

1 John 2:7-14

"Love & War"

*How does one lead a life that's pleasing to God? Have you ever stopped & thought about that? It seems (at times) like it involves a whole lot of "do's & don'ts" & quite frankly it can be difficult (if not humanly impossible) to keep track of them all... Wouldn't be great if there were just 1 or 2 things to keep in the forefront of our hearts & minds when it came to leading a life approved unto God?

We find in the gospel of Matthew, a certain lawyer who (perhaps) had the same kind of complications/frustrations when it came to his own life. Man, over 600 commands in the Mosaic law & quite frankly, it's just exhausting, meticulous & joy draining to try & keep track of it all... So, he comes to Jesus & (testing Him) he says, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" "What's THE one?" Which commandment outweighs, absorbs & takes precedence over every other command? *"Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."*¹ Jesus essentially makes a radical reduction of the *entire* law of Moses. He takes it from over 600 commands & boils it down to 2. If you'll love God supremely, w/all that's w/in you in totality & love one another, you'll fulfill the whole of the word of God, the ways/will of God for your life. *

We're coming back into the context of what it means to walk in the light, to know & have fellowship w/God. & John doesn't mince words, he doesn't pull punches, he speaks clearly & directly. If we're to walk in the light as He is in the light then we'll render obedience to His Word (or as John has it), we'll "keep His commandments".

Now, Vs 5 of Ch 2 is the "springboard" (if you will) that leads us into our section of scripture for today. So, let's turn our attention to Vs 5 & we'll read through Vs 11.

Vs 5-11

It's curious to me that back in Vs 7 John says, "I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning." But then he never spells out explicitly (or states plainly) what that commandment is! All that he really says about it is that it's a commandment that we've had from "the beginning".

Now, in case you haven't noticed, John speaks about "the beginning" on more than one occasion. So, if you're not careful you can get kind of confused as to exactly *which* beginning, he has in mind. ☺ Is he talking about the beginning of creation?

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 22:37-40). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Perhaps before creation regarding eternity past? – I think that the context here does a pretty good job developing for us which beginning John is talking about & it's the beginning of our walk w/Christ.

He's saying, "I'm not informing you of some novel concept that you've never been exposed to. What I'm talking about is something you've been informed *of* & instructed *in* since the day you believed on the Lord J.C. & were saved! – In fact, this commandment has existed for as long as Christians have been a thing. It's a '1st day' following Jesus kind of principle that we have here!" What John is talking about is so basic, so instrumental, so *fundamental* to what it means to follow Christ, that if we don't get this one anchored in our hearts/lives, there's really no reason to move on to "Exhibit B" or "C", we need to stay right here at "Exhibit A"! This is, "Square 1" in the Christian life... It's nothing new, it's something old, something basic that's been in place from the beginning. – Having said that, look at Vs 8.

Vs 8

Isn't that interesting? On the 1 hand it's an old commandment, but then on the other side of the coin he says, "It's new". If you're anything like me, you read that, & in trying to grab hold of it at face value, you kinda scratch your head & think... "How does that work? Is it old or is it new"? To which John would reply, "Yes". ☺ I think at this point it would help us to understand that there's more than one way that the word "new" is used in our N.T. (& remind ourselves of the connotations in the English language as well).

There's a sense in which when someone uses the word "new", we think, "never before seen or heard". But the other sense in which the word is used is to speak of something made fresh. Maybe a remake of an old song. It's not new in that the song is original, but it's new in the sense that there's perhaps an added dynamic, an added element (or approach) that makes it fresh... & "new" again.

That's what John is saying here. The commandment he's speaking of isn't new in the sense of "novel", "never heard before", but it's new in the sense of an added depth or understanding that hadn't really been in place up till that point. – Now, at this point perhaps you're waiting for the big reveal, "What's this commandment that you keep referencing but not mentioning"? ☺ But I think that most of you already know the commandment at hand. He teases us w/it in Vs 5, he speaks plainly of it in Vs 10. It's the command that we have, to love one another.

In fact, he goes on record w/it in his 2nd epistle when 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.”*² It’s something that we’ve been taught since the beginning of our relationship w/J.C.

