

The Light of Love

1 John 2:7-11

Thanksgiving is this week, and of course that also means Christmas is right around the corner. It is a time of year when we give gifts and express our thanks.

One family, having choked down a sampling of a dear lady's best efforts at Christmas cookies, found no other solution to disposing of this gift than to throw the cookies away. Yet, the family wanted to make the lady aware that it had appreciated the thoughtfulness. So a thank-you note was formed. "Dear Mrs. Jones," it started out, "I want you to know that cookies like yours don't last long at our house ..."

Here's another one: A small girl was forced to write thank-you notes, and this one came out. "Dear Aunt Mary, Thank you for the pin cushion. I've always wanted one, but not very much."

In the book, "Children's Letters to God: The New Collection", a little girl named, Nan, writes this letter: *"Dear God, I bet it is very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only four people in our family and I have trouble loving them."*

Love is never easy. But as we will learn today from 1 John, it is absolutely necessary. It is the glue that holds all of us together in Christ. It motivates us to work together and use our differences as a way to make us stronger rather than to tear us apart. It causes us to focus on one another rather than on ourselves and the fulfillment of our own personal desires. Love is the evidence of Jesus Christ in our lives.

John told us in 1 John 2:3, "**we know that we know Him if we keep His commandments.**" In other words, a person who is genuinely saved will have a desire to obey God. V.4 reminds us that the person who says "**I know Him**" but "**does not keep His commandments**" is a "**liar**," a counterfeit Christian. Authentic believers desire to obey "**His commandments.**"

In v.5 (NIV), we learn that "**God's love is truly made complete**" in us when we keep "**His Word.**" And that is how "**we know that we are in Him.**"

Paul tells us in Romans 5:5 that "**the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.**" God poured out His love inside us when we were saved. When we begin to live in obedience and "**keep His Word**" the love of God gushes out on every one around us.

Jesus told us about how the Holy Spirit does this in John 7:38, "**He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.**"

Last week we saw that V.6 tells us we are to "**abide in Him.**" To "**abide**" means "*to stand, to stay, to remain.*" We are not to serve Him for a while and then to stray away. We are to "**abide.**" In Jn.15:5, Jesus promised that the one who "**abides in Him**" will "**bear much fruit.**"

When we have that kind of fellowship with God we will **"walk just as He walked."** We will live every minute of our lives in unrelenting dependence on the Father. We will think what He wants us to think, go where He wants us to go, say what He wants us to say and do what He wants us to do. We will love as He loves.

As we continue today in vv.7-11, we will learn that we show our fellowship with God by keeping God's love commandment.

I. Fellowship with God means Keeping God's Love Commandment (vv.7-8).

A. The Old/New Commandment (v.7).

Note that John addresses us as **"brethren"** or beloved. In v.1, he calls us **"little children."** He is about to teach us about brotherly love so he reminds us that we are all in God's family.

At first glance, vv.7-8 does not seem to make much sense. In v.7, John says, **"I write no new commandment to you but an old commandment."** In v.8, he says, **"A new commandment I write to you..."** What gives, John? What is this commandment that is both old and new?

The **"old commandment"** John says is one that we have had **"from the beginning."** It is the **"word"** we **"heard from the beginning."**

John uses that phrase, **"From the beginning"** several times in this letter. In most cases, such as this verse, means the beginning of our relationship with the Lord, when we first heard and believed the gospel of Jesus Christ. What **"commandment"** have we always known from the time we were saved?

Vv.3-4 speak of God's **"commandments,"** plural, God's will in a general sense. V.7 speaks of a **"commandment,"** singular, a specific command from the Lord. Of all the commandments in God's Word, what is this specific commandment?

