

Love Shines

1 John 2:7-11

Introduction

The apostle John begins our text this morning addressing us with the word *beloved*. Last week it was "my little children." The apostle's tender care and love for his readers moves him to write what he does. The spiritual discernment he is calling for does not rise from a love for theological debate. It comes from love for his readers, marked by fatherly concern that we not be led astray by a fraudulent Christianity. *Distortions of the gospel do real harm to people. So genuine love does not look the other way or worse yet, modify the gospel to accommodate the lies.*

So far John has taught us that the gospel of Jesus roots itself in historical realities and produces fellowship among all believers and with God through Jesus. Those who have genuine fellowship with God walk in the light. They have an aversion to sin that leads them to avoid it, to fight it, and when they sin, they do not minimize, rationalize, or deny it. They confess it. God forgives them and cleanses them, thus restoring the fellowship. What grows out of that cleansing results not just in fellowship with God, but fellowship with other believers. That's one of the easiest ways to tell who's really right with God.

Now John elaborates on the nature of that fellowship. It's marked by love. The same kind of love John displays toward those he writes.

⁷ Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. ⁸ At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. ⁹ Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. ¹¹ But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

1. An Old Commandment to Love (7)
2. A New Commandment to Love (8)
3. The Test of Love (9-11)

1. An Old Commandment to Love (7)

⁷ Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard.

Just how old is this command to love? Its roots are ancient. Listen to Jesus answer the question about the greatest commandment of all.

Matthew 22:37-40

37 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. **38** This is the great and first commandment. **39** And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. **40** On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

Jesus is citing words from Deuteronomy 6 and from Leviticus 19.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. **5** You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Leviticus 19:17-18

17 "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. **18** You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Earlier in Leviticus 19 are other commands that show love to one's neighbor: leave corners of the field for the poor and sojourner; don't steal; don't deal falsely; don't lie; don't swear falsely by God's name; don't oppress or rob your neighbor; don't withhold pay from your hired worker; don't curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind; don't do injustice in court; don't show partiality to the poor or to the rich; don't slander or hold a grudge.

Repeated reason: I am Yahweh
In other words, *if you really love and fear God, you will treat your neighbor with love.*

Did this apply only to Jewish neighbors?
Does this apply now only to fellow church members?

A lawyer asked Jesus that very question: if I'm supposed to love my neighbor as myself, who is my neighbor?

Jesus answered with the parable of the good Samaritan.

Luke 10:36-37

³⁶ Which of these three [the priest, the Levite, the Samaritan], do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

Jesus flips the question, “who is my neighbor,” and asks “who proved to be a neighbor” to the injured man?

To whom should I show love? Anyone in need.

The irony in the parable is that the Samaritan man, despised as a man of mixed race and mixed religion, showed the love that the law of God calls for, while the priest and the Levite utterly failed to do so.

Jesus’s parable teaches that love for others is not limited to family, friends, culture, race, or religion. (Lev 19 refers to sojourners, not just Jews). Why? Human beings are made in God’s image. Sinful human beings are made in God’s image. (All humans but Jesus are sinners by birth and by choice.) *Jesus showed love to us by laying down His life for us while we were still sinners, enemies of God. We are to display the same kind of love.* This expands our understanding of the old command to love consistent with the OT text.

What needs do you notice around you in your day-to-day life? How are you responding to them? Self-sacrificing love or self-protective neglect?

God’s will is for you to love Him supremely and to love your neighbor as yourself. Your neighbor is made in God’s image, as are you.

2. A New Commandment to Love (8)

In what way is it new?

⁸ At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

John 1:9

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

John is not the one introducing something new. John is passing along what Jesus introduced as new: true in him and in you—the true light is already shining.

John's language is what Jesus Himself used in teaching His disciples about the significance of the sacrifice he was about to make on the night of the last supper, his arrest, and trial.

Listen to how closely Jesus wove together the themes John has been teaching us in this epistle, such as keeping God's commandments, love, and fruitfulness as proof of discipleship:

John 13:34-35

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By

this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 15:8-13

8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. **10** If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. **12** "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.

True in him and in you—expresses what you are on the inside; born again; indwelt by the Holy Spirit—"life of God in the soul of man."

Because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining—progressive sanctification of the believer shines out the light of Jesus through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit Christ gives to everyone trusting in Him. A truly regenerate person grows, and as he does, he lives more and more like Jesus—that is, his or

her life takes on the character quality of self-sacrificing love more and more.

