

1 John 2:7 – 2:11

1 John

By Jarrod James

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Christ Reformed Church
11808 S Elm St
Jenks, OK 74037

Website: www.christreformedchurchtulsa.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/christreformedtulsa

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Well, if you have your Bibles today, turn to 1 John 2 and today we're going to be looking at verses 7 through 11. 1 John 2, beginning in verse 7. John says,

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.

Let's pray.

Our Father, we pray and ask that you would help us to understand your word. We pray, Lord, as the psalmist, that you would not hide any truth from us but that you would reveal these precious truths to us. Lord, I pray today that if anybody is without Christ, who is self-deceived or thinking that they are a Christian when they are not, I pray that you would use your word here to expose them for what they are and, Lord, I pray that you would open their eyes to see their need of Christ. I pray for every believer here that, Lord, our hearts would be assured before you, pray that our lives would abound in love, love for the brethren, love for those saints around us, and pray that we would be displaying the same love that Christ displayed in this world for us when he died upon the cross. Lord, we ask all of these things in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.

You may be seated.

Many years ago when I got out of high school when I was going to kind of a community college before I went off to OBU, I was working at Walmart and I was going to school, working there, and many times when I would work there, they would stick me back in the automotive section and I enjoyed that not only because it was kind of off the beaten path of that crazy place but it was also a place where I could use the radio; if you've gone to Walmart, you've seen those radios that they put and they're on display. Well, what I would do is I would go back there and I would set them to the Christian channels where preaching was taking place and my goal was that people would hear the word of God preached, and one day before I went to work, I prayed that God would open a door, he would show his glory that day that I might be able to witness to somebody.

So I go into work and I'm back there and I had a preacher on the radio and it was playing, and there was an old man who walked around the corner and he heard that radio playing or he heard that preacher preaching and he looked at me with an angry look and he said, "What is that, preaching?" And I looked at him because at first before I saw his face, I thought he was going to be happy that there was somebody preaching in Walmart, and so but that wasn't the case. I looked at him and I said, "Yeah," and he looked at me again cross and we exchanged or we began to dialog about it and finally I realized, I mean, this guy doesn't like Christianity, he doesn't like Christians, he's an antagonist to the Christian faith. So out of the blue, I just asked him, I said, "What's wrong with this? Do you have a problem?" I said something along the lines of, "Do you have a problem with the love of God?" And the man looked at me and his face went from anger to just one of sadness and sorrow, and he looked at me and I'll never forget what he said, he said, "I don't know what love is."

So we began to dialog there about the love of God and what Christ had done, but I tell you that story because that man, he did not have the saving love of God. He had never experienced the saving love of God in his life. His life was full of hate and his life was just like every one of us before we became a Christian. Before we become a Christian, all of us are full of hate. Titus 3:3 when we studied that passage, it told us that very thing. Paul describes in that passage what we were like before we were Christians and he gives a long list, but one of the things that he says about us before we came to know Christ, he said we spent our days in malice and envy, and he goes on to say that we were hated by others and we were hating one another. We did not have the love of God in our hearts. That's what we were like before we were a Christian. We had no love for God and we especially didn't have love for our neighbor.

So when we do see love truly displayed in a person's life for the church, we see people loving God and so forth, you can bet everything that you have that that person is a Christian because no one just loves naturally. We don't know what love is, just like that man admitted. We do not know what love is until God sheds abroad his love in our hearts. So that is what Jesus was referring to when he talked about having eternal life, knowing we're saved. He said in John 13:35, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." So if there is love, a genuine love, not a worldly superficial love that is based upon if everything is going right for me, then I love.

No, the sacrificial, lay down your life type of love for the church, for your neighbor, that is a genuine love and that person is one who has been born again.

