

I John 1:5-2:11 and Lord's Day 40

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ,

While you and I live on this earth, we are called to love God and love our neighbor and when we do that, we become light of the world. It is truer to say that when God works His love in us, and we are filled with love and express that love by His power and grace we become light in the world. Though we are filled with this love we fall into sin and hate our God and fellow man—we sin, but as John says we experience that love once more when we receive forgiveness for those sins. If then from that love and in Christ's righteousness we love our brother, we are in the light.

Sin is darkness and hating our brother is to live in the dark. John is speaking about our love for one another in the church to be sure, and that, of course, goes beyond our church family. Jesus even calls us to love our enemies and Paul in Romans 12, to do the same. The Heidelberg Catechism in considering murder points out to us the spiritual root causes of murder that lead us back into the darkness and anyone who hates his brother is in the dark. Hatred is murder, it is the desire that the one whom God has placed in our lives ought not to be there and we would be better off if they ceased to exist. That is darkness. It is murder.

The sixth commandment for us, however, is rooted in God's covenant command. We are to love the Lord our God with heart soul mind and strength, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are to be holy as God is holy! We are to represent God here on the earth in love and with justice. Thus, the sixth command is for us. Recall that honor father and mother came with a promise, the promise of long life in the land. There cannot be long life if there is no honor of God and respect for His right to give and to take life. This command then is about life and love of God and our fellow man and there can be no tearing this apart. John teaches us in his letter how we can move from the darkness of hatred and murder into the life of love: I bring to you the Word of the Lord under the theme:

The Lord Commands us to Love Him by Loving our Brother

1. Reflecting the Light of God 2. Being Light in the World

Reflecting It is the moon that reflects the light of the sun. We would not be able to see the moon at night if it were not for the light of the sun that shines upon it and makes it visible to us in the dark of night. We claim to have fellowship with this God—that we reflect his light, for we have none in ourselves, but such cannot be if we are walking in the darkness.

It is very much the Biblical metaphor, of light and darkness, though others will claim it I suppose. But it is God who reveals Himself as light. Here light means spiritual purity and moral perfection. He is glorious in His perfection and righteousness. His light is love perfected and embodied. It is not what He does that makes Him the light rather it is that He is the light! Because He is the light in all that He does and all that originates from Him is bright and beautiful.

In God, there is no darkness at all. It is part of our metaphor. Light is good and dark is bad. The darkness is bitterness. The dark side of the moon is the cold, lonely and frigid side of the moon. In the darkness there is wickedness, there is immorality and ultimately there is death. For there to be life there needs to be light. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. (Ephesians 5:8-14)

This is John's point as well. You cannot be dark and light at the same time. Jesus called his disciples to be the light of the world. We are to reflect the love of God. But if we walk in the darkness then our claim of fellowship is bogus! We cannot claim to love God who is light and continue to live in sin.

But then how are we made to be light? We are made to be light in the death and the new life of Jesus Christ our Lord. In Jesus Christ, we are purified and washed to a gleaming white through the passing through His precious blood. Through His blood, we walk in fellowship with each other from darkness into the light

before the light of the face of God. We are light if we have fellowship with God and that fellowship reflects the light of God.

We reflect the light of God then in the way we live with each other. How do we live as a family? How do we live as husband and wife? How do we live as brother and sister in Jesus Christ? How do we live with our fellow man? How do we live with the person that we do not like? Or who makes us angry? Or who has violated us? Who has ripped us off? Who has done better than us financially or in position or status or is getting married when we aren't? How do we respond to all that as the children of light? As the children of darkness, we well know, murder, envy strife and yes, even sometimes murder! John is teaching us that the light of life to be specially shown in our life as the communion of the saints. This is the application of the sixth commandment is for the church.

We so easily claim to be light. We say Jesus has purified us, and that we are without sin. In the eyes of God's justice, we are forgiven but that does not mean that we live life as light. We must work at it. We cannot claim that we are without sin for that would make God a liar and God is light and purity so he cannot be a liar... John writes to us so that we will not sin! To reflect God's light, we must walk as Jesus did!

