



As I've been studying 1 John, I've been encouraged and amazed by the connection John brings to walking in the light and living in close relationship, fellowship and love with other believers. I've talked with Ben Jacques a couple of times about this, and he's talked about how these words of John seem to emphasize that if you're walking in the light of God, you will be a person who fellowships. You'll be the kind of person that reaches out and the kind of person that believers are attracted to. A Christian who doesn't fellowship is an oxymoron.

Keep this in mind as we move forward because John is showing his readers how Jesus shapes and transforms Christians. This is in opposition to the false teachers who are essentially saying that your fellowship with God isn't hindered by anything you do in this life. Instead, John says that your fellowship with God affects everything you do in this life. So, we've seen how fellowship with God leads to fellowship with believers. It leads to living in transparency about our weaknesses and sins. It leads to true confession and growth in godliness. Walking with God leads to following Jesus' example of living life in dependence on the Lord for everything.

Now we come to the next section of John. What's he going to emphasize here? You begin reading verse 7, and you might be confused. John's writing no new commandment, but an old one. Wait. What commandment is John writing? Did he already command something? Did we miss something? Let's remember that this letter wasn't broken up in sections. This section connects with what we looked at last week. So, before re-reading verses 7-11, let's read verses 5-6: **⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.** ¹ When we read these words, and then look forward to verses 9 and following, you realize that John is emphasizing the command of love. But remember that God isn't simply commanding that we do externally loving actions without internal heart change. In verse 6, when John says that we are to walk in the same way Jesus walked, he's emphasizing walking by faith. As we are in relationship and dependence on the Lord, God's love is perfected through us!

This reminds me of the apostle Paul's words in Galatians 5:6, when he says that the only thing that counts (i.e. – matters) is faith working through love. As we live our lives in dependence/faith on the Lord, his love works through us! And that's why we have fellowship with one another! God's love is being perfected through those of us who trust Jesus!

Right here, someone might say, "This is a command? It sounds like something God is doing, not something we do." And that's where a lot of people get confused. They think to not be a legalist, there can be no commands. Or, if you begin to live a certain way that is godly, then you were never listening to commands. That's not true. Jesus said that his commands aren't burdensome! When those of us who

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 2:5–6.

genuinely trust in the Lord Jesus for forgiveness of sins and eternal life, we are reconciled with God and we begin to obey out of the freedom and love that he has set over us! His commands aren't burdensome. They're expressions of the freedom we have in Christ. Therefore, the call to love is both a privilege and a command and a miracle of God working in and through us as we commune with him.

Ok, now that we have this basis, let's jump into the text today, and before I do, let me give you the main idea of the sermon: **God's love is foundational for Christians, and expressed through Jesus and his followers.** We're going to break this down in the first two verses, and then in verses 9-11, we'll look at three examples John gives to emphasize this point. So, let's start with love being foundational for Christians. John emphasizes this by saying that:

1. The old command of love is foundational for Christians (v. 7).

When I say foundational, I'm referring to the "old command" that John speaks of here in verse 7. Let's read verse 7 again: 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.²

"I'm writing you no new commandment," John says. But, wait! We just skipped over something extremely important. As we've already noted throughout chapter 1 and 2, John loves the people he's writing to. He's not writing a theological treatise so that these people can have boosted egos about their smarts. He's writing to them because he has great concern and love for them. Do you see it here? John uses the term "beloved." John, who could never get over the fact that Jesus loved him, shines God's love through him to these people! He calls them "beloved." And I know that word sounds obsolete. If I was preaching and said, "beloved," you might think I sound hoity-toity or weird. But, Ventura, this is a beautiful and comforting word. It means "dearly loved." Oh, don't read 1 John without knowing the tone of the letter. This is written with great love.

Now, we can move into these words about the "old command." It's an old command that they had from the beginning. In just a few chapters from here in 3:11, John writes, "For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another."³ But, what does this mean and why does this matter? In the Roman culture, "new" wasn't always prized. "New" religions were actually looked down on many times. It was those religions who stood the test of time that had greater respect. In addition, Christianity isn't really *new*. Christianity is based on the faith of the patriarchs, right? Yet, these false teachers are coming in saying they have something "new." Shouldn't that pose a problem? They're bringing in something entirely contradictory from the old. Ventura, I said this a couple weeks ago, but I'll say it again. When someone says, "I discovered something entirely new in the Bible that no one has discovered," watch out! Our faith is an *old* faith. And love has been the command of God from the beginning. As a matter of fact, Jesus himself said that the summation of the law is to love. When stating the most important commands, Jesus says to love God and love others. This is nothing new. And where the false teachers are trying to make their new ideas central, John is essentially agreeing with Paul by saying that all that counts is faith working through love!

And so, John says, this is the word that you have heard. It's old. And I don't believe John is simply saying this is a word they "heard," but the hearing here seems to expressed that they heard and believed. Faith comes by hearing. They embraced this in the past, why would they reject this and move to the false

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 2:7.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 3:11.

teachers who seem to say that even if you don't love others and you hide in your sin that it doesn't affect fellowship with God and that it doesn't affect fellowship with others?

