



## A New Command

### 1 John 2:7-11

As I have already said, the book of 1 John is filled with ways we can “test” whether our Christian experience is genuine.

However it is my experience that generally people do not like tests. How many of you likes to take tests? In fact some people have a phobia about taking tests, they freeze up as soon as the test is passed out.

Here’s some test questions that I found that would make anybody freeze up:

- Like this question: *Define the universe; give three examples.*
- Here’s one for an engineering student: *The disassembled parts of a high-powered rifle have been placed in a box on your desk. You will find an instruction manual printed in Swahili. In ten minutes, a hungry Bengal tiger will be admitted into the test room. Take whatever action you feel appropriate, and be prepared to justify your decision.*

But even when we get away from academic life, we find our lives are filled with other kinds of tests. We take driver’s tests, drug tests, eye tests, and entrance exams.

People in law enforcement have to qualify on the shooting range at least four times a year; many of you have to take a test for your chosen profession. Like it or not, tests are a part of life.

But are there tests to determine whether a person is on the right track spiritually? Several weeks ago we

started a new series through the New Testament book of 1 John.

One of the main purposes of *1 John* is to help the true Christian to know that they are truly in a right relationship with God. These “tests” or “marks” of a true believer are evidence that God is in you. They are the “by-products” the life God creates. Remember our Tiffany Lamps? No true Tiffany will lack the “T” mark, but just having one of these marks, or several, does not make you a Tiffany. Same with the marks in 1 John.

I remind you of this because so many people are mixed up about what makes a person a Christian.

The more I listen to the views expressed by people on the talk shows and in the media, the more I am convinced that the vast majority of people don’t even know the simple definition of true Christianity.

If we took a survey of the man on the street, I wonder what kind of opinions and ideas people would have concerning Christianity? **The view of Christianity that would top the list would be the one that says that Christianity is all about keeping rules and regulations.** Most people think that is how you become a Christian. For them Christianity is all about "do this" and "don’t do that."

Now to be honest, some of these impressions have been gotten from attendance at some churches. There are churches that have reduced Christianity to rules and regulations - “go to church every Sunday, do this, do do that - and you are a Christian.” But this is not true Christianity. What is so sad is that many people have rejected Christianity based on misinformation about what Christianity really is.

**Christianity is all about a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.** This begins by FAITH, and it continues by FAITH. Faith in what Jesus has done for us - not as many think by what we are doing for God. Then the Bible says that when we enter into that type of relationship by faith, we are “born from above” - a new life, spiritual life, begins - the effects

are real, and even measurable. We are talking here about the characteristics of a believer, not how someone becomes a believer. This book is about the change that takes place in a person's life when they become in fellowship with God.

And that brings us back to these "tests".

REVIEW - The first test was covered in Chapter 1 and we called it the "**sin test**". True Christians have a right view of sin. They don't cover it up or pretend it's not there - but they confess their sins and they conquer sin through the power of God's Spirit in them.

The second test we saw last week was the "**obedience test**". It's found in the first six verses of chapter 2. True Christians aren't perfect, but they aren't fighting against the commands of God like they once were. They seek to obey the commands of God because they now know the Giver of the commands and they Love and Trust Him. And we don't obey people we don't trust, do we?

### THE LOVE TEST

This second test leads right into the third, which is where we are today. There is one command which has a new emphasis and new priority. Because of that, it is a *mark* or *test* in itself.

Now allow me to re-read verses 7 – 11 and see if you can pick out what the THIRD test is. (

Here's the point. When we are in fellowship with God, walking in the light, we also walk in love. It is a basic spiritual principle that when Christians in fellowship with God, they will not only love God, but also love God's people. This is the **love one another test**.

In our English language, "love" is a very imprecise term - almost devoid of real meaning. We use this word in so very many different ways. Consider. "I love those baked beans." "I love my wife." It is really difficult to understand how a man can use the same word to express his love for his wife as he uses to tell how he feels about baked beans! Our English word *love* has so many shades of meaning that it almost has no meaning. Like the dollar, it has been devalued. It is obvious that you love your wife or husband in a different way than you love ice cream or baked beans.