Now to demonstrate that we are Christians, to demonstrate who the true Christians are, we come to 1 John. John is writing, as you know, to those who are being bombarded with false teachers who are denying the deity of Christ, denying that he had come in human flesh and all the like, and that had great implications because if Christ did not come, you're still in your sins, the sins have not been taken away. Not only that, but love has not been manifest, it has not been made known, and so we don't know how to love if Christ has not come, and John's whole argument is that Christ has come in human flesh, that's why he says we've heard him, we've seen him, we've touched him, we've looked upon him, all of these things, the life has come down, and so we proclaim him to you that you might have fellowship and our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son. And how do you know you have fellowship? Well, if you have fellowship with God who is light, then you will be walking in the light, and as we saw last time, if we are walking in the light, what that looks like is we will keep his commandments, and anyone who does not keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him. So you see that John gives all of these tests, all of these ways to know whether or not you are a true Christian.

Now last time we looked in chapter 2, the first part, and he said that if we are true Christians, we will keep God's commandments and we will walk just as Jesus walked, but now as we come to verse 7, we see here a specific example of what it looks like to keep the Lord's commandments; we get an example of what it looks like to walk in the same way in which Christ walked and that's what we see here in these verses from verse 7 all the way to verse 11 and it has to do with love. That's what John is going to be dealing with here. He is going to give us here the love test to see whether or not we're a Christian. If we truly love, then we're in him, we abide in him, but if there is no love in our life, then we are deceived, we're self-deceived. Despite our profession, despite saying that we are a believer, if there is no love in our life, we are not Christians.

So let's look at this passage together, if we will. Verse 7, we see here that love is an old commandment. He says in verse 7, he said, "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." In these verses, as I said, he is reminding us, his readers, of who the true Christians are and he reminds them of this subject of love. He goes back to this old commandment that he says here, that's what he calls it in verse 7. He says it's not a new commandment. He said, "I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment."

Now what in the world does John mean by all of this because he kind of goes back and forth, doesn't he? We see here that he says, "I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment," then he goes on in verse 8 and he'll say, "I am writing to you a new commandment," and he's talking about the same thing. Is he contradicting himself? Well, not at all. Let's sort things out here, if we will. When John says here that he is not writing a new commandment but is writing an old commandment which they have heard and which they have had from the beginning, there are two things in which John can

mean by this when he says that what he's writing is an old commandment that you've heard from the beginning.

First, we know that scripture, from scripture, that the command to love is not something new. We find that the command to love goes all the way back to the Old Testament. We find that the command to love is all throughout. Leviticus 19:18, for example, the Lord told his people, "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." And if we were to look at those narrative passages of stories in the Old Testament, we would find that the love, the command to love was really written on Adam's heart. It goes all the way back to the beginning because that's what we see, for example, in Joseph; he loved his brothers despite all that they had done wrong to him. So this is not a new commandment. It's not something new, this command to love your neighbor as yourself. It is an old commandment so that's why John could say, "I'm writing you no new commandment."

So that's one way to look at this or what John is referring to here when he talks about this old commandment that was from the beginning and that you have heard. He could be referring to that commandment that you had heard in the Old Testament, the Old Testament, the sacred scriptures that you had but, second, although it is true that the command to love is not new because it's what God has always required of his people and it's always been in his word, John could also be saying here when he says of this old commandment that you had from the beginning that you have heard, which is the word, he could be referring to that message they heard when they came to faith in Jesus Christ. For example, in 1 John 3:23, we see that that verse alludes to this fact when they came to know Christ, when the gospel was given to them, it seems that right along with that gospel, the good news of what Christ had done, there was also the command to love others. For example, 1 John 3:23, he says of what was commanded of them from the beginning, "And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us."

So whether you take the commandment here to love others in the old sense that it goes back to the Old Testament, or you take this here, John, to be saying, he's making reference to the commandment to love when they first heard the gospel. It really doesn't matter either way, both are true whether it be when you first become a Christian, you're commanded to love, or if you go back to the beginning of the Bible, we find the command is always to love. That's what God's law has always always required of us. The whole law is summed up in one commandment, as Jesus said, and that is to love your neighbor as yourself. And this commandment to love is what God commands also of us when we trust Christ as Lord and Savior. When we follow Christ as a disciple, we are to love just as Christ loved us, and to follow Christ is to obey the commandments of God and one of the commandments, the commandment that sums up the whole law is to love our neighbor as ourselves.

