

**WALKING IN THE LIGHT- First John and the Path to Living Deeply in Christ - Part seven**  
**Sunday, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2076**  
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## **LEARNING TO LIVE IN THE LOVE OF GOD**

**1 John 2:7-11 - "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."**

We need to pause long enough to see how this text is linked with the verses we studied last week:

**1 John 2:4-6 - "Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, [5] but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: [6] whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."**

Knowing God isn't a matter of *knowledge* or even *profession*. Those things alone don't reach the fallen human heart. "**Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked**." It's not the *talk*, but the *walk* that matters.

That's John's description of knowing God in very general terms. Holiness is important, not in some legalistic sense, but because sin is destructive to my knowing and loving and living in Father God. John hasn't yet talked about any particular sin as being especially destructive or any particular virtue as being especially life giving. But he will. John is too good a teacher and too loving a pastor to leave this all in general terms. He knows everyone agrees with *general* truth. It's *particular* truth that can become irritating.

Exactly what kind of actions are so damaging to my walk with Jesus? And exactly what kind of holiness and obedience is Jesus looking for in my life?

Ask yourself, if somebody just came to the Lord - or some Christian concerned about spiritual health and wanting more depth and growth in Christ Jesus - if such a person came to you and said, "I want to grow

in the Lord. I don't have any specific agenda. I just want to know, what's the most important thing I need to put into practice to really walk closely with Jesus?" And if you couldn't tell him or her **ten** things, but could only tell **one** thing, what would you say?

What kind of sins would you warn them about? Drinking? Drugs? Pornography? Lying? Swearing? Materialism? No doubt all of those things are important and should be covered at some point. But what would you say **first**?

Or what kind of positive instruction would you want to set in place first? Church attendance? Bible reading? Prayer? Tithing? Again, all of those things are very important and should be covered. But in terms of the specifics of holiness and walking with Jesus, what would you cover **first**?

Now that is exactly what we get to see in our present text from John. We're seeing what's **first** on this old, wise, apostle's agenda. He's been talking about **walking in the light**, about enjoying fellowship with Jesus. He says sin must be avoided at all costs. And he will write about many different types of sin in this letter. But what does he mention first? He will also write about many different ways of serving and pleasing the Lord. But what does he mention first?

That's the subject of these next five verses:

- 1) **HAVING PROFESSED MY LOVE FOR THE LORD, THE FIRST COMMANDMENT I MUST OBEY IS THE COMMAND TO DEEPLY LOVE EACH AND EVERY BROTHER AND SISTER IN THE LORD**

**1 John 2:7** - "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."

Before he gets into the specifics, John says he's not dishing up something brand new in our text. This is not some extra spiritual insight for those who have really advanced in the Christian life. This is not something I should pray about and hope that one day I'll grow into this kind of love for my brothers and sisters in the church I attend. This, says John, has **always** been right at the starting gate, the bedrock foundation on which everything else in my relationship with God is

constructed.

In other words, John is actually saying something like this: "Don, you need to remind yourself about what kind of decision you made when you first came to Jesus and said He was your Lord. Because anyone can **call** Jesus Lord - '**Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him....'** But Don, if you are **really** following Jesus there's something very important you need to remember. When you signed on - when you were **saved** - you didn't just make a decision about **Jesus**. You made a decision about all those who **bear His name!**"

John puts it so starkly because I don't always like to ponder this point - especially when someone has upset or hurt me, or trampled on my rights. When I came to Jesus I made the decision that I would always extend the same **genuine affection** and **heart-felt grace** to everyone who names the name of Jesus that I, as an undeserving sinner, **received** from Jesus. If **He's** Lord, then **they're** family. I can't have one without the other.

So John says, "This is old stuff. This is the way it's always been. There have never been any exceptions to this kind of conversion."

This is the point Jesus was making in **Matthew 22:37-40**. Someone asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment. Very tellingly, here's what Jesus said: "**And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. [38] This is the great and first commandment. [39] And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. [40] On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.'**"

Don't blank out that last phrase. It has everything to do with Jesus' main idea. Everything the Law and the Prophets wrote about - that's the **whole revelation** of Jesus' day - **everything** God had revealed about knowing Him and serving Him - absolutely everything **"depended"** on these **"two commandments"**(22:40).

Do you see what Jesus is saying? If I'm going to **please** God at all - if I'm going to **know** Him at all - it all **depends** on how well I understand that these two commands are really not **two** but

**one.** I can't keep the first without focusing on the second. Love for God and love for my neighbor are inseparable. Jesus was only asked for **one** command. Why did he feel obligated to give them **two**? He did so because Jesus knew the **first** command can't be kept apart from the **second**. Simply put, there is no such thing as the first command apart from the second.

