

Sunday August 28, 2005  
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

**Something Old, Something New  
(Holiness 101)  
1 John 2:7-11**

I usually try to take my sermons from the readings that we are doing together as a church. I thought I might be speaking at the end of July, so I looked ahead at the readings for that week. I found myself in 1 John. This particular passage intrigued me and has a lot to do with holiness in general.

This week I would like to look at just the first portion of this passage and then get more into the specific application next week (unless the Lord changes my mind – it happens).

**1 John 2:7-11**

*“Dear friends, I am not writing a new commandment, for it is an old one you have always had, right from the beginning. This commandment--to love one another--is the same message you heard before. Yet it is also new. This commandment is true in Christ and is true among you, because the darkness is disappearing and the true light is already shining.*

*If anyone says, "I am living in the light," but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is still living in darkness. Anyone who loves other Christians is living in the light and does not cause anyone to stumble. Anyone who hates a Christian brother or sister is living and walking in darkness. Such a person is lost, having been blinded by the darkness.” NLT*

John is writing this letter toward the end of the first century (~80-90 A.D.), and he is dealing with a major problem in the church in Asia Minor at the time. False teachers had infiltrated the church and had persuaded many to turn away from the pure truth of God’s word. His message to the church is to remain loyal to those things that go back to the beginning.

Fellowship is stressed as a safe-guard against further division and heresy. We need each other, the fellowship of believers, to stay strong against false teaching to keep the body, the church together and healthy. These false teachers claimed that Jesus was not actually the true One from God. John bears witness that Jesus is really the One – the life from God, the Word of God, and the Light of the world. He tells of what he has both seen and heard personally.

John is speaking to believers in this letter. Many of his points are dealing with the way Christians are to act and relate to each other. This is a letter to the Church of Christ. However, it is made up of many Jewish believers as well as Gentile converts. John relies on their understanding of Scripture as a way of getting them to deal with the situation and get back on track. Even the new Gentile believers were trained upon conversion in the new way they should live in Christ. Considerable time was taken to disciple new believers in how to live so they could be a legitimate part of the church. After all, they were located in an area that was not very welcoming to Christianity. The false teachers were introducing compromises to the stricter way of life that the church could accept.

Sometimes we need to assess where we are in our walk with the Lord. What compromises have we allowed in our lives that really don't line up with God's Word and intent for us? Sometimes we need to go back to the very beginning things and re-evaluate where we are and how far we may have drifted. In essence this is repentance. Well, actually doing something about it is repentance, but first we must realize our need to repent. When was the last time you assessed your Christian walk against Scripture?

Where do we start? – Something Old

John takes the church back to the roots of relationship with God. This is not a new commandment he is giving them. This is something they have heard before and are well aware of. Even the Gentile converts were instructed in these basics. So let's go back to the beginning and see what God has instructed His people...

## **Love God**

*Deut 6:4-7 – “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again.”*

This is called the Shema, and it was and is recited daily by a devout Jew. It must be pretty important for there to be such an emphasis on the repetition and teaching of this. Does God demand any less of the New Testament church? Jesus said He didn't come to do away with the Law, but to fulfill it. Some of these stipulations are just as expected of us today as when God directed them to be followed thousands of years ago. **The most important thing we must do is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.**

This one command alone could revolutionize our lives. Just try to think of how different things would be if we loved God completely, total devotion to God. This would set us apart from those who do not love God completely. Only God is Holy! In fact, the term holy can only relate to God. There are no metaphors or even definitions for this term. It is God – and He is Holy. So how then can we be holy if only God is holy? As near as we can get is be completely dedicated to God or set apart for God only. The Bible tells

us that vessels made out of the same material can either be holy or not depending on what they are used for. If a vessel is only used for the things of God, then it is holy, but if it is used for common things, then it is not holy. In the Jewish tradition a common vessel can never be used for as holy. It must be set apart from the beginning as holy. John is a black and white type of person. Things are either right or wrong, light or darkness, holy or not.

When we receive Jesus into our heart and make Him Lord, we are changed. Our sin is forgiven, the Spirit of God comes to dwell within us, and our lives are set apart for God from that point forward. This doesn't mean we become sinless or perfect. It means we begin a new process of being transformed into the image of God that He intended from the beginning. We begin a sanctifying process of holiness. We then understand what it means to love God with our entire being. However, we soon realize that sin is still around, and we can still stumble and fall in various ways. We realize that we are not living God's best for our lives. The Spirit is diligent to remind us when we slip and empower us to make the adjustments to put us back on the right path toward holiness.

Ron Killen states this major commandment of God this way:

*"Love the Lord your God with all your vigor and sense of physical life; with all your thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, affections, purposes and endeavors. Love Him with the vital force which animates the body and shows itself in breathing; the seat of the feelings, desires, affections and aversions. Love Him with all your ability, force, strength and might. And, love Him with all your understanding, imagination, feeling, desiring, your way of thinking and feeling ..."*

That's a pretty tall order if you ask me.

