

1 John

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1 John 2:7-11

Vss. 7-8

- John begins this section with his favorite way of addressing people: *Beloved*
- John uses *Beloved* four times here in 1 John and four more times in 3 John. Something he may have learned specifically from Jesus was to always speak with love, whether in teaching or in correction. Students learn better when they know they are loved and a spoon full of sugar does indeed make the medicine go down.
- In the earlier verses of Ch. 2, John speaks of how if we truly know God then we will keep His commandments and how if we claim to know Him and do not keep His commandments, we are lying to ourselves, self-deluded, and the Truth is not in us.
- Here, John gets down to specifics concerning those commandments. What does it really mean to be "good"? Typically, we have found it easier to develop our own system of Pharisaism. We make morality simply as list of negatives with just a couple of positives: don't smoke, don't chew, don't go with girls who do; don't drink, don't play cards, don't dance; if you're a woman don't wear makeup or cut your hair or wear short dresses. But do go to church for preaching on Sunday. We would say that if a child is just simply coloring or watching TV they are being "good". John here will have none of that. The Jesus John points to, the Jesus we find in the gospels knows nothing of a passive goodness. Goodness in the gospels and here in John is always ACTIVE!
- Old is a relative term. Perhaps John means really old, where in Leviticus 19:18 the Word of God tells us to love our neighbor as ourself. Or perhaps he is thinking to a long ago time when he was a young man in the Upper Room at the Last Supper when Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to

you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (John 13:34).

- It seems that it is this second memory that John is referring to. It was the commandment that John’s church had heard from the beginning of the church. The commandment was new and still is new, because it flies against common wisdom and tribal tradition (this is how we do things here). It comes to us new every morning. For to love as Jesus loved is to love the sinner, the Gentile, the outcast, and to love them and everyone else unconditionally. It means loving your enemies, even the ones who are driving nails into your hands and feet, even the ones who are standing by and laughing at you in your mortal pain. This is new. The Jews taught that there was joy in heaven for every sinner who is obliterated from the earth and that Gentiles existed only to fuel the fires of Hell. But to love as Jesus loves means that you love, actively love the people you’ve always been taught to hate.
- And as this love is readily practiced every day, “darkness is passing away and the True Light is shining.”

Vss. 9-11

- Here John digs deeper into “active goodness”. There MUST be a coherence between our belief and our practice. The one who actively loves his brother is in the Light and the one who hates his brother is in darkness, separated from God, not saved but still lost. And there it is: Light/darkness; Love/hate. There is no middle ground. There is no twilight in the Kingdom of God. There are no passive feelings of indifference toward people. You either love them or you hate them.
- John’s Gnostic enemies were guilty because they hated their brothers. They claimed to have a higher knowledge from “divine illumination”, but they failed to see the ethical ramifications of God’s True Light. They used people for their own selfish desires and then cast them aside. If they by their actions ruined someone’s life, what of it? “My soul is secure and my conscience is clear.” And so it is whenever we set our own ethical standard

to meet the requirements of our own passions and desires. This is why those who walk in the Light find that Christ has set their ethical standards and they are being judged and will be judged to the extent that they live by those standards, how they live in the light, and the proof is in how we love as Jesus loves.

- So the one who loves his brother is in the Light “and there is no cause for stumbling in him”. This cuts both ways. First, if we love others as Christ loves them, then we will never cause them to stumble. We will never mislead them. We will never teach them false doctrine. We will never lead them into temptation. We will never cause them to stumble on their spiritual journey. But this also speaks to us. As we walk in the Light and Christ’s love flows through us to others, WE will never have cause to stumble. Love is what enables us and empowers us on our own spiritual journey. Love is our fuel and our compass.
- “If God is love and if the new commandment of Christ is love, then love brings us nearer to people and to God and hatred separates us from people and God” (William Barclay).
- John concludes by saying that the one who hates his brother is walking in darkness and cannot see where he is going, that darkness has blinded his eyes. We see this every day in the news, don’t we? People so blinded by hate that they are moving in a direction that makes no sense. We see this in the civic meeting where one person makes a perfectly reasonable suggestion but it is opposed by another simply because they hate the one who made the suggestion.
- “Hatred, prejudice, and lovelessness are always disastrous. They are harmful to the person towards which they are expressed. They are even more harmful, however, to the person who harbors them” (Malcolm Tolbert)