So then, in *what sense* is it new? – It seems to me that John may be recalling in his mind that last night that he had w/his Lord & ours prior to His betrayal & subsequent crucifixion. There they were in that upper room. Jesus had been serving them, sharing w/them, He’d washed their feet, identified His betrayer & Judas had left. – Keep your finger in 1st John & turn back w/me to the *gospel of John Ch 13*. (& Let’s not forget that as it pertains to the *gospel* of Jn, & our present letter, 1st Jn, we’re speaking about the same man who penned them both. So, these words obviously made an impression upon him.) Allow me to draw your attention to Vs 31, (Judas has just left the room).

Vs 31-35

Did you see what happened there? Jesus called this commandment to, “love one another”, a *new* commandment. Now. We know that the words, the exhortation, the *command* to “love one another” certainly was not new. We just established as we began our time together that the whole of the law was fulfilled in the 2 commands to love God 1st & love others 2nd. If you love God you’ll fulfill the 1st table of the law (no other gods before Him, you won’t commit idolatry or blasphemy...). If you love others, you’ll fulfill the 2nd table of the law (you’ll honor your mother & father, you won’t murder or steal, commit adultery... you get the idea).

So, this command isn’t new in the sense of novel, or never before heard. But Jesus (if you’ll allow me) sort of gives the command a “remix” ☺. He adds a dynamic, He attaches a clarifying, qualifying standard to it that causes it to become new/fresh for us. Did you see it there? Look at it again in Vs 34 (read).

*The command to love one another is not new. But when Jesus said, “as I have loved you... you also love one another”, suddenly there’s a clarifying, qualifying standard involved in what it truly means to “love one another”.

How is it that Jesus has loved us? I’m certain we could go on & on but suffice to say that He loved us fully, completely, selflessly & sacrificially. We see it all throughout His life practically (& no doubt we could isolate many examples individually).

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (2 Jn 5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But perhaps we see it most comprehensively, most fully at the *cross*. & This is the love that Jesus exemplifies, calls us up to, & commands us to imitate.

There's something in us that feels like we can handle the command to love one another. "Love one another". Ok, got it. But when we hear the words, "Love one another, exactly as Jesus has loved you." We kinda shrink back at that. That's a tall order! No small thing at all! But that's one of the great lessons of the cross. Jesus is showing us the measure of love that He has *for* us & that God wants to work *in* us toward one another.

Ladies and Gentlemen: the cross demonstrates to us that the love of God is *wide enough* to include every human being. That it's *long enough* to last throughout eternity. It's *deep enough* to reach/save to the uttermost (or as we like to say, to the "guttermost") the most guilty of sinners. & It's *high* enough to seat us in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. **It's the kind of love that could cry out to God even on behalf of those who were nailing Him to the cross & say, "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do..." This is the magnitude of the love of God & it's the kind of love that kind of love that Jesus wants to work in us toward one another...**

& That's not all (but wait, there's more ☺)! It would've been heavy enough if Jesus would've stopped at Vs 34... But He kept talking & so we have Vs 35... take a look at it.

Vs 35

How is it that others are going to know that you truly are a Christian? Is it by the sheer scope of your great acts of service? Is it by the generous financial gift that you give? **Perhaps by your diligent academic studies of scripture? How about by all the time you spend in prayer? Jesus says here that the true identifying "mark" of genuine believer is... "love". Love for one another. Meaning, love for other Christians. People will be able to recognize you as a genuine follower of Jesus by your love for other believers.**

That's the "barometer" by which we're measured (both by the world & other brothers & sisters in the body of Christ). Now... last time we were together we looked at the *moral measure* of our walk that John set before us. (Turn back to 1st Jn & we'll look at it together).

Vs 3-4

John says, "Listen, I'm going to give you a way to measure out whether you truly know God & have a relationship *with* God. It's super simple, do you obey God's word or not?" God's word says, "Speak the truth in love." Do you find yourself lying to people all the time? God's word says we're not to steal. Are you all the time thieving?

If you're a lying thief, it's real simple, you don't know God. There's a moral measure involved in a relationship w/God. The bible says, "Let filthy language be put away from you." What's the reality of the way you speak away from church? You see? It's not difficult.

Later on Jn will give us another "barometer", it's the barometer of truth. So there's the moral barometer that John gives us, the measuring stick of truth that he gives us... But don't think for a second that Jn's going to let us get away w/out that 3rd marker, (or indicator) & that's the barometer of *love*... & Not in the ethereal, super spiritual sense of the word... But in the real, down to earth, nitty gritty, attitude of my heart & display of actions toward my brothers & sisters in Christ... sense of the word.

