

A New Old Problem

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[0 : 00] the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I'm writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.

Whoever loves his brother and abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother and is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, but does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

I'm writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. I'm writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I'm writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. Let's pray.

Lord, we are thankful this morning for your word, for the reading only is enough to convince us that you are glorious and that we need Jesus and that he is glorious. Lord, we pray also that you might tune our hearts and minds to your word, to the words that you speak to us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. You might not know the names MacArthur Wheeler or Clifton Earl Johnson, and even if you had never heard those names before, you definitely don't know about their meteoric rise to fame or infamy. They're famous for being really, really stupid.

[1 : 44] See, in 1995, Wheeler and Johnson robbed two Pittsburgh area banks, but they didn't have a clever plan or really good disguises. They thought they did, or really fast getaway car or anything like that. They are just really, really stupid. And that's what the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette said about them. That's what the evening news said about them, because you see, they thought they could get away with it all, not because they had a good plan, not because they had good disguises or fast getaway car or even really big guns or anything like that.

You see, Johnson convinced Wheeler that if he squirted lemon juice on his face, that he would be unseen to any CCTV camera, that no one would be able to see him, and they would get away with it, and they'd be rich forevermore. Mind you, they only stole \$5,000, but they even tested this plan out. They squirted lemon juice on their faces, and then they took a Polaroid of each other. Now, police think that they pointed the Polaroid camera at the wrong place, or they had bad film. But they were supremely confident that they would get away with it. And armed with supreme confidence and nothing else, they were subsequently caught within hours. Well, one was caught within hours, the other in a couple days. But they were extremely confident. In fact, when Wheeler was caught, he kept mumbling, but I wore the juice, but I wore the juice. Now, psychologists famously use this example to show how you can be so stupid that you don't know that you're stupid, right? And we chuckle and laugh about this, but the reality is that we're not unlike

Wheeler and Johnson, that we are supremely confident in ourselves or something else, and we don't realize we have no reason to be confident that we are so stupid that we don't realize we're stupid. See, confidence is a tricky thing. We all, even in our modern day, think that we should have it.

In this scenario, the bank robbers were confident. They were blinded. We are blinded. Our confidence is often misplaced in things that it shouldn't be placed in. And we're wrong. We're not unlike them at all. As humans, we fail to see ourselves rightly. I'm not talking about the emotional, intelligence, social aspect of it, but something far greater, something cosmic.

That left to our own devices, we squirt lemon juice on our faces and think ourselves invisible, if not invincible. John is not a writer for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, but he's writing to a group of people that have the same problem.

[4 : 53] The same problem as some of us here in this room, all of us here in this room. He's addressing a people that are tempted to be supremely confident, whether it's in themselves, in others, in their works, their actions, or the things they've done or things they haven't done.

But that's not where our confidence should be at all. The message of the gospel confronts that each time we hear it. And John is writing to Christians, to them and to us, to warn them that our confidence is off. That our call to love one another is based out of this fellowship with God.

And that should be our confidence, that fellowship with God. And he does it two ways. One is really harsh. One is a warning. And one is a little bit more gentle, a reminder of who they are.

So it's a warning and a reminder. Let's first look at that warning. It might not seem like the words he's using are that harsh. I mean, he starts out beloved. But in fact, he's repeating something that he's already said.

He kind of softens it a little bit up front in this warning. But this theme that we see here in these first verses is not something that's new to us. If you remember, when we looked at 1 Sean before, he, like any good pastor, repeats things over and over again.

[6 : 16] And this is one of those. He's warning us that the way to follow Jesus is to walk in his commands. And this time, he's very direct. He's not very broad. He's very specific.

And that command is to love one another. That seems simple enough, right? But then why do we have this huge body of work in the New Testament repeating this idea over and over?

We saw it in Matthew when we confessed earlier. Even the Puritans thought it was so important that they put it in the catechism. Love one another. Look back with me at verse 7.

Beloved, I'm 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. John's really concerned about showing them that this is nothing that's newfangled.

It's not a new idea. In fact, you've had it a long, long time. He's pointing them back to the ministry of Jesus, saying, Jesus said these things. This is an old commandment. And if you knew the gospel either from Jesus or the apostles, then this is not a new idea to you.

[7 : 25] But why is he so concerned about that? He's concerned because much like in our modern day, we have people that come around and say, this is the way to follow Christ. Some new idea.

