

The Second Test

1 John 2:7-11

I have chosen to continue the series of sermons from 1 John during this time when we meet only once for worship, and I want to begin this morning with a reminder of the overview of this whole letter, namely that you, his readers, might know that you have eternal life. That you might know that you have been saved. That you might know that you are a Christian. That you might know that your sins are forgiven. The assurance of your forgiveness.

The foundation of that sure and certain knowledge is, of course, Jesus. The man Jesus. The God-man Jesus. And so the book begins,

1 John 1:1 "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— 2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us..."

But it isn't just bare doctrine, bare knowledge, that John describes. So he continues,

1 John 1:3 "...that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full."

Joy, in the knowledge that you belong to God, that you belong to Jesus. That you know Jesus.

v.3

That's the first test, the first evidence, the first confirmation

that you do, indeed, have a relationship with God was our focus last week. It was a moral test. The test of obedience. Not obedience sufficient to earn our own salvation. Not obedience as a way to atone for your sins. But obedience as the evidence of God's work in your life. So again,

v.3

In other words, if you know God, then it will show in your life. And when it shows in your life, that becomes the assurance that God has saved you! That is the evidence. This morning, the second test, the second demonstration of evidence that you are a believer, a Christian. This is a social test. A relationship test.

I. THE TEST OF LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER.

v.10a "He who loves his brother abides in the light..."

Remember that John uses the image of "light" for life itself. To abide in the light, to live in the light, is to enjoy life itself. To be alive, in relationship to God.

1 John 1:5 "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."

John 1:4 "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

John 8:12 "Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

John 12:35 Then Jesus said to them, “A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. 36 While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

So who are the sons of light? Those who love one another.

A. The genuineness of your faith is demonstrated by your relationship with one another.

Again, I’m using the word “test.” In the sense of demonstration.

v.10

Likewise,

1 John 3:14 “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.”

When Paul dealt with the thorny issue in the churches of Galatia where certain Jewish Christians were requiring all those who came to believe in Jesus to be circumcised, he wrote,

Gal. 5:6 “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.”

James 2:14 “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

This is a necessary part of what it means to demonstrate the sincerity of your faith. This is the evidence. Love for one another.

A willingness to love another. And, by contrast, a rejection of hate. John is pretty plain, here, noting that,

B. There is an absolute distinction between love and hatred.

v.9

It’s a contradiction. If you say you are a Christian, but demonstrate hatred, you are deceiving yourself. You are still in the darkness of unbelief. That’s what John says. Paul puts it this way,

1 Cor. 13:2 “And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”

You can’t say one thing, about your faith in Jesus, and then contradict it by exercising hatred in life. And hatred takes a lot of forms, doesn’t it? Abuse, slander, false accusations, mean-spiritedness, unjust anger, disregard, gossip, cruelty, harmfulness, and I could go on. If you treat people that way, you cannot claim to be walking in the light of the gospel. There is a contradiction.

Similarly,

v.11

1 John 4:20 “If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”

It’s one or the other. Love or hatred. And John goes even farther in this point, namely that,

C. Your relationships with one another will affect all of your life.

Actually, in our text, either for the good or the bad. If you love one another appropriately, then that will affect your whole life for the better. If you hate one another, that will affect your whole life for the worse. Look at that negative first. With the image of light and darkness, he makes a really logical point. If you are walking in darkness, you are going to stumble! You are going to get lost!
v.11

John is so good in his writing about using very simple words and very simple ideas, then using those simple words and ideas to communicate very deep and profound ideas. If you live with hatred of one another, you will stumble in all of life. You will wander in the darkness not knowing where to go and where to turn. It's just inevitable. Inescapable.

The same idea works in the positive example as well.
v.10

That's actually of great encouragement, isn't it. If you live in the light, if you genuinely demonstrate love for one another, then "there is no cause for stumbling in him."

Listen to how Peter describes the progress of your Christian life and growth in godliness.

2 Peter 1:5 "But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, 6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, 7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. 8 For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Love becomes the pinnacle of that list. So if you have love,

you will have the rest, in their proper order. Your relationships with one another will affect all of your life. If you love others well, "there is no cause for stumbling in [you]."

So that's the test. Love for one another. John then adds an interesting thought. He says two things that seem to be contradictory, but he describes them that way in order to make clear the point of his rhetoric about the importance of love. That love is an old command, then that it is a new command. First of all, that,

II. LOVE IS AN OLD COMMAND.

v.7

What does he mean? Actually, I think, several things. Perhaps most notably, with emphasis on the full and literal sense of the phrase "from the beginning," John emphasizes that love has always been God's will for his creatures. "From the beginning." All the way back even to creation, from the beginning of time when made the heavens and the earth. When he made man in his own image, male and female, there was imbedded in the heart of man this concept of love.

A. From the beginning, written on the hearts of all mankind.

God would have his creatures love each other.

Sometimes that can be called natural law, the law written on the heart and conscience of a human being. It's why even non-Christians can show love. Sometimes, sadly, in my experience, even better than Christians. Some people, in their sinful wickedness and rebellion against God, suppress this natural law of love, but it is still there. It has been there from the beginning. There is, written on the hearts of all human beings, the law of love.

