

**Sermon Title: LOVED & LOVING—LIVING IN THE GOSPEL LIGHT**

**Text: 1 JOHN 2:7–14**

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7 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 is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. 14 I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the world.

Light causes growth. Within the garden of faith, what type of fruit is to be seen? Our passage today addresses this question. The passage opens with the Apostle calling his readers, “beloved” of God (2:7; cf. 3:1–2; 4:7–11, 16; Rom 1:7). This heart-warming, hope-filled greeting stresses the Apostle’s confidence that his readers are, with him, receivers of manifold grace. What makes this so significant is that passage is dominated by the command to love. But the only people who can love are those who are loved by God (much like Jesus was called “beloved” of God—Matt 3:17; 12:18; 17:5; cf. Luke 9:35; 23:35). In God’s garden, love is only produced when the light of God’s grace is shining, and John is confident that his readers are enjoying this love-generating grace.

1 John 2:7–17 is a unit that naturally divides into three parts: In 2:7–11, John overviews the command to radical love within the church. In 2:12–14, he gives a series of reasons why such love is possible. And then in 2:15–17, he stresses what must not be loved—namely the world. Today we are going to look only at the first two of these units, where John calls us to love (vv. 7–11) and then gives the reasons for this call (vv. 12–14).

**Big Idea: Because of the light of the Gospel shown us in Christ, we are called and empowered to love our Christian brothers (2:7–14)**

**1. The New-Old Command Described: How is the call to love our brother new? (2:7–8)**

John begins in 2:7–8 by describing what he calls a new–old command.

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. 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.

At one level, what John is about to say about love is not a new word for his Christian audience, for they have heard it “from the beginning” of their conversion (2 John 5; cf. 1 John 2:24). 1 John 3:23 clarifies what command we are talking about: “And this is his commandment, that we

believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another.” How often evangelism focuses on the freedom of forgiveness without the responsibility to love? Not so with John’s readers. They have heard the call to love from the beginning.

However, while familiar in one sense, the call to love our brother is new in another sense. Specifically, just as Pastor John addressed last fall in his sermon on John 13:34, with the coming of Christ, God provided us a new *pattern* of love and a new *power* to love like never before—a new *pattern* and a new *power*.

Back here in 1 John, the new *pattern* of love is hinted at in 2:8 when the text says the Supreme Command “is true in [Jesus].” Jesus embodied perfect love, and John calls his readers to follow in the footsteps of Jesus (cf. Phil 2:5–8). In the words of 1 John 3:16, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” Or back closer to our text in 2:6, “Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.” The call to love is new in the way Christ’s love provides a *pattern* for how we should love.

What is striking in 2:8 is that the Supreme Command is said to be true or verified not only in Jesus but “*in you*.” But how could a darkened people under the curse of Adam truly love? The text says it is “because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.” In 1:5, the Apostle said “God is light.” Now in 2:8, we are able to love only because “the true light ... is shining.” With the coming of Christ, the light of God’s love burst over the horizon of redemptive history, and with global scope this love of God is creating lovers. “We love because he first loved us” (4:19). The command to love is now true “in us”—that is, we have the *power* to love because the light of God’s grace is shining!

## **2. The New-Old Command Clarified: Are you living in this Gospel light?**

We now move on to 2:9–11, wherein John clarifies the command to love.

1 John 2:9–11 – “Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. 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.”

### **(a) Four general observations on 2:9–11**

Four things are very apparent as we look at these verses. First, *John is calling Christians to love fellow Christians*. While other places in the Bible stress the need to be a neighbor to all with whom we contact (e.g., Luke 10:25–37), John’s focus in all three verses on loving and not hating one’s “brother.” Who are our brothers? 1 John 5:1–2 defines them as those who have “been born of [God]” and are therefore “children of God.” 2:19 says they are those who persevere in their faith and remain in the church, rather than denying all God is for us in Jesus and leaving when times get hard. Here we are, in gathered community. This is the brotherhood of God. These are the ones God is calling us to love and not hate.

