

## Commanded to Love

Text: 1 John 2:7-11

Exegetical Big Idea: Those who are truly in fellowship with God mirror Christ's sacrificial love for their brothers and sisters.

Homiletical Big Idea: If we love Jesus, we're going to love people.

Fallen Condition Focus: People are hard to love sometimes, and we may if we are not careful fall into a habit of focusing on theology or practice of Christianity that ignores the people.

Intro: [A few years back I had strep throat and had to go see the doctor to get some antibiotics. She's a great doctor and listened to my problem and took a look and wrote me a script and in a few days I was feeling much better. But imagine how differently it could have been. Imagine I went to a doctor and sat down with him, and he starts to discuss with me the anatomy of a throat. "See you have your tonsils there Jason, and that dangly thing in back is called your uvula. Now at the back of your throat there is a fork in the road, one side goes down into your stomach, and that's called your esophagus. It's kind of a spongy muscly thing that works your food down when you swallow. The other tube is called your trachea, and it's not spongy at all, it's actually made up of many cartilage rings and has a structure. Now this is important Jason because that's how you breathe. You need it to be a rigid tube so it doesn't collapse. Ok well Jason that's all the time I have for you today, I'm always here if you need me, don't hesitate to give me a call. Bye!"

Now all of that may be very interesting information, although maybe for some it was boring, but whatever you think of the anatomy of a throat, I still have a problem. My doctor can be the smartest doctor in the world, but if he or she does not help fix the problem that the patient has, they are not authentically a doctor! You cannot be a doctor if you do not have any concern for your patients.

Church, it's the same with us. We can know theology, we can play the right music, we can use the right words. We can pray the right prayers. We can have our Bibles memorized. But if we do not have love for people, we are not authentically following Jesus. Do you love Jesus? I hope you do. You want to know one way you can have assurance that you truly love Jesus? You love people.

**If we love Jesus, we're going to love people.**

### **Verses 7-8 Love for each other is tied to the gospel**

John starts off this section by first calling the people his "dear friends" or "beloved". We know he's writing to the churches in Ephesus, but he makes it plain here that he is directly addressing those who he considers to be authentic Christians. And he has a command for them, but it's nothing they haven't heard before. This command is one they have had from the beginning. It's the message they have heard. Now this can mean none other than the gospel message itself. They are established churches at this point, existing for at least 30 to 40 years. John later on in chapter 3 says "this is his (God's) command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ." So the old command is to respond in faith to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But then John goes on to say that yet, he *is* writing them a new command. So how can this be? How Can John say that this is both an old command that is not new, and yet it is a new command?

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I think this has something to do with the way the false teachers were speaking of their knowledge. A big part of the false teachers' teaching was that God gives people a secret knowledge. And this secret knowledge is something new and novel, never heard of before, and only the elite, God's favourites will get this new knowledge. So John is refuting this by saying he is *not* coming up with something novel. The command he will be talking about is something that has always been the case, something that is built right into the gospel.

[I remember in science class being taught the difference between what's called a homogenous mixture and a heterogeneous mixture. A heterogeneous mixture is a mixture between 2 components that if you tried hard enough you can separate. If you take a spoonful of salt and a spoon full of pepper and mixed them together, well it would take you a while, but with a pair of tweezers and a magnifying glass you could eventually separate them. But take a spoon full of sugar for example and put that spoonful of sugar into a cup of coffee and stir it around, no amount of time or effort will be enough to separate the two components again. Both things separately, have now become one.]

This new command that John will talk about is inseparable from the gospel.

Jesus says in John 13 "a new command I give to you. Love one another as I have loved you" and then Jesus goes on to say that this is how the world will know that we are his disciples." John is saying that in a way, it *is* a new command because Jesus himself calls it a new command.

This command is "new" in the sense that Jesus taught radical, sacrificial love to one another. Think of when Jesus says in Matt. 5:38-42 if someone makes you go with them a mile, go 2. The Pharisees had gotten so wrapped up in the technicalities of the law that sure they carried them out (although not perfectly) to a "T". Their fault was that they did not obey the spirit of the law. When they had done what was required, they could claim they had done enough and no more kindness was necessary. And here Jesus comes along and turns that on its head. If someone strikes you, don't take revenge, give them another cheek to strike again if they want. If someone sue you for your tunic, give them your cloak as well. If someone makes you walk a mile when them, walk 2. What is this? Radical love for even your enemies. This is the kind of love that accompanies authentic faith in the gospel.

The second part of that verse in chapter 3 is "...and to love one another as he commanded us"

We can see that this is what John is getting at because of what he says next in verse 8 "its truth is seen in him (Jesus) and in you.

The truth, and literally the word "genuine" or "authentic" is used here, the authenticity of this command is seen in Jesus. In other words, Jesus embodies this command! Of course he did! Jesus perfectly embodied this command every day of his life as he taught and proclaimed the Kingdom of God, as he healed people and forgave people, and ultimately as he marched up the hill of Calvary towards his death for the sins of the very people who were whipping him and beating him and cursing him, not to mention the sins of the people not even born yet. Jesus embodied the command to love.