So on the surface, as I said, there seems to be a contradiction because as we have just looked at in verse 7, he says of this commandment that he's referring to, to love, he says it's not an old commandment but then he comes along and he says this in verse 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." So on the surface it may appear that John is contradicting himself. Now let's just take note, this is just kind of a side note: whenever you see in scripture two things being taught and they look like they contradict each other, know there's no contradictions with God. God is not the author of confusion. The contradiction is with us, we don't fully understand what's going on so we must dig deeper and we must look at the context, we must look at other passages because they will harmonize.

So when we look at this passage, that's what we see. There is no contradiction here, even though he says it is an old commandment and now he says it's a new commandment that he's writing to you, there's no contradiction. The command to love, when John says here that it is new, that it is a new commandment, in this sense, it is, or when he says it's old, it's always existed but it's new in the sense that now it is fresh. This commandment to love, it is fresh, it has a new ring to it, if you will. Why? Because of Christ. Before Christ came into the world and died for sinners, we did not really know love as it was displayed in the cross of Jesus Christ. As 1 John 3:16 says, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers." You see, though the commandment to love is very old, it was not fully realized until the coming of Christ for it was only in Christ that the commandment to love others was declared clearly, and this is what I mean: before the coming of Christ, this commandment existed, so it is old, but when Christ came into the world in love to suffer and die for sinners, to serve sinners, to save sinners from the wrath of God, the command to love our neighbor became fresh and it became new. Jesus, he helped us to see what it meant to truly love our neighbor.

So it's new not in chronology because it's always been, but it's new in the sense that the commandment has been made fresh and it has come alive as to what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves. That's what John is talking about here. That is what John means here when he calls this commandment to love our brothers new. It's always been around because it's God's law, but it is new in that Jesus, in Jesus we now know fully what it means to love others, which is why John will say later on in 1 John 4:11, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." So in that sense when we look to Christ, the commandment to love others is new in the sense that it has now been made fully known as to what it looks like to love those around us. It's always been around but Christ has made it known. He has brought a fresh sense about what it means to love our neighbor.

This is what Jesus meant as well because he called it, this command to love, a new commandment as well. In John 13:34, he said, "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." Now if we look at the context of that passage in John 13:34, this comes on the heels, it comes after Jesus washing the disciples' feet and he's showing his humility and showing how to truly love, serve other people. So it is a new commandment because Jesus has shown us.

Now do you see that? Jesus having just displayed what true love is in that chapter by washing the disciples' feet, calls the commandment to love a new commandment just as John does here, and he says that those who are to follow him, they are to love in the same way just as he loved them, which is why John adds here what he does in verse 8, he says of this new commandment to love, that it is both true in him, that is, in Christ, and it is true in you. In other words, the fulfillment of this command to love others as yourself is only found in Christ and it is also found in those who follow him because those who follow Christ, they walk in the same way as Christ walked. And how did Christ walk? He loved others sacrificially. It can be found nowhere else. It's found first and foremost in Jesus who manifested this love in his fellowship with the Father and how he loved the masses, the crowds, the enemies, his friends, and in how he humbled himself even unto death to die for his own, that is the church, and because the love of God has been poured out on those who are his, this love is now also made known. It is there, it is present in those who are true followers of Jesus Christ. Once we were filled with hate, now we are filled with love.

That's what a genuine Christian is, and because the commandment to love has been manifested in Christ, John goes on to say here, "because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining." Who is the true light? Well, if we go to the book of John, we find that the true light is Jesus. And so Jesus is the true light. We see this in John's gospel and we also see it here that God is light, and we know that Jesus is God. Jesus is the true light and he came into this world and the darkness has not overcome it and the true light is shining, it is shining into this world, and the light is shining, the light of the world, Jesus, and he is overcoming the darkness of sin, evil and unbelief. Even though this world is full of darkness, there is hatred and murder and wickedness and all kinds of evil, it is being conquered by Christ.