Jesus is saying the same thing John says in our text. Any fool can **claim** to love God. How many choruses do we sing serenading God with our love songs? But how do I know if I really **do**? How do I **prove** love for God? How is it **measured**?

Jesus and John are both saying that if you love God you must - absolutely **must** - love your brother and your sister who names His name. And I can't just **say** I love my brother. That's very easy to do because I know I'm supposed to love him and so I'd better.

No. John's talking about the kind of **fellowship** you have with the person the Holy Spirit brings to your mind. It's **fellowship** with God we have through Christ. And it's **fellowship** we're to have with that brother or sister. Your fellowship with God can't rise any higher than the fellowship the Spirit's calling you to with that brother or sister in Christ.

Why is my love for **you** the measuring stick for my love for **God**? Here's why. Both John and Jesus know how easy it is to **fake** love for God. You can't see into my heart. You don't know what's going on in my head.

It's very easy to **proclaim** my love for God with complete safety because **He's** invisible. And if **He's** invisible, so is my **love** for Him invisible. I have no conversations with God that you can hear. I can proclaim total loyalty to Him and never be proven a phoney. Who can challenge my invisible love - from my invisible heart - for my invisible God? I can even fool **myself** about how much I really love Him.

Then in comes John with the evidence. He says my invisible love for God leaves visible tracks - **1 John 4:20-21** - "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. [21] And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."

Remember our opening question. What's the *first* thing a person needs to know about loving God and becoming more and more like Him? John says the first point is clear. I love God no more than I love the brother or sister I dislike the most. My first obligation as a Christian is to love my brothers and sisters in the Lord. This is an old commandment. It's always been this way.

2) **JOHN SAYS THERE IS SOMETHING NEW ABOUT THE OLD COMMAND TO LOVE MY BROTHER OR SISTER IN CHRIST**

**1 John 2:8** - "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."

To see what's new about this command I want you to come back with me to a small, dimly lit room where John was present years earlier and Jesus was going to talk about loving one another:

**John 13:1-5, 12-17, 33-35** - "[13:1-5].... Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. [2] During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, [3] Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, [4] rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist...."[12-17].... "When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, 'Do you understand what I have done to you?'[13] You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. [14] If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. [15] For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. [16] Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. [17] If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them....[33-35].... Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' [34] 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. [35] By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.**"

Like all of us, John thought he knew about love until he met Jesus. We know what love means to us. We think about love for our children, love for our husbands or wives, love for our parents, love for our dear friends and companions.

But John found out the command to love can't be understood until you come with Jesus to the cross. That's what Jesus was preparing them all for in that little room. And when we come to the cross of Jesus we see love for people who ***hate*** - who ***betray*** - who ***despise*** - who ***kill***. We get to observe a love for people who reject everything we say and believe in - who rebel against everything we try to do. On the cross we see a love that Peter says wouldn't even speak back in a harsh tone when nails were driven through its hands:

**1 Peter 2:22-24** - "He [Jesus] committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. [23] When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. [24] He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."

No wonder when Jesus talks about His costly love for them - and how they should love each other, He asks, "***Do you really understand what I have done for you?***" (John 13:12). And I'm so quick to say "Yes, Lord. I understand. You died for my sins. Thank you!" And Jesus says "No. It's not just that!"

**John 13:15** - "For I have given you an **example**, that you also should do just as I have done to you."

Obviously we can't die for each other's sins. Only Jesus did that. So how is what Jesus did for us an example? What do Peter and John say I must copy in His love?

Simply this. I am frequently called to bear the burden and pain and cost of other people's wrong actions against me in my own person - without any attempt to get even or settle the score. And

the love command is new because it has been **expanded** and **deepened** in the embrace of Jesus Christ.

When He took my wicked heart into His embrace He filled it with **forgiving grace** - not only with forgiving grace for **my** sins - but **through me**, forgiving grace for **yours too**. The only kind of love I've received from Jesus is love that is **undeserved**. That's the only kind of love the Holy Spirit sheds abroad in and through my life.

So Jesus asks again, "**Don, do you really understand what My love is all about?**"

No Lord. Not very well at all. But I am learning why this law of love is ever new in my experience. I never learn it once and for all because situations constantly arise that show me how little I know about it. The demands for this kind of love are infinite and unending. It will take constant effort to live like this right up to the day Jesus returns. I can never forget about it. It's not some doctrine I can quietly tuck away in the back of my mind to say "I'm orthodox after all."

I am constantly pressed into situations with people where I have to plead the help of the Holy Spirit - that inward sweet, forgiving, embracing, non-retaliatory love of God. I've known it all along. But I never learn it once and for all. It's both old and new.

