

Text: 1 Jn 2.7-8

Proposition: The bedrock of the Christian faith is a fresh way of relating to others (and to God).

How do we know that we *have come to know* God? by keeping his commandments (1 Jn 2.3-5a)

How do we know that we *are abiding in Him*? By walking as he walked (1 Jn 2.5b-6)

The teaching of the previous verses points to a comprehensive way of life, where every thought and action is subject to the will of God.

However, John wants to intensify his demand on us and on any who would claim to be followers of the Lord. That's what he is doing in our text, with somewhat cryptic language.

Read 1 Jn 2.3-11, text 7-8

Prominent in vv. 3 and 4 is "commandments" and in vv. 7 and 8 it is "commandment," used *three times* in 7.

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I. A word to the "beloved" (7)

A. John's "terms of endearment"

1. John's use of "beloved": here, 3.2, 3.21, 4.1, 4.7, 4.11
2. John's use of "little children": 2.1, 2.12, 2.28, 3.18, 4.4, 5.21

B. A reminder, John's readers are believers

1. The terms communicate John's deep love for them
2. In addition, they communicate God's deep love for them
3. They also communicate John's pastoral heart
 - a. These believers are under pressure from false teachers
 - b. John's goal is to equip them with spiritual confidence (the shield of faith) and with divine truth (the sword of the spirit)

“In writing to them John was motivated by a deep, persistent love that desires the welfare of the readers.”¹

II. A specific bedrock commandment (7)

A. The contrast between commandments and commandment

1. John uses this word frequently (2.3, 4, 7, 8, 3.22, 23, 24, 4.21, 5.2, 3)
2. In three passages, the word is singular, “commandment,” (7-8, 3.23, 4.21), the rest are plural, “commandments”
 - a. Commandment = faith in Christ and love one another (3.23)
 - b. Commandment = the one who loves God should love his brother (4.21)
3. In the context, John immediately discusses a contrast between hating his brother and loving his brother (9-11)

It is pretty clear that “the commandment” is the command to love one another.

4. Jesus said “this is my new commandment, that you love one another” (Jn 13.34-35)

Jn 13.34-35 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

- a. Sums up the second table of the law, “love your neighbour”
- b. First table summed up by “love God” (see Mt 22.36-40)

John’s concern isn’t to identify the specific commandment here; it is to emphasize its characteristics.

B. The character of the commandment

1. Not new, but old

¹ D. Edmond Hiebert, “An Exposition of 1 John 2:7-17,” *Bibliotheca Sacra : Dallas Theological Seminary* 145, no. 579 (1988): 421.

- a. This is a time reference, both terms emphasize duration of time
 - b. John isn't minting a new commandment for his readers
 - c. He is reminding of an old commandment
 - d. They have had this commandment "from the beginning"
2. The commandment is "the word" they heard
- a. The "hearing" defines the "beginning" when the commandment came to them
 - b. John is describing the beginning of the gospel among his hearers
 - c. The commandment (the word) came from apostolic preaching
 - d. The apostles emphasized the very things Jesus taught, which, as to ethics, fall under this old commandment
3. The term "beginning" also ties in with the commandment to love one another (1 Jn 3.11)

1 Jn 3.11 ¶ For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another;

4. This commandment is the key to an ongoing intimacy with God (1 Jn 2.24)

1 Jn 2.24 As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.

Loving the brethren is a fundamental concept for Christianity. If we love God, we ought to cultivate more and more love for one another. The world doesn't behave this way – the world is out for number one, takes advantage, seeks its own way.

- Love thinks not of her own, but of one another
- Love bears all things
- Love assumes the best intentions
- Love lives with faults

Think through the 1 Cor 13 list, this describes how Christians should treat one another. The more you love God, the more your relationships will look like this.

III. A uniquely fresh and increasingly effective commandment (8)

A. The seeming paradox: is it old or new?

1. The difference is not a case of Greek synonyms, it is the same word
2. The difference is in point of view
 - a. The commandment is old in the sense that we find it at the core of the gospel, part of the Christian ethic Jesus taught
 - b. The commandment is new in the sense that it is always fresh, alive, vibrant

“The opening adverb (πάλιν) does not introduce a new subject but continues the matter of this love-command looked at in a new and different way. It is not a recent innovation, yet it is qualitatively new as experienced in Christ. This double feature assures those who oppose any innovation in connection with their faith and satisfies those who yearn for something fresh and invigorating.”²

B. The fresh quality is true “in Him and in you”

1. It is fresh and new in Him because of all Jesus did and said
 - a. New in emphasis, bringing Dt 6.5 and Lev 19.8 together and hanging whole Law on them
 - b. New in quality, the disciple is to love as Christ loved (not just as he loves himself)
 - c. New in extent, showing that we are to love those who don't love us (Good Samaritan)
 - d. New in apprehension, since the concept of loving others is always fresh among those who live it³

“though doctrinal Christianity is always old, experimental Christianity is always new.”⁴

² Hiebert, “1 John 2:7-17, BibSac 145,” 1988, 422.

³ These points from Stott, 93.

⁴ Candlish, quoted in Stott, 93.

2. It is fresh and new in us because of what it does to us when lived out in our experience – we are living a new kind of life

C. The reason the Christian life is fresh: the darkness is passing, the true light is shining

“The picture is that of a world in the darkness of night, but the first rays of the dawning sun have already begun to shine; more and more areas are becoming light instead of dark, and the light is getting brighter.”⁵

1. The verbs are continuous tense
2. The Christian life doesn't begin fully mature, but it sets us on a new path and heads us in the right (the fresh) direction
3. The true Light shines in us
 - a. Our testimony becomes more and more distinct from the world
 - b. Our life becomes more and more attractive in the world

Conclusion:

A lot more could be said.

However, the more we abide in Christ and lay aside self and the world, the more we impact our Christianity will have.

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I suspect the great weakness of our ministries is our deficiency in fulfilling the old/new commandment.

⁵ Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 130.