

THE OLD, YET NEW COMMANDMENT

1Jno.2:7-11

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The new life in Christ will always find expression in two forms: (1) In righteousness, and (2) in charity.
 - a. Or to state the same thing in concrete form: (1) In the obedience of sonship to God, and (2) in the service of brotherhood to men, especially to brethren in Christ.
2. John thus far has been dealing with the first of these; he now, beginning in our text, turns our attention to the second, thus beginning a new section by the direct address, "Brethren," or more precisely, "Beloved."
3. Since John speaks of brotherly love so often and emphasizes its absolute necessity repeatedly, declaring that in the absence of it one is in darkness, is not in fellowship with God, is not walking as Jesus walked, is not now in a saved state, and has no hope of eternal salvation, the lack of brotherly love must have been a very serious problem of that time that demanded much attention.
4. John had just told the brethren that evidence of knowing God, of perfecting the love of God in oneself, of knowing that one is in him, like in obedience to his commandments; and that the one who claims to abide in him ought himself also to walk as Jesus walked while in the flesh, a walk which was and is grounded in, and originated in, the love of God.
5. In the verses of our text, John goes on to say more about the nature of the command and the example, summing it up in the word love.
6. There was the need in that day for what is written in 1jno.2:7-11. Furthermore, there is no less need for it in our day. For this cause we are studying vv.7-11 dealing with The Old, Yet New Commandment, wherein we consider the following thoughts or Divine truths.

II. DISCUSSION

A. LOVE OF THE BRETHREN IS AN OLD, YET NEW COMMANDMENT, VV.7,8.

1. This commandment which I write unto you is not new, but is an old commandment; Yet, again, a new commandment I write unto you, V.7a; V.8a.
 - a. How is this saying to be understood? In one sense it was an old commandment, and in another sense it was new.

- b. Thus it is both old and new.
 - c. "Again" introduces another view of what has just been said. The command, which was in one sense old, but not antiquated, was also new in the fresh sanction which it had received.
2. It was old because:
- a. You have "had it from the beginning."
 - b. It "is the word which you have heard from the beginning."
 - (1) The "word" sums up the message they had received.
 - (2) "Heard" indicates the manner of reception.
 - (3) They had "heard" it; therefore, it came to them through preaching. Cf. Col.1:5,6.
 - (4) The time when they heard it was at the beginning, i.e., at the time it was first preached to them and they were converted by it. From the beginning of the gospel in their lives. Cf. 1Jno.3:11; Ac.11:15
 - c. Of necessarily arising out of the relationship of men to one another, and required by the oldest revelation of the Divine will.
 - (1) The duty of brotherly love is necessarily implied in the case of Cain and Abel, Gen.4:8-11.
 - (2) It is written as a part of the Mosaic Law, Lev.19:28; Deut.10:19; Mt.22:39,40; Mk.12:31; Lk.10:27.
3. Yet, it is a new commandment he was writing unto them, v.8a.
- a. The newness was not merely or solely in the command to love because the oldest revelation of Divine will has always required that.
 - b. It was new in the sense that it was the *standard*, the *measure*, the *extent*, and or the *motive* of the love that made it new.
 - c. Jesus had summed it up in words from the O.T. law which were centuries old by his time; but when he laid the obligation of brotherly love on his disciples in Jno.13:34,35; 15:12, he gave it a new or fresh form or a new depth of meaning: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye have love one to another." Cf. 1Jno.4:11.
 - (1) It was embodied afresh in Jesus' example. As for Jesus, his whole life was one perfect example of holy love for other. Cf. Mt.20:20-28.
 - (2) This is the characteristic command of the disciple of Christ in this dispensation.
 - (3) Never before had such a love been required of man.
 - (4) It was henceforth to be a condition precedent to discipleship; in fact, the badge and token thereof.