In Jesus, we find our example. There we find humility and the striving for perfection. In Jesus, we find the deep-rooted love that welled from the very depth of His soul! This is love that compels us. Whoever loves his brother is walking in the light! Yes, whoever honors, enjoys and understands that the other is ordained by God to live and called by God to service. In the church, we must see each other as saved by grace and precious in the eyes of Jesus. We must live for Jesus a life that is true, striving to please him in all that we do. His love compels us to answer the call- love one another that you may be blessed. This love, when we're still weak, at the right time Jesus died for the ungodly, the light in the darkness taking those who walked in the darkness and giving them the light of hope! (Romans 5)

We cannot reflect the love of God if we do not love our brother. If we do not love our neighbor, then we are in the darkness and then we are stumbling around. That is why murder is such a horrible sin. Murder is the act of hatred made violently. It is the end of that which originates in the heart of a person, yes even a Christian can fall prey to hatred. Hatred, we confess, is what we are prone to. Prone to wander, Lord I feel it! Prone to leave the God I love! Our natural tendency is to hate God and hate our neighbor (Romans 7:23-24 and Lord's Day 2). It is not natural for us to reflect the light of God. We are not born into this world as light reflectors but as the children of darkness, hating and being hated (Eph 2). Our filthy lives dull that reflected light. But washed in the blood of Jesus we have experienced that life of love and we seek to live out of that love because we confess, we are sinners- saved by grace who are washed clean in the blood of Jesus.

We also confess that my brother and sister in Christ are saved too. I can only reflect light as part of the family in fellowship with the family. Hatred is about me! It is about my right to exist as I see fit without regard to the other. In the church, we must share and live together to understand that the other's existence limits mine. It is so by the will of God. But in grace, God now says- let there be light! Let there be moral perfection love one another that joy may be full! Do not kill, do not envy, stop being so jealous, worship and adore me. Reflect my light and be light in the world walk as Jesus walked. Do not repel but win others to Christ!

Being Light To reflect that light then we say we must become that light. To live as children of light we must live in accordance with the commands of Christ, the commands of God. We have mentioned with the text that we are to do that as purified creatures in fellowship with God through Christ with each other. We cannot be light if we do not love one another. Love and hate then are not so many emotions but an attitude. They are, as we say, the act of the will. We chose to love and hate in every situation. By the spirit and the Word of the Lord planted in our hearts we become more and more free to make the choice for love— but we must be engaged

We are creatures of emotion and passion that too often drive us. For example, we enjoy certain foods and hate others because of how they appeal to us. We live in a rather fantastic society where even some of the lower-class folk eat better kings of long ago. We have food in abundance and so we eat for pleasure, for communion and for taste. We eat what we like though this brings poor health (we confess that we ought not to harm ourselves), it brings the problems of being overweight. What of booze and now legalized drugs? Discipline demands that we ought to eat to become strong and healthy in order to serve the Lord and do our work. But eating out or eating rich has become a hobby. A good chef in a good restaurant is a hot

commodity even here in Toronto. We know where the best food is the best deal and soon it dictates the way we eat and drink.

Now let's apply that same sequence to the way we relate to one another. I love whom I love because they appeal to me in some way shape and form. I love my friends because we have things in common or we share a common attitude and we enjoy the same things. The appeal is emotional. The call to love however is a command. Jesus by John is telling us, "Love one another whether or not you always like everything they feel, say or do. Love one another even when you disagree." Jesus even says that we are to love our enemies, that is, to be kind and to do well to them. We are to live such good lives that we might win our neighbor to Christ! (Romans 4:17-19; I Peter 2:12; 3:1-2; LD 32)

That love is never, of course, to be given apart from the righteousness of God. Here is another problem in our society, and now for us who hope to love by speaking the truth in love. Many in our society will tell us that we may not say that we love another one the one hand and then on the other criticize someone's way of life and call them to newness of life, in love for God and His holiness. We may not say we love you, so be holy as God is Holy. We must not ever call someone to repent. Believing is enough they say. For many Canadians, to love is to accept and to tolerate. But John is telling us that this is not loving because it allows people to walk in the darkness. We are called to love by not sinning and to call the other by not sinning. We who have been so deeply by loved by God who subjected His son to the murderous mob and rule of Pilate that we can see it no other way. Jesus did not die so we can continue in darkness or sin but to live in love as the children of light! Now the God of love says, "I am God, I give life and you must love one another." Murder is the act of hate. Hatred, however, itself puts one in the position of judgment under God. Hatred is what identifies the man of wickedness as the man of darkness! Love one another. We in love must call others in the church and outside to the same command.

