

Loving One Another
(Holiness 102)
1 John 2:7-11

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“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

Last Week we looked at the command of God from the O.T. to Love God completely and to love our neighbor. We also saw that Jesus summarized the entire Law and commandments into one statement in Matt. 22 – “*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.”*

We learned that sanctification is the process of growing in love toward perfection, where we love God completely and we love others genuinely as God commands. This is holiness unto the Lord. We are on a path toward being restored to the originally intended “image of God” - Christlikeness.

We saw that there is a requirement and a responsibility for us to set ourselves apart for this purpose – to love God and love others. Love is a pretty big part of the entire Christian experience, and should be. It’s no wonder John tells the people, *“This commandment--to love one another--is the same message you heard before.”*

We also saw that John is writing to a church that has a few issues to deal with and correct. One of the major issues is their lack of love for one another. This is why John reminds them of the Law, the commandment of God to love each other. He actually addresses this one issue three times in this one short letter. To disobey a commandment of God is to sin. So, not loving each other properly and genuinely is sin and must be dealt with. Let’s get a better handle on this concept and see if we measure up.

Faith & Repentance:

The things of God are received by faith. We love God and other by faith first and then in practice. But – we’re not there yet. We will fall along the way and repentance is instrumental for Christians to get back on track with God’s plan for our lives.

Theologian, Michael Lodahl, writes, “As far as Scripture is concerned, one cannot cleanly separate faith from repentance, since repentance involves the act of turning from sin and self-centeredness toward God and other-centeredness...Thus, to believe in Christ, in the biblical sense, is necessarily also to repent from a life of sinning.”¹ So, we see that living as God commands requires faith and repentance. This is not a one-time event. Repentance must be an on-going life time practice.

Living in the Light:

John is a black and white kind of guy. To him, things are either right or wrong, obedience or sin, light or darkness, love or hatred. He doesn't leave room for gray areas.

1 John 1:5-7 – *“This is the message he has given us to announce to you: God is light and there is no darkness in him at all. So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness. We are not living in the truth. But if we are living in the light of God's presence, just as Christ is, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from every sin.”* NLT

John tells us that this commandment, to love each other, is already true in Christ. Christ is our example in everything. It is Him we are to model our lives and actions after. We are in the process of being transformed by the Holy Spirit into image of God which is Christlikeness. “This commandment *to love one another* is true in Christ.” This old commandment is also new, because Jesus ushered in a new age, and a new era. The Light of the world had come and established the age of enlightenment – the age of love.

John 13:34-35 – *“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”* NLT

Just as I have loved you ... How did Jesus love us? He ministered to those who were outcasts. He loved those who hated Him. He healed those no one would even look at. He let the insults and false accusations roll off His back and spoke the truth in love. He didn't slander, gossip, or hold a grudge against anyone, and He ultimately died for us. Jesus gave us this new commandment – love one another – genuinely, completely, and truthfully.

Paul summed this up for us in his letter to the Philippians.

Phil 2:2-4 – *“Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one heart and purpose. Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. Don't think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing.”* NLT

Yes, God is light, and Jesus is the light of God that has come into the world. To walk in light is to walk as Jesus did; to follow His example; to love others as He did. We are commanded to be like Christ and love one another. Are you walking in the Light or in darkness? Remember how John thinks here. We are either walking in the light or in darkness – one or the other. We can't do both at the same time. Anything other than pure love is hatred. Whenever we act in an unloving way toward another person, especially a Christian Brother or Sister whom Christ died for just like you, we are walking in darkness and sinning in God's eyes.

Love Test:

1 John 2:9 – “If anyone says, ‘I am living in the light,’ but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is still living in darkness.” NLT

Our true condition is not determined by what we say but by how we act and live the Christian life of true love.

1 John 2:10 – “Anyone who loves other Christians is living in the light and does not cause anyone to stumble.” NLT

Do we love each other as God intends? If you examine your walk right now can you see any area in dealing with others where you could cause someone to stumble? Where love for others is not the motivating force behind your actions and words? Are we judgmental in our dealings with others in the church? If I have knowledge even from the Bible, but don’t treat others in love, then my knowledge is not true knowledge at all. We can’t use liberty or legalism as justification to judge, malign, and hurt someone else. If we really love others the way God intends, we would not allow our words or actions to cause anyone to stumble. I know people who have left churches because of the hurtful things people have said to them. I know people who have left churches because of the hurtful things people have said about them. What a terrible testimony for the church of Jesus Christ and Christianity in general.

A lack of love can blind our spiritual vision. It can cause us to lose our ability to make right decisions (ethical and moral). Things are no longer clear – black and white – because our thinking has been affected. Love for others maintains our fellowship with God in light. Everything we do and say must be assessed in the light of God’s love. Test your relationship with God by testing your love for God and for others as He commands.

Not loving perfectly (as Jesus loved us) is disobedience of God’s commandment. How do you rate your obedience to God? How do you assess your love life? Have you become legalistic over time? Have you lost that special love you had when you first met Jesus? Are you angry, bitter, disappointed, upset, or annoyed with anyone? Do you claim to walk in the light? That claim is incompatible with walking in darkness. God is light and God is love – walk in God. Having fellowship with God is living in love and true fellowship with others.

1 John 2:11 – “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

You may think that “hate” is a harsh word, but we just saw that anything other than pure love is actually hatred. Do not allow yourself to be blinded by the darkness in whatever form that may take. Walk in the light of God’s love all the time – to the best of your ability. Constantly evaluate your motives and words and actions against God’s commandment of pure love. Repent and get back on track as soon as you realize you are off the mark. It’s not good enough to realize it. You have to do something about it. It may require you going to someone whom you have hurt or held a grudge against and ask for their forgiveness. You may need to call someone that you have gossiped about or maligned in some way. We all do these things from time to time. It’s easy to get caught up in someone telling you about someone else. We need to be on our toes all the time against such unloving actions. If we are always keeping “in check” in this area, our thinking, discernment, and recognition of it happening will become more acute. We can stop before we go too far and walk away from that darkness and walk back into the light of love. We can’t change anyone else (usually), but we can change ourselves. Don’t entertain anything but love toward others – walk away.

