

July 9, 2017
Sunday Evening Service
Series: 1 John
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2017 David J. Whitcomb

To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from 1 John 2:7-11.

1. What is the “new” commandment, and how does it compare with the “old” commandment?
2. In what way is the command to love other Christians new?
3. What is the difference between liking someone and loving someone?
4. Describe practical ways by which Christians express love to each other.
5. Why are “pretenders” not able to show genuine love for others?

LOVE, NOT LIKE 1 John 2:7-11

The chief sign of a healthy church is not sound orthodoxy, which is knowing and holding fast to sound doctrine or the teaching of the Bible. As important as that truth is, it alone is not a sign of a healthy church. The chief sign of a healthy church is not even sound ortho-praxy in a broad sense. Orthopraxy is the matter of putting sound doctrine into practice. Though right living is vitally important to a local church, it alone is not the sign that the church is spiritually healthy.

To narrow down the definition to John’s teaching, a healthy church is a church in which the people love each other. Are we saying

that we don’t need to know and require accurate teaching of doctrine? Not at all. Rather, an accurate understanding of God’s Word will result in us really, truly loving each other. Are we saying that practicing the commands of Christ, or in a broader sense putting into practice the commands of the Bible, is not necessary? Not at all. But if we are actually practicing the commands of the Bible, we will be loving each other.

I think that in the past generation we have witnessed genuinely born again saints who reacted to a shallow, insincere, non-biblically motivated kind of love that spread through the visible church but was not a sign of spiritual health. In order not to be guilty of a shallow, fleshly, insincere kind of love, we sometimes became unloving. And that is not healthy.

John’s short letter to believers, probably in the church at Ephesus, lays out several tests that prove the genuineness of a professing Christian’s claim that he or she knows Christ. One of the most important tests is love. The word shows up 105 times in this short letter. Do we know what it is? Do we do it?

An Important Command for Light-Kind-of-People (vv.7-8).

John offered the Christians an old commandment. *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 (v.7).* The old command is the word of Christ. Therefore, John’s argument is that by keeping Christ’s commands, we prove that we have come into an intimate relationship with Him. John argued that truth back in verse three: *And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments (v.3).*

That being true, the contrast must also stand. Not to keep Christ’s commands while claiming to know Him is to lie. *Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him (v.4).* The desire and ability to be characterized by keeping Christ’s commands results in Christ’s love being completed in us. *But whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected (v.5a).* And then it only makes sense that keeping Christ’s commands proves that we abide in Him. *By this we may be*

sure that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked (vv.5b-6).

Okay, that was the essential teaching of the old command. It was a command with which Christ's followers are familiar. If you do what Christ taught, you become more like Him. If you do not do what Christ taught, then you have no relationship with Him. That is a simple enough conclusion.

But John was not satisfied to present a broad explanation of Christ's command. In this test, at this point in his letter, John narrowed down the focus on the particular command of Christ to love each other. To love is simply to reflect the character of Christ. Christ, who came into the world because He, the Father, and Holy Spirit love the world. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).* This Christ, who loves the Father and loves us, also commands us to love God supremely and to love other people in general like we love ourselves. *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:38-39).*

In fact, our Lord's command about love was so extreme that He expects us to love our enemies. *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:43-44).*

But Christ's teaching to His followers primarily required love for fellow followers of Christ. He taught the disciples: *"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. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).* In case we were not listening the first time, the Lord repeated the command a couple more times and said, *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12).* *"These things I command you, so that you will love one another" (John 15:17).*

So the old command and new command teach the same thing. But we do well to stop for a bit and determine what the old command requires. It requires us to love fellow Christians. As we contemplate

the depth and breadth of that command, we must admit that love is not the same as like. To like something or someone is to be favorably disposed toward it or him or her. We enjoy being with people we like. We like them because we find something appealing about them. Maybe they have traits similar to our own, or our personalities mesh well. Maybe they are pleasant, cordial, good looking people who make us feel good when we are with them. We often make people like this our friends.

No one feels that way toward an enemy. Christ didn't teach us to like our enemies. In the same way, Jesus Christ did not come to this earth because we fallen, sinful humans are likeable. Jesus didn't suffer and die for David Whitcomb because he is such a nice and likeable fellow. God's Word never indicates that we are supposed to like our enemies, because that would be impossible. Enemies make us uncomfortable and we do not like to be around them.