Since the New Testament was written in Greek, the writers were often able to use more precise language. So it is important for us to understand just what we mean when we use this word love.

For there are many definitions for love today.

- Our culture tells us love is like a boat, something we fall into and out of.
- The media illustrates love as emotionalism
- or hedonism, that is pleasure seeking.
- Love in the pages of self-help writings is no more than dressed-up selfishness or escape from pain and suffering.
- Love in your upbringing may be understood as reward for desired performance.

As confused as the concept is today, John tells us that we can test our relationship with God by our love for our brother. Let's see if we can understand what he means by that.

NEW AND OLD. As you look at the text, it seems confusing. He says that this commandment is *old* in v.7, and then he turns around and says that it is *new* in v.8. What does he mean? How can something be both old and new?

Here, a look at the Greek helps to answer the question. The Greeks had two different words for "new"— one means "new in time," and the other means "new in emphasis or priority."

The commandment to love one another is not new in time, but it is new in emphasis and priority. Because of Jesus Christ, the old commandment to "love" has taken on new meaning.

**Mark 12:28-31** <sup>28</sup> *One of the teachers of the law ... asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"* <sup>29</sup> *"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>30</sup> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'* (Deut. 6:4-5) <sup>31</sup> *The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."* (Lev. 19:18)

These commandments had been on the books from the beginning (old), but Jesus elevated them to a new priority (new).

[Love, you see, is not merely a New Testament innovation. Love is found from the beginning of the Bible to the end. Many people wrongly think that the God revealed in the Old Testament is wrathful, whereas Jesus is loving. But in both Old Testament and New, we see God as a God of love. Be careful not to mistake the holiness of God for hatred. God is a God of holiness *and* a God of love.

**But it is new in it's emphasis.]** No doubt when John wrote these words here he was thinking of Jesus' own statement recorded in **John 13:34**: "*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*"

We see here that it is new in another way. Jesus said, "*As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*" We have a **new way to define love**. We are to love one another as Jesus demonstrated He loved us.

Do you remember I said that we need a real definition of love, which is so diluted today? Let's come up with one.

The question then becomes "How did Jesus love us?" If I asked for your input to that question, you could tell me a number of things.

- He loved us **sacrificially**. Listen to **John 15:13**, "*Greater love has no one that this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*" Jesus loved us enough to lay down His life for us.
- What makes this love even more incredible, is that He love us **when we were still in our sin**. Listen to **Romans 5:8**, "*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*"

But perhaps the best definition is given to us a little later in this book by John himself. Let's skip ahead to **1 John 3:16-18** <sup>16</sup> *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. [17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?]* <sup>18</sup> *Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*

**Definition: Love is being willing to sacrifice yourself for the benefit of another.**

Love in the Bible is NOT primarily a *feeling*. It is an action. God would not command something that you can't do. You can't always control your feelings, but you can control your actions. We are to love others whether we FEEL like it or not. Some people are EASIER to love than others ... AMEN?

So we have seen so far that one way to test your faith in God is not to measure how many times you went to church in a row, and not how many Bible verses you have memorized, but a better question to ask yourself is "How's your love life?"

"How's your love life?" When you define love as **being willing to sacrifice yourself for the benefit of another**.

The next section of our text will help us answer that question. It will drive home the truth that Christianity is love in action.

#### LOVING OUR BROTHER

**1 John 2:9-11** <sup>9</sup> *Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness.* <sup>10</sup> *Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.* <sup>11</sup> *But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.*

This is the THIRD test. *Whoever loves his brother lives in the light.* **If a Christian walks in the light and is in fellowship with God, he will also be in fellowship with others in God's family.** You can know that you know God when you look at your "love life" and see that it is active in the area of loving your Christian brother or sister.

Now this third test is interesting and enlightening. Did you notice that while the first two "tests" or marks of a true Christian (*sin test, obedience test*) have to deal *directly* with us and God, THIS test deals with us and other believers?

**Number one** - this tells us how important your connection and my connection to other Christians is. If God says we can measure our relationship to God by our relationship to other believers, this is a reminder of how important it is that you have a working connection to a Christian Community (church).