So, Ventura, the old commandment of love is foundational for us as Christians! If you do anything without love, you're just making noise! But John now moves on to make what seems to be a contradictory statement:

2. The new commandment of love is expressed through Jesus and Christians (v. 8).

Let's read verse 8: 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.⁴

How can something be old and new at the same time? Good question! Jesus' words help us in this. In John's gospel record, he shares Jesus' words about this new command. In John 13:34, Jesus says, **“³⁴ 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.”**⁵

How is love a new commandment? Notice how Jesus qualifies the love. Love one another in the same way that Jesus has loved them! In the Old Testament, we never saw perfect earthly examples of love. We had commands of God. We could see how God worked, but it's all seen dimly. Over and over, God commands love, and while there are displays of God's love through people like Moses or Elisha or Ruth or Josiah, there are clearly destructive displays of hatred in this broken world. And even through the good displays, they're not perfect. That's why the entire Old Testament is groaning for the Messiah. It's looking forward to one who will honor and love God perfectly and set us free to love God and love others as we were intended to do – from the heart.

So, Jesus says to his disciples the command is new now. Why? Because now they have a living example. Jesus isn't merely words on a page. Jesus isn't merely a command carved in stone. Jesus is God come in human flesh and he perfectly displayed God's love. God's love worked through him in all he did. Whether he was confronting or comforting. Whether he was resting or weeping. Whether he was with sinners or the perceived saints. He is Love. Now Jesus tells his disciples that the new command is to love like he has loved them!

Get this Ventura. We are to love one another like Jesus loved. Let me ask you something, did the disciples always listen and obey Jesus? Was Jesus ever exasperated with his disciples? Yes, he even says, “How long must I bear with you?” But did Jesus ever stop loving? No. Did he ever leave his disciples even when they left him? No. He had a meal with them the night before he knew all but one would run from him! And he did this to rescue all of them. To guarantee that they would love God and others from the heart.

So, Ventura, if the commandment is to love like Jesus loved, what does that mean for you? How can you express love towards others? This is the heartbeat of the New Testament: love one another! Why? Because all that matters is faith working through love. And when we love, we can be overjoyed that God is working through us!

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 2:8.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 13:34.

John further emphasizes this by saying that this commandment is true in Jesus and in us. The idea of this word “true” here means “truly expressed. It doesn’t simply mean it’s genuine, but it’s genuinely expressed. We know that we can have actions of love, but our heart really isn’t in it. Have you ever done that? I’m sure. But have you ever had a deep care for the soul and personhood of someone that you want them to know and rejoice in God and because of God’s great love for you, you want to shower his love on them? That’s an example of a genuine expression of love.

John goes so far to say that this is the case through Jesus and Christians. Get that. Just as love can’t not come through Jesus, so love must flow through Christians. We are united with Jesus! To not love is to counter God’s plan for his children! What a freeing and awesome concept. Truly, Jesus’ command is not burdensome. Not only can we love, but Jesus guarantees we will love.

And why will we love? The last part is that the darkness is passing away and the genuine light is shining. Here, the word “true” refers to “genuine.” I believe the light is referencing Jesus. But notice here that John communicates in the present tense. We currently live in a tension. We live in a time period where there is great light and great darkness. In the Scriptures, darkness refers to Satan’s and sin’s domain. But John says this darkness is passing away. It’s like something has given the death blow to darkness, but it’s still convulsing. Who has delivered the death blow? Jesus! He’s the Light that is shining. He delivered the death blow through his perfect life, death, and resurrection from the dead. He took the full weight of our sins on himself. And being viewed as sin by God the Father, God judged Jesus the sinner in the place of sinners. Jesus took the punishment that sinners deserved and then died. You would then think Jesus lost, but he didn’t! On the third day from his death, he rose again! By taking the eternal consequence of sin on himself, anyone who trusts him no longer faces the eternal judgment from God. And, by rising from the dead, Jesus conquers death!

But Jesus didn’t bring in his Kingdom in perfection yet. There’s still sin in this world. There’s still brokenness. Why? Because God is calling people to turn from their sins and turn to Jesus for forgiveness and life. So that they would be set free to follow the Lord. Therefore, there’s still darkness, but it’s a defeated enemy. It’s passing away. And the genuine, true light is shining! So, because the genuine light is shining, we have been set free to love like Jesus loved. Do you know this love? Have you trusted Jesus? Are you living in the Light? At this point, John gives three truths that result from what he’s said. **Since God’s love is foundational for Christians, and expressed through Jesus and his followers, therefore:**

One’s bare confession means nothing (v. 9). When I say “bare” confession, I mean someone who just says something with their words, but they don’t show it with their life. Look at what John says in verse 9: ⁹Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.⁶

If you say you’re in the light – think back to chapter 1. To be in the light means that you’re in communion, walking with God, close in proximity and making progress. His light is shining on you. Now, if someone says that they’re in the light, but they hate their brother, John says they’re still *in darkness*. Oh, get this Ventura. He doesn’t say that you’re dabbling with the darkness. You are *in* darkness.

