

Script, Pastor Frank R. Johnson

First John: Authentic Faith for Jesus' People

"The New (Old) Command"

1 John 2:7-11

Take a first look.

I. A few years ago as I was meditating on this passage for a coming message, I awoke early on a Friday morning. Since it was still dark outside, I slipped from bed, grabbed my Kindle device from my Go-Bag, and tiptoed into the living room so that I wouldn't wake up my wife. I first opened the Bible app and read from Ephesians 3, which ends with this breathtaking prayer (Ephesians 3:16-19, NET):

*I pray that according to the wealth of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner person, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, so that, because you have been **rooted and grounded in love**, ¹⁸ you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and **thus to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge**, so that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God (my emphasis). And there was more.*

After spending some time praying, including praying for all of you, I turned to a news app and read the following story. Here's how it read:

Nicole Oyola, a 23-year-old from Clearwater [Florida], told Fox 13 that she suddenly pulled to the side of the Howard-Franklin Bridge outside of Tampa on Thursday when she spotted a man on its edge.

"I started talking to him. I told him, 'You're worth it. You're enough,'" Oyola said. "'I don't know what you're going through, but I love you and God loves you and everything is going to be okay.'"

Oyola added that the man appeared to be in his early 20s and that she initially thought he had stopped on the bridge because he was having car trouble.

The station reported that the man is now receiving counseling. Oyola said she called the police and an officer who arrived prayed with the man before taking him off the bridge.

Oyola said while speaking to the man, he became overwhelmed with emotion.

"He looked at me, and after he looked at me, he started crying and I said, 'I just want to give you a hug.' So he came to the other side and I gave him a hug," she told Fox 13.

"God has a purpose for everyone," she added. "I believe in that, so I stopped. I just wanted to help him feel better. If I was going through that, I would want someone to stop for me too."

II. Well, now. That was a winning combination for the start of my day! What a powerful witness to the love of Jesus. "Do to others as you would have them do to you." Indeed! So I want to remind you of some things which you probably already know, or at least suspect, as followers of Jesus. And here it is, from 1 John, chapter 2.

1 John 2:7-11: FJV¹: ⁷ Beloved ones, I am not writing a new command to you^{p2} but an old command which you^p have had from beginning; the old command is the word which you^p heard. ⁸ Again I am writing to you^p a new command which is true in Him and in you^p, that the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. ⁹ The one who claims to be in the light and is hating his brother is in the darkness until now. ¹⁰ The one who keeps on loving his brother remains in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him; ¹¹ but the one who goes on hating his brother is in the darkness, and he keeps walking in the darkness, and he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Take a closer look at the New (Old) Command in 1 John 2:7-11.

I. The challenge: the importance of hearing the same thing for the first time—again (v. 7)

1. *“Repetition is the mother of learning.” John repeats himself in writing.* This saying has been around a long time, most likely from the ancient Greek, Aristotle. It really seems here that John is saying, “I want to tell you something again that I have told you before. Now hear it as if for the first time”: “a *new* command.” Peter seemed to have the same conviction, as has every other pastor-type through the centuries. Here is what Peter wrote in **2 Peter 1:12-15**: *“Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have.”*¹³ *I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder,*¹⁴ *since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.*¹⁵ ***And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things***” (2 Peter 1:12-15, ESV, my emphasis).

2. *“The word which [they] heard” was the gospel of Jesus.* The “old command” was the simple gospel of Jesus Christ, as in John 3:16: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16, ESV). That “word which [they] heard” was about the “Word of Life,” our Lord Jesus Christ, as he described Him in the opening lines of this short pastoral letter.

A—Here is the challenge of life in this fallen world: we easily forget truths that are foundational to life and need the constant reminders of good reading habits and good listening habits to keep those truths in their proper place.

I—This is why we need constant reminders of the truth. Our minds can get flabby and out of shape, um, just like our bodies. This is not a matter of age, though God knows that at my stage of life, a full day of walking or manual labor really does me in for a few days afterward. We really should buy stock in the producers of Ibuprofen. 😊 I remember even in high school the shock on my system just between different sports. In the winter, during basketball season, I got into prime shape. We ran wind sprints (back and forth, back and forth) in the gym after a full two-hour practice, often running full court to practice our fast-break offense. Then, the season would end and we would have a space of a couple weeks or a month before baseball season practices started. That period was filled with raised donuts and (in my senior year) working parttime at a grocery store. Then, baseball would begin and we were running laps around the bases with our tongues hanging out and panting hard. Weren’t we just in top shape a couple of weeks ago? What happened?

¹ And yes, this means “Frank Johnson Version.” Don’t judge me. 😊

² The superscript “p” indicates that the pronoun is plural.

Now, the point here is not about physical exercise, though that does bring us a measure of benefit for good health. We must not settle for what Os Guinness called some years ago in a little book, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*. It is far too easy to get simply busy and forget what really matters in *life* and in the Christian way. John is helping us here to exercise our minds and hearts on the things that are of first importance. Now to the point.

