

Series: The Confident, Loving Church – week 7

CDOBC – beginning on 2/14/10

Title: “A New Command to Love”

1 John 2:7-11 ~ April 25, 2010

OBJECTIVE: To show the high priority each believer should have to love others.

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- Quarterly business mtg – after second service – 1st quarter financials report
- Youth PM – next Sunday – prayer gathering at 5 p.m. due to Youth PM
- The Gathering – Thursdays at Einstein’s – Ina and Shannon – 6:30 p.m.
- Mother’s Day gift... Women’s Conf. – tickets available in courtyard

Brief summary/report regarding Together for the Gospel conference – not a restful time, but a great time of refreshment and encouragement for us!

Opening Prayer

Read 1 John 2:7-9

The old and new commands to love. vs. 7-8

“Dear friends” – *agapetoi* – better translated “beloved”.

At a surface reading, you might think that John is talking out of both sides of his mouth here. First, he says that he’s not “writing (you) a new command but an old one”, then in vs. 8 he says “Yet I am writing you a new command...” Which one is it?

The general topic John is segueing to in this section is love – and how love should be part of the DNA of the Christian’s life, and how this love not only gives us assurance or confidence in our faith, but how this love is expressed.

Love is an old command in the sense that it was given more than 1,000 years before the incarnation of Jesus in the writings of Moses – in the first five books of the Scriptures.

Deuteronomy 6:5

“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”

Leviticus 19:18

“Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.”

In this sense, the command to love – both God and fellow man – is old. The audience John was writing to – even though it would have been a mixed audience of both Jew and Gentile – they were most likely very familiar with this command.

However, Jesus shined a new light onto this old command. The new command of Jesus did not change the command, but revealed a deeper level of love than originally thought and practiced.

You might remember when Jesus was in Jerusalem the week of His crucifixion, and the Pharisees were trying to trick Him and discredit Him. We read in **Matt. 22:35-40**

“One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Jesus testified to the great effect love has on the rest of God’s Law. But on the night He was betrayed, Jesus told His disciples a greater standard to love one another by – His standard and His example.

John 13:34-35

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

This is why John says that he is not giving a new command but an old one – and then says that he is giving them a new command. He is echoing the words of Jesus who recited the command to love God and love others while talking with the Pharisees, and then a few days later told the disciples a new command – to love each other *as He had loved them*.

This idea of love is also in God's instructions to husbands in **Ephesians 5:25**

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..."

So we see that the command to love was old, but Jesus brought some new elements to bear upon the command.

According to William Barclay and James Montgomery Boice, this command to love was new in three ways.

First, it was new in its *extent* – meaning that it reached not only Jews but Gentiles as well. Jesus' command to the church to "... make disciples of all nations" was indeed a new emphasis of God's love.

Second, it was new in the *lengths* it would go. The cross of Christ was a new expression of God's love. Never before had God gone to such lengths to make His love known for all people.

Third, the love of God and His command for us to love was new in the *degree* to which it is realized. In the O.T., people had to obey God out of their own power – out of their own self-will and self-determination. Now, after Christ had died, been buried, resurrected, appeared – and then after His ascension sending the Holy Spirit to indwell every believer – for the first time in human history – a new thing was possible! This new thing was to love others not only out of our human ability and desire, but with the power and guidance of God in our soul! This kind of love was genuine and real – because it's the love of God in us!

John then continues and says, "...its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining."

The "Him" is Christ – and His love was seen clearly by His willingness to go to the cross – to sacrifice Himself for us – the greatest expression of love the world has ever seen.

But John also says that this love is seen in “you”. John is trying to help the readers see that the love of Christ has been active in their life also. John has either observed first-hand, or he has heard of ways the believers in these churches had loved each other in light of their new life in Christ. He is testifying to the changes that have occurred in their life – the evidence of the faith that they had – the life-transformation that had already started taking place.

The “darkness is passing” – Christ defeated Satan and death on the cross – the consummation of Jesus’ victory is yet to come, but the certainty of His victory is sure – it’s a fact of history. The “true light is already shining” means that the “true light” – Jesus – has come – and He was not only the Light of the Word (John 8:12), but that His light – the light of God shines in each believer. The light of God is seen in each believer as they love one another. This was true love – the love of God shining out from His children.

The practice of love. vs. 9-11

These next three verses point out to us what the Christian life should look like. This love – this love of God should cause a change of attitude – but much more than that – a change of behavior. Because of the reality of your faith in Christ – the transforming power of the cross and of the resurrection – because of the power of the Word of Christ – because the Holy Spirit’s power and guidance in your life – there should be a change in your life. Love. Love should become a characteristic that people associate with you!
Are you a loving person? Are you more loving today than when you first came to faith in Christ?

Before I read these verses, let me give some cautionary words on these verses. In most of the commentaries – and if you listen to most sermons on this passage, you will see that many categorize this section in 1 John as one of the “*tests of genuine faith*” – and they go so far as to say that if you don’t do these things, your faith is not genuine or real faith – that you are a counterfeit Christian. This section is divided into 3 sub-sections, and 1:5-2:2 is the “*doctrinal test*” – relating to the deity of Christ and our sinfulness, 2:3-6 comprise the “*moral test*” of your faith...this section (vs. 7-11) is called the “*social test*” of your faith. It is true that these things are good ways to examine yourself to see if your faith has transformed you in these areas. However, be careful not to make a rigid, spiritual ‘checklist’ that is easy to abuse and miss-apply to your life.