And even people in the church are not always likeable. If you claimed that you like me all the time, I would have to conclude that either you don't really know me or you are not being honest. And frankly, I am not crazy about being around all of you all the time. We do not have to think very long to come up with reasons why we are not naturally drawn toward each other. That is why Jesus never commanded us to like each other.

A large part of the problem is that the world misidentifies "love" and confuses it with "like." In the world's opinion, two young people who barely know each other fall in love and get married. Then in the process of the next five years, when they really get to know each other, they discover they don't like each other and conclude that they have fallen out of love. Love is something we learn, not something we fall into like a mud puddle.

To that end, a person should not begin attending Community Baptist Church and say, "I really love those people." You can't love us if you don't know us. At first associations you might very well like us, but rest assured that idea will vanish when you get to know us. When we really know each other, we will need to love each other.

That is Christ's command for each of us. He desires for us to love each other. It is not just a feeling. Love is willingness to sacrifice for others. Love is fully aware of, fully acknowledges the other person's weaknesses, idiosyncrasies, oddities, and unlikeable traits.

God the Father was not blind to our unfavorable, yea, our offensive traits when He sent the Beloved Son to be our sacrifice for sin. Love is being fully aware of the recipient of love but still willingly sacrifices so that the recipient can have the very best. The very best for all of us is that we would be conformed to the image of Christ.

That truth leads us to a very important question. What kind of sacrifice are you making right now so that other real individuals in Community Baptist Church can grow to be more like Christ? Are you telling others the good news of the gospel? Are you demonstrating the character of Christ? Are you using the spiritual capacity (spiritual gift) that Christ gave you to benefit others and help them love Christ more? Are you even showing up at meetings which says to others, “I am willing to sacrifice my free time and pleasure in order to help you?” If this conclusion is true, and it is, even a ball game, or a nap, or a hobby that benefits you or makes you happy can be an indication that you don’t love us as much as you love yourself.

That is the old command. It is the same as a new commandment. *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 (v.8).* How can the old command and new command be the same? In the Greek New Testament, there is the idea of something being “new” with respect to time. That is how we normally use the word in English. It is like new wine as opposed to aged wine (Luke 5:38). Or the word speaks of a young person contrasted with an older person (Luke 15:12).

But John didn’t use that word in this verse. Here he used a word that speaks of “new” with respect to quality. When Jesus gave the command for His followers to love each other, it was not simply new at that time, but it was a command of a different quality. The law contains plenty of commands. But this command to love is found in a different kind of context; it operates in an environment of a different quality.

The old command is new because it comes in a darkness versus light context. The new command is best understood as it is demonstrated in Christ which John already established: *This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all (1John 1:5).* Because Christ already condescended to us and died in our behalf, we know what

sacrificial love looks like. That kind of love works only in a “light” context. If we tolerate sin, coddle sin, enjoy sin in our lives, it is very unlikely that we will be willing to sacrifice to help others become more like Christ.

The command to love other Christians only works in the “new quality” life of walking in the light as Christ is in the light. Okay, that leaves us with one simple, plain, painful conclusion. If a church is full of people who do not love each other, someone better do a “sin check.” If an individual who claims to be a follower of Christ is not willing to sacrifice to help others become more like Christ, he or she would do well to follow Paul’s instruction to *examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?— unless indeed you fail to meet the test! (2 Corinthians 13:5).*

In typical John fashion, he now expands on that conclusion. It is as though he has given us the information for which we are responsible. Now he will test us to see if we understand and practice it.

Light-Kind-of-People Love the Brothers (vv.9-11).

There is a great problem in that darkness-kind-of-people are blind. Therefore, what they say might not be true. John pointed out the possibility of making false claims. *Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness (v.9).* All of the verbs in this verse are present tense which indicates lifestyle. John presents to us a picture of a person saying that he or she is in the light. He or she admits that Jesus is the light. People like this understand that the “light” way is distinct from the “dark” way. So they claim that they are living like Jesus. They might even proudly display their W.W.J.D. bracelet.

But at the same time this person is hating his brother. To hate is to be opposed to, to take action against. We typically use the English word with great intensity. However, the New Testament sometimes uses the word comparatively as in “hate is the opposite of love.” An example of that kind of comparison was God’s statement, “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (Romans 9:13). It was not that God was vicious toward Esau like we would use the word

“hate.” Rather God’s love for and choice of Jacob made His attitude toward Esau look like opposition. And yet, even as God promised, He made a great nation out of Esau.