And he's saying, no, that's not it at all. In fact, this is something that you were taught from the beginning. You heard this from Jesus' lips. You heard it from the apostles' lips. I've told you this very thing. Love one another.

Why is that so important? Because he wants to confirm to them that this is an old thing. This is nothing new. We looked at this passage a couple weeks ago in Mark 12.

Jesus is challenged. His opponents try to trick him, trap him. And they ask him, Teacher, which is the greatest commandment of the law? And he says something like this.

The most important is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God. The Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. And the second is this.

[8 : 26] You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said to him, You're right, teacher. This is not anything new.

They heard this before. This is really old. But if you listen closely to Jesus' answer, we heard this other places. We read it earlier in Scripture.

We hear it in the Shema, which is Deuteronomy 6. Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one. Love the Lord your God and love others. We heard it in Leviticus, where there's this lengthy expansion of what it looks like to love other people.

It's not just an idea that's made up. It has teeth to it. Love one another. It's something old, something very, very old, that goes past when Jesus walked this earth.

But at the same time, it's something that is new. So why does John say it's new here? Something that's repeated in the Gospels. In John 13, Jesus says this, A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another.

[9 : 32] Just as I have loved you, you are to also love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. The newness that Jesus is speaking of is the fact that they're indwelt with the Holy Spirit.

It's kind of a new spin on an old command, that they are empowered and enabled to actually love one another. And they're to do so in the way that Jesus has done it, sacrificially.

They're to love one another. And that has an evangelistic quality to it, that when people see that, that's attractive. You will know that you're a disciple of Christ by how you love one another.

This idea that we see in 1 John, there's a couple ideas that keep coming back up. One is love for one another. The other is light and darkness.

And Jesus kind of, or John overlays those two ideas here. He starts in verse eight at comparing those. At the same time, it's a new commandment that I'm writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

[10:42] John has a couple themes, light and darkness and love for one another. And here he mashes them up. It's like when we talked about at Easter, there's a sense in which Jesus has defeated death, finally and fully, in some capacity.

But it's like that snake that's still around. I think that's an example. We talked about this in Sunday school earlier, but the fangs have been removed of poison, but death is still here.

The light has invaded the darkness, but not finally and fully in the sense that there'll be no more tears and no more sadness as we walk this earth. In the midst of that, we are called to love one another.

That's how light is shining in the darkness. Christians are called to love each other. We are called to love one another. And that light is shining in the darkness of this world.

But how do we know he's talking about love? Because we haven't seen it yet. Look at verses nine and 11 with me. Whoever says he's in the light and hates his brother is still in the darkness.

[11:50] Whoever loves his brother abides in the light. And in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and does not know where he's going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

He makes the connection here that walking in the light, which is fellowship with God, has a quality about it. And it's loving one another. And then he repeats the same idea by doing it in the converse. He says, if you say that you live like this, but then hate your brother, then you're actually not in the light at all. Light is fellowship with God. Darkness is not fellowship with God.

Loving one another is a quality of light. So you can't be in the light and hate your brother. Those are mutually exclusive. John's addressing this because light and darkness is really big and really important.

And he's really pointed right here because he's really concerned about fellowship with God. He's concerned because there are people that are swirling around that are maybe influencing the church that are saying, it doesn't matter how you live.

[13:02] It doesn't matter if you love one another. You can still be a Christian and do this. And John is saying, no, no, no. This is really important because if you follow after Christ, you will love one another.

You must love other Christians. Jesus mentioned this already. The disciples are gonna be known for their love for one another. And that was true in Jesus because he sacrificially loved his disciples. And that's true in you, John says, in Christians now, because as they have fellowship with God, as they're united with him, we will reflect that. They will reflect that.

Oftentimes, I think we think of darkness and we think, ah, that's not like dark. But John clarifies it here. It's not just my inability to see a little bit.

It's complete and utter darkness. You're stumbling around. You're tripping over things. I've moved around a lot in this country and around the world.

[14:05] And I'm sure most of you are like me right now where if I go out at night, there's always lights. There might not be a street light, but I can see on some level.

But there are places in this world, third world countries, or even the Colorado back country, where you can go and you can wave your hand in front of your face and you can't see it at all.

And that is really stinking scary. Especially if you go to a tunnel. There are some old mines here in Colorado and you can go down in those mines and if you cut out the light, I did this with my kids and I was a little freaked out.