The context gives us the clue. In verse 5 John talked about God's love being in us. Then in verses 9-11 John talks again about love and hate. So the context is LOVE. Now look at that phrase, **"new commandment"** in verses 7 and 8. Two other verses in scripture talk about this new commandment. In 2 John 5 he writes, **"And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another."** What is the commandment? **"Love one another."**

Where does this commandment come from? –From Jesus himself. In Jn.13-16, the Bible records what we know as *The Upper Room Discourse*. It is an intimate conversation with Jesus in which He prepared John and the other disciples for His departure. They celebrated the old Passover with the new wine of communion with Jesus. In this loving setting, with John leaning on Jesus' breast, Jesus said, **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another"** (John 13:34).

Paul wrote in 1 Thess.4:9, **"But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another."** As Christians, we are **"taught by God to love one another."** Brotherly love is a non-negotiable. It is a primary result of the Christian faith. Jesus said in

John 13:35, "**By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.**" Love for one another is a constant theme in the Bible.

What makes this commandment new?

B. The New Commandment: (v.8a).

Jesus gave the old commandment a new, richer and deeper meaning.

To love one another is an old commandment, but to love one another *as Jesus loves us* is new.

How did Jesus love them? He loved the overbearing boastful Peter even though he denied the Lord. He loved James and John the self-promoting "**sons of thunder.**" He loved the stubborn doubter, Thomas. He loved the introspective Phillip and the practical, hardheaded Andrew.

The disciples were not an easy bunch to love. They were arrogant, ambitious, selfish and self-centered. On more than one occasion, Jesus asked, "**How long must I bear with you?**" They displeased Him, exasperated Him, frustrated Him, annoyed Him and irritated Him... yet He loved them. In the same way He loves us today. Nothing will separate us from His love.

How much did Jesus love them and us? To the death. Rom.5:8 says, "**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**" John himself writes in 1 John 4:9-10, "**In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**"

In verse 8 he says this commandment to love is "**true in Him and in you.**" Because Jesus has this love and because He is in us and His love has been "**poured out**" in us, we can love in the same way. We can love those who are difficult, disgruntled and disagreeable.

C. The Practical Application: Live the Old Commandment Anew and Afresh every Day (v.8b)

So the "**commandment**" to love one another is both old and new. The famous preacher R.G. Lee said, "**The love of God was old when the pyramids were new.**" Yet it is new today.

Though the command to love is old, we are to make it new by fresh application. The sun is as old as creation. God created it in the beginning. Yet, every morning as we see it rise on the horizon we say it is a new day. In the same way the command to love is old, but as we apply it in our relationships with other believers it is new every day.

At the end of v.8, John says "**the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.**" As believers, we have been delivered from the darkness of the age. Eph.5:8 says, "**For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.**" Though we still live in a dark world, God's love, His "**true light**" is already shining in us.

The beam of light that shines out from God through Jesus and through us into the world is the beam of love. One day this light will cover this earth like the water covers the sea. But for now it has already begun to shine in Jesus and in those "who walk the way he walked" (2:6). To the degree that the gospel makes headway in the world and transforms people into those who love like Jesus, to that degree the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

Jesus said in Jn.8:12, **"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."**

Picture a sunrise. The Day of light is going to dawn over the whole world. The first rays of that light are the love of God in Jesus Christ. The glorious kingdom of God peeked over the horizon, and one beam of light shot into the darkness -- Jesus of Nazareth. He formed his church and said, **"You are the light of the world."** Or to put it in other words, he said, **"Love one another as I have loved you."** The love commandment is new because it is a commandment to become mirrors of the new age, which is shining over the horizon in the love of Jesus Christ.

II. Fellowship with God means Loving God's Great Family (vv.9-11).

If I am feeling bad and think I may have a fever, I use a thermometer to check my body temperature. The thermometer tells me a lot about my health. In the same way, our fellowship with other believers tells us a lot about our fellowship with God.