We see this to be true most certainly in the lives of believers. Our lives were filled with darkness, we walked in darkness, but when Christ saved us, he conquered those dark hearts. He gave us a new heart, a heart that is now filled with light and walks in the light. That's how Jesus is overcoming and conquering this darkness, and we also know that one day, that all the darkness of this world, all the moral evil, all the sin, all the hatred, all of that will be gone because Jesus will deal with sinners, he will punish them for all of eternity in hell, but those who are his trophies, those who are his elect, those whom he has saved, they will be the ones who will be shining bright. The world that is full of darkness is fading away and one day this evil world that has no love in it will pass away altogether and Christ and his kingdom will be fully realized. It is being realized in the lives of believers but it will be fully realized. This is what John means.

Now because of this, in light of this command to love, John can say in verse 9, he can give us the description of what this means, the application of all of this. Look at verse 9, he says, "Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. 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." Now John applies now the test of love. He has referred to the commandment which is old and it is new, that

is, it is fresh in Christ. He refers to this commandment to love your neighbor as yourself. He refers to all of this and now he gives us the application of what this all means. If Jesus is the true light and he is shining and he is conquering the darkness, the darkness of evil, sinful, hate-filled hearts, if he is doing all of that, then here's the application.

First of all, he says if you are in the light, that is, if you say that you're in the light and you say that you're a Christian but yet you hate your brother, you are still in darkness. I have known people in churches who profess to be Christians, I've known people who served in roles of deacons, but yet they could not stand their own brothers who were sitting right next to them, brothers in the fleshly sense, brothers biologically. They could not stand them. The word of God says that you're not Christian if that is you. Now when he uses the word "brothers" here, he's not necessarily referring to the biological brothers. He's referring here to who are the brothers, who are the brethren? The church. So what John is saying here is that if you say that you are a Christian but you hate your brothers, that is, those who are Christians around you, then you are not a Christian. You're not a Christian at all, you are still in darkness. That's what he is saying here.

Now what does he mean by hate because there are a lot of people who are in churches, who are unconverted, who do not know Christ, what does it mean to hate? They would say, "Well, we don't hate anybody. We don't hate the brothers." Well, let's look at what he means by hate. Go to John 3. I think we can figure out what it means to hate here because when we think of hate, I think we oftentimes just think of just this outright hostility where we would like to just murder somebody or can't stand somebody, and all of that, I think, is part of this, but let's look at what hate is.

In John 3, let's go to verse 19, it says, "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world." Now who is the light? We know that the light is Christ, right? So he's come into the world and it says the "people loved the darkness," that is, they loved sin, they loved evil, they loved doing what is wrong, and so the people loved the darkness "rather than the light." They didn't like Jesus and they didn't like the way of righteousness. They didn't like the way of living for God. They didn't like the way of holiness. And why? "Because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light." Do you see that? There's that word. Everyone who does wicked things, that would be anybody outside of Christ, they hate the light and they do not "come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

So here you have the idea of hate, hating the light. We know that we are in the light if we are Christian, and John says here that if you say you're in the light but you hate your brother who is also in the light, then you are not Christian, that you're still in darkness, he says. But what does it mean to hate? Well, I think what hate, and we can give a definition of it, what hate looks like. It is this: if you claim to be a Christian but you don't want anything to do with those who seek to live a righteous life for Christ, you are not a Christian. Let's apply this a little bit differently. There are people who claim to be Christian but yet somebody comes along in the congregation, they're sold out for the Lord, they love holiness, they want to obey the commandments of God, they want to

follow him, but it rubs other people wrong. I've seen this in churches where I've got up to preach God's word and go just walk verse by verse and people are ready to stone you. Now they would claim to be a Christian but they can't stand it. That is a person who hates and there are people like this all the time; you see it in many different ways. There are people who, they're religious, they tolerate Christians and things like that but, boy, if you get around somebody that is really a Christian, who is truly following Christ, they don't want anything to do with them, they don't want to come to that person, they don't want to be next to that person, they don't want to fellowship with that person because that person makes them feel uncomfortable. They hate the light.

If you claim to be a Christian but deep down the Christians around you make you feel really uncomfortable, and the way they live, it just agitates you, and so you call them self-righteous, or you say, "Well, you're just holier than thou," you're a type of person who really hates the light. That's what's really going on. It's not that this person is self-righteous, they're trying to live for God and your life, you realize, doesn't match up to that and it's exposing your evil deeds, and so you don't want anything to do with that so you attack them. You hate the light.

