

* These notes are provided for personal devotional and study purposes only. They may not be published, distributed, or disseminated to others without the permission of the author.

A New Commandment?

1 John 2.7-11

Series: Blessed Assurance (Communion Series)

The Village Church

May 5, 2024

I. Destroying a False Sense of Security

- A. I recall a story told of Dr. John Gerstner
 - 1. Who for many years was Professor of Church History at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
 - 2. At the time Dr. Gerstner was at Pittsburgh, Pitt was dominated by theological liberalism
 - a. Dr. Gerstner was one of the few evangelicals
 - b. By that I mean one of the few who actually believed the Bible
 - c. That the Bible was true, authentic
 - d. That the Bible was the authoritative Word of God
 - 3. The story I recall, assuming I'm recalling it correctly, was when a guest speaker came to the seminary
 - a. I believe he was a churchman of some note – perhaps a bishop or other denominational official in one of the mainline denominations
 - b. He was a prominent Pittsburgher
 - 4. And one of Dr. Gerstner's students asked him, "Dr. Gerstner, do you think Rev. 'So-and-so' is a genuine Christian?"
 - a. Dr. Gerstner replied, "Well, he drives like one."
 - 5. I think you had to know Dr. Gerstner to understand his comment
 - a. This was Gerstner humor – but it was humor with a point
 - b. Gerstner knew that one's driving habits were not the defining character of whether one was saved– that you can't drive your way into heaven
 - c. But Dr. Gerstner wanted his students to understand that, by and large, Christians obeyed the laws of the state
 - d. And that included the laws of the road
 - e. And that the clergyman in question drove within the speed limit, came to full stops at stop signs, didn't speed through intersections when the light turned yellow – that kind of thing
- B. We humans have a great capacity for missing the point
 - 1. That is, we have a great capacity for rationally inventing all kinds of characteristics and qualities that we imagine determine the genuineness of our religion
 - 2. We imagine that genuine Christians are members of a church
 - a. Now I believe that membership in a local church is very important

- b. But there is nothing in the Bible that says that church membership is the basis for our salvation
 - c. The thief on the cross never belonged to a church
 - d. As someone has said, being in a church doesn't make you a Christian any more than being in a garage makes you a car
 - 3. We imagine that theological knowledge is characteristic of genuine Christians
 - a. But it's possible to have multiple graduate degrees in theology and not be a Christian, not be saved
 - b. One of the great New Testament scholars, one who was one of the main authors of the Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, was not a believer
 - c. He was probably the best exegete of his day – an exegete is one who is able to explain the author's intention of the biblical text
 - d. But even though he accurately portrayed the author's meaning in the dictionary entries, he basically didn't believe it
 - 4. We imagine that religious zeal is characteristic of genuine Christians
 - a. That passion in our expressions is prima facie evidence for salvation
 - b. That the more bold our proclamations, the more emotional our appeals, the more we must be Christians
 - c. But that would apply to Judas Iscariot – the zealot
 - 5. So our tendency is to concoct all kinds of irrelevant criteria for what constitutes a genuine Christian
- C. The first epistle of John is about **The Assurance of Salvation**
 - 1. Which gives the impression that John is going to give us a big theological hug
 - a. That he's going to put his arms around us and tell us that everything will be all right
 - b. That he's going to pat us on the back and tell everyone that we are all going to heaven
 - 2. But actually, he's doing the opposite
 - a. He's, little by little, stripping away all of the irrelevant criteria that we humans have invented for what we think constitutes genuine Christianity
 - b. He's recognizing that by our human inventions, we have created for ourselves a false sense of security
 - c. That we are like Linus and his blanket
 - 3. And John is going to take our blanket away from us
 - a. He's going to strip us of our false presumptions
 - 4. And in their place, he's giving us true categories by which we are to understand our relationship with God through Jesus Christ
- D. Now in our series – **Blessed Assurance** – on 1 John, our communion series, we recognized that the Bible gives us both subjective and objective bases for assessing our assurance

