

SERIES: Authentic Christian Community

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Message Title: Me or You Pt. 1

Release Date: Wednesday 2/5/2020

One can only imagine, the emotional trauma that Jesus was going through that night He entered the upper room with His friends. In a matter of hours, He would be arrested; He'd be tried; He would be scourged, and He would be crucified. What He needed in those moments from His friends, was community. He needed them to be His friends, to encourage Him, to strengthen Him, to be there for Him—but they weren't. They were too busy absorbed in a self-centered, self-conceited argument, about which one of them would be the greatest in the Kingdom. In the Ancient Near East, it was customary, when you entered a home or a place like the upper room, that somebody would wash one-another's feet—usually the host or, in this case, maybe the low man on the totem pole. But no one had washed anyone's feet. No one was willing to disqualify himself from the possibility that he might be the greatest in the Kingdom. So the God of the Universe—who had become flesh—picked up a basin of water and a towel, and *He* washed the feet of these conceited, self-centered, arrogant men. Now get your mind around that: the God of the Universe picked up a basin of water and washed the feet of these selfish, arrogant men. When He had finished that, He said to them, "This is a new commandment." This commandment was so simple, but so significant, so radical, that Jesus said, "Your obedience of this commandment will be what identifies you to the world, that you are my followers." This commandment was so significant, that whether or not we choose to obey it, is the difference between whether we live our lives in darkness and despair, or whether we dance in the light.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 John, Chapter 2—just a little review: John has told us that, at a point in time, the God of the Universe took on flesh and appeared on this Earth, to manifest the life that has defined God forever. Forever God has dwelt in relationship with Himself—the Father loving on the Son, the Son on the Spirit, the Spirit on the Father. That is the very essence of life. That is the fountainhead of life. That is the deepest, richest life possible. Theologians refer to that as *The Dance of God* and we've talked about that—that because of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, Jesus could invite us, as sinful people, to join *the dance* now and forever. We reminded ourselves that Jesus only dances in the light so, to dance with Jesus, you must dance in the light. But light exposes our sin. The moment of truth is, what we're willing to do when the light exposes our sin. If we choose to back into the darkness in order to hide our sin, we have resigned ourselves to a life of despair. But if we are willing to face our *stuff*, and to confess our sin, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all our sin and we are set free to dance with Jesus. John reminded us that if you know Him, you will obey His commandments, that, if you are going to abide with Him, going to dance with Him, then your life should look like His life.

We pick it up in Verse 7 of Chapter 2:

Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. (*NASB, I John 2:7)

Already we've identified some of the false teaching; by the phrase *if we say...* in Verse 6 and Verse 8 and Verse 10, we were able to identify some of the false teaching of the Gnostics. We also talked about, the very name *Gnostic* comes from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means *to know*. They were *in the know*; they were enlightened, and so, when he talks about *knowing* God in light and darkness, these are very strategic terms with the Gnostics. Part of what the Gnostics were communicating, was that because they were *in the know*, because they were enlightened, that they have offered new commandments that justified their behavior. So John is responding to that by saying, "This is not a new commandment; this is an **old commandment**—a really, really old commandment." This is really important for us to understand because, in our culture, we tend to have a bit of a love affair with something that's new. Christians are looking for the latest book, the latest formula, the latest procedure, the latest technique—something that's going to magically unlock my Christian life. But we don't need something *new*; we need something *old*—and it's really, really old.

Now there's a lot of discussion about what he means by **...from the beginning**. *From the beginning* of when the message came to them? *From the beginning*, when Jesus died on the cross? *From the beginning* of the Incarnation? But I think, no matter how far you back it up, you end where he started in Chapter 1, Verse 1. He's talking about **in the beginning**, because, at the end of the day, what he's talking about is this life that has always defined God. For all eternity, it is the life that the Father and the Son and the Spirit have shared together, and Jesus came to manifest that life on Earth. It is the deepest, richest life possible. So when you think about this commandment that's *old*, the context will reveal he's talking about the commandment, "*To love the Lord your God with your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself.*" When Jesus was asked, "What's the greatest commandment?" He didn't hesitate. He says, "*To love the Lord your God with your heart, soul, mind and strength. The second is like it: love your neighbor as yourself.*" What God was saying is, "This is the essence of life."