And if Jesus embodied this command, and we are authentic followers of Jesus, then by nature we too are to embody the command to love. That's why John says that the truth of the command is seen in him, that is Jesus, and in us.

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The only way we can possibly embody this command is if Jesus himself empowers us to do so through the Holy Spirit. We are not wired up this way! We are naturally wired up to be selfish, but with the coming of Jesus, something changed.

There's a reason why all of history is divided into 2 parts, "B.C." and "A.D". These stand for "Before Christ" and "Anno Domini (In the Year of our Lord)". The coming of Jesus and his life death and resurrection was *the* turning point in history.

[Anyone want to guess how many days there are until Christmas? 111 as of today. I have friends who have made it a tradition to stay up until midnight on October 31<sup>st</sup> and as soon as it strikes midnight, they put up their Christmas decorations. Why? Because they are counting down the days until December 25<sup>th</sup> in eager anticipation of the joy that it will bring. We know that Christmas is coming, and the closer it gets, the more involved we all are. Go to the stores right now and everything on the shelf will be back to school stuff, next it will be Halloween stuff, but as soon October 31<sup>st</sup> is over with, the store will be filled with Christmas light and decorations and trees and wrapping paper and everything Christmas related. It's all part of the countdown in anticipation for Christmas.]

Jesus started a countdown with his first coming. He fulfilled all the promises of God made even in the opening chapters of the Bible that sin would be dealt with, and Jesus death and resurrection brought that light! John writes in verse 8 that the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

Darkness here is sin, or the realm of sin. It's easy to look around us and see all throughout human history the ugliness of sin and the death and destruction that it causes. The kingdom of darkness is a powerful kingdom! But the days of evil are numbered. Jesus began the dawning of a new age. With his death and resurrection, he proved his victory over sin and death. They no longer have dominion over the human soul. Jesus brought with him the Kingdom of God, and with each passing day the darkness is being driven out more and more by the light of the gospel of Christ and his Kingdom. The gospel is going forth and people are hearing it and believing it and lives are being changed. Jesus himself proclaimed many times "the Kingdom of God is here". The kingdom of God is here because the King of that Kingdom is here and reigns over all. Jesus showed his power over the material realm, sickness, the cosmos, and death itself.

The age of the Church is a peculiar age. We have seen and experienced the victorious work of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection. We who believe have been brought from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of light. And yet, this kingdom is not fully realized is it? We know this. Victory is certain, but full realization of that victor is still ahead in the future. We call this the already and not yet part of the age we live in. But John is encouraging his people of this when he says that the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

At first it seems weird that John would seem to change subjects so quickly, and yet understanding this idea of the passing away of darkness and the appearing of the light is crucial for understanding what comes next.

**If we love Jesus, we're going to love people.**

**Verses 9-10: loving each other is in our Christian nature.**

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John picks up again this theme of light and darkness to frame the next few verses.

Here John gets very specific about how the false teachers were hypocritical in their claim to have fellowship with God. We have already seen that they claim to have fellowship with God, but it is clear that their actions towards Christians was not loving.

John writes that anyone who claims to be in the light (meaning fellowship with God), and yet hates his brother is still in darkness.

Likely what is happening here is that the false teachers are trying to gain support in the church for their new teaching, and in so doing are causing splits in the church. They are showing contempt for John and John's authentic teaching of the gospel and likely also contempt for those who are holding onto John's teaching and not accepting the teaching of the false teachers.

John though says that this does not show that they are right, but exactly the opposite. Showing hatred for a brother or sister shows that you are not regenerated by God, since love for each other is tied to the gospel. You cannot accept the gospel call, and not also the call to love your brother or sister.

[This of course should remind us of the parable of the Good Samaritan.]

Church, we can have all the right theology, we can say and believe all the right things, we can be reading our Bibles every day, and praying often, all of which are great things, but if they are not accompanied by love for each other, they are useless because it only reveals that the gospel has not authentically taken hold in our lives. Remember what Paul say in 1 Corinthians 13. If he speaks in tongues, or prophesies, or can understand mysteries and special knowledge, or have faith that can move mountain, but has not love, then he's a resounding gong. In other words, he's an annoying sound that nobody wants to hear.

We are going to have disagreements among us. We're going to have spats. We're going to get frustrated with each other! We will because every one of us will struggle with sin until we stand before Jesus one day. But if we are authentic believers in Christ, grace will abound in those situations.

[We have made it a common practice in our home to always try and be quick with asking for forgiveness, and quick in giving it. And this practice is not just for the kids to each other, or the kids to us adults, but us adults to each other, and us adults to the kids. You know how many times I have said "I'm sorry, do you forgive me" to my wife and kids? Now I could chose instead of seeking forgiveness, to try and win the argument as to why I was right and they were wrong, but you know what's more important than being right all the time and winning an argument? Having a relationship with my kids and wife.]

You know what I want more than winning an argument with you? Is asking for your forgiveness when I sin. Is being quick to give grace when you sin against me. Ultimately, I want real family relationship with you, because loving Jesus means we love each other. How can I hate you when God himself loved you enough to send his one and only Son to die on the cross for you to reconcile you to himself?

