

1 John 2:7-11 A New Commandment

He starts with somewhat of a riddle – I am writing no new commandment, but an old one you had from the beginning – but at the same time it is a new commandment. How can something old also be something new? Let's follow John's lead and find out the riddle.

The old commandment – the word you have heard. What is the word that we heard from the beginning? We find a hint down in v. 24, "Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father." He uses the word "abide" here, which we actually find several times in this short letter – 23 times, in fact. It is a key word in John's letter. It means to remain, to dwell, and that is a concept he wants us to clearly understand in connection with our relationship with God and His Word. Here's a sampling just from chapter 2:

1 Jn 2:6 – whoever says he abides in him... 2:10 – whoever loves his brother abides in the light... 2:14 – the word of God abides in you... 2:17 – whoever does the will of God abides forever... 2:24 – you too will abide in the Son and in the Father... 2:27 – the anointing that you received from him abides in you... 2:28 – little children, abide in him...

We abide in Him, His word abides in us, His anointing abides in us, and we abide forever. But let's go back to our original question – what have we heard from the beginning, which is able to abide in us? Moving a bit further into his letter, we find in 3:11 "For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." We'll dig deeper into that when we get to chapter 3, but this answers our question. The old commandment from the beginning is that we love one another. So where do we find that old commandment? John's gospel, chapter 13 and verse 34, where Jesus says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." Jesus Himself called this a new commandment, so when John says it is an old commandment, yet also a new commandment, he means that it was introduced by Jesus as a new commandment – and it goes all the way back to the beginning of His teaching. However, the roots of it go back even further, to the Law of Moses. Lev 19:18 says to love your neighbor as yourself, and Jesus called that the second greatest commandment in Mark 12:31, so it is an old commandment, one that should already be well-known to believers. It is the very word of Christ, and Jesus said it is the way others would know we are His disciples. It is foundational to all that it means for us to be Christians – Christ-like.

Let's go back to v. 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." How is the commandment true in him? Jesus loved us and gave His life for us. In fact, it was while we were still sinners that He did that. Jesus said (Jn 15:12-14), "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you." When Jesus died in our place, He defeated the darkness of sin and death, and shined the light of God's salvation, eternal life, so we can receive it. It is true in us when we receive His gift of salvation, when we believe that He died in our place.

Verse 9 points out again the possibility of a false salvation. "Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness." This is a restatement of what we saw in 1:6 and 2:4, but applied to this "new commandment" to love one another. You call yourself a Christian, but you hate your brother? How does

that fit with obeying Christ's command to love one another? Again, later in ch. 3 John speaks of this in light of Cain murdering his brother Abel. We can't love God and hate our brothers. The love of God that gives us salvation will result in us loving others just as God loved us.

Verses 10 and 11 show us the contrast of two ways of life. "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 darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes." Jesus came to deliver us from the kingdom of darkness and bring us into His marvelous light. He shined His love on us and showed us the way to eternal life. If we have received His love, His light, and His salvation, it will be demonstrated as we reflect that love to others. If we struggle to love others (even those who have wronged us), that is likely evidence that we are lacking His love within us – and we are still in the darkness. Confess your sin to Him, and He will forgive you. Trust Him to give you the ability to love others as He has loved you. Come to the light and dwell there.