And they were definitely really freaked out. That they went in the darkness and you can't tell which way you came from. Because if you move slightly, your point of reference is completely thrown off. The only thing that you can even feel is the rush of wind that comes down the mine shaft that you just went in. That's the kind of darkness that John is talking about. That when you are in sin, you are completely blinded.

[15 : 12] It's not that you have some frame of reference. We're more familiar with this idea from Paul of death and life when we talk about sin and fellowship with God.

And that's all well and good, but darkness, true darkness, is often something that we have familiarity with. True darkness is stumbling, walking around, tripping and falling. That's what John is talking about. He's talking about being blinded by sin and not knowing what is good, what is right, what is beautiful, what is true.

Or even that you need a Savior. You're blinded by sin. That is darkness. When we come on these texts, I think it's often easy for us to draw parallels at Giant Mountain or whatever, or whatever church we go to.

And as Christians, that's a good thing. Right? John's writing to people that are Christians, writing to people that struggle with sin. We struggle with sin. We're Christians, so that's natural. We should do that.

[16 : 22] And that's why we're drawn to texts like this. But we have to imbibe, we have to soak in what he is saying to us. That if we walk in darkness, we don't have a frame of reference.

We're stumbling around. We need Christ. John said this very directly before. He said in the Gospels, and he said it now, that whoever claims that he's in the light, but hates his brother, walks in darkness.

That person is lost. If we say that we're Christians and we don't have love for one another, especially in this room, that we are in darkness. We are lost.

We are blinded. So what do we do then? We have to search our own hearts and ask, do I truly love my brother? Do I truly love my sister?

Practically, though, what does that look like? That means being concerned with people that don't look like you, not just tolerating them, not just holding them a distance and plugging my nose because I think that they're stinky, but actually being sacrificial towards them in both time and caring for them.

[17 : 48] And caring for them, caring about their soul because we're not walking in this Christian life alone. And sometimes we get distracted by that. Sometimes we get confused by that.

It doesn't matter whether we're age seven or 70. I should be concerned about a seven-year-old, a 70-year-old, or even a 38-year-old. We should all be concerned for each other even if we don't look the same, we don't work in the same spot, we don't live in the same neighborhood because we're concerned about each other's souls.

John's telling us that. Now we've looked on this warning. John is really forward, very direct about this.

And he can do that because of what's been done. Oftentimes we talk about what's been done for you as a Christian and then what you're supposed to do. And it normally follows that pattern. But we've seen that John doesn't like patterns at all unless it's his own.

He circles around ideas over and over again. But here he says, love one another because of who you are. He reminds them who they are or whose they are.

[18 : 58] Look with me at verses 12 and following. I'm writing to you little children. I'm writing to you fathers. I'm writing to you young men. I write to you children.

I write to you fathers. I write to you young men. He's repeating this over and over. John can speak with such emphasis. He calls them, first, because your sins are forgiven.

That's the axis on which all of this spins. He can say, love one another because of what's been done for you. But just remember who you are in Christ.

Remember that your sins are forgiven. That your ethics or what you do flows out of who you are. Your identity. Because your sins are forgiven.

It's not like this. Oftentimes we think of this. I have done this for you so you will do this for me. No. Love one another because you've been changed because your sin is forgiven.

[20 : 00] Your sin is not counted against you at all. That's who you are now. But when we think it's this for that, we get it backwards. John's calling them to action based on who they are as Christians and he reminds them.

He's pointing them back by using this phrase, I write to you, I write to you, I wrote to you, I write to you. He's reminding them this is not something that's old but it's new and old because it deals with the new and old problem of our own hearts that we think that we can walk in the light but have no love for a brother.

Their living is born out of their identity as Christians. As knowing that your sin is no longer counted against you, that should motivate us and prompt us to love one another.

Because we've been shown compassion, then we are compassionate. Their identity is fundamentally important. I've made my return to the soccer field after a very long time away and I thought that my U5 pride soccer panda bears would be really excited that they have so many that's a coach of such great experience and played all over the world and such a high level but they don't care.

It's been really fun but I was confronted a couple weeks ago with a challenge I've never faced before and it was this. I had a player on my team whose name was Emily and she refused to let me call her by her name.

[21 : 44] On the field. And in fact, she wanted to be called Bowser. And she got incessantly angry with me and furious stomping because I didn't call her Bowser.

