

That You May Know That You Have Eternal Life

The Social Test

1 John 2:7-11

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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The Social Test

Scripture

John wrote his three letters to oppose the false teaching that was creeping into the churches for which he was responsible. This false teaching was an early form of Gnosticism. The false teachers were claiming that they had a knowledge of God. The word “gnostic” comes from the Greek word for “knowledge.” They asserted that they were among the elite who were enlightened, and that they knew God.

John’s letters set down biblical principles of fellowship with God. He showed how genuine fellowship with God is identified by three different tests. First is the moral test, which is the test of obedience (that we examined last time). Second is the social test, which is the test of love. And third is the doctrinal test, which is the test of belief in Christ.

Let’s read about the social test in 1 John 2:7-11:

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 John 2:7-11)

Introduction

Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984) was an American theologian, philosopher, and Presbyterian pastor. He is best known for co-founding the L'Abri community in Switzerland with his wife, Edith Schaeffer. More than a generation ago, Schaeffer wrote that love is “the mark of the Christian.” What he said then is still profoundly true today. He writes:

The church is to be a loving church in a dying culture. How, then, is the dying culture going to consider us? Jesus says, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” In the midst of the world, in the midst of our present culture, Jesus is giving a right to the world. Upon His authority He gives the world the right to judge whether you and I are born-again Christians on the basis of our observable love toward all Christians.

That’s pretty frightening. Jesus turns to the world and says, “I’ve something to say to you. On the basis of My authority, I give you a right: you may judge whether or not an individual is a Christian on the basis of the love he shows to all Christians.” In other words, if people come up to us and cast in our teeth the judgment that we are not Christians because we have not shown love toward other Christians, we must understand that they are only exercising a prerogative which Jesus gave them.

And we must not get angry. If people say, “You don’t love other Christians,” we must go home, get down on our knees, and ask God whether or not what they say is true. And if it is, then they have a right to have said what they said.¹

This is the theme of the section in John’s letter that we

¹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, vol. 4 (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), 187–188.

are going to consider today.

Lesson

First John 2:7-11 gives us another visible, objective evidence that someone's profession of faith to be a Christian is credible.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Love Is an Old Commandment (2:7)
2. Love Is a New Commandment (2:8)
3. Love Is a Way of Life (2:9-11)

I. Love Is an Old Commandment (2:7)

First, love is an old commandment.

John begins a new section in verse 7 with the word, **“Beloved.”** He uses it six times in his First Letter (2:7; 3:2; 3:21; 4:1; 4:7; 4:11) and three more times in his Third Letter (2; 5; 11). **“Beloved”** means “a person dearly loved and cherished; sometimes preferred above all others and treated with partiality.” John deeply loves and cares for the people of God for whom he is responsible. He uses this term of endearment to let them know of his deep care for them.

Pastors are called by God to care for his people that the Lord is entrusting to their earthly care. Pastors are to care for the souls and the spiritual well-being of their flock. Pastors love their people and care deeply for them. Very early in my ministry and just a few years out of seminary I had become friends with a local pastor. He was perhaps a little older than I was, and he served a small congregation in western Pennsylvania. It turned out that some of his church members did not like him and said uncharitable things about him. My friend said to me,

“That’s okay. I will love them and keep on loving them until they get the message that I really care about them.” That’s what pastors do. They love their people even when it is difficult.

John continues to write in verse 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.”** John is referring to the commandment to love one another, as he says in verse 10, “Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.”

Commentators differ on what John meant when he referred to an **“old commandment.”** It could refer back to the teaching of Jesus since John was writing to the second generation of believers from the time of Jesus.

Or it could be old in that it dates back to the time that John’s readers received the gospel.

Or it could be old in that it dates back to the Old Testament teaching on love, specifically as it was summarized in Leviticus 19:18b, “but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” I think that John was once again being intentionally ambiguous because all three possibilities could apply.

