

1 John 2:7-11

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Preacher: Dave Moser

[0 : 00] It is so good to be back. For those of you who are new, my wife gave birth last week, so I wasn't here.

! This sermon is going to come from 1 John.

We're continuing our series in 1 John. We're going to be starting in chapter 2, verse 7, and reading through verse 11. And as we turn there, if you don't have a Bible, we would very much love to give you one.

They're on the back table. They should already be bookmarked, today's passage even. And we would very much love to give you one of those if you don't have one. 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. 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.

[1 : 23] Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. But whoever loves his brother abides in the light. And in him there is no cause for stumbling.

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. This is God's holy, inerrant, and sufficient word.

Let's pray. Fathers, we look at a passage that convicts a lot of us, I think.

We ask, Father, that you would make your love refine us and define us.

So that you might be glorified, not just with our lips, but with our lives. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. Many of you already know that I was a cadet at the Coast Guard Academy.

[2 : 33] A while back now. This coming year will be my class's 10th anniversary or reunion or whatever. And when I was a cadet, the Christian community in the core of cadets was a pretty tight-knit group.

And whenever you're in a tight-knit group, you get to know each other pretty well. And so a bunch of us gathered actually every weeknight when I was in an underclass.

We gathered every weeknight at TAPS for prayer. About 20 of us. And incidentally, it was in that group that I met the woman that I would later marry. But I met a whole bunch of other people.

And some of them were pretty awesome. Some of them were pretty weird. You know, that goes with the territory. The King James Bible, if you read the old King James Version, let's say that the church is a peculiar people.

Meaning a particular people, but also a peculiar one indeed. And so at the prayer group, you know, you're going to be closer to some and maybe a little further from others, especially that weird guy.

[3 : 47] This was me, by the way, the weird one. And so I overheard, I was a sophomore, and I heard some fourth class talking amongst themselves. And they said, they were having a conversation, and one of them was one of the more unusual of the bunch.

And someone turned to her and said, you know, heaven's a big place. We can probably lose you.

And, you know, it was a moment of light humor.

And it was meant in good fun. And no harm was meant. But it can be, it was right at that line where love turns into something else.

And a good-natured ribbing can go a little too far. And surely we have seen, all of us, I'm sure, have seen, in the church at some point, where love does not characterize God's people.

Certainly you've seen or heard or been subject to unloving attitudes. It's almost a cliché these days that someone has been burned by the church. And the moment that our attitude moves outside the bounds of love, that's when this passage corrects us.

[5 : 06] It's a short passage. It is a simple and a clear passage. But it has great depth to it. And I think that it will not only confront us, but it will also comfort us.

And it will cause us to grow in our love for Christ. So let's begin. If you haven't been with us for the past few weeks, up to this point, John's letter has been actually quite simple.

He began in the beginning with a prologue that talks about how Christ came and he saw him, he touched him, he heard him. And that is the bedrock of his ministry.

And we have in the back of our minds chapter 5, verse 13, how he actually closes out the letter.

And he says, he writes these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

Meaning that everything he wrote in this book is to help us with our assurance of our faith. When doubt creeps in, you know, have we believed hard enough in Jesus?

[6 : 14] Did these things really happen? Here is John who saw and touched and heard Jesus, a witness to the resurrection, telling us he is real.

It's a letter of encouragement. So when we read these words, we should always find reassurance that indeed, we have been born again, that we are new creations in Jesus Christ who shed his blood for us.

And so moving from that prologue, John moves immediately to our attitudes towards sin. Two weeks ago, Jordan preached about that. Chapter 1, verses 6 through 12, the people who have been born of God agree with him about their own sin.

And so, if we say that our sin isn't bad, we deceive ourselves. When we say that, you know, that's not sin, we accuse God of lying.

It's only when we agree with God about our sin that we can repent and be forgiven. And then last week, in chapter 2, verses 1 through 6, that's exactly where he goes. When his children do confess their sins, the Father forgives them because Jesus is our advocate.

[7 : 28] He is the propitiation, the payment for our debt of sin. And so, when I sin, he stands before the Father and says, Father, forgive him, not by sweeping it under the rug, but because I bled and died for his sin.

And with a love like that, John says in chapter 2, verse 6, whoever says he abides in him ought to walk the same way in which he walked. Well, how did Jesus walk?

