

# “Living in the Love of God”

(1 John 2:7-11)

## Introduction

- Sometimes we can unwittingly miss that which is most obvious. We can become obsessed with secondary or peripheral issues that we neglect that which is more, or even most, important. As the saying goes, “We can miss the trees for the forest.”
- ✓ **Illust:** Charlie loved fishing more than anything else in the world. Every winter he would sink into a deep depression because all of the lakes were frozen over for months at a time. Then a friend told him about ice fishing. “What a great idea!” Charlie shouted. “I’ll go first thing in the morning!” Bright and early the next day, Charlie lugged all his gear to a smooth stretch of ice. He cut a hole in the ice with an ax, baited up his hook, and dropped in his line. Then he waited patiently. Charlie fished for 2 hours without a bite. Suddenly a loud, deep voice from above broke the silence. “*There are no fish in here!*” Undeterred, Charlie fished on. About an hour later, he heard the booming voice again. “*There are no fish in here!*” Charlie had not fished in months, so he was not easily discouraged. He kept staring at his line, patiently waiting for a fish to strike. Another hour passed. “*There are no fish in here!*” Charlie could not ignore the booming voice any longer. He covered his head with his arms and asked meekly, “God, is that you?” “No”, responded the voice, “I am the manager of this ice-skating rink, and there are no fish in here!”
- As Christians, if we are not careful and vigilant, we can become so focused or obsessed about other things – even good things – in life that we overlook important aspects of the Christian life. Reading, studying and applying the Bible, and specifically here the book of “1 John” – is a great way to prevent or remedy any misplaced priorities in the Christian’s life.

As we have seen, and will continue to see, the book of “1 John” (words inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, and written by the apostle John) is simple, convicting, and straightforward. It is a book of stark “black and white” contrasts: love and hatred, light and darkness, truth and lies, righteousness and sin, Christ and the antichrists, the Spirit of God and the spirit of the world, children of God and children of the devil. This book has been rightly regarded as “the basics of Christianity”, or the “fundamentals of the faith.”

- The passage before us this morning is no exception:

**1 John 2:7-11** ~ “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. <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. <sup>10</sup>Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. <sup>11</sup>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.”

- Christians living in the love of God is one of the major themes throughout the book of “1 John” (variant forms of the word love is used 52 times, in just five chapters/105 verses). The point is terribly easy to understand, and yet often very difficult to apply. The point is this: those who truly love God, those who have been loved by God with a sovereign and salvific love, will love the things that God loves. To put it more specifically, those who are truly God’s children (Christians) will love all who are God’s children (Christians). This is not only common sense, but also a command of God.

**Matt 22:37-40** ~ “And [Jesus] said ... ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup>This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup>And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup>On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.’”

Therefore, the failure to love other Christians (as God loves them) is a sin, and – apart from confession and repentance – this sin can be evidence of a false profession of faith; proof that the professing Christian is actually unsaved.

➤ It is relatively easy for us, as Christians, to forget (or neglect) to love other Christians. Christians can be most critical, most demanding, and most judgmental of other Christians – after all, our expectations concerning the morality, integrity, and maturity of fellow believers is typically higher the same expectations of unbelievers.

However, our love for fellow believers ought to be greater and stronger than our love for unbelievers – for Christians uniquely share a love that comes from God through the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit. We find this truth expressed throughout Scripture:

**John 13:34-35** ~ “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. <sup>35</sup>By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

**Rom 12:9-10** ~ “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. <sup>10</sup>Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.”

**1 Peter 1:22** ~ “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart”

**Gal 6:10** ~ “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

➤ To be sure, Christians are commanded to love all people (Matt.22:39) and are even specifically commanded to love their enemies (Matt.5:44; Lk.6:27, 35). But there is a special, familial, love that Christians are to have toward one another. To be sure, some people – even some Christians – can be difficult to love. They serve as our “spiritual sandpaper”; helping to smooth out our rough edges, to correct our imperfections, to strengthen our weaknesses, and to deepen our love and compassion for others.

We are commanded to love others regardless of whether or not they love us, or whether we ‘deem’ them lovable or unlovable. Our love needs to be pure in both our motive and expression of love.

**1 John 3:23-24** ~ “And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. <sup>24</sup>Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.”