Say, “I don’t feel comfortable in this conversation. Let’s talk about something else.” This would be showing love toward that persona and whoever you were about to talk about too.

This is nothing new that you haven't heard before. We are commanded to love God completely and love others genuinely and purely. John tells us this is the same command we had from the beginning. He is also telling this to people who needed to be reminded and re-apply this commandment to their lives and church once again. If we had the time, I would read Romans 12 in its entirety. I'll give you a home assignment to read that chapter this week. "Paul tells us in Rom. 12 what holiness means in practical, everyday relationships and living: humility (v. 3), enthusiastic and willing service (vv. 4-8), love, joy, prayer, hospitality, sympathy, peace, and goodness, to name a few characteristics."¹ We are to have this attitude which was also in Christ (Paul says in Philippians 2). The church in any century needs to be living and acting in love or it will die. Love builds up. "Our religious profession must be tested by the presence or absence of love in action."¹ How do you measure up?

Monk Story

There is a story told of an old monastery that had fallen upon hard times. It was once a great order, but as a result of waves of anti-monastic persecution in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the rise of secularism in the nineteenth, all its branch houses were lost and it had become decimated to the extent that there were only five monks left in the decaying mother house: the abbot and four others, all over seventy in age. Clearly it was a dying order. Things looked grim.

In the deep woods surrounding the monastery there was a little hut that a rabbi from a nearby town occasionally used for a hermitage. Through their many years of prayer and contemplation the old monks had become a bit psychic, so they could always sense when the rabbi was in his hermitage. "The rabbi is in the woods, the rabbi is in the woods again," they would whisper to each other. As he agonized over the imminent death of his order, it occurred to the abbot on one of those occasions to visit the hermitage and ask the rabbi if by some possible chance he could offer any advice that might save the monastery.

The rabbi welcomed the abbot at his hut. But when the abbot explained the purpose of his visit, the rabbi could only commiserate with him. "I know how it is," he exclaimed. "The spirit has gone out of the people. It is the same in my town. Almost no-one comes to the synagogue anymore." So the old abbot and the old rabbi wept together. They talked for a short while and then the time came when the abbot had to leave. They embraced each other. "It has been a wonderful thing that we should meet after all these years," the abbot said, "but I have still failed in my purpose for coming here. Is there nothing you can tell me, no piece of advice you can give me that would help me save my dying order?"

"No, I am sorry," the rabbi responded. "I have no advice to give. The only thing I can tell you is that the Messiah is one of you."

When the abbot returned to the monastery his fellow monks gathered around him to ask, "Well, what did the rabbi say?"

He couldn't help," the abbot answered. "We just wept and read the Torah together. The only thing he did say, just as I was leaving – It was something cryptic – was that the Messiah is one of us. I don't know what he meant."

In the days and weeks and months that followed, the old monks pondered this and wondered whether there was any possible significance to the rabbi's words. The Messiah is one of us? Could he possibly have meant one of us monks here at the monastery? If that's the case, which one? Do you suppose he meant the Father Abbot? He has been our leader for more than a generation. On the other hand, he might have meant Brother Thomas. Certainly Brother Thomas is a holy man. Everyone knows that Thomas is a man of light. Certainly he could not have meant Brother Eldred! Eldred gets so grumpy at times. But, come to think of it, even though he is a thorn in people's sides, when you look back on it Eldred is virtually always right. Often very right. Maybe the rabbi did mean Brother Eldred. But surely not Brother Phillip. Phillip is so passive, a real nobody. But then, almost mysteriously, he has a gift for somehow always being there when you need him. He just magically appears by your side. Maybe Phillip is the Messiah. Of course the rabbi didn't mean me. He couldn't possibly have meant me. I'm just so ordinary. Yet supposing he did? Suppose I am the Messiah? O God, not me. I couldn't be that much for You, could I?

As they each contemplated in this manner, the old monks began to treat one another with extraordinary love and respect on the off chance that one among them might be Messiah. And on the 'off', off chance that each monk himself might be the Messiah, they began to treat themselves with extraordinary love and respect.

Because the forest in which it was situated was beautiful, it so happened that people still occasionally came to visit the monastery to picnic on its tiny lawn, to wander among some of its paths, even now and then goes to go into the dilapidated buildings to meditate. As they did so, without even being conscious of it, they sensed this aura of extraordinary love and respect that now began to surround the five monks and seemed to radiate out from them and permeate the atmosphere of the place. There was something strangely attractive, even compelling, about it.

Hardly knowing why, they began to come back to the monastery to picnic, to play, to pray. Its beauty drew them in. They began to bring their friends to show them this special place. And their friends brought their friends.

Then it happened that some of the younger men who came to visit the monastery started to talk more and more with the old monks. After a while one asked if he could join them. Then another. And another. So within a few years the monastery had once again become a thriving order and, thanks to the rabbi's gift, a vibrant centre of light and spirituality in the realm.

The church can be an amazing place when it is working as its supposed to – when we are treating one another as if each person were Christ himself. When we are following the command Jesus left – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength and love your neighbor as yourself”²

1 – **The Story of God** – Wesleyan Theology & Biblical Narrative, by: Michael Lodahl, Beacon Hill Press or Kansas City, Kansas City, Mo. (p. 187, 175)

2 – **Monk Story** – Andrew Hamilton – sermoncentral.com – “Loving One Another”