



As we continue our series in the New Testament letter known as First John, we come to a portion of it that introduces a theme that is then pretty persistent throughout the rest of the letter: Love. Now, this isn't Valentine's Day kind of love. And it isn't love like when we say “I love chocolate” or “I love football” or “I love coffee.” It's a deeper love, and we'll get into this some today, and then even more as we go along through 1 John.

So, you may recall that in the verses 7 and 8, John gives his readers kind of a riddle: That he's writing to them about a command that is both old and new. Now, we didn't really get into what the command is, but we get into it today. So, let me read to you verses 7 and 8 that we ended with last week, so you can better see the connection from them to today's passage which we will get into immediately after these two verses. “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 in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.” (1 John 2:7-8). And now we continue with **verses 9-11**.

So, now we get the substance of the command, and it's the command to love. It's not expressed as a “command” here, but it's clear from context that this is what he's referencing. When we do that (love others), we walk in the light and shine the light that he previously wrote about. **Specifically, he says in verse 10, “Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light...”** And then he contrasts it in verse 11 by saying that “anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness.” Now, although the biblical command is clearly to love people regardless of their spiritual condition, geographic location, color of their skin, and so forth, here: “Brother” and “sister” almost certainly is referring to brothers and sister in Christ. We are to love them. He uses family language frequently in this letter to refer to their relationships within the church.

We'll come back to this more in a bit. But this is the command that is both old and new, to love. Let's continue reading now, taking just the **next three verses (1 John 2:12-14)**.

This is a really interesting few verses. They are almost poetic in nature, and a lot of our English translation Bibles will format it differently to reflect the stylistic difference of this section. Obviously, it follows a pattern, addressing the "dear children" which is almost certainly the entire church to whom he's writing, just as he addressed them as "my little children" just a bit earlier. Then "fathers" which is not likely literal fathers, but those who are more seasoned in the faith. And then "young men" which is those younger in the faith. Then, the three are repeated.

And: Each address to the different group of people is a word of encouragement. Many Bibles insert subheadings along the way to help sort of summarize the verses that follow. Those can be useful when looking for a particular theme in a passage, or looking for a verse that has a particular theme, or in the case of the gospels, looking for a particular parable of Jesus, and so forth. And they're added by the publishers – they're not part of the original writing. So, a lot of Bibles will include a subheading above this section titled, "Reasons for writing." And that's exactly what he says here. "I am writing to you" occurs three times and "I write to you" occurs three times.

There is much speculation on why the verb tense changes a bit from the first three to the second three, but regardless, this section most clearly states why he's writing. And each of the statements in here are encouraging them in their faith. He reminds them that their sins are forgiven, which is a message at the heart of the gospel; they've known God; they have overcome the evil one; knowledge of God again; knowledge of God a third time; and then a threefold word of encouragement that these younger Christians are strong, the word of God lives in them, and the reiteration again that they have overcome the evil one.

One common understanding of these three verses is that John is sort of taking a pause from his letter. It's almost like he stopped writing for a moment, re-read the letter, and said to himself, "Wow. I kind of jumped right into things

and never really greeted the church, haven't really encouraged them in their faith, and simply launched into things with a pretty heavy emphasis on sin and its effects and walking in the darkness...and maybe I need to kind of re-set things here." For instance, one author puts it this way, **"This section is a rhetorical pause, in which John in essence says, 'Stay with me! I am writing to remind you of the important benefits of the gospel which you enjoy'" (Ray Van Neste, The Gospel Coalition Commentary on 1 John).**

It's one reason I've titled this series "Encouragement" because there is a lot of positive encouragement in this letter. But there's also a lot of what we might call "hard encouragement." It's the "truth spoken in love." It's "loving and encouraging discipline." There's a lot of that in here, too. But it is all under this broad umbrella of encouraging them in their relationship with Jesus, and in their relationships together in the church. Let's finish out today's passage with the final three verses where we get some of that hard encouragement. It's almost like the last three verses of encouragement aren't just to take a pause from what was written, but to build them up some before these next couple sentences (**1 John 2:15-17**).

Sermon slide. So: After the earlier discussion about love for one another, he gives a word of caution: Don't love the world or anything in the world. If we do, then the love for the Father is not in them. Don't love the "kosmon" is the word. We get our word "cosmos" from this. **In Scripture, "the world" sometimes is used positively, and other times negatively.** Along with everything else, God created the world and all that is in it. He loves the world. He loves the people of the world. He sent his son, Jesus, to die for the world. This is the positive kind of use we see throughout Scripture, and usually refers to God's creation, the physical world, and particularly humankind, created in his image. All of this is good.

Then we also see uses like here in today's passage, where we're cautioned about loving the world, or becoming worldly. Jesus tells his followers to "take heart" because "I have overcome the world." This use of the word is speaking to the values, morals, ethics, religions, and so forth, that people have and have created. They frequently stand in opposition to what God stands for. So, we are part of a good world and we love the creation as God

does, but we want to love heavenly values...kingdom of God values. Sometimes there is overlap, and that's great when there is. But oftentimes there is not.

