1 JOHN 4:7-11

The number/letter combination **A113** is seemingly everywhere in animated movies.

It's Andy's mom's license plate number in Toy Story; It's a door number in Monsters University; It's the courtroom number in Up; It's the camera model number in Finding Nemo; It's on a rat's ear tag in Ratatouille; And it's the train number in Cars ... to name just a few. But what does it mean?



"A113" was a classroom number at the California Institute of the Arts. "If it appears in a movie," reports BuzzFeed, "it means that a CalArts alumnus was involved with the animation." And it's not just in animated films. The trademark number even appears in live action films like Hunger Games and Mission Impossible. Like a digital calling card or a cinematic fingerprint, it's a message to the public...a CalArts alumnus was here!

As believers, what is our calling card — our message to the world? How do we communicate that we are alumni (disciples) of Christ? One of Scripture's "calling card" numbers is 1J47 — "Beloved, let us love one another" (1 John 4:7).

Because so many false teachers infiltrated the churches of Asia Minor and disrupted the faith of so many, John affirms a number of essential truths for the believers in those churches. This morning we find him upholding the familiar theme of love. He spoke of this issue in **2:5-11** and then again in **3:11-24**. Now in 4:7ff, he resumes his thoughts about love in the context of the church body.

Specifically, he is exhorting the readers to love one another...

WHEN WE KNOW GOD, WE MUST AND WE WILL LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

This is a helpful reminder as we think about *Excelling Still More* in loving and caring for one another. Just as a husband cannot love his wife enough, neither can any church member love another member too much. This is another helpful encouragement about pursuing love for each other in the body —

In this passage, John **answers five questions** about loving one another. It should be noted that while 1 Corinthians 13 is often called the "love chapter" in the Bible, 1 John is the "love book," and the last half of the book is particularly oriented to the theme of love and vv. 7-14 are the heart of that section: In these verses (7-11), the root word for love appears 13x in the Greek text (and twice more in v. 12).

1. **WHOM** Should We Love? (v. 7a) — God's **COMMAND** to Love
2. **WHY** Should We Love? (v. 7b) — God's **MOTIVE** to Love
3. **WHAT** if We Don't Love? (v. 8) — God's **WARNING** to Love
4. **HOW** Do We Love? (vv. 9-10) — God's **ENABLEMENT** to Love
5. **WHY** Should We Love? (v. 11) — God's **MOTIVE** to Love (Part 2)

1. Whom Should We Love? (v. 7a) — God's COMMAND to Love

- False teachers had infiltrated the church and taught heresy concerning sin and the person of Christ. And the problem was not only that these false views arose, but it also created an attitude of superiority and arrogance among these false teachers and their followers, so that they refused to care for others in the church body — they were known for hatred (3:15), selfishness (3:17), and cold-heartedness (3:17). One writer says these churches were “loveless to the core.” [Law, 30.]
- Ungodly theology produces ungodly living. What we believe matters. We will do what we believe.
- So John is writing to counteract the ungodly *theology* of the heretics, and also their ungodly *actions*.
- Notice how John begins v. 7 — **Beloved** reminds the readers of his relationship with them as a spiritual father. But he is also reminding them of God's love for them (**love is from God**; 2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:11).
- But John doesn't just remind them of their position as beloved people, he also draws out an implication of that position: **let us love one another**. John is giving a command; **let us love** is not an optional suggestion, but an essential imperative. And it is not to be done once and then forgotten; it is the believer's pattern and lifestyle. “Let us love *repeatedly* and *persistently*” is the sense of John's words.
- There are at least two important ideas to recognize as we think of John's command to the churches to love one another:
 1. *Love can be commanded*. We tend to think of love as an emotion or feeling that happens to us and not something that we can command or control. We are either “in love” or “not in love,” but there is nothing we can do to control that state. But John is saying that we *can* control the attitude and affection (feeling) of love. He is not just saying, “do loving things,” but he is also saying, “be those who demonstrate the affection of love for one another.” In other words, John is saying you *can* control the emotion of love; you *can* will yourself to being affectionate and loving towards others.
 2. *Believers are commanded to love all believers*.
 - It seems ironic that John is commanding the believers to love *other believers*. We know it's hard to love our enemies (which is why Jesus also says to love them, Mt. 5:44), but this infers it's also hard to love our fellow believer. It is *not* “natural.”
 - Love isn't something that should be so hard. But the very fact that he has been repeatedly saying, “love one another,” indicates that it *is* hard and that believers *do* need to be reminded to love one another. (And there are no exceptions; we love *all* the brothers uncond.)
 - John is also simply reiterating the words of Jesus — **John 13:34-35**. Do you want to know who is a follower of Jesus? Just watch to see if he loves other followers of Jesus.
 - When we are training our children, we remind them often of the things that are hard for them to do (and that they are often unwilling or slow to do). No father ever says to his son, “I want you to eat all your potato chips and cookies, and then be sure to finish your ice cream.”

