

**An old and new commandment**

1 John 2 7-11

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“Beloved.” It’s an archaic word that we don’t use much today. It only shows up in death notices. *“Mary Smith, beloved wife of Johnny.”* People used it to address or refer to those they loved. It described a person who was dearly loved or greatly loved. Beloved. Be-loved. Today we’re going to use it. Imagine a blank sheet of paper with the word *“Beloved”* at the top. Imagine it’s your list of beloved people in your life. Now whose names would you write on that page? Let’s say God is already on the page. So these are names of people in your life. Who is on your list?

If you’re married, hopefully your spouse would be up there. If you’re engaged or dating, your partner would make it. Maybe there’s someone you secretly love although you’re not sure if they love you. If you have kids they would likely be on that list. Maybe your parents would be on there; your brother; your sister; your relatives; your in-laws; friends; grandparents; grandkids. What about coworkers; colleagues; your boss; people in this church; your neighbors?

Who’s on your beloved list? But there might be times you want to delete people from that list. Those of you who have brothers and sisters – do you always feel great love towards them? Do you desire to hug them and share notes of appreciation with them? Maybe not always. There are times when spouses hurt each other. Kids do things that hurt parents. Parents say things that hurt kids. Relatives annoy. In-laws are weird. Grandparents are old fashioned. Coworkers? We work with them, but it’s not like we love them. People in the church – some are great. Others annoy or anger us. We disagree and when push comes to shove they certainly would not make our “beloved list.” This love thing is not so easy.

Let’s try something else. Imagine another sheet of blank paper. At the top of this one, we’re going to invent a word. *“Behated.”* If the people on the loved list are those who are greatly or deeply loved, the people on the behated list are those we struggle with. They anger and annoy us. Whenever we see them or talk to them or someone talks about them or something rises up in us. Something snaps.

Who’s on your behated list? Your spouse? Your ex? Your kids or one of your kids? In-laws? Parents? Relatives? Brothers? Sisters? Coworkers? Colleagues? Competitors on another team or in another class? People smarter than you or better than you at something? Your boss? Someone in this church? Your neighbors?

We wouldn't want anyone to know that we actually hate. Maybe hate is too strong of a word. Dislike. But it's there. They did that or said that. They hurt and they laughed! They rejected and wounded and it's gone on for years. And we know we shouldn't hate. It's not good to hate. But that person just drives us and maybe we harbor a little corner of darkness in our hearts towards people.

Is it okay to be a Christian and hate someone? That's what the Apostle John addresses in his first letter in the Bible. He's called his readers to look carefully at their lives to see that their walking with Christ. He's put forward a couple of contrasts. First, darkness and light. "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin." Last week we saw him contrast disobedience or obedience of Christ's commands. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected." In today's passage he contrasts hate and love. We're going to discover John's answer to the question, "Is it okay for Christians to hate?" We're going to see that hate comes in various degrees and forms.

We're going to discover something unique about the love command. Then we'll explore his comments on the long term impact of love and hate upon our lives. I pray that by the end of our time, He will encourage and affirm the many of you who do express love to others. I also pray that we will come to Him with any hate in our hearts and ask for his help to deal with it.

1 John 2:7-11 - ESV

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. **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. **9** Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. **10** Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. **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.

John starts by identifying his readers with one word - Beloved – or some of your translations say "Dear Friends." "Dear friends" kind of gets across the sense of Beloved. But the Greek word for "friendship" is never used to denote relationship among Christians because of their union with Christ. So we're not just dear friends like anyone else has dear friends. Dear friends are very important and valuable. But in relating to one another, God's people are called to

love each other. John is about to emphasize the command to love one another. Yet he begins not with the command but by living it out. He loves them deeply and starts with that beautiful word, “Beloved.”

But did you also notice that he never states the command when talking specifically about it in verses 7 and 8? He does it very clearly later in chapter 4:7. But for now, he just talks about a commandment that they heard from the beginning. This likely refers to the beginning of their Christian lives. They have heard the command “love one another” from the beginning. It’s so foundational and so familiar that he doesn’t feel he needs to state it at this point. Love was to be the characteristic mark of the Christian before a watching world in this new age.

**How can a commandment be old/new?** In what way is “love one another” old? It goes back to the time of Moses. In Leviticus 19:17-18 Moses wrote – “You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.” So here was God’s expectation upon His people that they love one another. Notice even back then, God commanded his people to deal with hatred in their hearts. They were not to hate one another in their hearts. They were not to take vengeance or bear grudges. Instead they were to love their neighbors as themselves.