Second, 2:9 stresses that *love is more than affection and more than allegiance; love is action*. Nice words mean nothing if they are not accompanied by tangible expressions of love. Recall 1:6 – “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” Similarly, 2:4 asserts, “Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” Our actions matter—not just our words! God cares about how we treat our spouses and respond to our kids and talk to our parents. God cares about how we spend our money and help our friends and interact with newcomers. God

cares! And if we live in the light, we should care. Light causes growth, and living in the light should make us loving people.

Third, 2:10–11 make clear that *attempting life's journey in the dark is deadly*. I see this emphasized in the fact the one who loves “abides in the light” (2:10), and if “God is light” (1:5), then those who love abide in God and enjoy the life that only comes from him. 3:14 – “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers.” Loving the brothers is exhibit A that we have indeed encountered God, for God alone can help us love. Darkness is the opposite. To be away from God means to be away from life, away from hope, away from help, away from forgiveness. In the Gospel of John, Jesus declares in John 3:19: “And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.” Bethlehem, don’t love darkness; you don’t want that! Those in the dark are blind and aimless (v. 11). Those in the dark remain in bondage, remain under the burden of guilt, remain in the empty state of self-indulgence, and remain in the discouraging state of self-reliance. Darkness means death! In contrast, to be in the light is to enjoy life, having fellowship “with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1:3).

Fourth, the contrast in vv. 10–11 discloses that *light enables sight, whereas darkness “blinds.”* As a result, in this journey of life, those in darkness are lost; those in the light know “the Way” (cf. John 14:6). You will recall that 2:8 told us that only those in the light can love. Now we are told that only those in the light can see. There is a connection being made here between right seeing and the ability to love, and I propose this connection clarifies how it is that we are only able to love when abiding in the light of God. What does the light of God enable us to see that in turn makes us lovers and not haters? Light enables us to see the hope of the Gospel—to treasure all God is for us in Jesus (cf. 1 John 1:1–3). How does seeing great worth in the cross help me love others? One way is that by reminding myself of the depth of my own sin against God and of the depth of his ever-forgiving grace toward me, I give the Gospel an opportunity to reshape my perspective and to put me in a place where I desire to be a channel of this same grace to those around me—even those who have wronged me. We recall how much love God has shown us while we were yet sinners, and we are in turn empowered to love those who have sinned against us (cf. 1 John 4:9–11). Another way focusing on the Gospel helps us love is that it reminds us that all future grace we need has been secured for us. And as we put our faith in God’s promises of future grace, hope is created, and what we hope for tomorrow changes who we are today (cf. 1 John 3:3). So if we are dreading an approaching phone call because we know we always blow-up in anger when we talk to this person, recalling the Gospel gives us confidence that God can justly supply all we need to love rather than hate. Similarly, say you are called to lead a Bible study, but the day of everything goes bad. You don’t feel like loving others, but you are confident in God’s promise of future grace, so you go in the strength he supplies (cf. 1 Pet 4:11). Seeing and savoring all that God is for us in Jesus helps us love our brothers.

### **(b) What John means by “love” and “hate”**

One of the challenges I faced in approaching this passage was John’s charge for Christians not to “hate” Christians. When I think of people who “hate” others, I think of Joseph’s brother’s “hating” him (Gen 37:4–5, 8) or Haman “hating” Mordecai and the Jews (Esth 3:5–6) or Hitler “hating” the Jews. To be honest, hate is really not part of my vocabulary, but it was part of John’s. “Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness” (1 John 2:9). Could that be me? By “hate,” does John mean the same thing I mean by “hate”?

John’s first epistle is full of polarities: You’re either in the light or in the darkness (2:9–10); you’re either a child of God or a child of the devil (3:10); you either practice righteousness or you don’t (3:10); you’re either alive or you’re dead (3:14); you either know God or you don’t (4:7–8); you’re either indwelt by the Son or your not (5:12). In our passage, you either “love” or “hate” your brothers (2:9–11). With this in mind, I worked my way through 1 John, looking for

clarity on what loving or hating is, believing that, in light of the polarities, if I get a picture of one, its opposite will also be clear.

Drawing from elsewhere in the book, I have two statements that describe what loving our brothers means and two more statements that detail what loving our brothers presupposes. I'll give you the four, and then we'll overview them one by one.

