

The Old Yet New Commandment | Reading: 1 John 2:7-11

Having introduced the obedience test regarding keeping Christ's commandments, John now focuses on a specific commandment of Christ. This particular commandment has to do with love. With this John also introduces the third test of Authentic Christianity – the love test. Commentators & Bible teachers explain how John weaves these three tests – truth, obedience & love – together as we continue reading this letter. Here we find a solid example of this. John has just been writing about obeying Christ's commandments generally & now he zooms in on one commandment & this one commandment has to do with love which also happens to also be John's third test of Authentic Christianity.

What we believe about Jesus (truth), keeping the commandments of Jesus (obedience) & loving God & others like Jesus (love) are three overlapping aspects of Authentic Christianity... Truth, obedience & love are overlapping & inseparable aspects of the authentic Christian reality. Just as Christ & his offices can be distinguished but not divided, so it is with these three tests. According to the Apostle John the test of authentic Christianity isn't how dramatic our conversion was, or how mystical or powerful an experience we've had; but how transformed our thinking, living & loving is!

FROM THE BEGINNING

John has been talking about the commandments of Jesus generally, about whole hearted obedience. Now he turns to a specific commandment. Listen to what he says; **“Beloved I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word 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.”** The following verses inform us that this commandment has to do with love.

Firstly note that John again points these believers back to what they had received from the beginning. This is how he opened the letter in 1:1; he will say it again in 2:24 & in 3:11... Do you want to know Jesus more? Do you want to know the Father more? Then abide in the teaching which was given from the beginning. He says it in regard to doctrine, obedience & love in the verses we just looked at. He keeps pointing them to what they **“had”** & **“heard from the beginning.”** Again this is a corrective to those who claimed higher or deeper knowledge. Authentic Christianity is based on teaching already received, not on new revelation attained by the super-spiritual or given to the extra-enlightened. It is based on **“the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints”** as Jude puts it. No Christian has access to higher or deeper knowledge than another Christian. One might understand what has been given from the beginning better than another, but no one has access to higher or newer revelation! If you do it's not from God! So get this truth into your system because if you do it will protect you from the many false spirits & false prophets John warns off.

If you want to know what Authentic Christianity is don't go looking for newer or deeper or higher revelation, but go back to the beginning – go back to the teaching of the original apostles who physically saw, looked upon & touched Jesus. In other words; go back to your Bible – which is how what John is saying directly applies to us today!

Secondly note that these believers heard the good news about Jesus as well as the call to obey him & love one another **“from the beginning”**. They were not lured or bated in with the blessings of Christ & then told about the commands of Christ & commitment to love one another sometime afterward. They were given the whole picture – the whole Christ – from the beginning. John's **“from the beginning”** statements make this clear. We need to follow this up-front-and-honest pattern today. Why? Because making authentic disciples should be more important to us than counting bums on seats on Sunday. We are after disciples not consumers. Of course we want to see more people coming & genuinely trusting following Jesus, but we don't want to see that happening because we have lowered the bar of discipleship. To do so would be to chart our course towards nominal & powerless Christianity, & we don't need any more of that in Ireland. What we need & therefore preach for & pray for is authentic disciples who display Authentic Christianity to a culture in spiritual, religious & moral darkness.

THE OLD YET NEW COMMANDMENT

John says the specific commandment he is now talking of is old yet at the same time it is also new. At first this sounds like a contradiction but when we think about it further we begin to see a beautiful paradox. Let's think about this by asking firstly; how is the commandment old & secondly how is the commandment new?

I. How the commandment is old.

It's old because it is rooted in the character of God. John will write later in this letter that **“God is love.”** He writes in 4:16; **“God is love, & whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”** It is Old because it is in the Law of Moses. **Let's turn to & read Leviticus 19:11-18.** This is exactly the kind of thing John goes on & talks about in verses 9-11. We could also turn to Deuteronomy 6:5; **“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”** And of course Jesus summarises the whole teaching of the law by putting these two commandments together, highlighting that love for God & neighbour are inseparable commandments. It's also old in the sense these believers were taught about it from the beginning of their Christian lives as we noted.