**1 John 4:7-8** ~ “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

**1 John 4:11-12** ~ “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup>No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.”

➤ In the scriptural passage before us this morning (1 John 2:7-11) can be divided into two main sections, each giving detail instruction/information on how we as Christians are to live in the love of God.

#### A. The Law of Love (vs.7-8)

➤ This picks up right where we left on in “1 John.” The apostle has stated clearly that the true Christian seeks to obey the commands of God:

**1 John 2:3-6** ~ “And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. <sup>4</sup>Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, <sup>5</sup>but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: <sup>6</sup>whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.”

➤ Generally speaking, Christians seek to following the commands of God as they seek to live Christlike lives. More specifically, in the subsequent verses, John points out that one such command is the command to love.

**1 John 2:7-8** ~ “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. <sup>8</sup>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.”

➤ The Greek word (*entolē*) translated “*commandment*” (vs.7<sup>[3x]</sup>, 8) is a general word used for any precept, order, or law. It is clear from the context of this passage that the specific commandment John is referring to here is the command to love (“*loves*” [*agapaō*]; vs.10); specifically, a “*brother*” (or sister) in Christ (vs.9, 10, 11). We are commanded by God to love others – this is simply not an option/elective for the true believer [note: we are *never* commanded to make sure others love us, or even commanded to only love those who love us].

**Matt 22:37-40** ~ “And [Jesus] said ... ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup>This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup>And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup>On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.’”

➤ Biblical love is not merely a feeling, or even an emotion. It is a conscious decision to act in a way that truly benefits the recipient, by demonstrating the love of God. This love [*agapaō* (vb.), *agape* (n.)] is selfless, sacrificial, and sacred. It is a love that comes from God (1Jn.4:7-8, 16), and therefore a love that reflects the attributes and character of God.

### 1. Love as an old commandment

➤ In giving this command, the apostle John wrote: “*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*” (vs.7). Clearly, the command to love one another is nothing new. John is not here giving Christ’s disciples a mandate that they have never “*heard*” before.

➤ One interpretive challenge that we face is understanding what is meant by “*from the beginning*” (vs.7). Some interpret this to mean from the beginning of creation (i.e., this has always been God’s command), what John’s readers heard from Judaism (see 1Jn.1:1; 3:8; cf. Matt.5:43). Others believe it refers to what these Christians heard from the moment of their conversion to Christianity.

While it is true that the command to love one another is found in the Old Testament (Lev.19:18; cf. Matt.23:39), it seems as though John is reminding these Christians of what the “*heard*” when they first heard and believed the Gospel (see 1Jn.2:24).

**1 John 3:11** ~ “For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.”

➤ In either case, the truth is the same. The command to love one another is nothing new. This is a reminder (as the saying goes: “Oftentimes, people need to be reminded more than taught”). John is not giving a new command, and neither did Jesus. But this command finds its ultimate fulfillment and perfection in Jesus Christ, and those who are true followers of Jesus Christ.

### 2. Love as a new commandment

➤ After establishing the command to love one another as an “*old commandment*” (vs.7), John then wrote: “*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*” (vs.8). Admittedly, at first

glance, this is a bit confusing. But, as is true of all Scripture, this is no contradiction. The word translated “*new*” (*kainos*) does not connote something that is brand new, but something that has been renewed (or even new and improved).

➤ This commandment is both old (vs.7) and new (vs.8). It is old in the sense that the people of God were commanded to love, and not hate, their brothers and sisters from their hearts long before John wrote this letter (Lev.19:17-18). It is new “*in him*” (vs.8) – i.e., in Jesus – meaning that the command to love others finds its fullest definition, expression, and perfection in the life and ministry of Jesus. As we are obedient to the Spirit – walking “*in the same way in which [Jesus] walked*” (1Jn.2:6) – we will live out Jesus’ example by performing new acts of love toward others.

**1 John 2:5** ~ “but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. ...”

**1 John 4:12** ~ “No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.” (see 1Jn.4:17)

➤ This is what Jesus was referring to when He told His disciples about the “*new commandment*” to “*love one another*”:

**John 13:34-35** ~ “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. <sup>35</sup>By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

➤ Jesus not only enables and empowers us to love one another, but also showed us the way to love one another.

