

First John (7) - Christian Love

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[0 : 00] And tonight we're looking at verses 7 to 11. We'll read through these verses first of all. That's 1 John chapter 2 and at verse 7.

Behold, I am writing 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.

Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause of 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.

So this is the second assessment or test that John is setting out. As we've said before, there are three main assessments or tests with regard to the genuineness of their Christian life.

[1 : 16] And as we said, the epistle as a whole is directed against false teaching that was coming to challenge the church of John's day and is still very much, of course, a feature of the days in which we live ourselves.

We looked last time at the first of these assessments or tests, which was the moral test, which has to do with the commands of God and obedience being the feature of that particular aspect of the Christian life.

Tonight we're looking at the second, which we can call a social test, which has to do with love, with Christian love in particular. And remember last time, it's not on the bulletin sheet tonight, but on the last one, the three circles that represented these three things, belief and obedience and love, and how we saw it was important that we maintain the overlap between these three great features of a Christian life so that we don't extract one to the extent that we displace the others.

And we'll see tonight, indeed, that there is an overlap between the commandment of God and the love that we are to show for one another, the commandment between Christian love and Christian obedience.

Interestingly, again, he mentions the commandment, having just followed through from the previous passage, that dealt mainly with the commandments and the keeping of God's command or obedience to the will of God as we find it expressed by way of command especially.

[2 : 44] So here is verses 7 to 11, which deals primarily with love. And as we'll see, there is that feature of the commandment in it as well. This is an old commandment, but he also mentioned it as a new commandment.

That's the first thing we need to look at. He said, I'm writing to 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'm writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

We'll take that under the heading of the old and new commandment. And the second part of the passage we'll take under the heading of the walk of love, because he's dealing there with the lifestyle that is characterized chiefly by love and how love is to be indeed foremost in our Christian walk.

So the old and the new commandment. As I said, it's very significant that he's using the word commandment in respect of a need to love one another and the emphasis on Christian love and especially Christians loving one another.

[4 : 01] It's important that we notice that overlap with obedience, the overlap between love and obedience, not just love for God, but love for one another as well. Because the Bible's definition of love, which of course many times and especially today is so very different and opposed to the normal idea of love that you find existing in the world, especially as we'll see when love is not really reinforced by any sense of attachment to the word of God or to the command of God.

It's important that we see that the Bible's definition of love is never at the expense of law. In other words, there's a reinforcement, if you like, of love by the matter of God's law.

You cannot actually say that love is in any sense detached from the matter of obedience to God or the law of God that calls for our obedience.

That is really what gives structure, if you like, to love. And love in this passage, as it's connected with commandment, you can see that that reinforcement is something that gives structure to love and gives boundaries to love.

After all, when you love your children, when you're trying to show love to your children, which will include at times disciplining them, pulling them back from things that they have done wrong, it's love that disciplines them, that shows them correction, that sometimes scolds them or speaks to them in ways different to other times.

[5 : 31] But you see, it's the sense of right and wrong. It's the way that you know that love has to have this reinforcement, this structure to it, this law behind it, because otherwise you don't have any boundaries to love.

And this ridiculous mantra that you find in the world today, especially with deviant lifestyles, you know the mantra I'm talking about, it's the words, love is love. Well, what does that mean?

Love is love. It's pretty meaningless, really, because certainly in the Bible's sense of it, love is not detached from the structure of God's commands, of God's word.

Indeed, he's using here command and word, as we'll see later on, he uses the whole body of revelation, the word of God, so as to give structure to the love that he's calling for.

Just as you see with a building, you find hidden within the concrete of major buildings, you find either steel or some sort of reinforcement, but there's always something there that stops the building from actually collapsing.

[6 : 41] And without that, the building would collapse, and that's what love is like in a sense. It's not necessarily the best illustration of it, but what I'm trying to say is that love without a structure, without the boundaries provided by law, will become saggy.

It just melts all over the place. It becomes what the person themselves makes it. And you never find God's love in any way spoken of by God himself in a way that's totally detached from his commandments.

God himself is a God of truth, as well as God of love. And the Christian life is a life of truth, a life that's attached to the definition of truth by God, just as it is to the need to love one another.

And one of the things you find, of course, in this mantra, love is love, one of the reasons that that's actually emphasized so much by those people who just live that sort of deviant lifestyle of different kinds indeed, but there's always an antipathy to rules.

They don't want to be ruled by any commandments, certainly not by those of the Bible, certainly not by those that God has given us in his word. That's completely out of order.