This command forms a crucial part of the Good Samaritan story. A lawyer asks Jesus “what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus asks him “what does the law say?” The lawyer answers “Love the Lord your God with your heart, soul, strength and mind AND love your neighbor as yourself.” So the lawyer quotes Leviticus 19:18. Jesus affirms his answer. Then the lawyer asks “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus responds with the shocking Good Samaritan parable which taught that your neighbor is anyone on the side of the road who needs assistance even if they’re outside your ethnic or social community. So Love your neighbor is an old command given in Moses’ time.

But John says it’s also new. 1<sup>st</sup> John 2:8. 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.” So this old commandment is somehow new because something has happened. Something has changed. This something has led to darkness lessening and light increasing. What’s happened?

Jesus, the true light came into the world of darkness. With Jesus comes an expansion upon the commandment. Jesus restated and expanded upon the commandment. Jesus said in John 13:34-35 “A new commandment I give to you.

Love one another. By this all will know you are my disciples if you love one another.” Jesus said this and right after washing the disciple’s feet at the Last Supper. He’s just shown them a self-sacrificing humble love. This is the kind of love He commands. So Jesus *restated* the old commandment. But He also *demonstrated* it. He *lived* it out. He loved His disciples with a Godly love.

So this command was true in him. He stated it and lived it. And it’s true in us if we have Christ in our lives. We don’t only have words on a page but the Lord in our heart who empowers us to live out this radical self-sacrificing kind of love.

So John has reminded them that he loves them. He comments on “love one another” by declaring it an old and new commandment. But John did not write this just to give us an idea for a plaque on the wall. Why does John share this? It’s another test for authentic faith. Verse 9 – “Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.” You cannot claim to be a Christian AND hate your brother or sister. A person who claims to know Christ yet goes on hating others is still in darkness. If there is hate in our hearts towards someone, then some darkness needs to be dealt with.

True, hate is a pretty strong word. It describes intense hostility of the mind often resulting in violent words or action towards another. Some of us may actually struggle with this kind of hate. It’s almost volcanic and explosive. But most of us are not intensely hostile towards others. So does that mean we’re good on the “not hating” front? Robert Yarborough writes, “If John had the intense hostility hate in mind,” many readers of this letter could assure themselves that this did not apply to them. But it is unlikely that John means “hate” in this very strong sense. While the New Testament word for “hate” can have extreme, even murderous associations, John refers to an attitude that he warns ought not to characterize believers. We lack any evidence that readers of this letter plotted to murder each other.” So this “hate” must have been different than the intense hostile kind.

Then Yarborough says “Jesus himself may help define what “hate” in John’s sense might have looked like. In Luke 6:22, Jesus talks about hate. “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 God.” The New Living Translation puts it like this - <sup>22</sup>“What blessings await you when people hate you and exclude you and mock you and curse you as evil because you follow the Son of Man.” What if Jesus is giving us a little commentary on the nature of hate? Or at least he’s talking about hate’s companions.

### **Hate – Excluding – Mocking – Call Someone Evil.**

What if excluding someone is a subtle form of hate? You know that awkward person; the not cool person; the girl that doesn't fit into your popular crowd or the guy that's relatively quiet? What about that sick person or poor person? Do we exclude someone like that? Maybe that's a form of hate without feeling any malice towards another.

A couple of weeks ago, I was dropping off my son at a Junior High Youth Event. Upon arriving, I was notified that a homeless person was inside the church. He has asked to use the men's washroom and had been in there 20 minutes. So while the youth event went forward, I was asked to go and speak to this person. Now my immediate first thought was not how may I show love to this guy. It was how do I get this guy out of the church so he doesn't wreck anything or threaten anyone? Isn't that pathetic on my part?

Yet I had a schedule and things I wanted to do that night. So I went into the washroom and there was this guy I'll call John. He couldn't speak very clearly. He was using some paper towels to wipe down his hair. It was obvious he hadn't had a shower in quite some time. As I'm thinking about how I'm going to get this guy out of the church so the youth are safe, the Lord starts speaking. "He's a human being Tom, stamped with my image. He is in desperate need. He is one I would have stopped for by the side of the road."