Parents do not typically have to force their children to go to the circus or a parade. But parents often have to say, “Before you get ice cream, you must eat your vegetables; no cookies without first eating that liver...” And they also say, “No parade or sleepover with your friends until your homework is finished.” They say these things because what is good and healthy for the child — vegetables and homework — are often neglected.

- If we excel still more in loving each other it will be because we are purposefully obedient in loving.

2. Why Should We Love? (v. 7b) — God’s MOTIVE to Love

- It is costly to love and it is hard to love. So why should we do it? John tells us, **for** (because) **love is from God**. To say it is **from God** means that God is the source of love — if anyone wants to love, he will have to get that love from God (which is also what John emphasizes in v. 10).
- **Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God**. This phrase does not mean that everyone who does even one loving thing is a Christian. (Even unbelievers can act lovingly.)
- He is talking about loving other believers persistently; so he means that everyone who regularly, consistently, persistently, affectionately loves other believers is giving evidence he has been **born of God** (regenerated and given a new life) and that he **knows God** (he is in fellowship and union with God).
- Why should we love? Because when we believe in Christ, this is our new nature. We are (re-) created to love others. And loving others evidences what God has done in our lives and hearts.

3. What if We Don’t Love? (v. 8) — God’s WARNING to Love

- Students will often ask the question, “what happens if I don’t turn in this paper, or if I turn it in late?” Employees want to know, “what happens if I get sick on a ‘can’t miss’ day of work?” When I’m at the car repair shop I want to know, “what will happen if I don’t make this repair?” In other words, “can I get away with it if I don’t do what I should?” Or, “even if I don’t get away with it, is the cost and the risk worth taking anyway?”
- So a believer might ask, “what if I don’t love? Is it really a problem if I’m not loving?” John could not be more direct and clear with his answer.
- **The one who does not love does not know God**. Period. If someone claims to be a follower of Christ, but does not give evidence for caring for God’s people, he cannot claim to know God. The lack of love is an indication of a lack of God in his life. He does not know God and he has not known God.

“The Bible does not allow us to rest in a merely formal relationship with God. It is possible to attend every church service and prayer meeting, to read the Bible regularly, to teach and preach the Scriptures, and yet not know God. If our lives do not manifest, even dimly, something of the love of God in Jesus Christ, then we cannot claim to be Christians.” [Beeke, *The Epistles of John*, 160.]

- The reason John says this is because of the nature of God — **God is love**.

- John is not merely saying something great about God, but notice the connection: *because* God is love, those who are God's also love. It is inconceivable that someone who is related to God could not be like God in loving God's people.
- This does not mean we overlook every offense of sin and we never exhort or encourage change; the Father who loves us disciplines those whom He loves (Heb. 12:6ff). But it does mean that all our actions towards others should be motivated by compassionate love toward them, seeking their spiritual best.
- And if we don't do that? It simply means we do not know God or His love. We do not belong to Him.

