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# *The Epistles of John*

Law Versus Love?"

## 1 John 2:3-11

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**T**oday there is a major focus on God's grace. He loves us, died for us, all while we were sinners. Our sins are forgiven, and so we never have any reason to feel guilt for our actions.

*One of the teachings that John was concerned about was how this truth could be used to lead to the conclusion that how one lives has nothing to do with one's relationship with Christ.*

*As I've said before, I had a believer come to me and say, "I've left my husband and am getting a divorce. I intend to remarry this other believer. I know God hates divorce, but I know He'll forgive me." In other words, this person believed God would ignore her willful disobedience. Another individual said that since God desired his happiness, God would overlook the choices necessary to fulfill his happiness.*

*Somewhere along the line, due to being self-centered and sloppy teaching, people claiming to be believers see no correlation between how they live and the fact that they are believers.*

This was the problem John speaks to in the next section in his first epistle. His argument moves from a focus on disobedience in the believer's life to concern over a theological position taught by the false teachers. Even in the early church there was a movement to take sin and excuse it by rewriting Scripture and the words of Christ and the Apostles.

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First, in what we've already seen, John has demonstrated Jesus is the Christ, reminiscent of his writing in the Gospel of John.

***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.***

***Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men" (John 1:1-4).***

In the next section John goes on to say, not only does it matter how we live but how we live says a lot about whether or not we are actually believers. And, John isn't saying believers don't sin. He is saying our lives are not typified by sin. He also reminds us that when we sin, we have an intercessor, Christ Jesus.

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Let us examine the passage, and next we will see just how we have to apply it in our own life. Here we will strive to make the distinction between the law and love. We need to make sure we don't confuse obedience with legalism. We don't want to fall into the trap of using works to validate someone as a believer versus recognizing works as proof of the quality of

the walk of the believer. Remember we are called to judge spiritual maturity, not whether a person is saved.

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<b>I Love and Command</b>
<b>II God's Command</b>
<b>III An Illustration</b>
<b>IV Conclusion</b>

<b>Verses 3- 6</b>
<b>Verses 7- 8</b>
<b>Verses 9-11</b>

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**I Love and Command: Verse 3:** *What is the association between obedience to God and relationship with Him?*

John starts this portion of his letter by identifying himself with fellow believers, “We know....” It is important to realize John’s salvation is shown not by the fact he knew Jesus. After all Judas knew Jesus. It is shown by the reality of God’s presence in his life.

No one has ever been reconciled to God based on personal merit. Mary, the mother of Jesus, could never have been saved unless she accepted her Son’s death for her sin, in the same way we must.

*“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well” (John 14:6-7).*

And so, John’s salvation wasn’t based on his earthly relationship with Jesus, but in having accepted Christ shed blood as payment for sin. As a result, John does not use his Apostolic position to stand above other believers. Instead, he identifies with the recipients of this letter.

The proof of salvation isn’t a verbal testimony, but a life committed to Christ. The child of God obeys the commands of Christ. What were Christ’s commands?

*“... ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37-40).*

The proof isn’t a perfect demonstration of love though. Calvin stated it this way:

*“ he (John) does not mean that those who wholly satisfy the Law keep His commandments (and no such instance can be found in the world), but those who strive, according to the capacity of human infirmity, to from their life in obedience to God.”<sup>1</sup>*

In other words the reality of God’s presence in our lives is demonstrated by God’s love manifested in our lives...

**Verses 2-6:** Many people claim to be believers. John says though, if there is no demonstration of a desire to obey Christ then these people are liars.

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<sup>1</sup> Stott, John R. W., The Epistles of John, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1983, p. 90

***“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).***

Conversely, obedience shows the manifestation of God’s love, therefore the reality of salvation in the life of the individual. This verse reinforces the fact that when John is discussing obedience to God his primary concern is our loving God and each other. Obedience is a loving life and love is proof of obedience.

And the desire to love, as God loves is a demonstration of salvation. It is important to note that while love is demonstration of salvation it is not the basis of salvation. It is God’s love of us demonstrated through the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection, that is the source of our salvation.

**II God’s Command: Verses 7-8:** *How do we see the coming of light and the passing of darkness today?*

John makes it clear that what he says isn’t new. Remember the commands of love are Christ’s summary of the Ten Commandments. This is why John said he isn’t talking about anything new.

On the other hand, it is new because the focus has shifted from the Law and the Sacrifice, to the Law of love. We are obedient, not out of fear, but because God first loved us.

***“We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).***

We desire to be obedient because we love God and want to please Him.

**III An Illustration: Verses 9-11:** *What is the relationship between walking in light and loving others?*

John next provides a specific illustration. If an individual says he is a believer, that is walks in God’s light, and hates his brother he’s a liar. Taking into consideration the context of the letter, here brother can probably best understood as a fellow believer. Someone who obeys God loves and this love is shown to all.

John may have had a specific group in mind. Then as know there were individuals, naming themselves Christians, who withdrew from the local community of believers, for one reason or another. The IVP Bible Background Commentary notes:

*“The secessionists who have withdrawn from the Christian community John addresses have broken fellowship with true Christians, thus showing that they “hate” rather than “love” them.”<sup>2</sup>*

You can’t be a believer and habitually hate. As with other sin the contrast is, the believer’s life isn’t typified by hatred. This doesn’t mean that because at some point in his life the aforementioned individual feels hatred towards his brother he isn’t a believer. But if he knows he

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<sup>2</sup> Keener, Craig S., IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by OakTree Software, Inc., Version: 1.0, 1993.

shouldn't hate, and is unwilling to depend on the Lord to release that hatred, then John says he isn't in the light.