Verses 9-11 apply the test of the love commandment in two cases: a person who loves and a person who hates. John doesn't seem to recognize any middle ground. Like Jesus in Mark 4:4 -- he comes into the synagogue, stands by the man with the withered hand, and says to the Pharisees, **"Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?"** He offers the Pharisees no place to stand between saving and killing. If you don't want to save, you are in the class with killers. And John would say, If you don't want to love, you are in the class with haters.

A. A Lack of Love is a Sure Sign of Darkness (v.9).

John says, **"He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in darkness until now."** Love and light go together. Hatred and darkness are partners. We can't claim to have an intimate fellowship with God and have hatred for a brother.

You might say, *"Pastor, I don't like some people. In fact there are some that I just can't stand to be around but I really don't hate anyone."*

Webster says hatred is prejudiced hostility, animosity. The Greek word means "to detest, to persecute." Hatred can be ACTIVE or PASSIVE. Active hatred is expressed by spiteful, malicious words or deeds like burning a cross in someone's yard. Passive hatred is more common. It is expressed in coldness, unconcern and indifference for someone. What hurt the Lord the most were not the enemies who openly accused Him but the indifference of those who followed Him but stood idly by while He was crucified.

John tells us the person who claims to be a Christian in fellowship with God but truly hates another Christian is not even saved. He's a counterfeit. He is **"in darkness until now."** The **"true light"** has never really shined in his life.

To say that you are in the light and yet hate your brother is at best an inconsistency and at worse a denial of the faith.

1 Jn.3:14 says, **"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."**

Just as a lack of love is a sure sign of darkness and spiritual death,

B. An Abundance of Love is a Sure Sign of the Light (v.10a).

Note the difference between the two people described in vv.9 & 10. One **"says he is in the light."** He's just talking. The other **"abides in the light."** He's not talking about it. He's doing it!

What does it mean to love your brother? It means we love some people we don't like! Just like Jesus and the disciples, people sometimes will get on our nerves. They will irritate us, frustrate us and exacerbate us! We won't always *feel* love for our brothers and sisters in God's great family. But we are still to show love to them.

Here's a secret: LOVE IS NOT A FEELING. LOVE IS A DECISION. If I love you, that means that when I have to make a decision about your well-being, I will make a loving decision. I will decide not to hurt you, speak evil of you or cause you pain. I will put your interests and your feelings ahead of my own.

C. Characteristics of a Loveless Life (vv.10b-11).

John says the believer who loves has **"no cause for stumbling in him."** By contrast the loveless life, the life bound up in **"hatred"** and contempt is a life of **"stumbling... in darkness."** John says such a man **"walks in darkness."**

John says we are either **"in the light"** or **"in darkness."** There is no twilight. If you are a genuine believer you love your brothers. If you don't love your brothers you are not a genuine believer.

John also says this person **"does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes."** He hates people because he can't see them clearly. He sees the color of their skin, their economic status, their practices or their ideologies instead of the real person God created.

Though John is describing the counterfeit Christian, many genuine believers stumble in darkness for a season when they turn from the light of God's love, when they fail to forgive. Nothing will hinder your fellowship with God like a grudge against a brother.

D. Loving God's Family is our Test.

The test of loving our brothers is found throughout 1 John. Fellowship with God is not evidenced in warm fuzzy feelings, etc.

God is Spirit. How do we know we love a Spirit? We know because we love His family (4:20). The love of your physical brother is the test of your spiritual life.

Biblical love is deciding to bless someone even though they don't deserve it. God loves us even though we don't deserve it.

My gas gauge tells me how much gas is in my tank. My love for God's family tells me how much love I have for God.

Hate is the evidence of blindness to the light of God. Love is the evidence that sight has been given to the blind. This is the miracle of the new birth. This is the true light that is already shining. This is the fountain of love in every believer.

There is much more to say about love in 1 John and here at New Covenant Baptist Church. But for today let us rejoice in the amazing grace of God that though we were once haters, blind and in the darkness, now we are lovers who see and walk in the light.

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound!

That saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost but now am found,

Was blind but now I see.