### 3) **LOVE BRINGS YOUR WHOLE LIFE INTO THE LIGHT OF GOD'S PRESENCE**

If living in this new command is so demanding and so humbling, **why** would anybody make the effort? What happens when I swallow my pride and do what John says?

**1 John 2:9-11 - "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."**

We all tend to say we are still walking in the light (that is, walking with Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives) even when we're at odds with our brother. We try not to call that feeling of **againstness**

with our brother sinful. We still **say** we're walking with Jesus. That's what these verses are all about. But they say even more than that.

I had always seen that John calls love for my brother the **evidence** of my relationship with God. And hatred for a brother reveals I'm still living in darkness and out of fellowship with God. But John isn't just saying that hatred **reveals** the darkness. He's saying hatred **contributes** to the darkness. It causes me to "**stumble**" - "**Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.**"

The important word in that verse is the word "**cause**" - "**....there is no cause for stumbling.**" This is profound. Love for my brother (John's **not** talking about my love for God here) **keeps** me from stumbling. But that also means if I **don't** love my brother - and love him in **deed and attitude and truth**, not just in **word** - if I **don't** love him as much and in the same way as God loved me in Jesus Christ - then this will be the **cause** of my spiritual stumbling in all sorts of other areas I don't even **relate** to my hatred for my brother.

Pay close attention to what John is saying. He's writing to people who can't figure out why they can't get things organized spiritually in their lives. There are people who just can't seem to get their Christian walk moving. They can't find the **handle** on their walk with the Lord. They can't seem to make the right decisions. Or when they **do** know what they should do, they can't follow through on those choices consistently. They constantly fall into the same sins over and over.

And they do this because **that's what stumbling is. It's falling down over and over again.** These people are always agitated on the inside. They have to constantly **argue with themselves to prove their own righteousness.** They're always in trouble with their own souls. They feel miserable and guilty. They may not even know why, but John says to look at this area of life **first.**

In my whole life I don't think I've ever heard a Christian admit, "That's right. I just plain, flat out hate brother so and so!" And John **knows** I never would admit that - even to myself. That's why both John and Jesus start with the other end of the stick: "**Do you love everyone in the church?**" And by that they both mean: "**Do you treat them with exactly the same grace and kindness and forgiveness that you've received from Jesus?**"



This goes way beyond the golden rule. **"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"** is the **old** command about love. Since the cross the rule is much newer and stronger. It's **"Do unto others what Jesus has already done for you!"**

And if this law seems demanding to you right now because you're the one who has been angered and mistreated and betrayed, John reminds you that this law is the only one that has the power to keep you from **stumbling** in other areas of life as well. In fact, James, knowing full well how hard this kind of grace-filled love can be when we've been wronged actually calls this law of love the **"law that gives freedom."** Giving in to our own instincts will put everything else about the whole life in bondage. John says it's like a cripple without a walker who can't stop the stumbling, no matter how hard he tries.

Here's how it works. When I was a kid my dad came home one day from the radio station where he did a little religious broadcast with an incredible treasure. It was a used recording of old fairy tales that no one today would even listen to. But we had no television and our imaginations were better than any video game. We quite literally wore that record to nothing but a bunch of scratches. I remember the telling of "Jack and the Beanstalk," "Rumpelstiltskin," "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde", and a host of others.

Among them was a story that probably would have been more appreciated by four girls than four boys, but we listened through it to get to the good stories. It was the tale of "Beauty and the Beast." The beast is a foul, ugly creature who shouldn't expect love from anyone, let alone someone totally beautiful. But beauty loves the beast anyway. Beauty doesn't love the beast because he **is** beautiful. In loving him she makes him **become** beautiful.

Back to the apostle John. Gospel love isn't a fairy tale. It has incredible power. It frees and unleashes the power of the kingdom of God in the lives of all who share it. Both in its **giving** and in its **receiving** it beautifies all it touches because it carries the Spirit of Jesus in it. It isn't magic. It's God. It's the only force that can make all of us inwardly ugly, marred people beautiful.

We know this is true because we're gradually experiencing this kind of transformation **ourselves**. How does Jesus change my life? He does it by loving me while I am still unlovable -

while I'm still unlovely. That's when He **gives** me His love, and if I ever forget that, I am of all men most miserable and delusional:

**"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..."**

**"For the love of Christ constrains us...."**

**"We love Him because he first loved us...."**

God's love transforms us. Love is His primary tool to make us holy.

Now we all are called to live by the Jesus' command. It's new because it has the power of the cross in it - **"You love one another just in the same way I have loved you - or don't talk about loving me at all."**

God grant us the wisdom and the strength to do it - right away.