In love. And that's what today's passage is all about, walking in love. And so, our first act of obedience to the Lord, it's not a ritual, it's not a sacrifice, it's not an obscure rule, it's to love like he does.

Chapter 2, verse 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.

What the Lord has for us today is not new. He says, it's old. The commandment is the word that you have heard. Now, this has some depth to it, because there are some layers to just how old this word that we have heard is.

[8 : 59] So, it's somewhat multifaceted. It's old because it's the first thing that you hear about Jesus when you hear the gospel. He walked in love towards you, and he calls you to walk with him.

It's old because it's the centerpiece of Christ's ministry. Even before we heard the gospel, his teaching in Israel 2,000 years ago was centered on teaching, most of it, about our own behavior, loving our neighbor as ourself.

He taught us how to love our brother over and over again. And it's old because it's been part of God's instruction to his people from the very beginning all the way back.

Every time God speaks, this is a facet of what he's telling us. Even if we go back all the way to the first books of the Bible, long before John's audience was alive, long before the message of the gospel left Israel, long before Israel actually made it to the land of Israel.

Look at the book of Leviticus, chapter 19, verse 18, says, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. We're going to come back to that verse in just a moment.

[10 : 22] But what I want to show us here is just how old this commandment is to love one another. That doesn't seem very exciting right off the bat, does it?

Okay, it's old. Great. Let's move on. But no. It's actually maybe, possibly, the most beautiful word in the entire passage.

Why is that? We don't serve a God who shifts. Our culture thinks that God is, you know, an arbitrary jerk in the sky.

Oh, you can't do, you can't have this fun, you can't do that. Completely arbitrary. A God, the Bible, they think, is a book full of rules that are obscure and unnecessary and really just hamper us. But, he is not a God who makes up haphazard commands on the fly just to test us. He's not fickle, he's not arbitrary, he is a rock, he is solid, he is unchanging.

[11 : 37] One of the great hymns of all the English language is, great is thy faithfulness. Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father, there is no shadow of turning with thee.

Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not. As thou hast been, thou forever will be. And that is such good news for people like you and me.

It means that as everything in this world shifts under our feet, as our culture shifts and heaves, he remains steady.

As the fabric of our society is torn and rewoven, every generation and in our day and age it seems like even faster than that, he stands solid.

As our thoughts and desires and as our emotions inside of us are roller coasters, each new day, he remains the same, solid to hang on to.

[12 : 47] And this is such good news for people like us. God is eternal. And when he speaks, he never backtracks.

And so, his commandments stand and his promises stand because he does not change. His promises are unailing and that is a really good thing for us.

His command from the beginning has been to love our brother just as his actions towards us from the beginning have been to love us.

Psalm 23 is probably the most beloved psalm in the whole Bible and it says, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. We can depend on that because he does not change because this is an old command.

He doesn't change ever. So when we walk through deep troubles, we know that the same God who lovingly guided and protected King David when he wrote the psalm, guides and protects his people today.

[14 : 02] When we are hurting, we know even this day, the Lord is my shepherd because he has never changed. And of highest importance, we know that the gospel is true.

God doesn't change. Your salvation, my salvation depends on the Lord not changing, remaining consistent for all generations.

Just two weeks ago, Jordan brought chapter 1 verse 9 to us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

we are sinners and we need that to not change. We need that to not change desperately or we are lost and ruined. But the Lord does not change.

And most importantly, his love for his people does not change. Even before Christ came in Malachi chapter 3 verse 6, God said to his people, I, the Lord, do not change.

[15 : 10] Therefore, you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. Because he does not change, we can be saved.

In the age of the church, the Lord spoke through his apostle Paul saying, this saying is trustworthy for if we have died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him.

If we deny him, he will deny us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful. For he cannot deny himself.

And that is where this command to love our brother comes from. The Lord himself. From his heart.

And we already saw in Leviticus chapter 19 verse 18, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

I am the Lord. He wants us to understand, this is my heart. God's commands aren't arbitrary, they're built on his character.

[16 : 19] And so when he calls us to love like he does, he is calling us into fellowship with him, to walk with him, and to depend on him in order to obey.

obedience to his unchanging statutes draws us into closer fellowship with him. God does not change.