The commandment to love is no new revelation or novel idea. It is as old as the Ancient of Days. It is rooted in the nature of the eternal God. It was at the heart Old Covenant with Israel. And with even more clarity it is at the heart of the New Covenant. For God & his commandments are unchanging.

II. How the commandment is new.

John then goes & tells us why this old commandment is also new; **“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.”** So from this one verse we glean three ways in which this commandment to love is new. 1. It is new in Christ. 2. It is new in us. 3. It is new because it is part of a new age.

Firstly it is new in Jesus – in his teaching, example & ultimate demonstration on the cross. His teaching goes deeper in our hearts than the Law of Moses, his example shows us what love in action looks like better than the Law of Moses & his demonstration of love on the cross is the pinnacle of his example. John writes in 3:16; **“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay own our lives for the brothers.”**

Secondly it is new in us. The Law of Moses taught: love your neighbour *as yourself*. Jesus taught his disciples to love one another: just *as I have loved you*. This is how people will know we are his disciples Jesus said! The Christian is not only called to love others as himself, he is called to love others as Jesus has loved him or her, especially brothers & sisters in Christ. This is a call to deeper obedience! This is the new covenant version of the old commandment to love. It was packaged in one way for Israel, now it is packaged in a new way for the Christian. In Christ the commandment to love is clarified, strengthened & given a new depth of meaning never seen before the Incarnation of Christ. And the result of this clearer revelation of love should be deeper obedience to the commandment to love.

Another aspect of it being new in us is our new obedience to this old commandment. Every day we have new opportunities to obey this old commandment in the new way Jesus has shown. In this way the old commandment is always new to the obedient Christian. The commandment to love is as old as God, but by walking in obedience to it is always new. Some were looking for new revelation; John is teaching them God is looking for new obedience to his old commandments.

Thirdly it is new because it belongs to the new age. John says **“the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.”** The world is full of darkness, which John links to hatred in the following verses. The Christian is not part of the old age of hate... but is part of the new age of love which Jesus ushered in when he came & will consummate when he returns. We live in the overlap of ages but we are called to invest in & reflect the value system of the new. Every time we obey the old yet new commandment to love we do that. However if we do not obey the commandment, if we choose hate over love, it is because we are still in darkness according to John. That is how black & white he is. Listen to what he writes: **“Whoever says he is in the light & hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the**

light, & in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness & walks in the darkness, & does not know where he is going, because darkness has blinded his eyes.”

In other words to hate is to choose to invest in the dark age that is passing away, to love is to invest in the light of the age that is already shining. Obeying this old yet new commandment is what enables us to see everything clearly. We live in the overlap of ages but there is only one age worth investing in for the authentic Christian. Whoever loves his brother or sister shows they are part of the new age, whoever hates his brother or sister reveals they are still in the dark age which is passing away – they are in darkness, walking in darkness & blinded by darkness according to verse 11.

The old yet new commandment calls us out of the dark age into the new age of light. Since Christ is the true light, the light of the world, first & foremost that means coming to him by trusting in his atoning work & obeying his commandments - it means receiving a whole Christ! This is how we abide in Christ, abide in the light as John puts it. Jesus, the true light, has burst into the age of darkness & is calling people into the age of light. Paul writes in Colossians 1:13-14 that God delivers people from the domain of darkness & transfers them into the kingdom of his beloved Son in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of sins.

If you realise today that you are still in darkness God is here by his Spirit to deliver you from the domain (or age) of darkness & transfer you into the kingdom of his beloved Son. You can put in a transfer request today & God will respond to your request if you come to him in repentance & faith. However you must understand up front this means trusting & submitting to Jesus Christ as your Saviour & Lord – as your prophet, priest & king.