Loving our brothers means:

1. Responding humbly and gratefully when a brother's actions reveal the evil of our hearts.
2. Giving out our own resources to help meet a brother's needs.

Loving our brother presupposes:

1. We are loving God and not the world.
2. We are obeying God's commands.

***The two things loving our brother means in 1 John:***

First, *loving our brother means responding humbly and gratefully rather than negatively when a brother's actions reveal the evil of our own hearts.* I get this from 3:11–12: “For this is the message that we have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.” Do you recall this story from Gen 4? Some have asserted that Cain's problem was his failure to bring an animal sacrifice like Abel his brother had. Cain brought fruit; God preferred blood. However, nowhere does the text make this point. Instead, the contrast between Cain and his brother was in Abel's bringing “the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions” (Gen 4:4). To let go of the firstfruits of the flock meant you were trusting God to provide more; to give God the fat portions meant you were offering him what was considered the best part. Cain brought some fruit; Abel brought the first and the best. And their worship experience exposed the hypocrisy of Cain's own heart. He didn't love God like he should. He was neither trusting God nor living in a way that declared God's worth. And when his evil heart was shown for what it was, he struck his brother to death out of jealousy. Loving our fellow Christians means responding humbly and gratefully to them when our interactions with them expose our own wicked hearts. Perhaps God uses your spouse to call you on a promise not kept. Perhaps another's God-sparked commitment to foreign mission work causes you to see your own love of comfort over your love for God. Perhaps God uses the discipline or dependence of a friend in your Bible study to reveal areas of laziness or pride or despondency. How will you respond when your sin is shown for what it is? Those living in the light are “quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger” (Jas 1:19), and we live in the light if we love those whose actions reveal the evil in our own hearts.

Second, *loving our brother means giving out of our own resources to help meet a brother's needs.* 1 John 3:16–18 – “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and truth.” The call has already gone out for us as a body to prayerfully consider how we can serve in children's ministry next fall. The need is clear. Loving rather than hating our brothers means that if we have the resources to serve, we will. We have numerous individuals and families in our church that have been massively affected by the downfall of the economy. Many are without work or struggling to get by. Loving our fellow Christians means that if we learn of a financial need and are able to meet even part of it, we do so, even if it means one less Caribou, one less soda, or one less movie rental. It may even mean we give up getting a new couch, going on a trip, or adding an addition. Living in the Gospel light

means we will love our brothers. Trusting God's promise that his love for us will supply all of our needs tomorrow (Phil 3:19), we are freed today to joyfully meet the needs of others with the resources of time, treasures, and talents God has provided (cf. 1 Tim 6:17–19). May God help us to this end.

***The two things loving our brother presupposes in 1 John:***

First, *loving our brother presupposes we are loving God and not the world.* I have to admit that this observation really floored me when I saw it. In anticipation of next week's message, I want to draw a link between 1 John 2:15 and 5:1. Let's start in 5:1 – "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone *who loves the Father* loves whoever has been born of him." Loving the Father means that we will love our brothers. Now look at 2:15 – "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, *the love of the Father is not in him.*" We can't love our brothers if we love the world, because those who love the world don't have the love of God abiding in them, and only those who love the Father can love fellow believers. What keeps us from loving? 2:16 says it's "the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions." These are "not from the Father but ... from the world." Evil desire keeps us from love of brother. James observed (Jas 4:1–2): "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel." We are not loving others when selfishness rather than service is our motivation. Furthermore, holding too firmly to the world's stuff limits our potential to love. Notice the third hindrance of love of brother in the list of 2:16—"pride in possessions," boasting in stuff. The only other time this word for worldly "stuff" is used in the letter is 3:17, which we looked at earlier: "But if anyone has the world's *goods* and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" Too great a love for stuff hinders our ability to love others. This call is for kids too. Children, listen. God wants you to love too—not just Mommies and Daddies. Maybe you've been saving your money for something special, and then you learn that putting some of your money into baby bottle could help save babies from getting killed or giving some of your money to the church could mean there is more space to help you and others to grow in Jesus. God wants us to love people more than money. May he help us to be free givers and to hold lightly to things of this world.