So eventually we get out the front door with his things and I ask where he's going. "Grande Prairie," he says. "If you could give me a ride to the edge of town, I'd appreciate it." How will you get there? "Hitchhike." Now I'm not totally naïve. I realize that sometimes people can try to scam you. But I looked at him and his body was so frail and his gait so slow that if he tried to jump me I didn't think much damage could be done. "I'll take you there," I said. So I got him in our car and drove him to the north edge of town. "Is this good I asked?" "Yeah," he said. "But it's getting kind of dark. So maybe you could drop me at McDonalds because I have a coupon for coffee there. Thank you," he said as he got his things out and headed for his coffee. This John was very easy to exclude. Yet he was the kind of person for whom Jesus would have stopped. Maybe my immediate reaction towards him was a subtle form of hate that I've been wondering about ever since.

Could mocking someone be hateful? We say that it's in jest. We say that we don't really mean it. But might some of the barbs be a little too sharp for the jokes? What about rejecting another person and calling them evil? Christians do this all the time to other Christians they disagree with on a point of doctrine. "You don't agree with my

understanding of how the end times will happen? What's wrong with you? Do you even believe the Bible?" And I'm not talking about people who teach heresy. I'm talking about interpretations that Christians have disagreed about for centuries.

Or how about this old new contrast that John talks about with respect to the commandment? If someone asked you, "do you prefer old ways or new ways," how would you answer? Do you prefer older, traditional ways? Or do you prefer the newest, latest and most up to date? Maybe you're somewhere in the middle. So no one's allowed to remain in the middle. What direction do you lean towards? Everyone got that in their mind?

How do those of you who prefer the historic, older, traditional ways feel about Christians who prefer all things new and the latest? What's your gut reaction to them? Do you fellowship with them? Do you love them? Or do you just join with those who have the same preferences you do?

What about you who prefer the latest, fastest and newest? How do you feel about those who prefer the historic, older and traditional? Do you write them off and believe that there needs to be a housecleaning before things can really get going? Or do you love them?

God is glorified not when people divide into camps but when profoundly different people come together in unity because of Christ. Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother maybe by excluding or mocking or calling names is still in darkness.

Whoever loves his brother abides or lives in the light and in him there is no cause for stumbling. When we love one another, it demonstrates our unity with Christ. "By this all men will know you are my disciples, if you love one another." Remember 1 John 1:5 – God is light and in him there is no darkness at all? Remember chapter 1, verse 7 – "If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin." So living in the light is living the Christian life. It's continuing to walk following Christ's pattern and in the strength of Christ's power every day. Here John gives another key to living in the light. **To live in the light we must love as the Light.** To live God's way, we must love as Jesus loved.

We've already reflected on the challenge this command brings. Our beloved and behated lists reveal our struggles. Yet we must struggle. We cannot just give in. We cannot conclude that we're going to love most people but reserve a little corner in our hearts for the darkness of hate.

**Why is it important to be concerned about whether we love and hate?** Our love or hatred does more than reveal whether we walk in light or darkness. Love and hate actually contribute to the light or darkness in our lives. Look at verse 10 again especially the end –“Whoever loves his brother lives in the light and in him there is no cause for stumbling.” In the person who loves his brother, no stumbling blocks will come out of their lives. They won’t cause themselves or others to stumble. So when we love others we don’t cause stumbling which means we stay in and walk closer to the light.

But look at verse 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.”

Harboring hatred leads deeper into darkness. We do not understand where we’re going. We pitifully grope around trying to find our way to the point that we don’t even know if we’re in darkness. When a person or a family or a people continue in this way, it can lead to horrific results. Remember Rwanda. In 100 days in 1994 there was a mass slaughter of the Tutsi tribe by the Hutus. Between 500,000 and 1 million were killed. 70% of those doing the slaughtering identified themselves as Christians. Hate left unchecked grew through the tribes. Darkness grew. When the opportunity came it spilled out to plunge that nation into one of the darkest episodes in human history. The person who hates goes deeper into darkness.

But the person who loves goes further into the light – further into Christ. We cannot love as the Light apart from the Light. We cannot dig down and root out the hate in our lives apart from the light. We can mask it – we can cover it up – we can suppress it. But squeeze it a little and the hate seeps out – sarcasm; mockery; exclusion.

Christ died so that the sin of hate could be overcome and rooted out of our lives. Only by His death were those sins paid. Only through His blood was God’s wrath satisfied. Only through His sacrifice could we come to God in a reconciled relationship. Only by the Holy Spirit can we be changed and transformed to leave hate behind and love like Christ loved.

Will you call out to the Lord to rescue you from hate and lack of love? Will you call out to the Lord for strength and power to love as Christ loved? Will you come to the Lord right now and speak to Him about what He’s been saying to you. Let us speak to the Lord and call for His help.