

ANOTHER TEST?

1 John 2:7-11

In order to stir our memory, when John the Apostle took pen in hand he did so with a purpose. One of those purposes was so man could “know” which is a, if not the, key word of this letter. But to know what is the question? The answer is having the ability to know we are saved.

I have often heard that in order for something to be trusted it must have the ability to be tested. God has designed things so our profession of faith can be tested. And, when it has been tested and proven to be true, it results in an assurance in the heart that, actually, meets a great need in man.

We need to know for ourselves and whether or not our profession of faith is real or not. Even when we are sure, I’m afraid those around know.

So, God has designed a test whereby one may know whether or not they are a present possessor of eternal life. The test God has designed is set before us by John. At the core of the test is love. When we think about it, it makes perfect sense especially in light of what Jesus said in **John 13:34-35**: “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, and that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

Remember I told you in the introduction John will follow in this letter the same format he used in the Gospel? There, he introduced us to three great truths about the One True God. Those three things are that 1) God is light, 2) God is love, and 3) God is life. Although you may have all three of those great things figured out and could explain them, I must confess I’m still working on being able to do that. I know when I see light but cannot explain what light is (but because I can’t explain it I don’t plan to walk in the dark). I know what love is and how it feels, but I can’t exhaustively explain that either. I know life to some degree, but it contains so many mysteries and blessings it would not take me very long to tell you what little I think I know about life.

John opened this letter with truth about light and how important it is for the believer to walk in the light. Actually, we find in this epistle that walking in the light is a necessity for those who profess to know Christ. In fact, John tells we **must walk in the light** if we are to have and know fellowship with the Father, the Son, and all those who claim to know them.

Also, in this letter, John introduces to us the subject of love and he does so by making it the core of the test. The love he is referring to is the highest form of love known to man. It is “*agape*” or love that finds its source in God Himself. This means “*agape*” love is divine love. It means it is a love that comes from above and is, therefore, a love above the love produced man. It is more than “*phileo*” or brotherly love and it surpasses “*eros*” or erotic love (which is never used in the Bible) as far as the day surpasses the night. This “*agape*” or divine love has God as its source and surpasses the love of man as much Heaven surpasses the Earth.

Yet, for those who come to know Christ as their Savior, after they are born from above, they discover this “*agape*” love to be resident in their heart. God has so designed it as to provide an internal testimony in the heart of the believer at least two great things. Those two things are: first, the fact that our conversion was real; and second, the fact of the undeniable presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling within the heart of those that have believed out of which this “*agape*” love of God is “shed abroad in their hearts” **Romans 5:5**. How wonderful is that?!

I believe **verses 7 and 8** need to be considered together because they are, in some degree, inseparable. As we read those two verses John will give us instructions on the matter of some new and old commandments.

In trying to prepare both my mind and my heart for this lesson, I took the time to read after several, what I believe to be, godly, reliable, and scholarly men. From what I gleaned from those men, in light of the way each presented their thoughts on these two verses, there seems to be no easy way to present the thoughts contained in them. At the core of all that was written by those men, I happily discovered all were in agreement as to the truths and intent of John. But as to how to present those truths, they all took differing paths in an effort to try and explain them. That is not a problem for me, however. Actually one should expect those men to differ in the way they would present their findings. Some of them were more simplified than the other, but all were edifying. It is my pray that the path I have chosen in order to bring to light the truths John has set before us is the path of simplicity.

Before we delve too deeply into the answers, I think one of the questions we ought to ask is: what do the references John gives to the old and new and from the beginning referring to? Is John referring to a kind of commandment or a point in time when the commandments were given? Well, hoping I do not confuse you, I believe he is refers to both.

For instance, the “old commandment” John refers to seems to be the one the lawyer (who was a Pharisee) asked Jesus about when tempting Him in **Matthew 22:35-40**. There we find him asking our Lord: “Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all they heart, and with all they soul and with all they mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hand all the law and the prophets.”

The places in the Old Testament those can be found are in **Deuteronomy 6:5; 10:12; 30:6**. In his letter to the Romans in **Romans 13:8-10**, Paul wrote something similar. At the beginning of his exhortation there he says: “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.” Continuing he ends his exhortation with “therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” So as to time, we find the commandment is not new, it is an old commandment. John says, we have had this commandment from the beginning.

As he continues in **verse 8** and speaks of a “new commandment...which thing is true in him and in you.” It is my opinion here that that phrase helps us understand what John is saying the commandment being new. The reference to the “new commandment” refers to being new in both point of time and in manner seeing it is manifest in “him” (referring to the incarnate Jesus) and to “in you” (which refers to the person who has been made a new creature in Christ).

In the Old Testament, under the demands of the law, the commandment was to “do” but without providing any power by which to accomplish whatever the command was. Sinful man cannot love either God or his neighbor as he should or even as he may like, without help. Why is that? He has not the power within that will allow it to happen, whatever it may be. We must remember the Scripture teaches that the weakness of the law was the weakness of the flesh.

Such a command to love can only be accomplished when the principle of love has been placed within the heart of one receiving the commandment and desiring to keep the command. The only way in which such a principle can be placed within the heart of man is by the means of a new birth whereby one becomes a new creature in Christ.

Have you ever heard someone say “I learned to love that person?” Well, the truth of the matter is, if we are saved and have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit within us, we will love other believers automatically. If we do not, John goes on to

tell us, we are in trouble. Thus, we will find we have failed the test God has designed for those who profess to know Him, but actually do not.

You see, when we are born the first time, we only know how to love as fallen man can love. When we are born the second time, we become enabled to love as God loves. Without His internal enablement, we cannot keep the new commandment.

Please notice John said “which thing is true *in him*” (emphasis mine). Here I believe he is speaking of the incarnate Christ and how He was able to love men who were unloveable, even those who were His enemy. No doubt in my mind John was still remembering how Jesus spoke when He walked among men and how He acted and reacted towards men of all types. Even towards those who wanted to take His life.

You see, when Jesus became a man, the Law of Moses or, actually, the Law of God came resident within Him. In truth, He was the law personified. Do you remember when He said: “I came not to destroy the law but to fulfill the law.” in **Matthew 5:17**? It was in the life of Jesus that the law came to life! Even His enemies said things like “And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” **Matthew 7:28-29.** We read in **Mark 2:12**, after witnessing an amazing miracle, they said: “And immediately he (speaking of the man with the palsy) arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all: insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.”

So, could it not be said that the new commandment John was speaking was not new in time but rather new in manifestation. First, it was manifested in the new kind of life which Jesus had never known before His incarnation. Second, it was manifested in the new life He gives to those who put their trust in Him as Savior? I think so.

Will you allow me to confess something here? I’m afraid I need to do better with expressing the love that has been placed in my heart as a believer in Christ. I’m afraid I fail too often to love as He would have me love. I’m afraid my love has not yet been perfected: but, I do desire it to be! You see, there are some brothers and sisters in Christ I can and do love, but I feel better loving them at a distance. I still need to work on the idea that my love needs to be the kind of love that loves one unconditionally. In our next study, we’ll look a little deeper in to this.

Tom Price, 2020