In other words, God doesn't command that because He's an insecure egomaniac, that says, "That's the rules." What He is saying is: for all eternity, that has been the very essence of life. The Father has loved the Son, the Son has loved the Spirit, the Spirit has loved the Father. The very essence of God is **He is love**. It isn't just that God is loving— He *is* love. And so what he is saying is, "If you want to find life, if you want to find that which is deep and rich and meaningful, then love the Lord your God with your heart, soul, mind and strength." That's what God has been doing forever; that's the essence of life. It's not a religious rule; it's not a religious requirement. It's a recipe for life. Suddenly those words sound different, if you understand this is the way to find life. The way to satisfy that longing in my soul, is to love God, to die to myself, and to pour out my heart to God, and to think of others as more important than myself. So he says, "This isn't new; this is old. This has always been where life is found."

Verse 8:

On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining.

So John says, "This is an old commandment but, on the other hand, it's a **new commandment**." What does he mean by that? The Greek language is very precise. It has a Greek word for **new**, meaning *new chronologically*, but it also has a completely different word for **new** that means *new in terms of quality*. This is the word that means **new**, *in terms of quality*. There's no question

John is reflecting words he heard directly out of the mouth of Jesus in the upper room that night. Jesus said, “This is a new commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you,” a commandment that is so significant, so radical, that Jesus said, “Your willingness to obey this commandment is the very thing that will identify you as a follower of Me.”

So what was new about it? What was new was the phrase *that you would love one another as I have loved you*—new in quality. In other words, whatever the people understood, it meant, to love the Lord their God with their heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love my neighbor as myself—whatever they thought the definition of that was. When Jesus walked on this Earth, as the essence of life itself, suddenly He ratcheted up the definition dramatically. Suddenly the bar was raised dramatically, to where, “This is what I mean by that.” Jesus had come to personify what it means to love God and to love your neighbor. So it was new in the sense of quality. As a matter of fact, it was so dramatically new, that the only way we could possibly love that way, is through the power and the presence of Jesus. Think of it this way. If obedience to that command was to be the identifying mark of a follower of Jesus, it would have to be something that no person could pull off apart from the power and presence of Jesus. It was what identified someone, who has the life of Jesus within him or within her. After Jesus gave that command, he said, “I have to go away, but that’s a good thing, because I’m going to send My Spirit, and My Spirit’s going to live within you, and you will have My power and you will have My presence to follow this commandment, and to love as I have loved you.” John says that in the text. He says, “This is the love that was in Him and it’s in you also. This was the love that defined Jesus, and it is that Jesus, Who lives in you. It’s His power; it’s His presence, which will give you what you need to love like Jesus loved.

One of the things I find striking when I read through the Gospels is how the sinners, the misfits, the losers, the hurting, the despairing, the struggling, the hopeless, found Jesus irresistible. They flocked to Him. They couldn’t get enough of Him. There was something about Jesus that they found irresistible. And then I wonder, “Why don’t the sinners and the misfits and the losers and the hurting and the wounded and the struggling find *me* so attractive?” What is it that was so different about Jesus, that is so often not reflected in the followers of Jesus?

Verse 9:

The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now.

Now the way John uses the metaphor of light and darkness, there’s no question he is saying a believer can walk in darkness. As a matter of fact, at the end of Verse 8, he says that you *were* in darkness, but you’re starting to come into the light. There’s clearly an indication of a journey moving from one into the other, so he’s saying, we can say that we dance in the light, but if I hate my brother, then I’m still in the darkness. “Until now,” he says, “you can choose to change that and dance in the light.”