- (5) These words of Jesus were embedded from the earliest days in the apostolic writings: Gal.5:14; Rom.13:9-10; Cf. 1Cor.13:1-7.
- (6) This is summed up by Paul in Phil.2:1-8 as an argument for brotherly love in us.
- (7) A similar account may be given of Jesus' early disciples.
 - (a) Like their Master, they denied themselves that they might benefit others as they were taught to do by Jesus, Jno.13:1-17.
 - (b) How incredible the hardships they endured for Christ and for others.
- (8) This was the spirit that pervaded the early N.T. church, Ac.2; Ac.4; Ac.5; et al.
 - (a) No other could have sustained it in those days.
 - (b) It was full of the tenderest sympathy, the most ardent love, and the severest self-denial.
- d. This old, yet new commandment, enforced by such an example of brotherly love sums up the practical side of the faith of Christ, or of Christianity, which had been preached to them "from the beginning."
 - (1) Formed on the model of Jesus' love for us, it should be more intense than it ever had been in ages past.
 - (2) Also, it should be wider in extent as it should be deeper in feeling
- 4. "Which thing is true in him and in you," v.8b.
 - a. It not only had been given by him; it was also exhibited in his example; i.e., the substance of this commandment has come true or been exhibited perfectly in him.
 - b. "And in you"
 - (1) That is, it is also true in measure in you, as true, practicing believers, disciples of Christ.
 - (2) Because it is received and fulfilled in you as you follow his example in walking as he walked. Cf. 1Cor.11:1.
 - c. Therefore, both in him and in his true and faithful disciples its truth is exhibited.
- 5. "Because the darkness is past, and the true light now shines," v.8c.
 - a. It is true that now the full light of the gospel, the full light of God's will, has been revealed and thus the true light now shineth.
 - b. But this expression being directly connected with the previous expression, and being cited as a reason for it, it seems to me the idea suggested here is this: because you have been led out of, or delivered from, the power of darkness, and made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; thus the darkness is past for you, and the true light

now shines in your life. See Jno.1:4; 8:12; Eph.5:8; Col.1:12,13; 1Th.5:5.

B. THE PRESENT CONDITION AND FATE OF THOSE FAILING TO OBEY THE OLD, YET NEW COMMANDMENT, VV.9-11.

1. V.9, the condition of the hypocritically professing brotherly love: he “is in darkness even unto now.”
 - a. The claim to be “in the light” – once more introduced by the phrase “he that saith he is” – is a claim to be in fellowship with God as it is in 1Jn.1:6.
 - b. There John denied their claim as false, as a lie. He insisted that such a claim is incompatible with walking in darkness.
 - c. Here in v.9 he insists that such a claim is incompatible with hating a brother in Christ. He is in the opposite condition from that which he claims.
 - d. So one’s claim to be “in the light” must be tested by one’s love of or hatred of his brother in Christ, the truth of which will ever be manifested by one’s actions, or attitude toward and treatment of his brother. See 1Jno.3:14-19.
 - e. This is the 5th time John points out a glaring inconsistency that is possible between profession and fact, or between profession and practice: 1:6,8,10; 2:4,9.
(In all of these passages the case is put hypothetically; but in some of the Gnostic teaching of that day this inconsistency existed beyond a doubt.)
 - (1) The first is a profession of fellowship with God, 1:6.
 - (2) The second a profession of sinlessness, 1:8.
 - (3) The third that of abstinence from sin, 1:10.
 - (4) The fourth that of knowledge of God, 2:4.
 - (5) The fifth that of being in the light, 2:9.
 - (6) There is still a sixth in 4:20.
 - f. In spite of what he claims, he “is in darkness even until now,” v.9b.
 - (1) His supposing that hatred of his brother in Christ is compatible with light, and or claiming that he is in the light while hating his brother, proves the darkness in which he is
 - (2) “Even until now” – i.e., up to the present; even now, he is in darkness.