There are many people like this, many people, they're comfortable going to church where everything is superficial, where the Bible isn't really being taught, but if they walked into a place like this where the Bible is being taught and there are people who do love the Lord and want to walk in holiness, it would rub them the wrong way. They want to get out of here. They want to go find a church where everything is superficial and nobody is going to expose their darkness. That's what they want to do and there's so many people that in churches like that, but when they come to a church where holiness is taught, where people are actually living for the Lord, they don't like it. It rubs them the wrong way because in that place there is light and they are in darkness, and the two do not get along. There is a hostility between the two.

Now this is the way it's always been. In Genesis 3 when sin came into the world and the fall took place, remember what the Lord told Satan? He said, "I am going to put enmity between her offspring and your offspring." Who are those offspring? There are the children of the devil and there are the children of God, and those two, one's light and one's darkness and they do not mesh, they do not get along because the darkness hates the light and that's why you find such hostility. We see that all throughout the Bible, those who are not Christian, they cannot stand those who are. That's why persecution takes place. They don't like the light. They don't like the church that is shining brightly and so they try to stomp out the light. That's why they killed Christ. He was the light. He was the true light. They couldn't stand it and so they sought to kill him and that is what they did.

So that is what John is saying here. If you say you're a Christian and that is you, you hate the light, you're not a Christian. You are still in darkness. You are still in darkness. You are lost. You are on your way to hell and you have never come to know Christ. No matter how religious you are, you do not know Christ. That's what John is saying. Now we move on here to state it in a positive way of what it means to be a Christian. He states it another way to help us to know whether or not we have eternal life. He says it this way in verse

10, "Whoever loves his brother abides in the light," abides in Christ, "and in him there is no cause for stumbling." We have seen what it means to hate our brother or to hate other Christians but now we see what it looks like to love our brothers.

In 1 John 3:16 it says, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us." And so clearly love here is being defined by Christ's self-sacrifice. We know love by Christ dying for us, him shedding his blood upon the cross. That is the picture of love that we have. That's what true love is. So John says, "Whoever loves his brother in that way, they lay down their life, they're humble before others, they're not self-seeking but they're there to serve and to encourage and to pray and to fellowship and rejoice with the brethren, and weep with them and all of those types of things, that is the person who is a true believer. That is a person who abides in the light and in him there is no cause for sin, no cause for stumbling."

My question for you today: is that you? Do you line up to this test? Do you love the brethren? Do you lay down your life? Is the sweetest place on earth with the church of God, those who are genuine Christians? Do you love the Christian fellowship that you have in this place? Do you pray for others? Do you weep with them? Do you love them in such a way that you would lay down your life, you would give of your goods, you would do whatever to serve your brother in Christ? That is love.

To give you another picture of love, if we were to go to Matthew 25, in Matthew 25 Jesus talks about on that last day, if you would go there with me, the final judgment. Here we see a picture of love. He says, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory," this is in verse 31, "and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left." This is believers and unbelievers. This is the final day. This is the judgment. "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

What is Jesus saying here about all of this stuff about clothing him and feeding him and visiting him in prison and all of that? He's saying here that on that final day, the test of those who are truly sheep and those who are goats boil down to their works, the evidence of whether or not they were truly saved, and the evidence of those who are truly sheep is that they served the brethren. They served the brethren who were in prison because they were persecuted. They served the brethren in that when they didn't have anything and they were naked, they brought them stuff, they brought them clothes, they served them. That's what he is saying. But those who are goats, those who are not Christian, who do not know Christ, they're the other ones. They could care less about those who are in Christ. They could care less about the brethren. Their thing is they want to go to church and check it off the list so they can feel better and ease their conscience but as soon as church is over, boom, they're out the door and they don't want anything else to do with the church throughout the week or any other time because they don't really want to fellowship with the church. They don't want anything to do with the church. They don't want to be a part of the church because really they're still in darkness. If they were in light, they would want to be with the church, and serve the church, and weep with the church, and rejoice with the church, and all the like.