[7 : 55] That's displaced. There's no need for that. There's no desire for that. The best thing for a human life, they're telling us, is to set that aside. It's been a harmful influence. People are not free to live as they want to live.

Well, you see, that freedom that's described in the Bible, as well as love, freedom is itself bounded by the structure of God's word, God's command, God's instruction, God's rules.

And that's why tonight you have that important overlap, overlap between love and obedience. And you come then to this statement that he's saying, an old commandment, as I'm writing to 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'm writing to you, which is through in him and in you. Now, how can he say that there's an old commandment that he's writing to them, and yet at the same time, it is a new commandment?

Is that not contradictory? How can it be old and new at the same time? Well, let me just look at, draw your mind to a few other verses in 1 John that helps perhaps to explain this.

[9 : 13] Chapter 2, verse 24. Verse 24, you see, you read there, let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.

And go to chapter 3, verse 11. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning that we should love one another. And you find the same in 2 John, and verses 5 and 6.

Very similarly there. And now I ask you, dear lady, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we've had from the beginning that we love one another.

So it's obvious from that that the commandment he's talking about, both in terms of old and new, is the commandment to love one another. And it's old in the sense that it's from the beginning.

In other words, John is not writing something to them that they don't know already. From the beginning, as you see from these other verses that we've just read, indicates from the outset of your Christian life, since you came to know the Gospel, since you came to know the Lord, this has always been the case.

[10 : 28] This is not something new, he's saying, that I'm introducing to you. It's always been there. It's part of the Gospel message. It's part of the instruction that God gives to His people. You're aware of it, he's been saying, from the beginning, from the moment that you came to be Christians, to follow the Lord, to know the Lord.

This is what we've had. In other words, from that sense, it's an old commandment. It's not new. You see, John is saying this because he wants them to be sure that although he's an apostle, he's not introducing something to them that they don't know already.

This is not, or this hasn't originated with John himself. And you see, that's how it is with yourself and with myself tonight. As you come across in the Bible, this emphasis on the need to love one another, you are aware that it's not been invented by a Kirk session.

It's not something been invented by the free church. It's not something that came during the Reformation. It's already there part of the gospel. Always been part of the gospel. The gospel that stresses salvation in Christ foundationally for us as a gospel message that also stresses the need for Christians to love one another.

And that's become more important as we go through the passage to see that. So it's not new. It's old in that sense. There has always been there in the setting of the gospel and in the way they've come to know Jesus as their Savior.

[11 : 53] But then he's saying it is at the same time a new commandment. So how can it be new as well? What does he mean here by it is a new commandment?

Well, if you take the next words with you, it's new, he says. I'm writing to you a new commandment which is true in him and in you because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

He's talking there about Jesus and the new era or the new chapter in human experience and in the church's experience that began with the coming of Jesus himself.

Jesus, the light of the world. In other words, you can put it this way, picture it this way. When Jesus came into the world, when the Son of God took our human nature and lived the life he lived, died the death he died, rose from the death, everything to do with Christ's ministry on earth.

It's a new dawn. It's the dawn of a new day. The old is finished. The Old Testament has gone by. That era of revelation has come to an end and while there is a bit of an overlap with the likes of John the Baptist and the first disciples, still the New Testament age, the new covenant age, this new age began with the coming of Christ.

[13 : 08] The true light is now shining, he says. The darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. In other words, from the coming of Christ onwards, it's a new day.

It dawned with the coming of Jesus, with the ministry of Jesus. And it's going to go on until the evening comes, which will be at his return. As the dawn of this day is with his first arrival, so the ending of this day is with his second coming.

With his return. And all that expanse of time, however long it is, in the sense in which we speak of time, it is this day, it is the time that the true light is now shining.

The gospel has come. Salvation is extended to us in the new age, the new gospel, the new gospel age, in a way that exceeds that of the old in terms of revelation, in terms of clarity, in terms of privilege.

Now he's saying this is new in that sense. It's new because it belongs to this age of the gospel. There's a continuation from the old, but it's still a new chapter in God's revelation.

[14 : 22] It's new in you and in him and Jesus who is the true light and the darkness he says is already passing away. But there's something else here as well that makes this a new commandment.

It's new in the sense that Jesus gave love one another a new or an intensified or a deeper meaning. He took the concept of love for God and love for one another onwards into a more explicit and a more far-reaching emphasis than before.