God's love does not change. God's commandments do not change. And that is terrific news for God's people. His desire is that his people love just like he has from the foundation of the world.

And so it is an old command, but yet verse 8, John says to us, 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.

Now that's a strange turn of events. We just spent a whole bunch of time thinking about how it's an old commandment. How is it then new? Well, let's look at the first half of the verse.

[17:36] He says, at the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you. If our hope is built on an unchanging God, with unchanging desires for his people, how can this command be new?

Well, the hint is in the words, it is true in him and in you. What does John mean by that? It is true in him and in you is the most literal reading of the text, but some translations of the Bible try to give us some help in understanding it.

So if you're reading the NIV, it will say, its truth is seen in him and in you. If you're reading the New Living translation, it will say, Jesus lived the truth of this commandment and you also are living it. The idea here is that the commandment is new because we have seen Jesus live it anew for us. That's what we're talking about here.

John has watched Jesus all the way back to the prologue where he said, I watched him, I've seen him, I've touched him, I have heard him. John has watched Jesus live out this command to love one another in radically new ways.

[18:55] And so it is not a dead command in a book. It is not old in the sense that it is lifeless. It was alive to John, so he calls it new.

And Jesus himself called this a new command. In John chapter 13, starting in verse 31, we read, when he had gone out, Jesus said, now is the son of man glorified.

And God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a 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'm going, you cannot come. And so Jesus is setting up the cross. Judas has just left and he is going to the cross. They cannot go there with them, but he is going there on their behalf. Then John 13, 34, a new commandment I give you, that you love one another just as I have loved you.

[19:58] 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. love one another just as I have loved you.

What does it look like to love just as Jesus loved us? How far did Jesus take it? All the way to the cross. I love how one pastor put it. To what length will the love of God go?

To the length at which the very Son of God will take upon himself a human form, die on a cross and there bear the sin of a fallen race, so that in bearing the punishment for that sin, he is actually alienated for a time from God the Father and thus cries out in deep agony, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

That is the extent to which the love of God goes. It is thus that love becomes an entirely new thing. in Christ.

That is how this is a new commandment. It's new and true in Jesus because he expressed it in new and living ways for us.

[21:19] But that's not the end of the story. That's not the end of what John tells us here. He also says the command is true in us. the new and living command to love our brothers in the church is new and alive in the people the Father has renewed and made alive in the Holy Spirit by the blood of his Son.

God and that's where this passage connects with John's purpose. Remember chapter 5 verse 13? John tells us that he's writing to help assure us.

And so it's easy for us to take our eyes off of the sure foundation we have in Christ and say, am I really saved? I don't think you can be a Christian longer than a few minutes without having some kinds of doubt.

And so he's writing to help assure us that we do indeed have life in his name. And so he says, look, look at yourselves. If his love is alive in ourselves, if this command is true in us as it was true in Jesus, we have a strong assurance that our faith in Christ is genuine.

And we have been born of God. He says, look at your lives. If you love the church, Christ lives in you. And so he finishes the thought in verse 8, saying the commandment is true in him and in you because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

[23:03] What does that mean? The darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. if you look at a newspaper, okay, nobody looks at a newspaper, if you go online and you look at the headlines, it sure doesn't look like the darkness is passing away.

I opened up the headlines and I have a list and I don't even want to read it to you because it's too depressing. It does not look like the darkness is passing away in our nation, in our world.

It doesn't look like that. So it might not be easy to see that the darkness is passing away in the nations, but John has just told us that Christ's love is alive.

Where? In us. In his church. In Christ we are loosed not only from the guilt of sin. He paid the penalty for our sin.

That was what we talked about last week, the propitiation for our sins. So we are saved from the penalty of sin, but we are also saved from the power of sin to live lives like his.

[24 : 23] We are no longer slaves to sin. We are slaves to righteousness. So we are the new creation breaking into this world.

We are the light that shines because Jesus, the light of the world, lives in us. In Christ we are regenerated.

So we are finally made alive to the command. We see its beauty. We desire to love like God loves.

And being slaves of righteousness we have the ability now to walk in that love. And this is why he says that it's new because the darkness is passing away and the true light is shining.

The true light is already shining, he says. We are meant to walk in that light now. Not at some future date, but today.