1. There is a **Subjective** sense of assurance
 - a. Subjective in the sense that the Spirit of God, indwelling in the life of the believer, speaks to our hearts to confirm that we belong to Him
 - b. **Romans 8:15–16** (ESV) — 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...
 2. But, as you all can testify, that sense of the Spirit’s affirmation can come and go
 - a. And our capacity for self-deception based on our feelings is legendary!
 3. So as precious as that internal testimony of the Spirit with our spirits is, John gives us **Objective** criteria
 - a. Objective tests by which we can confirm the impulses of the Holy Spirit who indwells genuine believers
- E. That stripping away began back in Chapter 1
1. He begins by warning us of our speech – that it’s possible to speak about ourselves in ways that belie the actual state of our souls
 2. **1 John 1:6** (ESV) —
 - a. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.
 3. **1 John 1:8** (ESV) —
 - a. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
 4. **1 John 1:10** (ESV) —
 - a. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.
 5. So then, our speech, the way we speak about ourselves, may be false
 - a. We may talk ourselves into a false sense of security
- F. Then in Chapter 2 he gives us our first objective test
1. That test is **obedience to the commandments of God**
 2. **1 John 2:3** (ESV) —
 - a. 3 And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.
 3. **1 John 2:5–6** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.
 - b. By this we may know that we are in him:
 - c. 6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.
- G. Text continues in that vein – the vein of keeping the commandments of God
1. But gets more specific about which commandment in particular
- H. **1 John 2:7–11** (ESV) —

1. 7 Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning.
2. The old commandment is the word that you have heard.
3. 8 At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you,
4. because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.
5. 9 Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.
6. 10 Whoever loves his brother abides in the light,
7. and in him there is no cause for stumbling.
8. 11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness,
9. and does not know where he is going,
10. because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

II. The Commandment

- A. John begins by mentioning a commandment
 1. He doesn't immediately say what it is
 - a. But then again – he doesn't have to
 - b. Everyone to whom he's writing would have known what he's referring to
 2. And in his introduction to it, he speaks almost in terms of a riddle!
 - a. "I'm writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment..."
 - b. And then he says,
 - c. "At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you..."
 3. It's not new; it's old; but then again, it is new!
 - a. What?
 4. Well, most everyone who's receiving this letter is familiar with John's gospel
 - a. In which John records Jesus' own words
 - b. Words which John echoes in this passage
- B. **John 13:34–35** (ESV) —
 1. 34 A new commandment I give to you,
 2. that you love one another:
 3. just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.
 4. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples,
 5. if you have love for one another."
- C. **Old**
 1. Now, when Jesus speaks of this new commandment, he has in mind an old commandment
 - a. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another..."
 2. But that's not new!
 - a. That's old

- b. “Love one another” is right out of your favorite Old Testament book: Leviticus!
 - c. **Leviticus 19:18** (ESV) — 18 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.
3. In other words, “Love one another”
- a. Especially, your own people
 - b. And you shall love them as yourself
 - c. It’s the OT version of the Golden Rule
 - d. **Matthew 7:12** (ESV) — 12 “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”
 - e. Love one another – and love them as you would love yourself
- D. **New**
- 1. So what is it about Jesus’ commandment that makes it new
 - 2. Well, he takes the old commandment – the one from Leviticus – love your neighbor as yourself – and raises it to a new level of love
 - a. “**Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.**” (**John 13.34**)
 - 3. So the old becomes new
 - a. **Old – love others the way you want to be loved**
 - b. **New – love the way Jesus loved you**
 - 4. So with what kind of love did Jesus love His disciples?
 - a. He gave Himself up for them!
 - b. Jesus’ love was – from the very beginning – a self-sacrificial love
 - c. A costly love
 - d. The agape love of the NT – a self-giving love
 - e. A love that demands nothing in return; no quid pro quo
 - 5. And then Jesus tells us what will be the result of that kind of love:
 - a. “**By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.**” (**John 13.35**)
 - b. That the world will know that you are genuine Christians if you love your brothers in Christ
 - c. That is – if you love them the way Christ loved them!
- E. So John takes this old-made-new commandment of Jesus
- 1. And he applies it
 - a. He applies it, not just to the world – that the world will know you are a genuine Christian
 - b. He applies it to ourselves – to our own sense of assurance
 - 2. That if you love your brothers and sisters the way Jesus loved them, you’ll know that you belong to Jesus
 - a. Listen to how he puts it:
 - 3. **1 John 2:8** (ESV) —
 - a. 8 At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you,