And if you go back to the passage we read in John 13 you notice how that chapter begins. Before the feast of the Passover Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to depart out of this world and then it says having loved his own who were in the world he loved them to the end.

The end can mean to the extremist point required. He loved them with a totality of love whatever way we describe it but it's a love which lacked nothing. He loved them to the end and it's love that's then exemplified and shown forth in what he did.

He rose from the table he actually girded himself with a towel I think we've mentioned that on another occasion that is symbolic of God himself actually descending into the form of a servant clothing himself if you like as Jesus did he with a towel as God clothed himself in the person of Jesus his son with servitude with the office of the servant.

[16 : 06] That's what's really shown out in a kind of parable if you like in Jesus washing the feet of the disciples and then when he had done that you find that he then asked them a question do you know do you understand what I have done to you?

That's a really profound question in the light of what he had just done he is setting this question for them do you understand have you really taken in what I have just done to you?

Have you really come to appreciate or to understand anything of what you have just seen? You have seen God wiping the feet of disciples in the form of a servant do you understand what I have done to you?

For I have given you an example he went on to say if I then you see he said you call me teacher and lord he wasn't accusing him of saying anything wrong in fact what he was confirming was that it was right of them to say this about him you call me teacher and lord and you write for that's what I am this is who I am so then if I your lord and teacher have washed your feet if it's come to this if you've seen me your lord and master and teacher coming to do this then you ought to wash one another's feet for I've given you an example that you also should do as I have done to you and then the other verses we read there 34 and 35 you notice he's saying 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 by this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another that's how

Jesus gave an even deeper meaning to the concept of love and especially of love of Christians for one another by what he did by then explaining it to the extent that he had given them an example that as God in the person of Jesus the son came into the world and came to the extent of washing the feet of disciples I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you this new commandment I'm giving you that you love one another in other words the physical aspect of the foot washing was a demonstration of the love of Jesus and that's what he's saying this is your example this is how far your love must go it must be a love that's selfless and complete in other words you could say there are two things in the deeper meaning that Jesus gave to love when he said as I have loved you that's how he's emphasizing the quality of that love that's not to be a love for one another as you see in one another or as you've had in previous generations shown good though that may have been that is not the great example that is not the pattern that's not the template for our love for one another it is as I have done to you that's the pattern that's the template that's the challenge we're not to rest anything with anything less than following the example and seeking to match the example of

[19 : 31] Jesus in other words love it's a love it's a selfless love a love especially that is exercised by a servant that's a servant of others in other words as Jesus demonstrated to love one another when you individualize that in terms of my responsibility to love my fellow Christians I need to stoop in order to do that I cannot do that from a height that sees myself somewhat better than them that sees myself superior to them as somebody put it if you're sitting on a throne that's raised up it's virtually impossible to wash the feet of those who are beneath you because you can't reach down that far you're set elevated above them and it's very instructive that at that time that Jesus instituted the Lord's

Supper in that upper room it's not John that tells us this it's there in Luke there was a dispute among the disciples there was a dispute among these people it was after he had instituted the supper Luke is saying and that brings up the question again that you find in John do you understand what I have done to you because he's saying that to people who are squabbling over who is going to be the greatest who is the greatest at that time the dispute that rose among them and it wasn't a small sort of murmur this was really something that caused them agitation which of them should be the greatest imagine these people these saved sinners disputing amongst one another which of them was the greatest having just seen the Son of God wipe their feet sort of place isn't it that doesn't fit into the whole framework and context of loving one another that they're disputing which of them should be the greatest he has given them an example of love he's deepened the meaning of love for them as he does for ourselves it's deepened in the sense of quality the quality of it is the quality of serving love love that is selfless love love that stoops to do good to others love that's not afraid to actually say you're actually better than

I am and I have to place you higher than I am and I have to consider you better than myself that's what Paul wrote to the Philippians wasn't it when he knew that there were some in Philippi that had grudges against one another nevertheless he said to them this is your great example let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus who in the form of God did not think it a thing to and took the form of a servant and being humbled and being found in fashion as a man he humbled himself and became obedient unto death there's just no room for pride within the example that Jesus gives us for loving one another there's no room in it for thinking that you somehow are better than others are whatever gifts