Because it's real easy for me to stand up here & tell you how much I love God. & Perhaps I could convince you that my love for God outweighs the love of God that anyone else here has. My, how I love God... But you can't *see* that can you? I may be deceiving you, pulling on your heart strings, manipulating you emotionally.

But what you *can* see is my love for other people. So, John says, "I'm not gonna let you get away w/simply *saying* you love God. You better *show* that you love God & the way you do that is through how you treat one other as Christians." *Look at Vs 9.

Vs 9-11

*Essentially what Jn is saying is, "Talk is cheap". You can say, "O how I love God, it's so wonderful to walk in His glorious light." (Have all the right Christian rhetoric). But if you don't love your brother in Christ... you're not in the light, you're in darkness. You're not in fellowship w/God at all... Your words are empty.

& I have to confess, this can be a real struggle for us can't it? We can at times fall into that mindset of, "Man, it would be so easy to be a Christian, if it just weren't for all those Christians...☺ Lord I have no problem w/You, it's that brother, or that sister of mine that gets to me..." Sibling rivalry in the family of God is a real thing, isn't it? But as parents think about how much you just hate it to see your children not getting along, fighting & bickering, being hateful toward one another... there's nothing worse (it seems) in a family setting. – Think how God must feel when He looks upon His family & sees so much bitterness, so much hatred being harbored in His children's hearts toward one another, surely it breaks His heart... & It should break ours as well.

Think of how many people in the body of Christ are going through life, hurting & scarred by the wounds inflicted upon them by other believers... & Maybe that's you, so you've decided you're just not going to love like you should. It's just easier/safer not to.

I wish I could tell you that's ok. But I can't. You take that route you do so to your own peril & you'll find yourself out of fellowship w/God, walking in darkness. There simply are no exceptions in this text. There's no, "If you say you're in the light & hate your brother, you're in darkness... *unless* your brother has really hurt you, or burned you, or done wrong by you... *unless* you're right, they're wrong & they're being a jerk about it."

There just isn't any of that. & If that's happened to you, I'm truly sorry, I really am. But the answer isn't in drawing back, it's in reaching out in love. Because the measure by which we're defined as believers is this, "Do we love one another..." *

* "He who hates his brother is in darkness & walks in darkness, doesn't know where he's going because the darkness has blinded his eyes." The point is plain. If we lose love, we lose everything. You can do all the right things, believe all the right truth, but you lose love, you lose it all. Think of the 3 measures (the moral measure, the doctrinal measure & the measure of love) as 3 legs on a stool. **You lose one, the whole thing falls. They stand together. You hold on to hate, harbor bitterness, you lose your way, "He *doesn't know where he's going* because the darkness has blinded his eyes." To hold on to hatred, to harbor bitterness, is to invite darkness/blindness into your life. You're hindering your spiritual growth...** * That's what Jn talks about here beginning in Vs 12.

Vs 12-14

Now as you read this, don't think that John is addressing 3 different places in which one might be physically. He's referencing 3 different stations in life *spiritually*. * You might be a child (regardless of your age) spiritually speaking. It's where we all begin. You've been born again & you're just waking up to this wonderful journey that God has planned for you... **There's nothing wrong w/that, it's a precious place to be! John says, "I want you to relish in this truth, your sins are forgiven. Not because you're so great, but because *He's* so great. For *His name's* sake." What a wonderful truth for us all to joy in today. If you're in Christ Jesus, listen to me, your sins are forgiven! That should joy your heart!**

Maybe you've been walking w/the Lord 8-10 yrs or more & truth be told, it doesn't really hit you like it used to. Then you've forgotten from where you've come, how sinful of person you truly were! Think about who you were, how much God has forgiven you & you'll get excited about His forgiveness all over again...

& Here's one of the wonderful things to realize about forgiveness (as a spiritual child). You're as forgiven the day you believed on the Lord J.C. as is that person who's walked w/the Lord for the last 50 yrs... We're not forgiven in degrees.