- b. which is true in him and in you,
- c. because the darkness is passing away
- d. and the true light is already shining.
- 4. This kind of love – this self-giving, self-sacrificial kind of love, as Christ loved
 - a. Is true in Christ
 - b. And it is true in you
- 5. How?
 - a. Because if you are genuinely a believer in Jesus, the Spirit of Christ dwells in you
 - b. And you can't help but love your brothers and sisters in Christ

III. **Darkness and Light**

- A. There is much about darkness and light in John
 - 1. In this epistle to be sure – but also in John's gospel
 - 2. Remember the opening to the Gospel of John
 - 3. **John 1:1–5** (ESV) —
 - a. 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
 - b. 2 He was in the beginning with God.
 - c. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.
 - d. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men.
 - e. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
 - 4. **John 1:9** (ESV) —
 - a. 9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.
 - 5. **John 3:19–21** (ESV) —
 - a. 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.
 - b. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.
 - c. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."
 - 6. **John 8:12** (ESV) —
 - a. 12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."
- B. In John – and in Jesus, for John has Jesus in mind every time he speaks of light – light captures the essence of life in the presence of God
 - 1. Light refers to the character of God

- a. **1 John 1:5** (ESV) — 5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.
 - b. The purity of God, the holiness of God, is represented by light
 - c. **1 Timothy 6:16** (ESV) — 16 who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. ...
 - 2. But light also refers to illumination – by which God, by His presence, reveals His way to His people
 - a. By which He lights our path, leads us into safety
 - b. **John 11:10** (ESV) — 10 “But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.”
 - 3. And light refers to revelation – in which God reveals the truth about ourselves and our world
 - a. **1 Corinthians 4:5** (ESV) — 5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.
- C. Godly character, illumination for the path, revelation of the heart – all are included in this passage as John strips away our false sense of security
 - 1. And its antithesis, its opposite – darkness – represents all that is false
 - a. All that leads the unbeliever into danger and destruction
 - b. All that represents a heart of self-centeredness and wickedness
 - 2. And it is this commandment of love that distinguishes the genuine from the false
 - a. The true believer from the pretender or the self-deceived
- D. **1 John 2:9–11** (ESV) —
 - 1. 9 Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.
 - 2. 10 Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.
 - 3. 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.
- E. John gives three examples by which he applies this criterion of loving our brothers and sisters
 - 1. Two of them are negative examples
 - a. One is positive
 - 2. The negative are the bookends that set the contrast for the positive in the middle

IV. **The False Believer**

A. **The Hypocrite**

- 1. **1 John 2:9** (ESV) —

- a. 9 Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.
 2. One who claims to be a Christian
 - a. Yet hatred for a brother or sister belies this claim
 - b. This false assertion
 3. Whether that hatred manifests in acts of destruction, is not critical
 - a. You don't have to murder someone for it to be qualified as hatred
 - b. You don't have to steal from someone; you don't have to lie to someone to qualify as hatred
 4. **Matthew 5:21–22** (ESV) —
 - a. 21 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’
 - b. 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.
 5. In other words, the way we use words can qualify as hatred
 - a. But even without words – our thoughts, inclinations and dispositions toward someone can qualify as hatred
 - b. How do you feel about someone – your own brother or sister in Christ?
 - c. Your motivations and dispositions – while hidden from others, are not hidden from God
 - d. They can give you away!
 6. And even though you may say you're in the light – you're still in darkness!
- B. The Blind**
1. **1 John 2:11** (ESV) —
 - a. 11 But whoever hates his brother
 - b. is in the darkness
 - c. and walks in the darkness,
 - d. and does not know where he is going,
 - e. because the darkness has blinded his eyes.
 2. Just as in v. 9 – one who hates his brother is in darkness
 - a. But also walks in darkness
 - b. That is – this one's behavior, one's actions – are in darkness
 - c. Does things of darkness
 3. What kinds of things?
 - a. Well, the works of the flesh come to mind
 - b. **Galatians 5:19–21** (ESV) — 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. ...
 - c. Maybe you don't resonate with this list; maybe you think you can cross off a bunch of them – many of them don't have to do with hatred as much as selfishness