II. The command: the importance of recognizing the transition between darkness and light (v. 8)

1. John gives the “new command” with confidence in its truth, both in the Lord and in His working in His followers’ lives. This is important on a variety of levels. John reveals that his “new command” is given at a strategic moment, but that it speaks of the *truth*, not just a system of thought and practice that “works” to make us happy or prosperous.

A—We should believe in Jesus and follow His way because it is true, not for the immediate benefits it might bring to us.

I—This is a harder sell in our time. One notable Christian writer who has been quoted by Ken Myers of Mars Hill Audio and many others has described much Christian emphasis in our time as **Moral Therapeutic Deism**. He calls it *Moral* because it has to do with being basically good people. *Therapeutic* because it is all about feeling good and gaining inward happiness. And *Deism* because it really doesn’t require a God Who is present, only One Who has created the world, wound it up, and then revealed some basic principles by which we can work well within that system. This is really the fruit in some ways in our time of a kind of *scientism*. We have heard so often and so adamantly that the world can be explained in terms of mechanical systems that we *almost* believe that it is “nothing but” a mechanical system. It is like we have heard the piano so many times that we are fooled into thinking it is just a combination of wood, wires, and felt-tipped hammers. We may forget that it makes no music without a pianist. We say we believe that God is out there somewhere, but we may not really expect Him to turn up at church or at home or at our jobs. He has been disinvited to our schools, so we really don’t expect Him to barge into that realm of personal or public life. So, we focus on applying the formulas (from the Bible, no less) to get some personal inward peace, and we don’t waste time on such outmoded practices as prayer, especially the kind that involves *confession, thanksgiving, and asking and expecting to receive*.

Yet, for all of this, **God is still both *there* and *here***, meaning that He is certainly *transcendent*—over and above all else in creation—and that he is also *imminent*—present right now in this very place wanting to invade every area of our lives by His Spirit, both personally and corporately.

2. *This truth is believed and lived in a time of transition between darkness and light.* Notice the importance of the present tense of the verbs in the second half of v. 8: “*The darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining*” (FJV). We live at the point of tension where darkness and light transition. The aeon of darkness is still over the world to some very real extent, but the aeon of light is dawning upon it. We are in a spiritual *Twilight Zone*, if you can allow that. Things like physical decline and ultimately death seem surreal and just not right. They should feel this way in a fallen world. But the dawning of God’s light in His Son Jesus Christ is already shining and changing us, preparing us for a permanent glory.

Paul puts it like this in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: “*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.*”¹⁷ *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,*¹⁸ *as we look not to*

the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (ESV). The “transient” is fading away like the darkness of the night. The “eternal” is dawning upon our lives through our faith and hope in Jesus Christ.

A—So let’s live with our primary focus on the eternal, rather than the temporary.

I—Pastor Jeremy, Stacia Harmsen and five others from our Northwest Collegiate Ministry (NCM) team led worship a few years ago at the NCM Fall Conference. Before they left, in our staff meeting on the preceding Thursday, Jeremy was talking about the guest speaker for the conference. She spoke about the recovery of *hope*. She was a professor in New Orleans that does ministry also at a women’s correctional facility. The inmates at that prison are there for long sentences, 20-30 years quite often. She reported that she has observed a visible change in their physical countenance after they come to put their faith and *hope* in Jesus Christ. From the outside looking in, she reports that their circumstances haven’t changed. They are still facing a long-term incarceration, for some, the rest of their natural lives. But, something has changed! They now have a hope that stretches beyond that incarceration. They are learning to “*look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen*” as they wake up to the same confining lives each day. And that changes everything! It can for us, too. Our hope in Christ changes our inward sense of being, and it changes the way we see others, too. It should compel us to treat one another as *fellow-pilgrims* differently.

III. The contradiction: claiming to be in the light and hating your brother (v. 9)

1. *Jesus’ people must live in the light which we have through the Person and work of Jesus.* Again, this should be obvious. As followers of Jesus, the “light of the world” (cf. John 8:12), we should be living by and in that light.

2. *There is no room for a Christian “hating his brother.”* This is where the contradiction enters. If someone claims to be in the light and yet that person is harboring hatred in his/her heart toward another, then, asserts John, that person “is in the darkness until now.” This is a simple application of the analogy: *light dispels darkness*.

A—So let’s examine our hearts. Are we holding ill-will toward a brother or sister in Christ? Are we allowing hatred to living in our hearts toward someone or some other class of people? We must deal decisively and ruthlessly with such hatred.

I—On Saturday, October 27, 2018, a hate-filled man entered a synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA, and began shooting people. Before some good-guys with guns—in this case, the police—showed up and confronted him and stopped him, he had killed eleven people and injured several others. Even after he was also shot and being taken to the hospital along with other victims, he kept spewing hateful words toward the Jewish people in general. What strikes me as supremely ironic is one report that indicated that the first three people to treat this guy at the hospital were also Jewish. They treated him as professionals and mended his wounds like they would have done for any other person. That seems extremely like “love you enemies,” as Jesus commanded His followers.