The fruit of the Spirit is love

Part of what makes the command to love new is that Jesus sets the pattern for it—"as I have loved you." Self-sacrificing love. But there's more. This love is planted in a believer by Christ and grows by the power of the Spirit. The believer's love shines because Christ the light has made him or her a child of light. God is light and His children shine light too. Light shines through love, which fulfills the commandments of God.

Jesus commands His disciples to preach the gospel to all creation, to make disciples of all ethnicities. His love is wide as the world—just as our text last week noted—not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

One of the biggest challenges the early church faced was how to graft Gentile Christians—believers from other ethnic groups—into a church family that began as primarily Jewish. But the great commission demanded that it happen. When we share the gospel, we do not know who will believe and become a Christian brother or sister. Treat unbelievers as those who have not trusted in Jesus yet, future members of your forever family, not as enemies.

How is this even possible? We are naturally sinful, therefore naturally selfish.

Key—"in Him"—your connection to Christ
 "In you"—His indwelling of you in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Because of redemption, regeneration, reconciliation, let the light of God dispel your natural darkness.

3. The Test of Love (9-11)

⁹ Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. ¹¹ But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Whoever says—we've seen this pattern before. The test of a person's Christian identity is not just what he says; it's what he does. True Christianity cannot be mere talk.

So what actions verify a person's profession of knowing Jesus?

Whoever loves his brother

- **Abides in the light**—same as saying he abides in Him—remain, stay, closeness, vital connection (John 15); this is the pattern of those living in connection with Christ

- **In him there is no cause for stumbling**—the closeness to Jesus (as evidenced by love for his brother) sheds light on the path a believer is to walk. He's not tripping up because the light enables him to see where he's going.

*When we walk with the Lord
In the light of His word,
What a glory He sheds on our way.*

By contrast—

Whoever hates his brother—hatred does not have to mean that you utterly despise and loathe a person; just that you treat the person in a way contrary love—slander, deceit, abuse, disdain, dismissiveness, belittling, ignoring, disregarding, in other words, sinning against him in any way that does not match his being made in God's image and redeemed by Christ. Love fulfills the law. Love does not sin against a person.

- Is in the darkness—the atmosphere he lives in
- Walks in darkness—his walkabout life pattern
- Does not know where he is going—ignorance with practical consequences—contrary to the Gnostic claim to possess superior knowledge
- Darkness had blinded his eyes—what God has given him to perceive what's

around him does not work. The darkness has made him blind.

John's words are reminiscent of what God says in Proverbs 4:18-19

18 But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. **19** The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble.

A person may be very religious. He may know many Bible verses. He may even have a disciplined lifestyle. But if he lacks love for others, he is still in darkness. This kind of religious blindness characterized many of the leaders in first-century Judaism, and it characterized the false religious teachers and philosophers of John's day. Love is still the test.

The Pharisees believed the Bible was inerrant; they tithed; they tried to keep separate from the prevailing Greek culture that dominated the world at the time. But they looked down on others; they hated Jesus. Why? Because they hated God. His light exposed their hypocrisy. They were blind, but refused to admit it.

After Christ heals the man born blind, He says
John 9:39-41

39 Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind."

40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" **41** Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.

What John is teaching is what Jesus taught. And what Christ and His apostles taught was the proper application of what the OT taught. *The New Command is the Old Command clarified. As such, whether we love our brothers and sisters or not reveals our true state—whether we are in the light or still in the darkness.*

Ephesians 5:1-2, 8-10

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. **2** And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light **9** (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), **10** and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

We make all kinds of missteps when we walk in darkness. Let God's love shine on your path—let love shine from your life, and you'll be able to see the path. You'll not only bring

blessing to others. You'll be kept from stumbling yourself.

Conclusion

1. An Old Commandment to Love (7)
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Old Testament, New Testament, Now—the test is the same. Love shines.

What situations tempt you to respond in an unloving way?

What difficulties are calling you to shine?

Love shines.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it helpful to know that John's warnings are warnings from a heart of love, not from a love of doctrinal controversy?
2. When Christ identifies the greatest command and the second greatest by citing Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19, what is He illustrating about the relationship between the teaching in the OT and His teaching in the NT?
3. What does this old command to love rooted in the OT tell us about the God of the OT?

4. What do the practical examples God gives in Leviticus 19 show about genuine love?
5. What does the parable of the Good Samaritan teach us about the scope of loving one's neighbor? What are some opportunities you've found to love that broadly?
6. Christ made new the old commandment to love by setting the example (as I have loved you) and by giving us the power to live lives of love through the indwelling Spirit. How can/should these two gifts impact your love for others?
7. What examples have you seen of those whose lack of love for others has caused them to stumble blindly in their life choices?
8. What examples have you seen of those whose love for God and for others has caused them to shine brighter and brighter over time?