- (3) Jesus commands his disciples to love one another (Jno.13:34,35; 15:10,17); and without it, one is in and remains in darkness.
 - g. It is significant that John leaves no middle ground either here or elsewhere in the contrasts he draws between light and darkness, right and wrong, truth and error.
 - (1) With him, on the one side is God, on the other, the world; here is life, there is death; here is love, there is hate; here light, there darkness; there is no common ground between any of these – they are opposites, completely incompatible
 - (2) This is in harmony with Jesus' affirmation:
 - (a) Lk.9:50: "he that is not against us is for us"
 - (b) Lk.11:23: "He that is not with me is against me"
 - (3) One is either for the Lord, in which case the principle or rule of his life is love, the sphere in which he moves or lives is light, and the desire of his heart is obedience.
 - (4) Or, he is against him, in which case, though he may claim otherwise or he may cleverly hide his hatred, and craftily conceal his worldliness and evil, the fountain from which his life emerges is not God, but the world, and his proper element of existence is darkness.
 - h. The word "hate" (miseo) here does not indicate the degree, but merely the fact of such a disposition.
 - (1) However, when it exists in any degree, he who manifests it is yet in the darkness, not the light, in spite of any claim to the contrary.
 - (2) John indicates middle ground between love and hatred. By hatred, however, he does not necessarily mean positive animosity but mere lack of love.
2. The condition and fate of the brother of v.10 is just the opposite of the brother of v.9; for this is the one who loves his brother in Christ.
- a. "He that loveth (continues to love) his brother abideth in the light,"v.10a.
 - (1) The tense of the verb "abideth" reveals a continuous action rather than a temporary one. He continues to abide in the light as he continues to love his brother.
 - (2) He is settled down into the light as if it were his home. He is evermore remaining in the light.
 - (3) The fact of his continuing to love of his brother guarantees continuation in the sphere of light.

- b. To be in the light is the same as to be God and in Christ; and one who abides in the light will manifest the fact in his course of life or conduct, or deeds of light, not deeds of darkness; such as, hating one's brother in Christ.
 - c. "Love" means more than mere affection. It stands for all the graces that adorn the character of the Christian, all the duties owed to those who are our brethren in Christ. Cf. 1Cor.13:1-7; 1Jno.3:18; 5:2,3.
 - (1) Of course, love for either God or man is never accepted in lieu of faith and obedience; for there is no such thing as love apart from obedience, 1Jno.5:3; Jno.14:15,21,23,24.
 - (2) The one who truly loves God and his brother will be prompted thereby to discharge his full duty to both. Cf. Mt.25:31-46.
 - d. Moreover, "there is no occasion of stumbling in him."
 - (1) It's "in him," not "in it", i.e., "the light," as some think. Cf. v.4: "the truth is not in him"
 - (2) Either to himself or to others.
 - (3) Here the emphasis is on "him" since a man's own personal salvation is under consideration, not his influence over others.
3. Then V.11 intensifies the present condition of the hypocritical professor of brotherly love who is guilty of failing to obey the old, yet new commandment.
- a. Three unacceptable conditions are here affirmed of the brother who hateth his brother in Christ.
 - (1) He "is in darkness"
 - (2) "And walketh in darkness"
 - (3) "And knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes"
 - b. The brother-hater's inner condition is one of darkness; his outer life is a walk in darkness.
 - (1) The element which has become his natural sphere has possessed him.
 - (2) He has partaken of the realm in which he habitually moves.
 - (3) Moreover, he has lost his sense of moral and spiritual direction: "He knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes."

- (4) His way is dark; he neither knows its direction or its end; he is in ignorance as to the course he is taking; he is in darkness of moral and spiritual condition; darkness of moral and spiritual action; darkness of the spiritual being and vision; darkness as to his final destination.
- c. For emphasis, note the alternation in vv.9-11.
 - (1) V.10 is the antithesis of v.9.
 - (2) And V.11 is the antithesis of v.10, repeating and enlarging v.9.
- d. Note also the climax effected by the gradual increase of predicates.
 - (1) In V.9, one: “is in darkness even until now”
 - (2) In V.10, two:
 - (a) “Abideth in the light”
 - (b) “And there is none occasion of stumbling in him”
 - (3) In V.11, three:
 - (a) “Is in darkness”
 - (b) “And walketh in darkness”
 - (c) “And knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes”
- e. Thus, in V.9 and V.11, it is with the erring child who is a brother-hater after his conversion to Christ as it was with him as an alien before his conversion; he is in darkness and ignorance. Cf. Ac.26:16-18.

III. CONCLUSION

1. This old, yet new commandment which the Lord had enjoined upon us as his disciples is that we are to be lovers of our brethren in Christ in word and in deed – love one another “even as he has loved us.”
2. He has enjoined it upon us by word, by command, and by deed, by his example.
3. This grace of brotherly love is so basic that the disciple who lacks it is deficient in all the virtues of the faith of Christ or of Christianity. Where it does not exist, no other can!