- d. Be careful! – a lot of them do reflect hatred
 - e. Enmity? You really don't like someone!
 - f. Strife? You're willing to let conflict fester?
 - g. Jealousy? You don't like it that someone else has more gifts and talents than you?
 - h. Rivalries? You're too competitive about something with a particular brother or sister (lost to the Nesselrode brothers yesterday)
 - i. Dissensions and divisions? You can't believe that some brother or sister doesn't see things the way you see them?
 - j. Envy? You're not happy that someone else has property or positions or influence that you don't have?
4. That's what walking in darkness looks like
 5. But then – "does not know where he's going"
 - a. Such a person has lost his or her moral compass
 - b. Can't find their way to the goal of Christ-likeness
 - c. Is off the path, lost in the dark woods of evil
 6. Why?
 - a. "Because the darkness has blinded his eyes"
 7. That's the kind of thing that I see when I hear the people involved in these anti-semitic demonstrations on so-called elite college campuses
 - a. So-called – most of them no longer qualify as elite universities – they've lost all moral authority, not to mention intellectual integrity
 - b. They really have no idea what they're talking about
 - c. They've been fed lies and they've bought them hook, line and sinker
 - d. And they're blind
 8. Now most of them are probably not believers in Jesus
 - a. They're just acting like we would expect unbelievers to act
 - b. But if believers act this way – they have no basis for they're being assured that they belong to Jesus

V. **The True Believer**

- A. And the false believer is contrasted with the true believer
 1. **1 John 2:10** (ESV) —
 - a. 10 Whoever loves his brother abides in the light,
 - b. and in him there is no cause for stumbling.
- B. **The Abiding Believer**
 1. The abiding believer is not here today, gone tomorrow
 - a. The abiding believer is faithful over the long haul
 2. **John 8:31–32** (ESV) —
 - a. 31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him,
 - b. "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,
 - c. 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."
 3. Abiding = continuing

4. **John 15:4–11** (ESV) —
 - a. 4 Abide in me, and I in you.
 - b. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.
 - c. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches.
 - d. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.
 - e. 6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.
 - f. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.
 - g. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.
 - h. 9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.
 - i. Abide in my love.
 - j. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.
 - k. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.
 5. This might as well be the text for John’s sermon in his 1st epistle!
- C. **The Steadfast Believer**
1. “... and in him there is no cause for stumbling.”
 2. If you are a genuine lover of your brothers and sisters, you will not stumble
 - a. “You will be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (**1 Corinthians 15.58**)
 3. **2 Peter 1:5–8** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge,
 - b. 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness,
 - c. 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.
 - d. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 4. **2 Peter 1:10** (ESV) — 10 ... for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.
 5. No cause for stumbling for those who love their brothers and sisters

VI. Application

- A. Do you love the church?
 1. Do you love the people of God in this place?

- B. Some of us may be harder to love than others
 - 1. KJV – 2 Peter 2.9 calls us a peculiar people
 - 2. Looking around you, you may think these people are peculiar
 - a. I'm supposed to love these people?
- C. Mission: Building a community of forgiveness, purpose and hope in Jesus Christ
 - 1. Community – we do it together
 - a. We can't do it together unless we love one another
 - 2. Forgiveness
 - a. We can't love one another unless we are a forgiving people
- D. We're about to share in the Lord's table
 - 1. Gathering around the common elements
 - 2. Elements that express the love Jesus had for each one of you
 - a. The kind of love we're called to have for one another
 - b. For we are called to love as "I have loved you" Jesus says
 - 3. Is there anything in your life, in your relationships with your brothers and sisters, that would make you hesitate to share this meal with one another?
- E. Take a moment – ask God if there is anything that you need to confess
 - 1. "If you confess your sins He is faithful and just to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1.9)
 - 2. If you need to go to someone and ask forgiveness – there is no indictment to simply let the elements pass you by this morning until you can resolve the issue
 - 3. And if you have not forgiven someone – whether they have even realized they've hurt you – you're still called to forgive
 - a. Take this moment to, as an act of your will, by the grace of God, forgive them in your heart
 - 4. Matthew 6:14–15 (ESV) —
 - a. 14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,
 - b. 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.
- F. Silence; pray