But it is so difficult to do. I cannot abide that someone is doing better than I am. I cannot abide that someone has a new ride, a new home, or new clothes. I cannot abide that so and so has a boyfriend and girlfriend when I do not. Love cannot work from the "I" perspective. Love cannot work from the "me" centrality. Love does not work from the perspective of identity politics for that says you must love me no matter what I do or who I am. This is the message of the world, of public education and even early childhood education. If you do not love yourself then you cannot love others. God says if you do not love me you cannot love others and will not love others and then you can never reach a full reconciliation with yourself and the darkness that is there.

These dark feelings left unchecked are the reason that people murder. Let's recall the first murder in human history as we read of it Genesis 4. Abel brings his sacrifice before God. Abel is accepted by faith. Cain is in the darkness. Cain is filled with hate. Cain wants to be God and wants God to like it. Cain kills Abel and wanders in the darkness, a hell on earth for the rest of his life. John writes this about that:

For this is the message that you 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 not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. (I John 3:11-14)

In 1 Samuel we read about King Saul who is filled with darkness he will not lead his people; his doom is sure, and he falls on his own sword harming himself. We also read in God's Word about King David when looks on Bathsheba the wife of Uriah the Hittite and sleeps with her. He walks in the darkness. If you think he loves Bathsheba at this point you are wrong. He certainly showing love to the great warrior Uriah, to his own wives and family and not God wither! He hates her and tries to love himself. She will serve him. David uses his power not to protect life but to take it. Uriah is murdered! David is walking in the darkness. But the God of love was not finished with David. David was walking in the darkness even though he was the man after God's own heart.

The law of love and life comes to us like Nathan to David points the finger and says, "YOU ARE THE MAN!" And what do we say? We are not murderers, right? We have killed no one most of us would say. Certainly not us! We have not taken a life? We are without sin. But then we make God out to be a liar. We love ourselves with an imperfect and perverted love. We love ourselves too much. We whine because we

love ourselves and others have more, and others have it better and others have it easier! We burn with bitterness because others have not tried to make us happy. We expect to be loved and left alone and we burn with disgust with those who would limit us. We look with disgust on those who are not Calvinist and are not as good as we are. We get down, get bitter, become envious and finally burn with hatred because our self-imposed divinity has been forsaken. No, I do not murder but man I wish that the person was dead! Have we not from time to time insulted, slandered and robbed the man of a good name (or at least enjoyed it when it happened to some politician we despise and read of it with glee in the newspaper)? We seek to kill while leaving alive. We throw him into the darkness considering ourselves to be light. John knows us because Jesus knows us, and Jesus simply reveals what God has shown to Him. God is light and we are not! Love your God and your neighbor and your brother and be light!

And on it goes. We say we have fellowship God. We say we are the light. But are we the people who walk right on by the neighbor in the ditch or are we like the Good Samaritan? The one in the ditch is beaten up and he is bloody. Do we walk on by like the Priest and the Levite? They ask the question, "What will happen to me if I stop?" They want to know what is in it for them. They crossed by on the other side of the road. The left him to die! Or are we like the Samaritan? I think God's people some of the time and I hope most of the time are like that Samaritan. They step up and clean up and lift up this fallen neighbor. They make sure there is continued care. They ask the question of what will happen to my neighbor if I do not now stop and show love to him. We want to be the light of God in this world!

No, I suppose that we do not, perhaps, physically murder others—that is by the grace of God! By His prevention and the work of the Spirit in the heart of a child of God, we are moved to forgiveness and love and the hard feelings pass away but usually sadly not before they rise and plague us. It is not easy to walk as Jesus did. It is impossible. But let us strive then to love God and love our neighbor as our self.

In condemning envy, hatred, and anger, God requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves, to show patience, peace, meekness, mercy, and kindness towards him, and to prevent his hurt as much as possible; also, to do good even unto our enemies, the catechism teaches reflecting the light of God's Word. Yes, in the new love of God made known to us in Christ we receive the new command! So, John writes that we may live in faith, hope, and love, **Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing, and the true light is already shining.** Love your neighbor, love God be light and do not murder! Amen