God has given to you or to me it's not wrong to actually accept them and accept that they are given to you by God that that differentiates you perhaps from others who have different gifts but there is no room for whoever for saying the fact that that's the case makes me a better person and so and so he gave a deeper meaning to love it's a new commandment you see it lived out in Jesus you see it put into practice in the stooping of Jesus to wash the feet of his disciples that's where we find a pattern and a template for loving one another and it's also to the extent that he showed his love not just a deeper meaning in terms of quality but also in terms of extent he washed their feet it doesn't say he washed some of them it doesn't say he washed the feet of

Peter James and John because they were often chosen by him to be with him at other times when our disciples weren't there it doesn't say he chose a select few of them and washed their feet it simply says there they were together he washed their feet and Peter of course being Peter being this kind of reaction is frequently in Peter isn't it he sometimes speaks up but it's not necessarily anything other than love and regard for Jesus he just did not see it right that he the Lord and teacher and master that he would be on his knees washing the feet of the likes of Peter are you going to wash my feet that's the emphasis in the text the original Greek text of the verse the emphasis is on the you and the my are you going to wash my feet and he said to him after that you shall never wash my feet it's not becoming it's not right it should be the other way about until

[25 : 18] Jesus corrected him in his own way it's the extent to which he washed all their feet Jesus knew what was in Peter Jesus had instructed Peter already many times about his need to accept that Jesus must die that you go to Jerusalem and be accused and be put to death this shall not happen to you Lord what did Jesus say get behind me Satan because the enemy of your soul doesn't want you to humble yourself doesn't want you to stoop down to wash the feet of fellow disciples doesn't want you to think of love as something that means you love one another in the entirety and extent of the Christian fellowship that enemy of your soul wants you to say you can pick and choose you don't have to love everybody there are some of them indeed are very difficult to love so it's alright if you hate some and love others it's not nowhere in the

Bible do you find in the emphasis here on love or elsewhere that you can pick and choose who is right for us to love or otherwise and indeed you remember the parable of the good Samaritan even adds to that where you find this person that had fallen foul of robbers or thieves or thugs on the way and he was assaulted and robbed and left in the gutter left just there assaulted injured priest came along he walked by on the other side a Levite came along he walked by on the other side religious people people for whom religion was in that sense a God who couldn't stoop down to look at this poor wretch of a man that had fallen on hard times now you have a Samaritan looked down on by so many of the Jews as inferior who never washed the feet of a Samaritan never see him or them as being even anything like at the same level as themselves and that's the parable

Jesus told the story Jesus told and when he told it they put a question to him and Lord who is my neighbor when he had that was what introduced sorry the account of the good Samaritan that was the question that started it all off who is my neighbor Jesus then told this story and then he reversed the question now he said who do you think was neighbor to the one who fell among thieves the question for us tonight is not who do I love it's not who exactly am I going to love out of the totality of Christians that I know you have to turn it around the other way and say who am I going to be a loving neighbor to what can I do to whoever I see is in need or in need of my love there's the example there's the template this is a new commandment in the sense that it is deepened in its meaning by Jesus and here we are tonight where a congregation of believers congregation of people have come together to worship God let not be my mind or your mind tonight anything to do with selectiveness in Christian love people who are very unlike ourselves who have different background to ourselves different practices to ourselves but if they're the

Lord's people you and I are constrained to love them from the emphasis of scripture this new commandment that's a real challenge that's a very difficult thing but it must be a reality for us otherwise we're in the category of those who hate and that's the next thing the walk of love we mentioned earlier the new day that has dawned with Jesus and then he says in verse 9 whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness in other words John is now saying well this light this dawn has now come the era of the gospel the time of salvation in Christ and whoever says I'm in that light I belong to that day he says whoever says that and hates his brother is still in darkness whoever abides in the light whoever loves his brother abides in the light and in him there is no cause of stumbling but whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and does not know where he's going because the darkness has blinded his eyes very briefly let me just deal with the contrast that's brought up there

Jesus John is dealing with this in terms of light and darkness as he often does and what's really important one of the things really important is that there is no twilight area between light and darkness in other words you and I cannot say well I don't love such and such a person he's a difficult personality but I don't hate him John will have nothing of that whether love or hate there's nothing in between because darkness plays no part in the light and light has no part in the darkness they don't mix they're opposites there's a clear distinction between them and it might sound blunt and it might sound difficult to accept but that is what John is saying that's what God is saying to us through this tonight when we're thinking of the need to love one another we cannot actually say well there are some that I don't love but I wouldn't say