Now, it does need to be noted that the word for "love" here – "don't love the world" – is the same as was used just a few verses earlier – "love your brothers and sisters:" It's "agape." **"Agape" is a uniquely Biblical word that speaks primarily to the love that God has for us and that we are to have for him and towards others.** It's a love that rises above other loves. It's a sacrificial love. It's like the love that I showed all of you at our barbecue a couple Sundays ago, when I bought onions for the hamburgers; not because I want them on my burger (can't fathom why anyone would), but because I knew most of you would. That's Biblical, sacrificial, selfless, agape love. 😊 Ok...that's a very shallow example of love, actually. God's love has depth and a real cost to it. And *we* are to love other people with this kind of love, just as God loves us with this kind of love.

He goes on to list three things in particular that derail us from this kind of love: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life. There's a lot that can be covered by these three things – the temptations are many: Greed, power, materialism, judgmentalism, arrogance, lust in the sexual sense, coveting what others have, and so much more. How many times have we made a purchase just because we saw it? We see an item we didn't even know exists, and all of a sudden, we wonder how we've ever even lived with out it – so we buy it. A lot of this boils down to not being satisfied with what God has provided us with and blessed us with – not just materially, but spiritually too. In fact, the problem is often that we emphasize the physical blessings too much and de-emphasize the spiritual ones, which only opens the door to to lust after worldly stuff. **When we are satisfied with God's provision, and acknowledge that it is God who has provided, then the lusts hold less sway and pride can slip away because we realize God is the one who's provided for us, and not ourselves.**

There's some connection here to what he wrote earlier in verse 11, "But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness

has blinded them.” When we lust after things of the flesh, and of the eyes, and live with pride, we are then walking around in darkness. It’s all succumbing to temptation. Sometimes we’re tempted by things that we know aren’t even good – like hating someone else, something he addresses here. It sounds like such a strong word and we might say, “I would never hate anyone” and yet in the moment, it can be very tempting, and even take root in us when we hardly realize it.

So, the temptation to hate someone often comes about when they’ve done something to harm us. We want retaliation. We want to even the score. When we do that, it’s like a double tragedy of the way of darkness. There’s the victory for evil by person who hurts us, and a second victory when we succumb to evil and respond in kind. Instead, if we really are going to overcome the evil one, as John writes to the “young men” in the church in verses 12 and 14, then the ways of God have to win out, and his ways are rooted in love. Paul puts it well in Romans 12, **“Do not repay anyone evil for evil.” He goes on to say, “Do not take revenge...do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:17-21 selections).** Jesus himself says, “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Jesus, in Matthew 5:44).

Many of you know that about three years ago, my mother-in-law, Rose, was out for a walk with her dog near her home in Ocean Shores when she was hit by a drunk driver who swerved off the road going some 35 miles per hour. Her dog died, and Rose was exceedingly fortunate to make it out alive as well. She has, for all practical intents and purposes, recovered fully after surgeries and rehab, though an event like that never fully leaves you. So, his driving drunk and hitting her was the first evil. There was a second one, however. It wasn’t in her response...but unfortunately, evil got a second victory when the guy who hit her committed suicide a month or two later. It’s really tragic. But Rose’s response was not of hatred, but forgiveness. She actually wrote a poem to express her forgiveness of him, and I want to share with you some of it.

The enemy of my life has fallen
His essence now destroyed

Difficult it is to know the downing
His departure to the dead

I'm lame to call it out with glee
Sin surely then would reign in me
How can I judge, how can I know
His demise is not of Thee

Perhaps in death you save him
Answered all my prayers
Perhaps you called him home to be
In a place of rest prepared

Judgment must find no rest in me
It's not the way prepared
Lacking all, I find my all
In sadness and in the call

The call for me is mercy
You once gave your all for me
The call for me is graciousness
The pathway to be free

My task in short time
Is only much to bless
My joy is praying, hoping, trusting
That Your cross is on his chest

I love the line, "I'm lame to call it out with glee; Sin surely then would reign in me." The rest of the poem really flows out of that stance. And when we revel in someone's downfall, or when we desire to get revenge on them because they've wronged us, then sin has taken root in us; there's a double victory. We are lusting after the world's values. Instead, God calls us to a place of love, and from there flow forgiveness, and peace, kindness, and so forth.

This response of love instead of hate, is why the cross and the empty tomb of Jesus is so powerful. He didn't defeat Satan using the means or methodology that the evil one uses. He was tempted to, I'm sure. He was tempted by Satan early on to use his power and his relationship with God for his own benefit; certainly, there was temptation to return evil for evil as well. But instead, Jesus went to the cross for sinners like you and me as an act of love. Love was his motivation. And then he was raised from the dead by his heavenly father to defeat the power of death, darkness, and the grave. It was all rooted in love. Love is his response to evil, to hatred, to darkness.

So, two things this morning. **First, please know that God loves you just as you are.** You are part of his creation, made in his image, made to be in relationship with him, like a good father and his child. Whether your life is marked by agape love modeled after him, and walking in the light, or your life is marked by wandering around in the darkness, succumbing to the temptations of the world, he still loves you. Jesus has already gone to the cross for you, to pay the price for your sin, to redeem you from the eternal grip of evil, and bring you into relationship with God your heavenly Father.

Second of all, for those of us who are already Jesus-followers, let's make sure we follow God's ways, and not the ways of the world that are so tempting. It's a challenge sometimes – lusts of the flesh and eyes...our pride gets in the way. The temptations are many. But if we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, if we stay rooted in his love, then the fruit of our lives will come from that place, and announce that the Kingdom of God is here, that heaven has come down. And that is fruit that lasts forever, right into eternity with him. Let's pray...Amen.