[25 : 31] that's good news for so many reasons, if not only, because holiness, walking in that love, walking in purity, is a closer walk with God right now.

Obedience is not a burden, it is a delight, because it is done in reliance on God, and it is done walking side by side with him. Now we want to be careful here.

the direction that we think about this is really important. We cannot love our brothers enough to become saved.

It only works the other way around. It only works when we say Christ has risen from the grave. We are in him through faith.

He has regenerated us and made us alive, and now we can love our brother like he loved. We can't love our way out of death.

[26 : 36] His love breaks us free from death. And so it is an outworking of the new creation. It is not how we get saved. That's critical for us to remember.

In Romans chapter 13, the Apostle Paul writes, the night is far gone, the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.

If you love the Lord, you'll listen to him. And what did he say? He said, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind.

This is the great and first commandment, and a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On those two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

[27 : 42] Simply put, people who love God love the people who love God. That's the church. That's what this command is about. So he continues to give us a few examples.

Verses 9, 10, 11 are just a couple examples. Verse 9 and 10 say, whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light and in him there is no cause for stumbling.

There are two things I want to pull out of these verses. First, John gives an example of someone who says he is in the light. The person isn't actually in the light.

This person just claims it. But there is such a thing as a false profession. And we can know what it looks like, what's different, by looking at the second thing.

There are really only two categories in John's thinking. There is the one who says he is in the light and then there is the one who loves. He's painting in black and white here, isn't he?

[28 : 47] There's no middle ground. If you've been born of God, you will love God's people. You could say you're in the light all you want, but if you don't love the church, you have to ask, does God live in you?

Because he loves the church. And if he is alive in you, he will animate your desires and your affections. That's why it scares me so much when people say, I love Jesus, but I'm not interested in the church.

You're all here today, so it's kind of weird to talk about that. We would ask that person, what kind of Jesus do you think you love? Because he loves the church.

He died for the church. Are you sure you love him? If you don't care about something for which he paid the greatest price. But those who love the brethren, the church, they are living in God's light. And John makes a final contrast. Verses 10 and 11 are a final contrast. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. 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.

[30 : 09] Whoever loves the brethren, they show that they are full of God's light. But the one who has blinded himself shows that he doesn't have God's light and walks in the darkness.

One doesn't stumble, the other can't help but stumble, because he has no light. And if we look at verses 10 and 11, there are only two categories.

Verse 10, whoever loves his brother abides in the light. And verse 11, whoever hates his brother is in the darkness. Where's the middle ground?

I mean, I can walk down the street and see another church and say, or I can walk here and see you and say, oh, I don't really love that guy, but I don't hate him, right?

John will say no. There is no middle ground. What is indifference? It is calloused.

[31 : 18] It is polite hatred. You can't be neutral, but you can be indifferent, which is polite hatred.

But, on the flip side, love isn't just a fond feeling. The person in verse 10 who loves the brethren. Love in the Bible is not just fond feelings.

It is action. Jesus did not come for us with fond feelings alone. He came to give his life for us. One pastor put it this way, it is not just the absence of sin which characterizes the true Christian.

It is also the positive presence of love. That means we need to take real action towards each other. That's why Jesus said, by your love for one another, they will know that you are my disciples.

Fun feelings don't cut it. And so we encourage one another, we pray for one another, we help one another, we comfort one another. my community group right now, we are actually walking through the one another commands of the New Testament.

[32 : 38] And it's been really enriching to us. Because we see what active love looks like over and over. And so this person who lives and walks in love, the psalmist says in Psalm 119, great peace have those who love your law, oh Lord.

nothing can make them stumble. But on the flip side, sinning leads to more sinning.

Because in order to keep doing it, we have to harden our own hearts. And that's why the one who walks in darkness in loving his brother is also going to fall into other sin.

In order to hate our brother, be indifferent to them, we have to harden our hearts. That's going to make us hard towards all sorts of other sins along the way. And so when we look at our culture that is trying its hardest, sometimes it feels, to send itself to hell, there are a lot of reactions we have, rightly, towards that.

One of them should be pity. Because a culture that is trying to walk in the darkness cannot help verse 11, but stumble.

[33 : 58] cannot help it. Does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes. So what do we do with this old and new commandment to love our brothers?