**1 John 3:23** ~ “And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.”

**1 John 4:11** ~ “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” (see Eph.5:1-2; 1Jn.4:19)

**John 13:34** ~ “... just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”

**John 15:12-13** ~ “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”

➤ Through the indwelling power and presence of God’s Holy Spirit, which abides in all true believers from the moment of their conversion, Christians can love one another as they have been loved by Christ. For Christians have been saved from the domain of darkness (Col.1:13; 1Pet.2:9), and dwell in the light of Christ (2Cor.4:6). Therefore, Christians do not walk in the darkness of this world but in the light of Christ.

This is what John was referring to when he wrote: “*which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining*” (vs.8). Even though we live in this dark world, as Christians, we have the love and light of Christ already shining in and through us.

## **B. The Life of Love (vs.9-11)**

➤ Hatred is a characteristic of unbelievers (we can easily see the hatred, hostility and volatility that exists in our society at large). Unbelievers are ruled by hate; they hate God and godliness, Christ and Christians.

**Rom 1:30** ~ [they are] “... haters of God” (see Rom.8:7-8)

**John 3:20** ~ “For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.”

**John 15:18-19** ~ “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup>If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

**John 15:23** ~ “Whoever hates me hates my Father also.”

**1 John 3:13** ~ “Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.”

**Titus 3:3** ~ “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.”

➤ Hatred should not characterize a Christian’s life. In fact, Scripture tells us that hatred *does not* characterize the Christian life.

**1 John 2:9-11** ~ “Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. <sup>10</sup>Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. <sup>11</sup>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.”

➤ In these verses, John outlined both the effects of hating and loving one another. These serve as important, and humbling, reminders as what it means to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ [all-too-often we read a passage like this and immediately think, “I know someone who needs to hear this!” rather than examine our own lives, or we think of ourselves only as the one who needs to be loved rather than the one who needs to love]. These verses – written in absolute, black-and-white terms – are meant to cause us to examine ourselves, the veracity and maturity of our faith in Christ (see 1Cor.11:28; 2Cor.13:5).

### 1. The effects of hating one another

➤ As we have seen, John is not condemning a Christian for one act of hate or for struggling with hatred. He is here referring to the unbroken practice of sin (see 1Jn.3:4, 8, 9, 10). He is referring to the professing believer who lives with unconfessed/unrepented hatred in his/her heart.

a) **Spiritual reality (vs.9):** “*Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness*” (vs.9).

Once again, we see the condemnation of Christian hypocrisy – saying that you are a Christian and living like a non-Christian. Merely calling yourself a Christian does not mean that you are truly a follower of Christ. Saying your saved does not mean that you are saved. A person can profess Christ and not possess Christ; a person can be in church and not in Christ; a person can know about God and not know God.

**1 John 1:6** ~ “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.”

**1 John 2:4** ~ “Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar ...”

**1 John 3:10** ~ “By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”

To be a true Christian, one must do more than simply acknowledge Jesus or affirm Christian doctrine – a true Christian seeks to live for Christ and to live like Christ. One way this is demonstrated is in our love for one another. The “Christian” who harbors hate toward another/others may “[say] *he is in the light*” but is actually “*still in darkness*” (vs.9). It is important to remember that “light” refers to purity and wisdom (1Jn.1:5), and “darkness” refers to sin and foolishness.

**1 John 3:14-15** ~ “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. <sup>15</sup>Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

**1 John 4:20** ~ “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.”

b) **Spiritual practice (vs.11):** *“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”* (vs.11).

Notice the natural progression here: to hate is to be *“in the darkness”*, to be in the darkness is to *“walk in the darkness”*, to walk in the darkness is to *“not know where [you] are going”* (vs.11). It is to effectively live like you are spiritually blind. Hatred blinds us to the will of God, causing us to stumble in sin and into various other sins.

Sin cannot be managed, compartmentalized, or domesticated. A Christian simply cannot be living a Christlike life while they are reveling in, harboring, and/or practicing hatred. Such sin will affect other areas of the Christian’s life, causing them to walk in unrighteousness and foolishness.

➤ Over my nearly thirty years as a pastor, I have had countless conversations with professing Christians who declared their disdain/hatred for the church and/or other Christians. Many of them prefer to worship God alone, which makes sense, because then they only have to love themselves. The simple, and yet sobering, truth is this: You cannot truly love God, and not love those who are truly children of God; you cannot truly love Christ, and not love those who are truly disciples of Christ.

