



Let's Talk About Love - part 1

1 John 2:7-11

TWO WEEKS AGO, when we last looked at 1 John, my message title was "Let's Talk about Sin." And we looked at 1 John 1:5-2:6. The word "sin" is brought up at least 28 times in this little five chapter book, so it's very, very important. But the apostle John is not known as the "apostle of sin" is he? No, he is known as the "apostle of love." And in this same five chapter letter the word love occurs at least 45 times!

You see you can't understand God unless you understand both concepts. That God hates sin and also that God is love. And God intends for us to love as a result.

Let's read our section for today - vv. 7-11.

1 John 2:7-11 *Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. 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.*

The first thing you might notice is that the word love is only used once in this passage, and even though it's

only used once, it is being talked about all the way through. So 45 times doesn't even begin to explain how much this letter is about love.

Let me ask you, what is the "old/new commandment" that John is writing about? If you're new to an understanding of the Bible, it might sound "mysterious" but it's really not. No, John is most definitely referring back to when he heard Jesus talk about a new commandment. In fact, right now turn back to John's Gospel, chapter 13. Remember the same John wrote the fourth Gospel so these words were fresh for numerous reasons: First Jesus said them; second John under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote them down for the rest of us to read.

So here it is Jesus in the 13th chapter quickly approaching his arrest, his trial and crucifixion. Peter is about to learn that he will deny Jesus three times and Jesus is giving his followers key truths to hang on to. In verse 33 he tells them again that soon he will no longer be with them. And then in verse 34 look at what he says:

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."

A new command -love one another. And yet love is not a new command because Jesus already summed up the law and the prophets by saying

Matthew 22:37-40 ..." 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

No love is not a new command. It's not new to the new covenant. But it is new, not in time, but in *priority*. It's new in the sense that it is to become the *BADGE* by which people will know that we are true followers of Jesus Christ.. Isn't that what Jesus

said? Look at it again. “**By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.**”¹

So let’s go back to 1 John see what he is telling us.

One of the topics contained in this letter of 1 John the topic of assurance. In other words, “how can I know for sure that I am a Christian? How can I know for sure that I have forgiveness and eternal life?” [Hint: look for the work “know”.]

Before we are done John will give us several ways to *test ourselves* so that we can know for certain that we are not just fooling ourselves about our eternal destiny. For centuries people have asked the kind of questions that John wants to answer for us. And I have no doubt that there are numerous people in this congregation this morning who deep down inside have the very same type of questions. “Am I really a Christian? Sometimes I don’t feel like God could possibly have saved me.”

Well, if you will come each week I guarantee you that this book in this Bible will clarify your questions.

He says, does he not, that (v. 11) *whoever hates his brother is still in the darkness and he does not know where he is going*. And, (v.10) *Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble*.

You may be saying, “darkness, light, stumbling” how can you be sure that John is really talking here about whether or not a person is saved?

Well, this self-test is so important to John that this is just one of at least three times he brings the subject of “loving our brothers” up. Quickly, let’s look at the other two.

1 John 4:20 *If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.*

1 John 3:14-15 *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone*

who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

Yes, John uses a lot of “figures of speech”. Light, darkness, death, life, etc., but in the end he leaves no doubt about what he is talking about. A person who hates his brother doe NOT have ETERNAL LIFE IN HIM.

How can you know if you are a Christian? Well one important way is to examine your life in the relationship to other believers. In the light of other brothers and sisters who share the kingdom of God with you. A true Christian treats fellow brothers and sisters with love. And it’s not “their own love.” It’s like what Peter Chen was saying last week-it’s God’s love flowing through me to you.

“Tests of Faith”

Now, I know we will explore this deeper in the weeks ahead. But today I feel like I need to share with you an important foundation so that you can understand what John is saying here, what he will say in other ways later, and what the whole Bible says about saving faith.

The Bible is very clear that we become Christians when we place our faith completely in Jesus Christ and what he has done for us by dying in our place to pay for our sins and rising in victory over them. It is “faith alone.”

You see, why then does John say “If you want proof whether you are Christian or not take a look at how you treat your Christian brother or sister.” Doesn’t John believe that we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ alone?

And I want to tell you that before we’re done John is going to give us other self-tests that also may not seem to be about believing in Jesus Christ, but also more about our actions. Does John believe that somehow our actions save us?

Of course not. No, no, no! In fact, of the four Gospel accounts, if there is any one gospel that most clearly teaches that we are saved by faith it is John’s Gospel, isn’t it?