[31 : 17] I hate them for John it's either love or hate it's the one or the other that's important for us to notice for a start because he says whoever says he's in the light and hates his brother is still in the darkness whereas the claim to be in Christ to be in the light to belong to this new day of salvation the claim to be a Christian in other words is authenticated by love by loving other Christians and indeed your love extends beyond that but John is confining it to loving one another and what he's saying he is that hatred falsifies that claim if I say tonight that I'm a Christian and at the same time I say but I hate so and so well I'm showing by that that I'm not a Christian at least not in the definition of John here in terms of love there's something lacking in my understanding of what a Christian is if I can't say I hate such and such a fellow

Christian and even when it comes to loving your enemies this is where the boundaries come in as well we have to love Jesus says our enemies doesn't mean you love what they're doing that you love their lifestyle but you love the person here it's love for one another as Christians notice what he's saying in verse 11 he says that whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness walks means a particular lifestyle particular attitude in life or practice in life and he does not know where he's going because the darkness has blinded his eyes you see what hatred does according to John here it's one point that's important to notice according to John hatred distorts our vision it distorts our view of other people and of ourselves if we're filled with hate then we're not seeing properly we're not able to actually see things clearly and we're going to stumble along in the darkness of hatred whoever hates his brother is in darkness and walks in the darkness and doesn't know where he's going that's why hatred is such an important why it's such an important thing to actually get rid of hatred and seek

God's help with any element of hatred that's in our hearts tonight but on the other hand he says whoever loves his brother abides in the light and in him there is no cause of stumbling he abides in the light in him there is no cause of stumbling for stumbling in other words he's saying if we love one another then we're at home in the light that's where we're based we belong to this new day of the gospel and of salvation and of being Christians that's what our life takes its rooting and that's where our life takes its impetus from we abide in the light and he says this person who loves the other who loves one another whoever loves his brother in him there is no cause for stumbling because you see if we love each other then we're going to take care that we don't give them any cause for stumbling that we don't actually place anything in their path that they see in our life or anywhere else that will cause them to stumble that will bring them some element of retreat or some element of backsliding or whatever in their own

Christian walk there is no cause for stumbling and that's what we are committed to in loving one another we don't provide anything over which people will stumble this is a huge challenge challenge for me challenge for yourselves but love is always a challenge love always provides us with difficulties in the way of exercising it when it comes to practically loving one another there will always be things that make it difficult there will always be times and there will always be personalities that really provide a challenge to the need to love one another and when we are committed to the fellowship as we began our study of John that's how he begins having fellowship with God having fellowship with one another belonging to the fellowship that the church is and the fellowship is surely characterized nowhere better than where you find it characterized by love and by loving one another and by loving in the way of having

Christ as our template and our example and a selfless love a love that's following that pattern as far as possible for ourselves one of the books I consulted in preparing for tonight is the message of first John by David Jackman a series of IVP books called the Bible speaks today and I'll finish with a quotation from what he says in that book in regard to love one another and the need to have that within the fellowship of God's people this is what he says there is a certain sort of Christian piety which imagines that security is to be found by being hermetically sealed off from other people even from other Christians in a recluse like detachment in this way the individual is safe from the infection of those who may not believe as strongly or as purely as he imagines he does his edge is not blunted his soundness is unsullied churches as well as individuals can be affected by this mentality but that is not loving my brother or sister who needs to walk in the light and who needs my fellowship as we need theirs the more a Christian gets wrapped up in himself concentrating on the cultivation of his own character or the preservation of his own virtue the less clearly he will see the light he has become self-centered and it will not be long before self-love takes over and then he finishes with the sentence this paragraph and the greatest enemy of real love is self-love the greatest enemy of real love is self-love love that's worth taking with us and remembering and applying to the need to love one another and as the greatest enemy of real love is self-love so we might add the greatest ally of real love is selfless love the love that you see in

[38 : 39] Jesus washing the feet of the disciples may God bless his word to us once again let's conclude our service tonight singing psalm 48 48a on page 63 and we're singing from verse 9 to the end of the psalm verse 14 the tune is Evan we contemplate your steadfast love within your house oh God for like your name your praise extends through all the earth abroad so on to the end of the psalm we contemplate your steadfast love we contemplate your steadfast love within your house oh God for like your name your praise extends through all the earth abroad all that you do is righteous

Lord Mount Zion's joy is great and Judah's towns rejoice as they your judgment celebrate round Zion walk and count her towers to every citadel so that two children yet unborn a story you may tell for God the Lord who is our God forever will abide he is our

God forever forever more and to thee and our guide I'll go to the main door this evening now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and ever more amen