God doesn't forgive us somewhat & then as we grow up He goes ahead & forgives us for the rest of it. If anyone be in Christ, they're a new creation, old things have passed away, behold *all* things become new. God wants you to *rest in* & be *blessed by* this fact, you're forgiven...*

Perhaps you're on the other end of the spectrum spiritually speaking. You've walked w/God for decades upon decades & (though you're too humble to ever say such a thing), the truth of the matter is that you're a spiritually mature individual. John says, "I write to you because you've *known* Him who's from the beginning." You have a tried, tested & true relationship w/J.C. You've *known* Him. You're not speculating *about* Him, you've walked *with* Him for years upon years. You've got roots that run deep, a depth of relationship w/Christ that you can't find by any other means other than years upon years of being rooted/grounded in Him.

There's something special about being around a person who's known the Lord for 40, 50, 60 yrs. There's a depth of character/wisdom/love to them that you can't find anywhere else. You can't get it out of microwave oven or a drive thru window. Ladies & gentlemen there's simply no substitute for yrs & yrs of an experiential relationship w/Jesus.

Then he writes to the "young adults", spiritually speaking. & He says, "I write to you, because you have overcome the wicked one."* Allow me to state the obvious here but as believers we're engaged in a war. Spiritual warfare is simply a reality & we've been called to fight the good fight of faith. We don't wrestle flesh & blood, but powers, principalities & spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

But when you look at the military (or even a boxing ring or M.M.A. cage). Do you see a ton of old men/women out there fighting? How about toddlers or young children? No. We don't send children into war. The old men are like generals, we let them call the battle strategies from the war room, we call on their experience. It's the young adults, those who have strength, vigor, energy. – Spiritually speaking, it's the same way! It's those spiritually youthful who are out there working hard, advancing the kingdom of God, getting things done, overcoming the wicked one! You may not be completely spiritually mature, but you're maturing, you're gaining ground & experiencing victory to the glory of God!

Do you know what this tells us? There's a real responsibility placed upon those "young adults" spiritually speaking. & I've discovered something about this & perhaps you have as well. Because the "young man" is expected to engage & be about the work...

Too many people try to shirk their duty & remain spiritual children for as long as possible. They're like spiritual draft dodgers. They don't wanna grow up, they've been in Christ for 10 yrs, but they won't engage in the work of the kingdom... something's wrong there. *Forgive me if this comes across harsh but I'm just gonna say it. If you've been in Christ 5, 10 yrs or more & you're not engaged in kingdom business on any level... you've shirked your duty, you've dodged the draft, you need to repent & get in the battle. We need you involved in the work...*

"I write to you little children because you have known the Father." It's a wonderful thing to be enamored w/& look up to your father as little child. Before I was pastoring, I did a little work siding houses. My son (Greg) would tell his baby-sitter, "My dad lifts houses!". & This is the way it is for little children, their dad is the greater than the president, than the greatest athlete... That's the way it should be w/the child of God. Our Dad, our heavenly Father is everything, He's our whole world.

"I've written to you fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning." We read this & think, "Why repeat this, isn't there more?" The answer is. No, there's nothing more, nothing beyond. It's the greatest pursuit of our lives. To know Jesus. Think about Paul the apostle. In my mind you don't get much more spiritually mature than him. Remember what he said? Write it down, read it later, Phil 3:10. For all the things he knew, everything he'd accomplished in life. He said, "It's nothing, all I really want is to *know* Him & the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead... There's nothing more, nothing else... to *know* Him that's all I want. **Close**

Finally, he writes again to the young men, & he speaks not only of their victories, but he gives us the secret to, the source of their strength. "The word of God abides in you..."
"How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You."³ You see, it's not just knowing God's word that brings victory, it's submitting *to* God's word that causes you to overcome.

Your take home assignment is to read through the temptation of Jesus in Matt 4. Satan came to Him, sought to tempt Him & how did Jesus overcome? Not just by quoting scripture (Satan quoted scripture), but in submitting *to* the scripture.

³ *The New King James Version.* (1982). (Ps 119:9-11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Knowing God's word is one thing, submitting *to* God's Word is another thing altogether but *that* is where the victory is found...

Prayer Points:

Father, we thank you for these lessons in both love, & war today. Help us God to honor Your word, that we not harbor bitterness or unforgiveness. That we love one another (Jesus) as You have loved us. & May we grow to be all You've called us to be, not shirking responsibility, busy about the work of Your kingdom.

We spoke today of the forgiveness of God. But if you haven't experienced that, you can today. Right here, right now. Turn from your sin, believe on the Lord J.C. & He will forgive you of your sin & cleanse you of all unrighteousness.