That's what Jesus is saying and that's what John is saying here too. If we truly love our brother in that way in which we serve them and fellowship with them and just, we come alongside of them, encourage them, and all of those types of things, that's true love when we lay down our life for the brethren. And if you love like that, well, it's evidence, it's a sure evidence, a sure sign that when you find a person doing that, that type of person is one who is a true Christian. They are the one who is really abiding in the light and in them there is no cause for stumbling.

Now this goes back to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13 about love. Go with me to that passage just for a second. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul talks about love and you know this chapter as being the love chapter, but he gives us a definition of love. He says, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels," sounds pretty religious, right? Sounds pretty spiritual. But he says, "but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge," I have all this right doctrine and I know more than scholars, "and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing." And here he says about love, "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends." What we find there is that if we don't have love, it doesn't matter what we do. If there is not love, love for the brethren, then we are in darkness, but if we love, we abide in the light, as John says here.

Now we go on to this third application. He says it a different way, although he kind of wraps things up and brings these first two things together. He says, "But whoever hates his brother," there it is again, "is in the darkness and walks in the darkness," and then he adds this, "and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his

eyes." Despite what one says, they can say they are a Christian all day long, that they are on their way to heaven, they can be a churchgoer and all the rest, but if they do not love the brethren and they hate the brethren, want nothing to do with them, then they're not Christian. They are self-deceived. They are in darkness. They don't know where they're going. They're groping in the dark. They don't see the light. They don't see the glories of Christ because the darkness, their own sin, has blinded their eyes. They are self-deceived.

So as we can see, one of the greatest tests of whether or not you are a Christian is whether or not you love the church, and the way you know you love the church is your sincere desire to lay down your life for the brethren just as Christ lay down his life for you. Just as Christ lay down his life for the church is the same way in which you should lay down your life. You will give yourself to the church if you truly love, you will desire fellowship with the church, and when you're with the church, it will be the dearest place on earth for you. This is the mark of a true believer. As Paul Washer once said, when a man who once despised the people of God suddenly finds himself sharing the same desires with them, longing for their fellowship, it is a great indication that something marvelous has happened, and what marvelous thing has happened is that a person when they love and they love the brethren, what marvelous thing has happened is the new birth. God has taken that heart of stone out and given them a new heart, and the love of God has been shed abroad in their hearts.

So the question is here today: are you a Christian? And you will know that you are a Christian and all will know that you're disciples and followers of Christ by your love, the love that you have for the brethren. And if you don't love and there is no love, no desire to lay down your life for others, the good news is that Christ has loved, he has come into this world and he's laid down his life. You were an enemy of God, you hated God, you hated others, but yet Christ came to this world to take your punishment, to be punished because you didn't fulfill that royal law to love your neighbor as yourself. He came and did what you could not do. He loved the unlovely and he lay down his life and he shed his blood upon the cross, he took and bore the wrath of God in your place, and if you will look to him by faith and repent of your sins, God will clothe you in the righteousness of Christ. If you'll cry out to him, he will save you, he will change you, he will give you a new heart.

If you are a Christian, you say, "Well, what do I do with all of this?" Well, the Bible calls us in 2 Peter 1:7 to abound more and more, to add to your faith brotherly affection and brotherly love, and as Paul says, outdo one another in love. Owe no one anything except to love each other. Go on loving, Christian. That's what you are to do. Look to the one who loved you, the one whose love surpasses all knowledge. Look to that. Pray for yourself and others that you might comprehend this love of Christ and the height and the depth and the breadth and the length of it. Pray that you would comprehend it and you would love like Christ.

Let's pray.

Father, as we come to you, we thank you for your word. Lord, I pray that we as believers would go on loving. Lord, I thank you that you have placed so many people in this church that truly do love this way in which you have laid out in your word, but I pray, Lord, that we would excel all the more in our love for one another. I pray that this place would be a place that is known for its love, known for its care for one another, and the love that they have for you. Father, if there's anybody here today that is self-deceived and does not have love but they're full of hate and angry all the time and, Lord, there's no joy in their heart, I pray that you would open their eyes to see their need of Christ and pray that they would turn from their sins and be saved and look to Christ for their righteousness. Lord, we ask all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen.