

Sermon 4, Same Old, Same Old, 2 John 5-7

Proposition: The command to love each other has been clear from the beginning, but in addition to being well-known, it is vitally important.

- I. The Ancient Commandment: Love One Another, v. 5
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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come this morning to the main request that John makes of the elect lady — that is, the local church. In other words, brothers and sisters, this is a request that John makes of us. If you are part of this church — which you are, because you're sitting here — then John is standing here, behind this pulpit, asking you one thing. You know how, when you get a call from someone who doesn't usually call, all you can do is sit and wonder "Why is this person calling me?" And until he says why, you're not easy in your mind. You're waiting and waiting for the real purpose of the call to emerge. Well, the congregation was wondering why John wrote to them. Now they know. He wanted to remind them to love one another.

It's simple. It's not complicated. It's just difficult: Love one another. This command has been clear from the beginning. It's well-known. And it's vitally important. With God's help, I will remind you of these things today.

I. The Ancient Commandment: Love One Another, v. 5

First of all is the stipulation that this command is ancient. It has been around since the beginning. There has been a lot of discussion about what John means by "the beginning" in his works. He is obviously, in the first instance, referencing Genesis 1:1. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth; in the beginning was the word; and from the beginning the love commandment has existed as a moral obligation binding the people of God. So there is no need to argue about whether this is "the beginning of the Christian life" or "the beginning of the world" or "the beginning of creation." The reality is that whenever you became a Christian the love commandment was already there. It was already a moral obligation that bound you. Indeed, we can say both by creation and by redemption you are obliged to love. Love your neighbor. Love your enemy. Jesus is incredibly clear about both of these things.

In other words, there was never a time when you could say "Yes, I'm a Christian; no, I'm not obligated to love." From the beginning, you are on the hook to love. Brothers and sisters, we had a baby born in my house two weeks ago. It's not the case that we expect him to get to two

years old before we start to encourage him to love his siblings. We want him to love his siblings now. We speak to him in the language of love, and we expect him to return love in the way he best can. From the beginning, you and I need to walk in love.

II. Love Defined: Obedience to the Whole Law, v. 6a

All right, John. We get the picture. Love is something that we needed to have from the beginning of our walk with Christ. But what is it?

In English 1, one of the assignments is to write a short essay answering the question of whether Romeo and Juliet were truly in love with each other. I tell the students over and over that in order to successfully answer that question, they simply must define what love is. Some define love as a feeling of affection; when they do, it is a simple matter to prove from the text that R & J had this feeling for each other, and that it was strong enough to drive them to all kinds of stupidity including suicide. But if you define love as a genuine desire for the other person's good, then it is relatively simple to show that the star-crossed lovers didn't truly love each other a bit.

Well, John doesn't say "Love each other" and then leave it up to you to decide whether that means "Have powerful erotic feelings that culminate in suicide" or "Knock yourself out for the good of the other." John says "Love each other" and then adds, "Here's what I mean. Love means to walk according to His commandments."

Do you remember how we spent about 6 months working our way through the Ten Commandment last year? That was because we want to love each other. The Ten Commandments are a lover's how-to manual. I remember finding in a thrift store one day a book called *The Best Places to Kiss in Northern California*. It was a travel guide. I have never kissed in any of the places it named, so I can't tell you whether it was right that a kiss on Highway 1 overlooking the Pacific is better than a kiss in the parking lot of our little church here in Gillette. But I can tell you that as a guide to love, Exodus 20 is way better. You will do a lot more for your relationship by not committing adultery than you will by kissing in a romantic spot in Napa Valley.

So this is love: to walk according to the Lord Jesus' commandments, which are summarized most comprehensively and clearly in the Ten Commandments written by the finger of God on Mt. Sinai.

You love by having no other gods. You love by worshiping rightly. You love by using God's name in a holy fashion. You love by giving God one full day each week. You love by honoring your parents, preserving life, preserving chastity, preserving property, preserving truth, and walking in contentment. If you're doing these ten things, you are loving and living exactly as John envisions.

That is love.

Do you believe that? Or do you believe the cultural propaganda that says "Love is love" and "Wanting to sodomize a little boy is true love"? Brothers and sisters, the ten commandments are the words of the Spirit of Jesus, and they speak directly to you and me. When John has one thing to say in a one-page letter, that thing is "Do what Jesus said." When Jesus gives the great

commission, His definition of a disciple is “the one who has been taught to do everything I commanded.”

