

Love One Another as Brothers and Sisters

I. Chase away the darkness of hatred

II. Live in the Light of Christ

⁷ Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. ⁸ 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.

⁹ Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. ¹¹ But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.

A young soldier was going off to fight in World War II against the Japanese. As his father put him on the train and waved good-bye, he turned with bitter tears and said, "If my son is killed, I hope every Jap in the world is killed!" Yet the fact that the father was a Christian made it difficult to feel that way. He had a fierce struggle with himself and finally realized that it was not Christian to hate, whether his son lived or died. He declared rather, "I will not hate. I refuse to be destroyed by hate!"

A year later his son was killed in action. Soon life insurance money arrived. The father did not really need the ten thousand dollars so he sent it to a Foreign Mission Board and designated it for missions to the Japanese. How could the father do that? Only by pondering the love Christ had for him. Only Christ's love for us can change bitterness and hate into love.

In John 13:34 Jesus told his disciples, "**A new command I give you: love one another as I have loved you.**" One of the apostles who heard these words in that upper room on Maundy Thursday evening was later inspired by the Holy Spirit to share that same command with other Christians. In his first letter, chapter 2 verse 7 the apostle John wrote, "**Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning.**" John addresses his readers with affection, "Ones whom I love so dearly: This command that I share with you is nothing new. You've heard it proclaimed to you since the time you became Christians." This command really was old. It was found in the Old Testament book of Leviticus. The LORD, through his prophet Moses, commanded his people Israel to love one another. (Lev 19:18)

But in verse 8 John says, "But on the other hand, the command to love each other is new." John asks his readers to look at the old commandment from a new point of view, not one from the law, but a view from the cross. The Israelites loved one another because God told them to. But now believers everywhere have a new reason to love each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus showed them how to love.

Gentlemen, don't forget your sweetheart in a couple of weeks. Valentine's Day is fast approaching. You may choose to send your love with a box of chocolates, roses or jewelry. Or like me you will find yourself staring at the vast ocean of greeting cards, until you find that "one" and think, "Yeah, I'd say something like that." You can shower your loved one with gifts and tell her, "I love you." But true love puts itself in action. Jesus once said, "God so loved the world." He didn't just send a nice greeting card to the whole sinful race, but he did something about it. We see his fullest expression of his love for the world on Good Friday. The apostle Paul in Romans 5:8 wrote, "**God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**" The commandment to love one another is new because we have new motivation. As Christians we love each other in view of how Christ loved us.

Because you and I base our love for each other on Jesus' self-sacrificial love for us John says, "**The darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.**" *The darkness that is passing away* is the sinful attitude that lurks in your hearts like a dark shadow. This darkness will never be fully driven away, not until the Last Day, when the Sun of eternal life rises upon us. *The true light that is already shining* is the light of Jesus' love illuminated in you. The world sees the Light of Christ in the way you act toward your neighbor, in the way you speak to your coworkers and the sales associate at the store, in the way you share the gospel, the good news about the Light of the world. This is how you and I will love each other, in view of Christ's love for us.

But then in verse 9, the apostle John issues a serious warning, "**Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness.**" If someone claims they have the love of Christ in them, yet their actions reflect hatred, then they are still living in the darkness of sin.

Some of you might be thinking, "But I don't hate anybody, I don't wish ill or death on anyone, except for maybe terrorists." Dear friends, hatred is more than that. Hatred is an attitude, a condition of your sinful heart, and it manifests itself in various ways. Take this example from the Old Testament: After the shepherd boy slew the giant Goliath, the people of Israel came from the battlefield shouting, "**Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.**" The Bible then tells us, "**King Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.**" That very next day King Saul tried to pin David to the wall of his palace with a spear. (1Samuel 18) Hatred can reveal itself through jealousy.