4. How Do We Love? (vv. 9-10) — God's ENABLEMENT to Love

- So how will we do this task of loving other believers? Notice verse 9 — ***the love of God was manifested in us*** — that is, God's love was revealed *in us* by the sending of Christ.
- How did God the Father reveal His love to us?
 - ✓ ***He sent His only begotten Son*** (sounds like John 3:16, doesn't it — it should!). Before the creation of the world, He saw the devastation that sin would cause and He planned *then* (before sin even happened), to send His *unique, one-of-a-kind* Son to earth so that by believing in Him the sinners ***might live*** — be regenerated. His unique Son was the unique source of life.
 - ✓ But so the readers might not miss the point, John also says that life would only be provided through that Son being the ***propitiation for our sins*** (v. 10). John is using the same term he used in **2:2** — Christ was the sacrificial atonement for sin. He who knew no sin, was sacrificed, and died in our place for our sin.
 - ✓ And notice that this was ***not that we loved God*** and so He loved us in return. No. *We hated God. We wanted nothing to do with Him. We were running from Him. We did not love. But He did love.* He initiated love when there was nothing remotely lovely about us. He did not meet us halfway. Without His coming to us, we would never have come to Him.
 - ✓ How does the gospel message relate to loving each other? We love out of the overflow of His saving and redeeming love for us; we give to others because He gave to us (**Eph. 5:25**). **Definition (x2)**
- This, friends, is what Christianity is all about. **If you are not a Christian**, understand that just because God is love does not mean that He doesn't care about sin. No, because God is love, He cares about sin a great deal. And if He was willing to pour out His wrath against sin on His Son Jesus Christ, he will certainly be willing to pour out His wrath on you. So is there hope?
 - ✓ If you are not a Christian — if you do not love God or His people, then you do not know God; know that while still being love, He will judge you for your sin of rebellion and hatred against Him.
 - ✓ But also know that if you are not a Christian, God also is compassionate, merciful, and loving.
 - ✓ And He has made an escape from His wrath and an escape from your sin. You don't have to sin and you don't have to pay the penalty for your sin.

- ✓ By confessing that you are a sinner who deserves His wrath and trusting that Christ died for you and that there is nothing else that you can do to gain freedom from God's wrath, then He will forgive you of your sin. Just like in the OT sacrifice was made annually for the sins of the people of Israel and God was "propitiated" (satisfied) by that sacrifice, so Christ died for our sins, and God is fully satisfied by that death. And if this is what you want, then the Father will forgive you of your sin, and He will also come to live within you so that you no longer have to continue to live a life of sin (2:1-2). The only way out of sin is by trusting in Christ, who is the Savior of the whole world (2:2) — anyone who wants salvation will only find it in Him.
- ✓ If you are not a Christian, will you turn away from your hatred of God today and become a lover of God instead, by asking Him to forgive you and change you?
- John has given us God's command, motive, warning, and enablement to love others. One final answer...

5. Why Should We Love? (v. 11) — God's MOTIVE for Love (Part 2)

- John writes, *if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another*. The word "if" is much more certain than our English word indicates; a better translation is, "since." So, "*since/because* God has loved us, we also ought to love..." That goes to our motive (for a second time in these verses)...
- We might ask, "why do you love someone?"
 - ✓ Often the kind of love that is talked about between husbands and wives is a superficial, physical attraction and desire — and nothing more. And at that level, love is not love; it is selfish.
 - ✓ But John is particular in making God's love for believers our standard for loving others:
 - *God did not love us for our merit, but because of our need.*
 - *God does not love us for our inherent value or our ability to love Him.*
 - *God loves us because it is His nature to love and He loves us because the magnitude and extent of His gracious and sacrificial love is demonstrated by His love for us.*
 - *And those same motives are to become our motives in loving each other. We don't love others because they deserve our love, but because God has put them in our lives and they need us.*
 - *A profoundly helpful statement for me has been, "I don't need to be loved; I do need to love."*
- God does not love us because of benefit He receives from us; He loves us so that we might benefit from Him and from Christ. We love others in the same way.
 - ✓ Christ touched and healed and loved lepers; He forgave prostitutes and He had dinners with tax collectors (one of whom was even one of His trusted disciples!). And notice who John says those people are — it's **us** (v. 11). God so loved *us*.
 - ✓ Just as Gomer was an adulterous wife to Hosea, so we are adulterous sinners to God. And He loved and loves us anyway. *We* are the sinning enemies, lepers, prostitutes, and tax collectors.