This is what the church is about. This institution is supposed to be the place that teaches you to do what Jesus loves, to love Jesus by doing what He loves. If we don’t make disciples who obey Jesus, we are failing. Just as Walmart is failing if it doesn’t sell merchandise, and NASA is failing if it doesn’t explore space, so we are failing if we don’t make disciples.

We claim to be disciples. John reminds us that the ten commandments specifically, or the commands and law of God more broadly, define exactly what that looks like.

III. Love Commanded: Walk in Love, v. 6b

And then, in case you missed that the command to love is a command, he says it again: Walk according to His commandments. The command is that you should walk in the commands. I am irresistibly reminded of the old “Rule #1: Obey all rules.” And so it is, brothers and sisters. Love is not an optional extra for the Christian life. If your wife is annoying, you don’t have the right to say “Well, I simply don’t love her anymore. I’m divorcing her rear end.”

Where are we tempted to treat love as optional? When it comes to our wayward children, our annoying fellow believers, our boneheaded politicians — basically, when it comes to anyone who seems bent on evil. We are very tempted to think that we needn’t love those people. We think that if someone shows symptoms of heresy, or even of disagreeing with us about lesser issues, we need not love them. We can treat them like liars. But even there, though we should not receive the liar and give him a platform in the church, we are still called to love him — to wish him the best and do the best we can for him.

IV. Love Warned: Liars Lack Love, v. 7

Well, John warns out about the biggest threat to love, which is this: Liars lack love. Many liars have gone out and they are out there lying right now. Some of them work for Hollywood. Some of them work for the news media. Some of them work for the church, in its denominational apparatus and even in local ministry positions. Don’t be deceived! Don’t be lied to.

A. Love Lest You Be Deceived

How do you armor yourself against deception? You love. Love is a method of knowing.

Let me put it this way. Let’s say we’re having a conversation with a mutual acquaintance, who gets onto a baseball kick and rattles off enough statistics about the various players to make your head spin. Then he walks away and I say, “That guy really loves baseball.”

You would understand me to be explaining the source of all those stats. He knows so much about baseball because he loves baseball. Love is what motivated his knowledge. Without the love, the knowledge would not be there. But where love is, knowledge comes. Love is not the thing that knows, as far as I understand our psychology. But love is certainly what activates the thing that knows. We can see it all around us with people who love sports. They couldn’t tell you when the Declaration of Independence was signed or when the Civil War took place, but they can tell you how many rushing yards their favorite player made in the 2018 season.

So how do you avoid being deceived by these deceivers? Love. If you’re keeping the commandments, especially the commandment not to lie, you are in an excellent position to see

through the deceivers' efforts. If you are walking in obedience to the Lord, you have the wisdom that comes from fearing God. Above all, you have the love that drives you to learn the truth about the beloved. And when you have that love, you are triply armed against deception. If I hear a message that claims to be from my mom, or my wife, I can say "Something sounds off. I know the voice of this woman. I know how she thinks. And I know she would never say something like that." In the same way, when you know Jesus Christ, you will know His voice. You will be able to tell if a theologian is a heresiarch. You will be able to tell if a preacher is going off the reservation.

B. Love Is Made Possible by Christ's Coming in the Flesh

But John adds another point: The liar is the one who does not acknowledge that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. The liar denies the Incarnation and the Second Coming. The liar refuses to acknowledge that Jesus took bodily form, that He is one of us in the most emphatic sense.

Put the opposite way, love is possible because Jesus came in the flesh, and the liars who sin against love deny love by denying the Incarnation. So if you want to affirm the incarnation, you need to walk in love. If Jesus came in the flesh, you need to love in the flesh. If Jesus is one of us, you need to love others as though they were Jesus. Love is made possible by Christ's coming in the flesh. If He were not one of us, and had not died to give us His Spirit who is the Spirit of Love, we would not love, we would not know, and we would be totally vulnerable to lies.

C. Our Love Is So Important Because the Alternative Is So Evil

In short, brothers and sisters, we need to engage in the same old, same old of loving each other, the command that we heard from the beginning. Only thus can we be safe from the lies of the wicked one. Only thus can we please God and fulfill our purpose. Only thus can we gruntle an apostle. We should love one another, and we should recognize that failing to love each other dishonors the name of Christ and makes His church look ridiculous. They will know we are Christians by our love for one another — and they will know we aren't Christians when we don't love one another.

The command is the same. It is possible because Jesus came in the flesh. He is one of us, and He died to save us. Because of His death, we can love. Amen.