Sometimes people think that love came to the forefront only in the New Testament. However, God’s character did not change from the Old Testament to the New Testament. God has always been a God of love. Of course, today many people don’t understand that love does not mean that I get to do what I want to do. Love is guided by the parameters of God’s character as it is revealed to us in his word. God’s love is demonstrated throughout the Bible, in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. Love is as old as God himself. For God is love.

I. Love Is a New Commandment (2:8)

Second, love is a new commandment.

John writes in verse 8a, **“At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you.”** Now John is talking about a **“new commandment.”** He had been talking about an **“old commandment”** in the previous verse. These are two ways of talking about the same commandment. In one way it is not new but old, and in another way, it is not new. It is a paradox in that it is an “old yet new” commandment. The commandment to love one another is new in the sense that Jesus gave new meaning and depth to the commandment. He modeled love for his own by laying down his life for his brothers and sisters. He gave a fresh expression to an old commandment.

In his commentary on this passage, James Montgomery Boice suggests three ways in which love became new.

First, in Jesus, love became new in “the extent to which it reached.” In Jesus’ day, Jews knew about the old commandment to love. But most of them considered that love should be given only to a small circle of family or friends or, at most, to one’s nation. In fact, to the orthodox Jew, the sinner was not to be loved. Rather, they believed that sinners were those whom God wished to destroy. In addition, the orthodox Jews believed that Gentiles, that is, non-Jews, were created by God to go to hell. But when Jesus came along, he loved everyone. He became the “friend of sinners.” He listened sympathetically to everyone. He spoke with women (who were considered as second-class persons in those days). Jesus even loved Gentiles. Eventually, as John himself said earlier in this letter, Jesus was the propitiation “for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Jesus’ last words to his disciples were that they were to make disciples “of

all nations” (Matthew 28:19) and that they were to be his witnesses “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Second, in Jesus, love became new in “the lengths to which it would go.” Nothing that anyone could ever do to Jesus could turn his love to hate. Examine the life of Jesus carefully and you will never find a fraction of an ounce of hate in him. Look at Jesus on the cross. There he was bearing the sin of a fallen human race. The agony was so excruciating that he was actually alienated and cut off from his heavenly Father. It was so awful and severe that Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). That is the extent to which the love of Jesus goes. Love is an entirely new thing in Jesus.

And third, in Jesus, love is made new in “the degree to which it is realized.” John indicates this by adding in verse 8b, “**...which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.**” In this verse “**true**” (*alēthes, alēthinos*) means “genuine,” and the point is that the true or genuine love is now being seen not only in Jesus but in those who are made alive in him as well. The love of Jesus is now possible for the people of God in a new way because “**the true light is already shining.**”²

I enjoy reading biographies of great men and women. They are instructive as I learn about how they overcame adversity and challenges to accomplish the great things they did accomplish. However, by far the greatest example is Jesus. We have a record of his life – brief as it was – in the four Gospels. There I learn about Jesus’ extraordinary love for sinners – and saints. He modeled in a beautiful way the new commandment

² James Montgomery Boice, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 53.

to “love one another.” And because of the Holy Spirit, believers are now empowered to love as Jesus loved.

III. Love Is a Way of Life (2:9-11)

And third, love is a way of life.

In verses 7-8, John stated the commandment to love. Now, in verses 9-11, he gives three examples of those to whom the test of love may be applied. John was particularly addressing the claims of the false teachers at this point. John gives three examples of love as a way of life. Two examples are negative, and one is positive.

First is the negative example of the one who professes to know God but hates his brother. John writes in verse 9, **“Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.** John is speaking in terms of clear contrasts. He speaks of light and darkness, love and hate. Hate is a lack of love or lack of sympathy. So John is saying that if someone claims to know God, then one evidence of that claim is love for his brother. The word **“brother”** refers not only to fellow believers but is general enough so that it can refer to other persons. Jesus once said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

Love for one another is evidence of knowing God. It is one thing to say that I love others, but love is demonstrated in actions. It is shown in spending time with another person. It is shown in writing a note or a card to someone. It is shown in helping another person with a project. It is shown in hospitality. It is shown in making myself available to help when needed. It is shown when a young man falls in love with a young woman. He spends time with her. He sends her notes. He gives her gifts. He helps out with projects. He has meals with her.