**Rom 13:12** ~ “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.”

**Eph 5:8** ~ “for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light”

**Eph 5:11** ~ “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”

## 2. The effects of loving one another

➤ Conversely, when a Christian truly walks in the light of Christ, he/she loves as Christ loves. Whereas the false (sinning) believer stumbles in the darkness

a) **Spiritual reality (vs.10a):** *“Whoever loves his brother abides in the light ...”* (vs.10a).

As hate is evidence of spiritual darkness and blindness, love is evidence of spiritual light and sight. The Christian who truly loves not only “walks” (vs.11) in the light but *“abides”* (*menō*; lives, remains, perseveres) in the light of Christ. That is, through Christ and the Holy Spirit, God lives in them and they live in God (see Jn.15:4-17).

**1 John 2:17** ~ “And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

**1 John 3:24** ~ “Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.”

**1 John 4:12** ~ “No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.”

**1 John 4:16** ~ “So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”

Again, the apostle is emphasizing, and re-emphasizing, a simple but vital truth: a person cannot truly be living in the light and in darkness at the same time. If we are truly abiding in the light of God, we are also abiding in the love of God. The evidence of this is demonstrated as we love one another.

**b) Spiritual practice (vs.10b): “... in him there is no cause for stumbling” (vs.10b).**

Where the false (sinning) believer stumbles in the darkness (succumbing to the temptations of sin, and the error of foolishness), the true believer walks in the light of Christ (i.e., in the righteousness and wisdom of Christ). Just as living in unrighteousness produces further unrighteousness, so living in righteousness produced greater righteousness.

The Greek word translated “*cause for stumbling*” (*skandalon*; vs.10) is from where our English word “scandal” or “scandalize” is derived. It refers to a stumbling block, or obstacle, of any kind (see Rom.9:33; 1Cor.1:23; 1Pet.2:8). When we walk in the light of Christ, we walk in the purity and wisdom of Christ.

**John 11:9-10** ~ “... If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble [*proskoptō*], because he sees the light of this world. <sup>10</sup>But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles [*proskoptō*], because the light is not in him.”

This word (*skandalon*) is also used in the context of causing another person to stumble – to be a spiritual stumbling block or obstacle – his/her Christian walk (see Matt.18:5; 7; Rom.14:13). So, when we walk in the light of Christ, we walk in love toward one another, keeping ourselves from stumbling into sin and helping others not to stumble into sin.

✓**Illust:** “Light is in itself – in its very nature and bare shining – a great extinguisher of hatred; especially of hatred among those who should be brethren. It is in the darkness that mistakes occur, and misunderstandings arise. It is in the darkness that injuries are brooded over, and angry passions nursed. If you, brother, and I, are at variance it is almost certain to be because there is some darkness about us that hinders us from seeing one another clearly. Therefore we imagine evil of one another, and impute evil to one another. Let in the light. Let us see one another clearly. Differences between us may still remain; our views of many things may be wide as the poles asunder. But we see that we are men of like passions and like affections with one another. The light shows us that we are true brethren in spite of all” (A.W. Pink; *An Exposition of 1 John*; p.52).

## Conclusion

➤ In his letter to the Corinthian church, writing words inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, the apostle Paul outlined both the importance of and the expression of true biblical love:

**1 Cor 13:1-3** ~ “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

➤ A Christian without love: 1) Produces nothing, 2) Is nothing, 3) Profits nothing

**1 Cor 13:4-7, 13** ~ “Love is patient; love is kind. Love does not envy; is not boastful; is not conceited; <sup>5</sup>does not act improperly; is not selfish; is not provoked; does not keep a record of wrongs; <sup>6</sup>finds no joy in unrighteousness, but rejoices in the truth; <sup>7</sup>bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ... <sup>13</sup>Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.” (HCSB)

1 Cor 13:4-7, 13 ~ “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant <sup>5</sup>or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup>it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup>Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all

things, endures all things. ... <sup>13</sup>So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” (ESV)

- This is the love that God shown and given to all believers. Consequently, this is the love that characterizes all true believers. To this we must give serious self-examination, and earnest prayer, so that we can be sure to found and to walk in the light of Christ.