So loving God completely is a key first commandment for all to follow. The Bible lists in detail regulations and guidelines for living as people set apart for God. The book of Leviticus is just loaded with sacrifices, rules, laws and judgments all to govern the way to live "holy." Throughout the book it is repeated to do these things for "I am the Lord." God commands holiness of His people. Leviticus 19-25 is what is called the Holiness Code in Scripture. It is in this Holiness Code that we read about loving others as a commandment...

### **Love Others**

Lev 19:15-18 – *"Always judge your neighbors fairly, neither favoring the poor nor showing deference to the rich. Do not spread slanderous gossip among your people. Do not try to get ahead at the cost of your neighbor's life, for I am the LORD. Do not nurse hatred in your heart for any of your relatives. Confront your neighbors directly so you will not be held guilty for their crimes. Never seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone, **but love your neighbor as yourself.** I am the LORD."*

So God commands holiness for His people. There is a responsibility on them (us) to do something about it. God never forces His ways on us; we have to set ourselves apart for Him and be holy, but it is the Spirit of God who is with us to accomplish this.

Lev 20:7-8 – *“**So set yourselves apart to be holy, for I, the LORD, am your God. Keep all my laws and obey them, for I am the LORD, who makes you holy.**”*

Lev 20:26 – *“**You must be holy because I, the LORD, am holy. I have set you apart from all other people to be my very own.**”*

Moses, the man of God, met with God on the mountain to receive all these commandments. He was to deliver these instructions (called the Law) to the people for one purpose only. They were to be holy because God is holy and they belong to Him.

### **Something New**

A few thousand years later, on a mountain side, Jesus imparted the instructions for holy living to the people of God. He taught them about love in a way that was challenging, but showed the true intent of God’s commandments of old. In His Sermon on the Mount from Matt. 5-7, Jesus spoke of loving even enemies, and in the context of teaching about love, He referred to the Holiness Code of Moses’ Law.

Matt 5:43-48 – *“You have heard that the law of Moses says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust, too. If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. **But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.**” NLT*

### **Entire Sanctification – Christian Perfection – Our Goal**

So perfection became the Christian goal. What actually is Christian perfection? What is the goal in all practicality? According to Wesley, our theological mentor, **perfection is loving God completely and loving others as He does.** That’s Christian perfection. That’s entire sanctification. That’s almost impossible in this life to accomplish. However, that’s the mark we are shooting for, and that’s the goal of the Spirit of God within all who have accepted Christ. He is in the process of transforming each of us toward this goal of perfect love.

This process will take a life time in most cases – and then some. John Wesley believed that since this is a work of God in our lives, there is a possibility that this “Christian Perfection” or “Entire Sanctification” could actually be complete while one is still alive, but that would be extreme and very rare if at all.

Jesus summed up all the commandments of God into a simple statement ...

**Mark 12:28-31** – *“One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the discussion. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” Jesus replied, “The most important commandment is this: ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.”*

Most people’s love or sense of love is distorted by a self-centered approach. We are really out for ourselves rather than pure love for others in spite of ourselves.

Some time after a woman broke the engagement with her fiancé, she wrote him this note: “Dearest Jimmy, No words could ever express the great unhappiness I’ve felt since breaking our engagement. Please say you’ll take me back. No one could ever take your place in my heart, so please forgive me. I love you, I love you, I love you! Yours forever, Marie...

P.S., And congratulations on winning the state lottery.”

In our text for today, John is telling the church that this is not a new commandment that he is giving them. This is something they have already heard and known. This is the original great commandment that God gave from the beginning. Nothing has changed. The same commandment is still in effect for the church of Jesus Christ. We used to say, “Yeah, so tell me something I don’t already know!” Sometimes we have to go back to the original things we learned in the beginning to get everything back into perspective. John is doing just that for these people. They needed to understand again what the main focus should be.

How do you measure up to this high standard of love in your life? Are you struggling against sin as you purposely set yourself apart as holy? Have you compromised your walk with the Lord over the years and realize you are not where God wants you to be? Don’t we all need to re-evaluate where we are in this process of sanctification and make adjustments? The Holy Spirit is the One who can and will help each of us keep the goal in focus and empower us to succeed in inching our way toward that goal. Everyone progresses at their own rate, but everyone must be progressing.

John says, ***“Dear friends, I am not writing a new commandment, for it is an old one you have always had, right from the beginning. This commandment--to love one another--is the same message you heard before. Yet it is also new...”***

Next week I would like to look at our text from 1 John and this issue of loving each other the way God commands. For now I want to give you some time to assess your personal progress with God. Let’s pray together...