If we had this attitude, and we longed to grow in it more and more, we will be bright shining lights to all around us, testifying to the Love of God. I think this is what John is getting at when he says in verse 10 "whoever loves his neighbor lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble."

The idea of stumbling is connected to the idea of sinning.

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But Church, as we walk in the light, we are aware of our own sin and the sin of others. Since we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, who was the atoning sacrifice for our sins, then we are forgiven before God and we have the capacity to forgive each other. As we receive grace upon grace and new mercies from God every morning, we more and more embody the gospel as our Saviour did. We love, because he first loved us.

**If we love Jesus, we're going to love people.**

### **Verse 11: Hatred for others has eternal consequences.**

As John has been doing a lot so far in this letter, after explaining one side of things, he makes sure we understand the other side of the coin. John continues and writes "but, whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness"

[One of the youth events that we the youth like to do is a big game of hide and seek in the church. We do this in the winter or fall when the evenings are dark. We turn off all the lights in the church and people go hide and the person who is "it" has to go find them. We usually open up most of these two buildings to make a big area for hiding. There is one area however that is completely off limits. This balcony up here. Believe it or not, it can be dangerous. You may ask, well if it's dangerous how come we use it Sunday after Sunday? Well the answer is, because on a Sunday morning, when the sun is pouring in and the lights are on, we can all safely navigate our way up there. But in the night, in the darkness, one trip can send someone flyer over that railing. The difference is the light]

The darkness can be a dangerous thing. John's warning here is that hating your brother or sister is a sure sign that you are in dangerous territory walking in the darkness of sin.

How is someone able to look at a person whom God loves, and for whom Christ died, and treat that person with hatred? The only answer is that they do not know or believe the gospel, and they do not know Christ. They are in darkness. They live in sin because they have not been cleansed from their sin. And look at how John describes it, he says they "walk around in the darkness". Now, picture somebody walking in darkness. How do they walk? They stumble! The exact opposite of how a person walks in the light. The picture here is a continual stumbling of confusing and disorientation. Walking in sin is a useless pursuit. In fact it's not just useless, it's dangerous. Walking in darkness here is someone who is continuing to walk in sin, and willfully ignoring the truth. Having hatred for someone is just the symptom of your deeper issue, you are still in your sin.

But let's connect some dots here. Just a few verses ago John told us what is happening to the darkness as we speak, day after day. It's passing away. Here is the very real reality. Those who chose to suppress the truth of the gospel, and continue in their sin, will pass away with the evil when Christ comes to bring his kingdom in its fullness. The light of the kingdom of God is growing and growing with every passing day and the darkness of sin cannot stand against it. Christ will judge the living and the dead, and those still in their sin will be thrown into hell.

But all hope is not lost! God has given you his command to save you from your sin. Believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ.

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Look at verse 11 again with me. The person who is still in their sin “does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded him”. This is the vicious nature of sin, we are all guilty of it, but we’re also victims of it. Sin has blinded us to the glory of Jesus, and the world needs authentic Christians who have had their eyes opened to the truth of the gospel to proclaim this truth to a world that is wondering in darkness.

We read in these verses that we are to love our brothers and sisters, and yes that means us within the church. But we cannot miss that we are brothers and sisters in a sense with anyone and everyone who is made in the image of God. And how do we love those who are not in the Church? We hold out to them the glory of the gospel and invite them to believe.

Our culture, stumbles in the darkness. Our culture is so confused. We have people who don’t know who they are or what they are doing or what their purpose is. You’ve heard me rail against the LGBTQ movement and rightfully so because it’s an evil movement that’s ruining lives and families and driving people mad. But we cannot forget to separate the movement itself from the individual people. There are countless people who have been caught up in the lies of this evil ideology because they are looking for hope and looking for answers. They won’t find them there. The only place they are going to find hope is in becoming who Jesus has died to make them. I want to be a Christian who can walk that line of condemnation of lies but who has deep love for the person hurt by them. When you think of the Good Samaritan we often just think of a guy down on his luck and a stranger came by and helped him. But that’s not the point at all! The point is that the guy in the ditch and the guy who found him were supposed to be mortal enemies. And Samaritan picked him up and brought him to the inn and paid what was probably a crazy hospital bill to make sure the guy was going to make it. In one sense it’s easy to love each other in the church. It’s a totally different thing to have deep concern for those who are adamantly, and even may be violently against us. Are we willing to be a church who will love them enough to say that we disagree with them with every fiber of who we are, but we will hold out the gospel of Jesus Christ to them with open arms, praying for repentance and eager for sharing in the glory of Jesus with them.

Who do you think we were before Christ held out hope to us? You think we were loveable? Do you think we were “nice” towards God? Do you think we loved the truth? Do you think we thought the message of the cross was glorious? No, none of that.

That’s where God found you. That’s where God found me. But God took an authentic Christian, planted in his or her heart a love for people, and he used them to preach the gospel to you. They loved Jesus, and so they loved you.

May we be a church who loves Jesus, and because we love Jesus, we love people.

**If we love Jesus, we’re going to love people.**