So non-Christians can do some nice things for you. They can and do show love sometimes, to do acts of love. And some even regret when they fail. Again, my point, that is how God made man, in his image, to know and to exercise love.

Adam and Eve knew this love before the law was given. They knew the command to love as it was written on their hearts. From the beginning.

This is always a fascinating subject to consider, because it helps you understand what is so different and unique about human beings. We are simply creatures of habit or instinct. We are moral creatures, and though we sinned in Adam and inherited a fallen nature from him, though, by that nature, we are enslaved to sin, still, even then, there is this law of God written upon the human heart. From the beginning. The law of love.

I think there is another sense in which John uses this idea of an old command, from the beginning, and that is, more simply, that as John writes this letter rather late in the period of time before the writing of Scripture ended, he emphasizes that this command has always been a central and crucial aspect of the message of the gospel of Jesus. There is nothing novel here. Nothing new or different than all that Jesus has ever taught. The law of love,

B. From the beginning, embedded always in the gospel of Jesus.

That idea is important for us, too, because we need to be able to say ourselves, there is nothing new here. As I preach the gospel, as I preach a sermon on this passage, I need to be able to say to you, there is nothing new here. No novelty. Nothing ingenious that I have come up. Nothing original with me. It's all been here, from the beginning of the gospel, since the beginning

of this new inaugurated by the first coming of Jesus. The message of the Christian faith has always, from the very beginning, focused upon our duty and obligation as Christians to love one another.

So we read,

1 John 3:11 “For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, 12 not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous.”

2 John 5 “And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. 6 This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.”

In the academic world, there is always a clamor for something new. Novelty. If you get your PhD degree, you have to publish a dissertation that is new! You have to prove your worth and worthiness by coming up with something new. That is often called academic freedom. But that isn't what you want in a preacher. That isn't the qualification for an effective preacher or for a good sermon, that there be something new. In fact, just the opposite. You want faithfulness to what God has already revealed in the past and made known to us. As Jude writes

Jude 3 “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

Love is an old command, written on the hearts of all mankind

from the creation of the world, and embedded since the very beginning in the gospel of Jesus. And in that context, even the command to love as Jesus declares it is a law coming out of the law of the Old Covenant. When Jesus declares that second great commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself, he simply quotes the Old Testament.

Lev. 19:18 “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”

That is certainly the idea the Jesus emphasizes in the sermon on the mount, when he takes that Old Testament law and applies it to the lives of his disciples today.

Matt. 5:17 “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. 19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

So the NT does not contradict the OT law, and it does not remove the obligation of that law. The law is the same, and has been since the beginning, love God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself.

So v.7 is true. Love is an old command. But what about v.8. Now he says it is a new command. What does that mean? Is this a contradiction in the Bible? Is this an error in John’s writing? Certainly not. This command has always been part of God’s law, it has always been Jesus’ message, from the very beginning. But also,

III. LOVE IS A NEW COMMAND.

How so? That is the question.

v.8

What does he mean? What is the newness of this old command? Certainly, we could answer, in the emphasis Jesus gives it, raising this command to love to the height of importance within God’s law. But I believe more is meant here, and perhaps the best way to put that is that,

A. Jesus lived out and demonstrated a new and fuller meaning of love.

He embodied love, in himself. For example,

John 15:12 “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”

Well, in terms of personal application and implications for your life, that is certainly new! No longer is love to be defined by external acts, nor any ceremonial laws and regulations. Love is shown forth in action, in deed. And the definition provided is Jesus’ own. So we read this,

1 John 3:16 “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”

And we read this, with specific applications to a husband,

Eph. 5:25 “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not

having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. 28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.”

This is a new and fuller meaning of love, the total and complete selfless love by which you give honor and preference to others, even unto death. Jesus revolutionized the command to love, by giving it such an intensity and depth of meaning. Jesus' life defined love! And Jesus would not allow anyone to pick and choose whom to love. He severely criticized the Pharisees, who took this OT command to love their neighbor as an excuse to hate their enemy. Jesus would have none of that.

Mat. 5:43 “You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

So the plain meaning of the parable of the good samaritan comes into focus, where Jesus points out that we are not given the freedom to pick our neighbors, as those whom we will love. But rather are called to be the neighbor by showing that love to others. Thus the conclusion of that parable,

Luke 10:36 “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” 37 And he said,

“He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

One more thought about the newness of this command, again with reference to the incarnation of Jesus as a man.

B. Jesus inaugurated a new age of gospel revelation.

It was a new age, the age that began when he was born as a man. There is a new light that shines in the darkness, and the newness is not so much a change from what was past, as if we went from something false to something true, but there is now a much fuller and clearer revelation. There is more clarity. No longer types and shadows, but now the real thing has come. Jesus is the full and final revelation of God to us, the full and final revelation of God's love. And so this commandment is new “because it belongs to this new age which has been ushered in by the shining of the true light.” (Stott)

So Jesus has come in the flesh. And in his flesh, he showed us what love it all about.

1 John 3:16 “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

Such self-sacrificing love for one another is the evidence of the saving work of God in your life, such that you might be able to know that you know him, that you might know that you have eternal life in him.