There are many ways to demonstrate Jesus' love to others.

Second is the positive example of the one who loves his brother. John writes in verse 10, **“Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.”** The false teachers claimed to walk in the light. They claimed a special knowledge of God. But, says John, one practical test of a relationship with God is loving one's brother.

Robertson McQuilkin and Muriel Webendorfer met as students at Columbia Bible College. They got married in 1948 and for the next three decades, they raised six children (one of whom was a classmate of mine at seminary) and served God together at a variety of posts, including 12 years as missionaries in Japan. In 1968 they returned to the United States and Robertson became president of Columbia Bible College (now Columbia International University).

In 1981, Muriel was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. It was hard to believe, since the disease – which causes progressive degeneration of the brain – does not usually strike someone so young.

As the next few years went by, Robertson watched helplessly as his fun, creative, loving partner slowly faded away. Muriel knew she was having problems, but she never understood that she had Alzheimer's. “One thing about forgetting is that you forget that you forgot. So, she never seemed to suffer too much with it,” Robertson said.

There was one phrase she said often, however: “I love you.” Robertson learned much about love from Muriel, and from God, during those first few years of her disease. When he was away from her, she became distressed, and would often walk the half-mile to his office several times a day to look for him. Once Robertson was helping take her shoes off and discovered her feet were bloody from walking. He was amazed by

her love for him, and wondered if he loved God enough to be so driven to spend time with him.

By 1990, Robertson knew he needed to decide about his career. The school needed him 100 percent, and Muriel needed him 100 percent. In the end, Robertson says, the choice to step down from his position was easy for him to make. Perhaps the best explanation can be found in the letter he wrote to the Columbia Bible College constituency to explain his decision:

...recently it has become apparent that Muriel is contented most of the time she is with me and almost none of the time I am away from her. It is not just “discontent.” She is filled with fear – even terror – that she has lost me and always goes in search of me when I leave home. So it is clear to me that she needs me now, full-time....

The decision was made, in a way, 42 years ago when I promised to care for Muriel “in sickness and in health...till death do us part.” So, as I told the students and faculty, as a man of my word, integrity has something to do with it. But so does fairness. She has cared for me fully and sacrificially all these years; if I cared for her for the next 40 years I would not be out of her debt.

Duty, however, can be grim and stoic. But there is more: I love Muriel. She is a delight to me – her childlike dependence and confidence in me, her warm love, occasional flashes of that wit I used to relish so, her happy spirit and tough resilience in the face of her continual distressing frustration. I don’t have to care for her. I get to! It is a high honor to care for so wonderful a person.

Robertson relied on Jesus to give him the strength to meet his wife’s needs week after week, month after month. When people asked him if he ever tired of caring for Muriel,

he would often say, “No, I love to care for her. She’s my precious.”³

Yes, Muriel was his spouse. But Robertson relied on Jesus to enable him to love her as Jesus loved him.

And third is the negative example of the one who hates his brother and walks in the darkness. John writes in verse 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.”** John’s false teachers were walking in darkness. They did not even know that they were teaching error. A person who **hates his brother** may be sure that he is still in darkness.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the social test of love in 1 John 2:7-11, let us examine ourselves, to see whether we are in the faith.

How can you be sure that you are a Christian? If you are a Christian, you will love others. Practically, that means that when you have sinned against someone else you will go and seek his or her forgiveness. Additionally, if someone else has sinned against you, then you will show your love by forgiving that person. And finally, you will demonstrate your love even when it is costly. You will give of your money, of your time, and of your effort to demonstrate your love to others.

May God help us to love others as Jesus loved us. Amen.

³ See <https://www.familylife.com/articles/topics/marriage/staying-married/commitment/till-death-do-us-part/>.

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is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org