In the same way, professing Christians might play favorites by which they shun less popular Christians and refuse to help them become more like Christ. That was the problem in Corinth according to 1 Corinthians 11:17-22. The people in the church who were well off were avoiding the poorer people and not sharing their food at the love feast. That is what John is talking about here.

The evidence proves the person is not in the light but is characterized by spiritual darkness. Darkness is the characteristic of sin and Satan. Spiritual darkness is devoid of the light of truth. In spite of the person’s claim, there is no light of God present in his life. In John’s setting, it was likely that the people making this claim were also teaching “the Bible.”

We are reminded that just because a person makes a claim does not mean it is true. Why would a person lie about being a Christian? Maybe it is an intentional lie. In some cultures, great benefits are derived from being a “Christian.” Many years ago, a missionary told me about serving in Vietnam before the war. He said that in those days one of the biggest problems they had to deal with was “Rice Christians.” He explained that on days when the missionaries received shipments of rice to hand out, everyone in the villages was a Christian. But then when the rice ran out, the people resorted to their real condition of paganism until there was more rice.

Even in the Bible belt there is still a certain amount of pressure for people to act like, talk like, live in the light – even if it is just on Sunday. In South Carolina it is quite important for a politician to be known as a Christian man or woman.

Maybe the claim is not a lie. Maybe the person is confused. Because they don’t want to go to hell, the person made some kind of religious decision, possibly even in a religious-kind of meeting. But the Holy Spirit never did the miracle of regeneration. As a result, the person still does not have any desire to sacrifice for a “Christian” brother or sister. They might even attend church services fairly regularly, but it is for their own benefit.

The darkness of sin blinds to reality. *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 (v.11). This is the third test proving the validity of fellowship with God. **The first test is theological:** “Do we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, come in the flesh?” (1:1-4). **The second test is moral:** “Are we obeying what Jesus taught and walking in the light?” (1:5-2:6). **The third test is social:** “Are we loving other Christians?” (2:7-11).

The spiritual darkness of sin causes confusion so that the darkened person is not able to pass any of the tests – especially the social test of loving other Christians. It is just like trying to walk in the darkness. If you ever get up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom, you know what this is like, especially if there is no night light. More times than I care to remember, I have stepped on something, or run into a door or a wall. The problem is simple. Because of the darkness, I really don’t know the truth about my immediate environment.

The person who has sin in his life is not capable of discerning truth. Therefore, he cannot do the truth. If we are not able to know truth or do truth, we are not walking in the light that characterizes God. As a result, confused people have no love for fellow Christians but freely claim they are walking in the light of Christ. John says that nothing could be further from the truth.

In contrast to the people who are consumed with spiritual darkness, and therefore are not loving Christians, are the light-kind-of-people who have no cause for stumbling. *Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling (v.10).* Loving fellow Christians is an indication we are living in the light. Again these are all present tense verbs that indicate lifestyle. The words picture someone who is genuinely loving other Christians. John said that such a person is abiding in the light that characterizes God. And that person is not creating a cause for stumbling spiritually.

The light is the light of truth as opposed to the darkness of sin. It is already shining (v.8). John opened the letter with this affirmation: *This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5).* Jesus, the light from God the Father, has come, has lived, has taught. We have the word of Christ. It is our guide, our standard. Or as John argued, *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we*

have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

We know what the light is. The question is whether we are walking in it, living according to it? People who are living according to Christ's teaching willingly sacrifice for the good of fellow Christians, and people who are willingly sacrificing for other Christians do so because they are living in the light of Christ's truth.

That is the test. Now are we able to apply the test? Imagine being one of the people in the church who received John's letter. The first question we might ask in that setting is, "Was John talking about me?" But then we also realize, "Oh. John is explaining how we can know and identify those false teachers who claim to have special knowledge about God but who are not even born again."

The application of the test means that God expects us to examine ourselves, and then He also expects us to discern the testimony of others lest we be led astray by them. A few weeks ago, I was in a conversation with a man who asked, "In light of the population in America being about 325 million, how many millions of people do you think are truly born again?" After some thought I responded, "I'm not sure it's millions, but maybe more like thousands." He was incredulous. But I still think if we simply apply the tests from 1 John, we have to conclude that there really are not that many people walking in the light of Christ in America.

How do you feel about your fellow Christian here? Your feeling is actually pretty obvious. God does not ask us to like everyone. God's desire is for us to love each other enough to sacrifice to help others become more like Christ. We can do that for people we don't even like.