Now, does she share the same qualities as Bowser? Does she have spiky shell? Does she look like a dinosaur? Does she, I think he spits fireballs, I'm not really a video game guy but spit fireballs or smash Mario or anything like that?

No, absolutely not. And so she got so angry at me that I refused to call her Bowser on the field. But she was reminded by her dad that no, you're not Bowser or later Princess Peach.

But you're in fact Emily. Your identity is Emily. Emily, a little girl on the U5 Pride Soccer Panda Bears soccer team.

her dad reminded her of her identity as Emily, not as Bowser. We are reminded in the same way by the words of John.

[22 : 49] He can call us to love because he reminds us of our identity as Christians. It wouldn't make sense for him to call us to love one another and warn us and shout at us love one another unless he reminded us out of the well which we draw as Christians.

He reminds us by first starting with the good news that our sins are forgiven. That's the axis on all that all of this turns.

And then he says fathers you know him from the beginning. Again, it's not a new idea. It's an old thing. Young men you have overcome the evil one. There is triumph over sin now because of what Christ has done.

You know the Father. You know the Son. Think of that. Think of the intimacy that that is communicating. You know the Father. You are strong.

You are strong not because you have muscles and you work out. No, you're strong because the Word of God abides in you. Because of your faith in Christ that's what makes you strong. That's what allows you to overcome the evil one.

[24 : 01] That's what he's communicating in this second part. John's reminding us he's reminding them of who they truly are. And he uses a couple different terms to highlight different stages of life.

Young men, fathers, children. But all of these apply to us as Christians. All of these are good reminders of who we are.

But why are their sins forgiven? Not because they love. I think that's the danger in this text is coming to this and saying our sins are forgiven because we love one another.

That confuses it. What does he say in verse 12? He says this, little children because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. Not because you love. Not because of how great you are.

Not because of how great of a soccer coach you are. No. Your sins are forgiven because Christ is who he says he is. For him alone.

[25 : 01] For his mere good pleasure. And in order to love one another that has to be settled. And if we're truly to love we must experience that love and know it to our core.

Woven throughout this is this reminder and repeated again and again that this is something they've known from the beginning. That's a good reminder to us that when we're assaulted with new ideas with new challenges and that will happen that we apply the same old faith the same old past to new challenges to those new ideas to those new situations that our lives might not look like the people that John wrote to but they do at their core because we have that same faith and we're assaulted with some of the same challenges.

and as we apply that faith we must be reminded old is not bad especially when it comes to this life changing message. We know the Father we've known him from the beginning of our Christian walk.

He's talking about Jesus often in this phrase when he says you've known him from the beginning. He's pointing back to Jesus but he's also pointing to the Father because they're three in one. we've known this from the beginning of our Christian lives and our strength flows from that. All of this is written John writes all these people to reassure them of the faith they have to reassure them as they face these different challenges these new ideas that it doesn't matter how you live they're returned to the old old story to the old faith to the Christian message and that they're to have confidence because of their fellowship with God as they love one another.

[26 : 52] John's reminding them of who they are and we're reminded of who we are. So when the voices in this world try to tell us that we're silly for thinking that this is true remember that is not a new challenge that's something that they faced as well.

We'll face new challenges but we must return again to this old old story that Christ has died and has risen and our sins are forgiven and that is how we love one another.

Out of that is how we love one another because we can't do it without that and that should grant us confidence in this life.

That should grant us an accurately placed confidence not misplaced in ourselves not misplaced in anything else but in this old story.

So when the tempter accuses us and says to us surely can't be serious surely you can't think that you're a Christian because you failed to love one another.

[28 : 01] Our desire to love one another is born out of that faith. We must have confidence in who we are and that's what John is reminding of us this day. we love one another because we have fellowship with God through Jesus.

We love one another we're warned that we must love one another but we're reminded our loving one another does not make us lovely that we are made lovely based on what Christ has done. May we be reminded of that this morning. Let's pray. Lord we thank you this day for the life changing message of the gospel the fact that you change sinners into things that are lovely not because of what they have done not because of who they are we pray that you might remind us of that and we would have confidence confidence with the saints of old that we don't face new challenges that you have not faced yourself but father that we have the same old old faith and we pray that you might show us more and more how to love one another out of that old faith in Jesus name amen