If your life does not have these “evidences”, it might mean that you don’t have genuine faith, **but** - it might mean that you are still in process and growing spiritually. As we’ll see in a minute, John wasn’t very loving when he was a new convert to Christ. Look at Peter’s great confession of Jesus as “...the Christ, the son of the Living God” in **Matthew 16:16**, only later to deny Jesus three times in one night. Talk about a failed test! Yet no credible person would state that Peter wasn’t a believer with genuine faith at that point! They would say that he was a believer with immature faith – a faith that was growing. A few years later Peter was treating Gentile believers in an unloving way (**Gal. 2:11-13**), but nobody would say that Peter’s lack of love for the brethren – and according to John’s view, Peter’s hatred of the Gentile believers, would mean that Peter had an invalid faith.

We must realize that these things in 1 John are great indicators – and if you like the term, they are great “tests” of our faith – but be very careful that you don’t judge your faith or anyone else’s faith as valid or invalid if they pass or fail these tests.

These tests can be great tools for self-examination of our faith, but in a more practical way, John is communicating to us some specific ways that our faith should transform our life. He is telling us the theological and behavioral standard for our faith. If these are not present in your life, the existence of faith may be an issue to address...but more likely, you need to begin allowing God’s Spirit and His truth to transform your life. You probably need to submit your prideful ways to God’s Word and begin living as He calls every believer to live.

Read vs. 9-11

John was not a natural ‘lover’ of people. In fact, early on, Jesus gave James and John – who were brothers – a nickname that meant “Sons of Thunder” which most commentators believe was characteristic of their strong personalities.

Mark 3:17

“James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder)...”

In fact, at one time in Jesus’ ministry, Jesus and His disciples were rejected by a small town, and John along with his brother were not very loving toward them...

Luke 9:54-55

“When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village.”

So we can see that in John’s own life, there was a process he underwent as his character was changed by the presence of Christ in his life.

Interesting difference between *eipon* (1:6 – “If we say”) and *legō* (2:9 – “Anyone who claims”). *Eipon* can carry the idea of the words that one says haven’t been thought through entirely – especially how the thoughts or ideas tie together. In other words, the words spoken may sound good, but they may not make sense. *Lego* (2:9 - “anyone who claims...”) can carry the idea of putting words together where the entire sentiment of the words has been considered.

I see these verses as a parallel to 1:6-8. John is trying to correct the false teaching that had invaded the various churches in Asia Minor, and he was helping the Christians in those churches understand that if they claim the name of Christ, then there was an ethical and moral implication that being a Christian brought into their life.

Once again, John uses “light” and “darkness” to differentiate good, God-pleasing actions with actions associated with sin and evil. When he says that “Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness”, he is saying that these things are not in agreement – they are inconsistent. To say you are in the light – a believer and follower of Christ – and to hate your brother – means that you are not living according to the light but according to the values of the darkness – the values of the world.

By the way – when John says “hate your brother”, he is not referring to someone who is openly and actively an enemy – one hurling public insults at another or physically attacking someone. Of course that is included, but in John’s ethic, simply ignoring another’s need is seen as hating them. Ignoring their need because it would be costly to you to help them would be hating them. Remember the new command

he is bringing before us – not just the O.T. version which prevented improper behavior toward another, but Jesus’ expansion which said “love others as I have loved you”. Vs. 10 – the person who loves his brother is living in a way that will encourage holy living. The love he has for others will not be a stumbling block for him – it won’t cause him or others a problem or a temptation to sin – he is obeying the command of Christ and only good things that please the Lord will be a result.

Then in vs. 11, John repeats the negative view of vs. 9 – but expands on the thought. Not only is the person who withholds love from another actually hating the other person, but they are truly lost in how to live in a way that pleases God. This is a very important point to understand – and one that plagues many modern American Christians. The believer who lives according to the Gnostic or antinomian philosophy, will be lost in life – their faith will never produce a meaningful and fulfilled life. They will feel lost – they will wonder why others have a joy in their faith, when theirs only seems to lead to disappointment, guilt, and pain. They miss the blessings of God in this life because they have not learned the importance of obeying God – the importance of allowing God to transform their life – the value of sacrificing the flesh and how on the front side of that process what we are called to give up for the Lord seems so costly – but after we obey we look back and realize the bondage we were in and the freedom that can only be found when you obey the Word of the Lord.

Illus. – *My in-laws – Lew and Kathie Backer – were able to visit Meramec Caverns. They told us that at one point in the tour, they*

turned off the lights – and it was so dark that you couldn't see your hand right in front of your face!

It's that kind of darkness that John is referring to. Darkness that makes it impossible to navigate – impossible to walk with any sense of direction or what is in your path – or even if you are on the path!

Eventually, this person is blinded by their sin and their pain.

Is this person saved – of do they have a counterfeit faith?

I don't know. I would say that some people like this are not saved – and some are.

I do know this for a fact...that there are some people here this morning that are believers in Christ – in His death, burial, and resurrection – but they have never given their daily living over to Christ – and as a result, as we read vs. 11 – they see themselves in that verse as clearly as if they were looking into a mirror!

Application

Self-examine your practice of loving others.

Are you obedient to Jesus' command to "...love one another as I have loved you"?

Is your love for others conditional? It should be unconditional – like Jesus' love for you is.

Strive to have a 'loving others' reputation – personally and corporately.

Jesus said that when we love one another, "...all men will know that you are my disciples". Over the 9 years I have been the Pastor here, I have heard often of what a friendly church we are – I pray that we would go further – and become known as a loving church – and

that will only happen when each of us loves others in this manner.

Close in prayer – transition to RHOF