As I was thinking about this event this week, I remembered our Jewish friends here in Ellensburg, Drs. Bruce and Elise Herman. They have spent many years caring for the children of our community, both being in pediatric medicine. So, thinking about this, I called and left a message on their home phone. I told them that we are very glad that they are a part of our

community, that we have appreciated their friendship and service (they delivered several of my grandchildren!), and told them that we, my wife and I and our church, would be praying for them and for the victims of this hate-motivated action. Later in the day, Elise called back and shared how much that meant to her, that these are scary times, and that she knew people from that synagogue personally, having had some shared experience with them in the past. My friends, this is really the very least that we can do at a time like this. It has only gotten worse since then, especially this side of the terrorist attacks against Israeli citizens on October 7, 2023, and the ensuing war with Iran and its terrorist proxies, Hamas, Hezbollah, and others. This is a time for Christians to stand against the hatred and the vitriol and to speak words of peace. We can still speak the truth, but we must keep on “*speaking the truth in love*,” as we are commanded (cf. Ephesians 4:15, ESV).

IV. The calling of the social test: love your brother and walk in the light (vv. 10-11)

1. *The practice of love as Jesus’ followers gives evidence that they are walking in the light.* This is just what Jesus said we should expect: “*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*” (John 13:35, ESV).

2. *The practice of love as Jesus’ followers commends rather than detracts from our witness of Jesus.* “*There is no cause of stumbling*” in those who practice Jesus’ love. This means that when we practice this life of Jesus’ self-giving love, we make the Christian faith more appealing rather than placing barriers in front of people that would keep them from believing.

3. *Harboring hatred in our hearts extinguishes the light of Jesus and confuses the way forward in life.* “*The darkness has blinded his eyes.*” When we don’t follow the light of Jesus faithfully, it has a personal effect on us as Christians. We get confused about what is really important, because we have rejected what truly is really important.

A—The light of Jesus is the light of His grace—love offered to us that we can’t possibly earn and won’t ever deserve. Are we expressing grace to each other and before the watching world, or something much less?

I—In Philip Yancey’s important book *What’s So Amazing About Grace*, he retells a story written by Danish author Karen Blixen, who wrote under the pseudonym Isak Dinesen. Her story was called *Babette’s Feast*. Babette had fled a civil war in France to a small impoverished village in Norway. She went there with a letter from a famous opera singer from Paris. He asked that two middle-aged single sisters might take her in to protect her. He tells that her husband and son had perished during the civil war, and that she can *cook*. One of the sisters had had a romantic brush with this man in the past but had withdrawn from his advances. Her sister had also had a brush with romance for a young cavalry officer but had also stepped back. They both had remained to care for their single father, the stern leader of their Lutheran parish. When Babette arrived, fifteen years had passed, their father had died, the congregation had dwindled, and Babette moved in with the sisters. She cooked up their simple gruel—though it caused her to wrinkle her nose a bit—and quietly cared for them and what was left of their small congregation. The sisters came to love and appreciate her service over the next twelve years.

Then, news from France came by letter. Babette’s brother had renewed her numbers in the federal lottery, and she had won 10,000 francs. Rather than leaving the sisters right away to return home, she begged them to allow her to cook them and their little church of a dozen

people a proper French meal. She had not asked anything of them for twelve years, and so they finally agreed, even though it went against their self-determined austerity. For the following weeks, everyone marveled at the deliveries coming by boat: cases of champagne, wine, and crates of small birds, fresh vegetables, truffles, pheasants, ham, and much more.

The day of the feast was December 15, and a light covering of snow brightened the dull village. They found that an unexpected 90-year-old guest would be coming, and she would be bringing her nephew, the young cavalry officer who had once wooed the second sister. He was now a general. They all sat down to dinner, the twelve austere Lutheran folks quietly and without expression. As the courses came and the champagne was served, the general could not contain himself. He praised the food as the best he had ever eaten. When the final dish was served, the *coup de grace*, he stood to his feet and exclaimed that he had never eaten such a dish at any place than at the famous Café Anglais in Paris, formerly renowned for its woman chef.

And he continues, "We have all of us been told that grace is to be found in the universe. But in our human foolishness and shortsightedness we imagine divine grace to be finite.... But the moment comes when our eyes are opened, and we see and realize that grace is infinite. Grace, my friends, demands nothing from us but that we shall await it with confidence and acknowledge it in gratitude."

The story closes with two scenes. First, the formerly dour members of the congregation gather with joined hands around the fountain in the town square and sing the hymns of the faith with joy from their hearts, "as if they had indeed had their sins washed white as wool, and in the regained innocent attire were gamboling like little lambs." Second, the sisters find Babette in the kitchen which was now piled high with dishes and pans. She was looking rather spent. They tell her that they will always remember this evening when she returns to Paris. But then, Babette shocks them. She has spent every franc of the 10,000 she won on their dinner. It's OK, that is what a proper dinner for twelve costs at the Café Anglais, she assured them.

Take it home (final applications).

I. "We love," John will write in a few paragraphs, "because [God] first loved us."

II. How might God be calling us to extend His truth and love in Jesus Christ to other undeserving folks like ourselves?

III. Then, let's do it.