¹ 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.” It is the latter that is used in both John and 1 John. 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.

No, that's not it, and you will clearly see that today if you keep listening. But what we need to do is get a more comprehensive view of just what saving faith looks like.

If you were to ask some people what faith in God is, they would give you some pretty amazing answers, wouldn't they? The misunderstandings of religious faith run deep in our society.

A middle school teacher asked one of the young students, "What do you think faith is?" He said, "*That's believing what you know isn't true!*" When a university student was asked the same question, he said that "*faith is believing what you cannot know.*"

In our world there seems to be a dichotomy between "faith" and "facts". An assumption that you can have faith without "facts you believe in". Blind faith.

The Essential Components

But that is not possible, not for Biblical faith at least. Did you know that in the Bible, "faith" is the noun and "believe" is the verb form of the same Greek word. They are interchangeable as illustrated in the familiar John 3:16: "*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes [has faith] in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" There is no difference in meaning." A close synonym that may also be substituted is "trust."

Today I want to talk about 3 essential components to Biblical Saving Faith.

I have here three tripods..... What's the same? Three legs.

Just like a tripod must have three legs, so, Saving faith has three essential components [Note: I adapted this from Don Bierle's, "Surprised by Faith"²]:

1. Knowledge

The university student who said that "faith is believing what you cannot know," would have quite a different impression if "trust" were substituted for "faith."

Let me illustrate. If I asked him about a person with whom he is not familiar "Do you trust so-and-so?" Most likely he would respond, "*How can I trust him since I don't even know him!*"

"But," I would remind the student, "You said that 'faith (trust) is believing what you cannot know.' Now you say that you cannot trust (have faith) in someone if you do not know them. Which is correct?"

The apostle Paul leaves little doubt which one he thinks is correct.

Romans 10:13-15 *for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*

Writing to the people at Rome, he communicates an interesting and logical sequence.

We must call on the Lord to be saved.

To call we must believe in Him.

To believe we must hear about Him.

To hear we must have someone tell us.

To tell they must be sent out.

The apostle then summarizes his teaching on faith in v. 17: "*Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.*" So, **according to the apostle Paul, faith cannot even get started without knowledge.** I don't believe in "nothing," "*what I cannot know*" I believe in "something." In other words, faith requires an OBJECT.

Faith is not the same as sincerity, nor does sincerity make faith genuine. It is the object of faith that makes it genuine. That takes knowledge.

A tragic incident at a local hospital was reported in the media. A nurse connected a patient to an "oxygen" source, and he immediately died. Problem: the source was mislabeled. It was actually a poisonous gas. Was the nurse competent and sincere? Did she really believe the gas was oxygen? Yes, on every count. But she was sincerely wrong. The object of her faith was defective, thus her faith was in vain.

The significance of knowledge to a valid faith must be understood. The object of Christian faith is the person of Jesus. If He is not who He claims to be, the incarnate Son of God, then no amount of sincerity, confidence, or religious experience can make it legitimate. This is precisely the conclusion of the apostle Paul to the people at Corinth. He said that "*if Christ has not been raised [from the dead], then our preaching is vain, ... And your faith is worthless.*" (1 Cor. 15:14-17)

Realize what this means when we think about other religions. Christians cannot claim superiority

² Bierle, Don. *Surprised by Faith*. Faithsearch International, Chaska, Mn. 1995.

to other religions on the basis that Christians are more sincere or make more personal sacrifices in the living out of their faith. That may not be true. **The point of distinction between religions is the object they are trusting for their life and eternity.**

The Christian mission, therefore, is not about judging the sincerity, morality or culture of other religions, but instead merely inviting people to transfer their trust (faith) to a different and *certain* object—Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul is right. I can only put my faith in Jesus if I *know* about Him. And only if that knowledge indicates reasonable certainty of His deity will my faith in Him be any good. I cannot even get started into the area of personal faith without using my mind and interacting with the evidence.

This is the first component of faith, but for some that is as far as they go. It is not enough.

2. Will

There is a second, just as important step to saving faith. It is the Will. Knowledge is one thing, but choosing to commit one's life to that knowledge is another matter. I could know exhaustively the evidence supporting the life of Jesus, and have no faith at all. The second faith component involves our will. This is illustrated once again in Paul's letter to the people at Rome.

Romans 10:16-19 *But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" [Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.]*

But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."

Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding."