Well, first, if you are a Christian today, there are a bunch of things that we need to do with this. First, we need to love the brethren. Now, that might seem pretty obvious, right? Well, that might not be a core component of what you think of when you think of Christianity.

Because the American church has long said that Christianity is make a decision, go to heaven, with not a whole lot else attached to it.

God. But there is no conception of salvation in the Bible that doesn't include the whole people of God. The teaching of Jesus and the apostles has everything to do with being born again, being a new creation, and then living like that, living like a new creation.

For God's glory, for our own joy, and for the benefit of his church in the world. So, loving the church, and everyone in it, that's the first step of obedience that John wants for us.

[35 : 30] And that means, especially if we are not able to abide simply saying that love is fond feelings, that it is action, we have to get connected to the church.

Love is nothing if it is not relational. The Bible doesn't give us explicit, absolute, required guidance on how to get connected to one another, what that is supposed to look like from day to day.

But, one of the things that we've done here at Shoreline, Shoreline grew out of small group Bible studies, and we have continued that and multiplied that. If you haven't gotten connected, that's one of the ways that we, probably the primary way that we here, our community groups, have made that available.

Cadets, you probably can't get out and make that a regular feature of your day to day, but the Lord has provided for you ways to get connected as well.

Officers Christian Fellowship, the chapel groups at the academy, many of you have already started discipling one another, meeting together regularly for prayer, for Bible reading, and for mutual encouragement.

[36 : 48] And there are so many benefits to this, for ourselves. It forces us to take the log out of our own eye, to use Jesus' word.

It gives us the opportunity to have others speak with a loud voice into our own lives, to shine the light of Christ and his word there. You can't participate in more than a handful of Bible studies until something hits your heart.

Or, someone looks at a verse in a way that you never would have considered, and it opens up the richness and the beauty of that passage in ways that you never would have encountered unless you were with a brother or a sister.

It also puts us in the way of people who are older and wiser than us. So those are some of the things that Christians should be doing with this.

If you're coming today and you are hurting, where better a place to take your wounds, your worries, your sadnesses, than the community we just described?

[38 : 02] one where the Lord instructs, demands, and equips his people to love one another like he has loved them.

Not perfect. We aren't perfect today. We won't be until he brings us home to glory. But there is no better place for hurt people than his church.

church. And last, if you're not a Christian, if you don't know the Lord, if you haven't turned from self and sin and in faith turned to Jesus to save you by the blood of his cross, you might still have found this compelling, this community of love.

I was listening to a pastor recently. He has a strident atheist friend. who is a scholar in Great Britain. He was moving from one community to another. And he mentioned, the first thing I'm going to do when I get there is find a good church. He said, oh, are you converting? He said, no, I'm not converting.

[39 : 13] But Christians are great people. They love. And so even someone who rejected God saw the beauty of the church and the community that is there in ways that the rest of the world doesn't have.

in my community group, I'm sure everyone here can share stories, but we bridge all sorts of boundaries that don't normally get bridged.

Age, occupation, race, all sorts of things. I mean, someone in my community group, I mean, makes puns. And as distasteful and unnatural as it is for me to care for that person, Jesus died for him and put his blood on him and he is precious to Christ.

And if Christ is precious to me, his people will be precious to me. And so if you're drawn to that kind of community, you don't yet know Christ, but you love, you see something in the family of God, that is God at work in your heart drawing you to himself, showing you, as Christ called it, a city on the hill, showing you where to find light.

And so if this old yet new command is something that excites and draws you to itself, that is the Lord drawing you to himself.

[40 : 55] Don't leave here today before turning to him, turning from sin and turning to him. The last thing I'll say is, back to the beginning, heaven, it's a big place, we can probably lose you.

It's funny, but it's also tragic. They say that you can choose your friends, but not your family. The church is a family, Christ's family.

If you love him and he lives in you, you will love them. Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you that you do live in us.

so that we can obey you and that you have provided for us a family, your family.

And you've instructed us all to love one another as you have loved us. But for those who are hurting today, let them find comfort, joy, and love in your family.

[42 : 11] For those who are disconnected today, let them find those same things. And for those who do not yet know you, but know that your family is distinct and loving, let them find you in the midst of your family and come to you.

Father, we pray these things in the name of Jesus, who showed us how to love. Amen. Amen.
Amen.