This is one reason why God established the local church -- the fellowship of believers. "You can't be a Christian alone"—a person cannot live a complete and developing Christian life unless he is in fellowship with God's people. The Christian life has two relationships: the vertical (Godward) and the horizontal (manward). And each of these two relationships is to be one of love, one for the other.

You see, the church is like a "workshop." A workshop where God uses his tools to build his people up. If you choose to stay out of the workshop, you can't be made into what God wants you to be made into. That's why every Christian NEEDS to be plugged into the life of a church!

Number Two. Now I want to tell you something - something that many of you probably already know - but some of you may not. And if you don't already know, it's important that you do know, or else the Devil may use this lack of understanding to tear you apart.

Although loving your brothers and sisters is one of the most powerful ways to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ - because it demonstrates the power of God, **it is not always easy**. *God never meant it to be easy.*

In John's gospel, Jesus said,

**John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."**

Why is Christian love such a witness to others of being a follower of Jesus Christ? Because in many ways it is a mini-picture of a world in harmony.

Most people just love people who are easy to love. But it is not easy loving people you don't have a natural affinity for.

Sure it's easy loving my wife, and loving my kids--at least most days--and loving my friends, but loving people I may find irritating, loving people who are different from me, loving people I think are weird, or loving people who grate me the wrong way...that is also part of loving our brothers and sisters. And that takes God's love.

That's why the word John chooses here is the Greek word *agape*, which describes God's kind of

love, the kind of love that's given freely and generously, regardless of the worthiness of the object.

Loving the lovable, anyone can do that, but loving the unlovable among us--a Christian who betrays our trust, a friend who lets us down, --this is the kind of love that's supernatural, God's kind of love.

**Jesus sets the example.** Did you ever think how difficult it was for our Lord to love the disciples? We are so apt to see them through the aura of twenty centuries of admiration that I'm afraid we glamorize these disciples and see them only as saints, almost plaster saints. But these were no plaster saints, these were very human men:

The Apostles were not really easy to love:

- Peter was always boasting, he was overbearing and unreliable.
- James and John - who Jesus called "sons of thunder" - they must have been fun to be around! Once they wanted to call down fire on people, another time they brought mom to try to talk Jesus into giving them the top two spots in the kingdom.
- Thomas wouldn't believe.
- There was even an occasion when Jesus in exasperation, looked at them and said, '*How much longer must I put up with you!*' Matt. 17:17.

Have you ever want to say that after being in church?

"Let's face it, some Christians are like porcupines ... they've got a few good points, but they're hard to get close to!"

**BUT** nevertheless, loving your brothers and sisters in Christ, different as they will be, is evidence that God is in you and working through you.

Again, remember what love is. Love in the Bible is NOT primarily a *warm feeling*. It is an action. Love is **being willing to sacrifice yourself for the benefit of another**.

Now I realize that this is somewhat simplistic. I know that *knowing how to love* someone isn't always easy. For example, I'm not talking about sacrificing yourself so that other can have their way, if their ways are not beneficial to them or are harmful to

others. Love is not condoning or allowing sinful behavior.

You do not help the man who gambles his money away by giving him your paycheck. Love is the willingness to die to self for the benefit (not the addiction, abuse or abnormal behavior) of another, but the benefit of another.

Yet, love of our brothers and sisters is test of my relationship to God. Such love is the willingness to die to self for the benefit of another.

**CONCLUSION: I wish it weren't so.** I wish God would test my relationship by the number of hours I put into preparing my sermons or the percentage of my income that I put into the offering box.

If you want to know how far along you are in your obedience to God, don't look at the number of verses you know from the Bible or what you are able to do for the church. See if you are able to die to self for the benefit of another.

### **How's your love life?**

- Have you first of all expressed the love John is talking about, **by making an attachment, a bond to Christ's body the church?** Your love of brothers and sisters starts with identifying yourself with them in membership. You join the family.
- Do you see God working in you to express sacrificial love to brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ? **If you don't, you may not be a believer and that is where you need to start.** The good news is - you can become one today.
  - *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.* It begins with accepting God's love, expressed in action - dying on the cross for your sins.
  - Put your faith in Jesus Christ and what he has done for you, and you will be His forever.
- If you do see God's love working in you to love others, rejoice in it and praise God for that gift today.