Romans 10:21 *But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."*

The people of Israel had disobeyed God, i.e., they lacked faith to trust Him. Paul is questioning

why that was so. He asks the question whether they heard and understood what God wanted. If not, the reason for their lack of faith would be a lack of knowledge. That's a possibility, but it was not the case here. It was the will.

I've had many similar experiences, so have you. Several years ago as I was leaving the house for the day, I remember I told one of my sons (name withheld) to mow the lawn that day. When I returned that evening I noted that, either the grass had grown at an unprecedented rate in the last few hours or he had failed to do what I had asked.

I went to him and used a question familiar to every parent, "*Son, didn't you hear me?*" Did I really think that that morning, that the physics of sound waves had failed? No, I was quite confident my voice had reached their ears, but I was giving him the benefit of the doubt with my question. It turned out my son did not have a knowledge problem. He had a "will" problem. He didn't want to mow the lawn.

In the passage above, Paul uses the same approach. He also concludes that the Israelites' problem was not caused by a lack of knowledge, but due to disobedience and obstinacy, i.e., a "will" problem.

Have you ever had a disagreement with your spouse? And you're in the middle of a intense exchange, only to have the doorbell ring? Answering the door, you are greeted by some good friends from another city who had stopped by because they were in the area. What happens?

Now if what happens to you is the same as what has happened to me, the transformation that immediately takes place between you and your spouse would make metamorphosis from a worm to a butterfly seem like nothing! You are instantly loving and pleasant.

Now, reflect on what happened. What was it that changed you? The doorbell? You're not that naive. The doorbell did not change you — YOU did. By a deliberate choice, an act of your will, you both changed. You chose to stop fighting and to be pleasant and nice.

Faith is like that. In spite of the knowledge concerning Jesus that we have gained, if we do not exercise our wills, we have all the faith we are ever going to have — *none*. **Unless we make a choice concerning who Jesus is, there will be no faith.** A consenting will is the second essential component of the Bible's definition of faith.

That will says, "I fully choose to receive Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord. I place my trust, my faith entirely on Jesus Christ."

3. Response

Faith is first, knowing the truth about Jesus, and second, being willing to accept Him. But one of Jesus' parables identifies another factor in faith: Faith is not the same as good intentions.

Matthew 21:28-31a *“What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’ ‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go. “Which of the two did what his father wanted?” “The first,” they answered.*

The point Jesus makes is that **faith is proven by its RESPONSE, its ACTION. If there is no response derived from the will and knowledge, then there is no faith either.** In other words, according to the teaching of the Bible, to qualify as legitimate, faith must consist of all three components: knowledge, will and response. A response that is consistent with what is known and believed in.

This is the third “leg” of saving faith. It ALWAYS follows the other two, without fail. According to this Bible, you cannot have a correct knowledge of Jesus Christ and a commitment to that knowledge **UNLESS there is an accompanying response consistent with it!**

Why Actions?

Now, that gets us back to our original question - why does John give self-tests like “loving our brother” or “obeying his commands” (vv. 2:2-3)

First, we can see why - because these actions are always seen as intergral to saving faith. (Now just as knowledge alone is not faith, and commitment of will to just anything is not faith, so too actions/works alone are not saving faith). But they are all present.

Second, of the three “legs” the “response of actions,” is, in the end the one most easily observed in a person’s life.

Consequently, when Jesus or John wants to give self-tests of saving faith, they often start here.

BUT THEY ALL ARE NECESSARY.

- I have known people who, once they are satisfied intellectually about Jesus, stop there, and they feel that they are now OK (saved) at that point, yet they make no real commitment of the will and thus display little response. And they miss salvation.

- I have also known people who sincerely commit their wills to that which is not true (new age). And they miss salvation.
- I have know people who trust not in Jesus Christ and his atoning work, but in their good works to save them. And THEY miss salvation.

Our time is up. There is so much more I want to say about our passage about love today, but we will have to keep it for another day.

Let me simply say this.

If we are ever going to *“love those who persecute us”* or *“love our enemies,”* - i.e., to love as Jesus loved -- then “loving our brothers and sisters **MUST** come first.

- If you “say” you’re a Christian, but you can’t even bring yourself to unite with other believers in community in a church, you need to be careful....
- If you are in community, but you have cut yourself off from real connections, same thing....
- But if you have love for your brothers and sisters in christ. Even if you struggle to love *some* people, but you know you need to learn how, and you don’t give up.... Be encouraged. A good sign.