Second, *loving our brother presupposes we are not living as hypocrites but are, by faith in all God is for us in Jesus, obeying God's commands.* Look at 1 John 5:3: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments." Hypocrites are haters of others, not lovers. There is no real love of our brothers if we don't love God, because God is the source of our love and because we do not love others if we fail to point them back to God. And there is no real love of our brothers if our lifestyle in other areas does not direct people to Jesus. If, as a husband, all my passion goes into my work and not into loving my wife as Christ has loved me, I cannot love you as I should, for I am only able to love you when I take God seriously in other areas of my life. If, as a man, I do not tenaciously war against lust and greed and self-reliance, I cannot rightly love those in my Shepherd Group because I have severed the root of love through sinful, temporary pleasure. If, as a dad, my kids see a kind and gracious man at church but another man who is quick to speak, slow to listen, and quick to become angry at home, I am a hypocrite and am not truly loving anyone other than myself!

But now, Bethlehem, gear up as the Gospel light explodes into this service.... You will recall at the beginning of this sermon I read 1 John 3:23—"And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another." The command is not simply to love, but that faith in Jesus would work through love (cf. Gal 5:6). Let us now read 5:2–5:

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his

commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

We want to be great lovers here at Bethlehem! And loving means we will not be caught up in the ways and things of the world. What is the victory that overcomes the world? What can free us from selfish ambition or discontentment in order to love others? John says it's "our faith"—faith in Jesus. Note the logic of the passage. To love others presupposes that we are keeping God's commandments, and we can only keep God's commandments if we believe in Jesus. In the garden of God's grace, faith in Jesus is the root; love is the fruit. The call of this sermon is not simply to live in love but to realize that I will only live in love by greater surrender, greater dependence, greater humility, greater trust in all God is for me in Jesus. This side of heaven we will never be perfect lovers; but we can be real lovers through faith in the future grace of Jesus. Through focusing on the Gospel, we are empowered to love. We are beloved, Bethlehem. God is for us, not against us (Rom 8:31), and "he who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all ... will ... with him graciously give us all things" (8:32)! In *Future Grace*, Pastor John wrote (283):

What will propel us to greet strangers when we feel shy, to go to an enemy and plead for reconciliation when we feel indignant, to tithe when we've never tried it, to speak to our colleagues about Christ, to invite new neighbors to a Bible study, to cross cultures with the gospel, to create a new ministry for alcoholics, to spend an evening driving a van, or a morning praying for renewal? None of these costly acts of love just happens. They are impelled by a new appetite—the appetite of faith for the fullest experience of God's grace.

This appetite is only gained through seeing and savoring the Gospel light of God's love. This is what John means by believing Jesus. Seeing and savoring God's love for us is what empowers us to love our brothers.

### 3. Conclusion

Bethlehem, I am hopeful for us because I know we are loved. My hope is not grounded in me or in my knowledge of you but in my knowledge of God, who is light. And the light of his love always causes growth in love within the garden of faith. So as we conclude, let us now look back to the final six declarations of our unit and hear the Gospel-encountering confidence John has for his readers. Why does he feel free to call you and me to love? I will read 2:12–14, adding a little commentary throughout:

I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven because of Jesus name. I am calling you to love because I know you are tapped into the power and have experienced the sin-overcoming, life-generating, past and future grace-securing work of Christ.

I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. You know the "word of life" (1 John 1:1) that was "with the Father and was made manifest to us" (1:2)—the one through whom all things exist and who alone enables faith to work through love (cf. Gal 5:6).

I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one, for, as 1 John 4:4 declares, "he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

I write to you, children, because you know the Father. You are a child of God and are beloved. You abide in God, and where there is light, growth in love abounds!

I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning, who always was, always is, and now always will be for you because of the wrath satisfying, love-securing work of Christ.

I write to you, young men, because you are strong by the power of God in you. I write you, young men, because the word of God abides in you, which according to 1:10 means you recognize you are a sinner in just as much need of Jesus today as ever, and which according to 2:5 means God's love for you is going to reach its intended goal of making you a lover of your brothers, and which according to 2:7 means you have heeded the message you have heard from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

Loved and loving—living in the Gospel Light. May God help us, Bethlehem be better lovers of our brothers.