A pastor will hear about another brother in the ministry whose congregation is growing by leaps and bounds. He will hear of other pastors and how they have more guests on Sunday mornings and how their congregation has a killer outreach program....and very quickly jealousy can creep in. In your occupation you may cast a jealous eye on a higher paid coworker, or an employee who advances quicker than you. You may see a neighbor who is more successful and has nicer things than you. In school, you will see students who are smarter than you, more athletic than you. And hatred reveals itself through jealousy. We find ourselves not loving each other as Christ loved us.

The apostle John says, “Especially love your brothers and sisters in Christ.” The sad reality is that at times we even hate our fellow brothers and sisters. The darkness of hatred rears its ugly head in the form of gossip, harsh words, nasty looks, the way we coldly ignore someone, the way our stony hearts hold a grudge. We try to justify our actions. “Someone offended me! They said harsh words to me! They made nasty faces at me first! They did something I didn’t like and now I have hurt feelings!” These excuses do validate our actions, thoughts or words. Christ’s command is to love one another as I have loved you.

In vs11 John tells us that when we continue to act this way toward our brothers and sisters then we are like blind people, walking around in darkness. We stumble and fall into the devil’s trap. Darkness invades our hearts and it chases the light away.

When we find ourselves walking in darkness, Christ shines in your dark heart through the light of his Word. When Jesus told us to love each other, he showed us how. Jesus always loved his brothers and sisters; Mary and her sister Martha, their brother Lazarus, at whose tomb he wept because he loved him so much, the disciples, lepers, the blind and sick, the demon possessed, those starving spiritually, even his enemies the Pharisees and teachers of the law, the soldiers who beat him and drove nails through his hands, and the thieves who hung next to him. Jesus loved all these perfectly. But his life was more than a shining example. The Son took his perfect life of love and gave it to you.

But then he went a step further. In the greatest display of love he went to the cross. He allowed the darkness of your sins of hatred to cover him, so that he could cover your sinful heart with his perfect sacrifice. The light of his love shines in your hearts when you hear his Word. The light of Christ’s love scatters the darkness when you remember your baptism. That was when the Holy Spirit first removed the darkness of your sins through water and the Word. The Light of Christ’s love shines in your heart when you eat and drink his body and blood. The promise of forgiveness that you receive in his Holy Supper covers you with Christ’s life and death and chases away the darkness of hatred. At the beginning of worship, you confess your sins; that includes your sins of hatred toward your brothers and sisters. But then Jesus shines the light of forgiveness of sins into your hearts as he announces absolution. Through his Word and Sacraments, Jesus chases away the darkness of your sinful heart and fills you with his light.

So now, love one another in view of Christ’s love for you. The apostle John says in vs10, **“Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.”** If you continue to live in the light of Christ, you will not fall into the trap of this world that encourages hatred. You will not be snared by Satan who loves nothing more than to see you holding a grudge. You will not allow darkness to creep into your heart. When you are offended and hurt, when you feel wronged, when someone is rude to you, when you begin to feel jealousy, chase that darkness away by looking at the light of Jesus. You will forgive when offended. You will talk to that individual who wrongs you. You will swallow your pride and put away your arrogance and talk to your brother or sister in Christ. You will put aside hurt feelings and ignore harsh words and respond not with rudeness, but you will speak the truth in love. Respond with gentleness and you

might be surprised to see the reaction they might have, you might just bring them into the light. Instead of being jealous, you will thank the Lord for how he has blessed others and say, "Good for them." Examine your own life and see how richly God has blessed you.

You can say, "That's hard to do." It's easier to ignore, to be rude back, to hold a grudge. You're right. It is hard to love one another, according to the darkness of your sinful heart. According to the light of Christ in your heart it is easy. This is what you want to do and what you will do; love your brothers and sisters in Christ.

My dear beloved friends, reflect the light of Christ that is in your hearts. Keep that light in your hearts burning brightly by soaking in the glorious rays of the light of his Word and Sacraments so that you can chase away the darkness of hatred. Love one another, then, as he has loved you. Amen.