The one who loves his brother is the one who lives in God's light, purity and righteousness. And of course by living in God's light we walk clearly and don't fall.

The saddest result of disobedience is the unbeliever, those who walk in darkness, stumble around blindly. They are lost and can't even see it. This truth is clear because we see the hatred in their lives.

John has answered the claim that living in the light, means having knowledge of God. But that this knowledge has no relationship to moral obedience to God's commands. For example the following is found in the Corpus Hermetica 10.5-6:

*“ Not yet are we able to open the eyes of the mind and to behold the beauty, the imperishable, inconceivable beauty, of the Good. For you will see it when you cannot say anything about it. For the knowledge of it is divine silence and annihilation of all senses...Irradiating the whole mind, it shines upon the soul and draws it up from the body, and changes it all into divine essence (cited in Dood, **Johannine Epistles**, p.30).<sup>3</sup>*

John said that if an individual really lives in God's light he will live in moral obedience to God. He was calling the false teachers liars who dwelt in darkness. Walking in the light is not an exercise in mysticism, but a life lived in conformity to God's commands. Stott states:

*“ The Gnostic claim was as much to have been 'enlightened' as to possess the 'knowledge' of God. The falsity of the claim to be in the light is betrayed not now by disobedience, but by hatred. The true Christian, who knows God and walks in the light, both obeys God and loves his brother. The genuineness of his faith is seen in his right relation to both God and man.”<sup>4</sup>*

**IV Conclusion:** Much of today's teaching muddles the differences between the relationship of works to salvation, and obedience to fellowship with God. Even here some commentators believe John, when speaking of knowing God, refers to salvation. Conversely others understand him to be dealing with the issue of quality of relationship with God. There do seem to be elements of both present and certainly there are truths tied to both views.

Let us get one thing clear, we are not to judge whether or not someone is saved. This assumes that they are clear in their understanding of the basis of salvation. If their testimony is orthodox, then we must deal with them from the position that they are brothers.

*“ The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them’” (Matthew 13:28-29).*

On the other hand we are called to judge works. Some don't want to be judged for their actions, so quote Christ where He said,

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<sup>3</sup> Baker, Glenn W., The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 12, 1, 2, 3 John, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1981, p.315.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 94

***“Do not judge, or you too will be judged” (Matthew 7:1).***

But, the purpose of this verse is to warn against a judgmental spirit, not against judging. What we can judge is the obedience of a believers, and therefore by implication, the quality of their relationship with the Lord. Clearly the reality of obedience in our lives gives testimony of our salvation.

***“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do” (James 2:14, 17-18).***

Where the problem arises is when we lose sight of the basis of our works. First, they are the product of salvation, not the source of salvation.

***“A new command I give you; Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).***

James says, by works faith is demonstrated, and Christ says faith is demonstrated by love. So how do we reconcile these two proofs? Simple, our works must flow from the love of God manifested in our lives. The Jewish leaders carried out works, but the problems was that these were done in a spirit of legalism, not love.

***“Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them ‘Rabbi’” (Matthew 23:1-7).***

As we claim to be believers, we must depend on the Holy Spirit to motivate, and empower us to live out our testimony in works, which our provoked by God’s love moving through us.

If we have something against a brother we must go to them and strive to restore fellowship. If we have sinned against a member of the body we must be willing to go and ask forgiveness.

***“Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt” (Leviticus 19:17).***

Finally we must encourage one another to live in the love that is the fulfillment of Christ’s commands for His body. In this way we will show the truth of John’s words: It does matter how we live if we claim to be in the light. And, the world will see that Christ is in our midst.

## **Blest Be the Tie**

*Blest be the tie that binds  
Our hearts in Christian love;  
The fellowship of kindred minds  
Is like to that above.*

*Before our Father's throne  
We pour our ardent pray'rs;  
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,  
Our comforts and our cares.*

*We share our mutual woes,  
Our mutual burdens bear;  
And often for each other flows  
The sympathizing tear.*

*When we asunder part,  
It gives us inward pain;  
But we shall still be joined in heart,  
And hope to meet again.  
Amen.<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> Fawcett, John, "Blest Be The Ties," Public Domain.

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### **I Love and Command:** *(John 1:1-4)*

**Verse 3:** *What is the association between obedience to God and relationship with Him?*  
*(John 14:6-7; Matthew 22:37-40)*

**Verses 2-6:**  
*(Matthew 7:21).*

**II God's Command: Verses 7-8:** *How do we see the coming of light and the passing of darkness today?*  
*(1 John 4:19)*

**III An Illustration: Verses 9-11:** *What is the relationship between walking in light and loving others?*

**IV Conclusion:**  
*(Matthew 13:28-29; Matthew 7:1 James 2:14, 17-18; John 13:34-35; Matthew 23:1-7; Leviticus 19:17)*

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Personal Application: If there is anyone with whom you are estranged, make peace and work for restoration, as much as it is dependent on you.

**Prayer for the Week: Lord, soften my heart, giving me the desire for peace and restoration. In Jesus' name, amen.**