- ✓ Now here's the point John is making: since that is the kind of love God has given to us, then we should be willing to share that same kind of love for others. Specifically, since God has loved me in this way and He has also loved *you* in that way, then how can I not also love you?
 - ✓ Why do we love each other? Not because we are good looking or desirable or worthy or because we can benefit from loving each other. We are motivated to love because we have received such a magnanimous gift of love from God the Father, through Christ.
 - ✓ [Aside: This motive for love will keep you from discouragement when those you love fail you.]
- Notice that John also says we **ought** to love. That is, there is an *obligation* to love. Because of God's love for us, there is a moral obligation and necessity for us to love. Love for others is not optional.
 - But the word **ought** also refers to an inner constraint and compulsion; it's not just that we *have* to do this, but we *want* to do it. On a Thursday afternoon or a Saturday morning, you might find me behind the lawnmower or weed trimmer and Raye Jeanne pulling weeds in the garden or planting; I am there by external constraint — if I don't mow the yard, the neighbors will be unhappy... But Raye Jeanne is there by internal constraint — she loves to have a little dirt underneath her fingernails! That's the idea behind this word **ought** — there is a moral and internal obligation and desire — we want to love others because it's right and good.
 - Now one of the things we also need to determine at this point is, "what does it mean to love?" When we say "love," just what is that obligation? What are we volunteering to do? There are several indications:
 - ✓ We love others when we don't hate and have animosity for them because they are our **brothers** (2:9-11; 4:19-20). We treat them as we would our own blood brothers.
 - ✓ We love others when we are willing to give our lives for one another (3:16).
 - ✓ We love others when we share our possessions with one another (3:17).
 - ✓ We love others when we do deeds truthfully as well as when we speak words of affection (3:18).
 - ✓ We love others when we love them the way Christ commanded us to love (2:6-7; 3:23-24; 4:21).
 - ✓ Beyond these specifics, John is pointing to the sacrificial nature of love in opposition to the world's selfish concept of love. John would say, when you give and serve and sacrifice for others out of a desire to demonstrate the gracious love of God the Father, that's love.
 - ✓ So love is what we do when we see a need from someone who is unable to reciprocate and yet we affectionately, liberally, joyfully meet that need anyway — because we love Christ.

"We often speak of reaching out to the world with God's love. But God's love cost Him His Son. It hurt God to love us. Love without sacrifice or struggle is a cheap imitation, not the real thing."

[John Norman, DJ #43, p. 53.]

- ✓ When John says, “love one another,” he’s talking about a radical, sacrificial kind of love that looks bizarre to the world. In fact, there is a sense in which when you explain the implications of what love is that people will put their heads back and laugh and say, “You’re crazy! *Who* would do *that*?” And the answer, of course, is “No one. Except God. And Christ. And the people who are loved by them.”

CONCLUSION: Is it even possible to love the way John exhort us? Yes, consider John himself:

- ✓ His nickname is “the apostle of love,” because of all of his references to love in his gospel and epistles. Yet, he did not naturally love others.
- ✓ His first name was, along with his brother James, “the Son of Thunder.” He didn’t acquire that name for being soft-spoken and unassuming and gentle. As one writer notes,

He was rugged and hard-edged, just like the rest of the fishermen-disciples. And again, he was every bit as intolerant, ambitious, zealous, and explosive as his elder brother. In fact, the one and only time the synoptic Gospel writers recorded John speaking for himself, he displayed his trademark aggressive, self-assertive, impertinent intolerance. [Mk. 9:38]

John was capable of behaving in the most sectarian, narrow-minded, unbending, reckless, and impetuous fashion. He was volatile. He was brash. He was aggressive. He was passionate, zealous, and personally ambitious — just like his brother James. They were cut from the same bolt of cloth. [MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men*, 96-97.]

But when John wrote this letter, while still bold, strong, and courageous, he has also learned to love.

John died, by most accounts, around A.D. 98, during the reign of Emperor Trajan. Jerome says in his commentary on Galatians that the aged apostle John was so frail in his final days at Ephesus that he had to be carried into the church. One phrase was constantly on his lips: “My little children, love one another.” Asked why he always said this, he replied, “It is the Lord’s command, and if this alone be done, it is enough.”

By God’s grace, John learned to excel in loving others. We have started well. Let’s persist still more.

BENEDICTION: 2 Thessalonians 3:5