Right here, I can imagine some people squirming. What does it mean to “hate?” Before I answer that question, I do want to emphasize another point. In these verses, John is highlighting Christian’s love for fellow believers in Christ. The term “his brother” is referencing how we treat fellow Christians – male

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 2:9.

and female. Please don't assume John is now suggesting we can hate non-Christians now. That's *not* true. But here, John is emphasizing the community of believers. It'd be like me saying to my children that they need to love their siblings. And that family-love is unique. That doesn't mean I want my kids to hate their neighbors and classmates. But I am saying there's a unique love with the family. That's what John is saying here. Do you believe that? Do you know there's a unique love we can have and express with fellow Christians?

Ok, now we can go on to ask what "hate" means. Some of you could read these words of John and say, "Well, I don't *hate* that person, I just want to make them pay for what they've done. I tell other people how horrible they are, etc." What would the first-century readers be thinking? Could the false teachers say, "We're not murdering anyone! So, we're good." I don't think John is reserving the word "hatred" to refer to acts of atrocity that might come from Nero or Hitler or Ahab. So, what does he mean? I think Jesus' words in Luke's gospel helps us. In chapter 6:22, we read this: **"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!"**⁷ Jesus defines hatred here to include exclusion, insulting and rejecting people. This opens up all kinds of categories for us to consider. I actually believe that John's word for "hate" here actually simply means to *not love*. In chapter 4, John says "whoever does not love does not know God." He doesn't say whoever hates. He says "whoever does not *love*." A lack of love and a lack of a pursuit of loving others (in real life) is contrary to the light. So, you might not spout out mean words or phrases about people, but do you quietly exclude or passively insult and reject people? What's your judgmentalism like towards fellow Christians? Do you believe all things, hope all things, endure all things with those who are brothers and sisters in Christ? Are you walking in the light as a believer? How are we, Ventura? How are you in talking about the Christians here in our own church family?

At this point, others of you might worry about this because you might think, "Is John saying that if I hate someone at any moment in time or even for a season, I'm not a Christian?" I don't believe that's the case. Remember, we still sin. We have an Advocate who forgives. But we can't settle in with hatred. Christian's cannot keep holding on indefinitely. Therefore, to say with your mouth that you're in the light, but you show a lack of love in practice, means nothing. Now let's move to John's second point:

One's actions of love lead to the spiritual growth of others (v. 10). Let's read verse 10: ¹⁰Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.⁸ Here's how you know someone is walking in the light, they help others to walk in the light! This goes to a phrase that we use here at Ventura. We are disciple-making disciples. Meaning, we believe that followers of Jesus help followers of Jesus to follow Jesus. If I love you then I don't want to give you any cause to stumble. That word for stumble, of course, isn't literal. It refers to spiritual stumbling. And to stumble ultimately means to get people's eyes off of Jesus – their relationship of faith. If all that matters is faith working through love, then I want you to grow in dependence on the Lord and loving God and others, too.

Whoever loves his brother abides in the light! The confession is real. The talk and the walk match up. Are you the kind of person who helps others walk in the light? Are you a cause of stumbling, grumbling and complaining for others or do you help focus people's attention on Jesus? When a fellow Christian's eyes are on the anxieties of this world, do you help come alongside, weep with them and also comfort them and point to the Lord? Those who love, help people grow spiritually by not being a stumblingblock.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 6:22.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 2:10.

Finally, John gives his third example: **One's lack of love reveals bondage to sin (v. 11)**. Verse 11 says, 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.”⁹ If you hate, you're in darkness and your life is darkness.

What is love? Sometimes people define it purely as emotional. They might also describe it primarily in terms of what they get from others. So, they'll say they love somebody because that person does so much for them. I've known people who been verbally and mentally abusive to their spouses, addicted to porn or other things, and they'll still say, “But I love you.” I believe they have a broken definition of love because if that's love, I'd hate to see hate. But these individuals might still fight to say, “No, I love you,” which just adds to John's words here. The darkness has blinded the eyes. You don't even know the truth.

Of course, we know that hatred here doesn't have to only refer to abusive relationships. It can be the two Christians in the church who don't talk to each other anymore because of that situation a while ago. Is it worth being unreconciled? If both repent, praise the Lord! As much as within you, seek to bring peace and unity. Don't be ok with darkness.

Oh Ventura, I hope we understand these glorious realities. Jesus came to grant us fellowship with God and each other – and this fellowship is expressed through a unique love for each other. I pray that we would grow in this love. I pray that we would be astounded in God's love for us! I pray that Christ's Advocacy and forgiveness would shape us in how we love one another. After all, **God's love is foundational for Christians, and expressed through Jesus and his followers.**

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 2:11.