Now it’s really important that we properly define the concepts of love and hate. When you read Verse 9 and you say, “Yes, a Christian shouldn’t hate other people,” typically we think of some emotion— some hatred that defines somebody else—but when we look at ourselves in the mirror, most of us don’t say, “I hate people”. So it’s easy to say, “Yes, it’s a bad thing; it’s not me.” But the Greek words *love* and *hate* are meant to be terms of contrast, and neither of them is emotionally based.

Let’s start with the term *love*. The Greek word for love is not an emotionally-based word. It’s actually a choice of my will. As a person made in the image of God, I can exercise my will and

choose to think of others as more important than myself. I can choose to die to myself, in order to give myself away for the good of another. The essence of Biblical love, is to die to self, to give myself away. That's why John 3 says, "For God so *loved* the world that He *gave*." It doesn't say, "God so loved the world that he *felt*." Jesus, that night in the upper room, probably didn't have warm, fuzzy feelings toward His selfish, arrogant, self-centered friends but, in a choice of His will, He served them. If that is the definition of love, in Philippians, Chapter 2, Paul says that, "*We are to think of others as more important than ourselves,*" and he puts Jesus up as the model. Like Jesus, who left the glories of Heaven to come to Earth—all the way to the point of death, even death on a cross—in order to love us and provide Salvation, Jesus is the model for how we should love. If that is love, then what would be the contrast?

What is hate? And the answer is: hate is not an emotional term. It's a term of contrast. It is to be selfish to the core. It is to think of myself first. It is my orientation in life. "What about *me*? What about *my* needs? What about what *I* want? What about *my* preferences? What about *my* pains? What about *my* struggles? What about *me*?" When I think of myself first, which is what our culture has taught us, this is the result of what sin has done to us. This is the default mode of every person; unless I choose every day to live *other than* my default mode, this is how I live. This is how I pursue every relationship. It's ultimately about me, and what I need, and what I want, and what I want to feel, and what matters to me, and my happiness, and my joy, and my story. If we define hate that way, suddenly every person struggles with that. He says, if we say we dance in the light, but our orientation in life is selfish, we are still in the darkness. As long as that is your orientation - and, again, that is the default orientation of every single one of us, it's the effect of sin; it's the mentoring of the culture -as long as that is my orientation in life, I stand no chance of a passionate love affair with Jesus, and I stand no chance of deep, rich community with other people.

Picture the scene: four people meeting in a coffeehouse, all four of them on default mode, all four of them with hurts, with pains, with struggles, with a desire for joy, a desire for happiness, with a desire to have life breathed into each one of their souls. But, in default mode, they each come to that meeting, desiring to use one another to ultimately meet *my* needs. "This needs to make *me* happy. This needs to give *me* joy. This is about *my* loneliness, this is about *my* hurt. This is about *my* pain; this is about what *I* need." As long as those four people are in default mode, there is no possibility of deep, rich community. As long as we're in default mode, we will suck the life out of every relationship in our lives, and it just leaves us more empty, more dissatisfied, more hurt, more wounded and more desperate, and this is the cycle that takes us deeper and deeper and deeper.

You know, it's sad how selfish we can be without really realizing it. I think in our individualistic culture, it just seems so normal, that it's hard to see in ourselves. We read the story of Jesus and the disciples in the upper room, and their unwillingness to wash one another's feet, but I'm pretty sure if I would have been among the disciples, I would have been as unwilling to wash feet as they were. We live in a culture where people are so desperate for relationships, but what I see so often, is how we go about that is just so selfish. People want a small group that's going to be loving and accepting, but they go into it thinking, people need to love me. People need to accept me. People need to do things for me. And so how we go about it, often sabotages the opportunity for true community to happen.

We want true community, but we go about it in such a selfish way, that we're always thinking someone needs to wash my feet. So the reality is, you put 10 selfish people in a room, you can't

have community; it's just going to be 10 selfish people in a room. **For community to happen, I need to think of others as more important than myself. I need to ask myself, what can I do? I need to ask myself, whose feet can I wash?** This is what we're going to talk about more tomorrow.