

SERIES: Authentic Christian Community

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Verse 9:

The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. (NASB, 1 John 2:9)

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. 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 towards 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. 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 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.

He says in Verse 10:

The one who loves his brother abides in the Light [he dances in the light] and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

This is the alternative. This is the alternative to the default mode. It is the *dance in the light*, which is a complete reorientation—to love as Jesus loved—to think of others as more important than myself—to orient my days around, “What can I give; how can I breathe life into other people’s souls? How can I help people love Jesus; how can I give myself away, for the sake of another?” He says, “Those are the people that are dancing in the light.” It is a call so radical, that it is not possible without the power and the presence of Jesus, to give me what I need to live that way. I assure you, if you are not intentionally thinking that way each day, you will go automatically to default mode. We’re not talking about just being nicer to somebody; we’re not talking about treating somebody better here and there. We’re talking about a complete and total reorientation of life—to live radically *other than* my default mode.

Now there’s a lot of discussion about, “Really, what does it mean about **stumbling**?” The grammar here goes equally both ways. It can be referring to the fact that I make myself stumble, or that my behavior causes someone else to stumble. Grammatically, both ways go just as easily. I would suggest to you it is both, because when I cause myself to stumble, I always take others down with me. It’s always both. The word *stumbling* is a Greek word that was used to describe a stick that was used to trigger a trap. That’s kind of the root of the word and so, over time, it really took on a definition of being in a trap, of being enslaved, of being in a cage, of trapping myself or trapping somebody else. What he’s saying is this: when I’m in default mode, when I’m walking in the darkness, then basically my whole life is about *me*. It’s about what *I* want. It’s about *my* hurts, it’s about *my* pains, it’s about *my* struggles, it’s about *my* joy, it’s about *my* happiness. I am selfish to the core, but, because of that orientation, I have locked myself—I have trapped myself - in the darkness. I stand no chance of dancing in the light. I stand no chance of having those needs satisfied. I have no chance of finding that happiness and joy. We are selfish, because we think, by being selfish, it will make me happier; it will make me more satisfied; it will heal my wounds. But that’s the lie; that’s the deception. That orientation never delivers the goods. I have trapped myself in the darkness, with no chance for ultimately finding what I’m looking for. The alternative is, when I walk in the light, and I reorient my life towards a sense of mission, a sense of purpose, that’s about others rather than myself, about meeting other people’s needs, about breathing life into other people’s souls. When I have locked myself in the darkness, not only have I caused myself to stumble, but I will take down those around me. I will suck the life out of every relationship in my world.

Imagine someone out there that is desperate. There's a sense of despair, a sense of hopelessness, a sense of woundedness, a sense of pain, a sense of longing to find something that will satisfy this thing within me. And they think, maybe, possibly, Jesus could be the answer, and they know that you're a Jesus-follower, and so they think possibly they might find life in Jesus. But if you, as a Christian, are in default mode, rather than bringing life, rather than helping them understand how to love Jesus, rather than bring healing to their woundedness, you're sucking the life out of them. You're in default mode. You're using them to meet your own needs, to satisfy your own longings, to try to find your own happiness and, in the process, they walk away *less* instead of *more*, and they conclude, "Obviously Jesus isn't the answer. I think I'll try something else." You have not only locked your own soul in darkness, but you have locked their soul in darkness as well. I think that's what he's saying. But if we *walk in the light*, we rightly represent Jesus and people find what they're longing for, in a dynamic, intimate relationship with Jesus.

Verse 11:

But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

But the one who is *dancing in the dark* is the one who is **walking in the darkness**, the one who is in default mode, and, again, unless you're making an intentional decision every day to live other than that, you are in default mode. That's the whole point! It's what comes naturally. It's how we've been trained and mentored. He says those people just wander aimlessly in the dark. They have no purpose; they have no meaning; they have been *blinded by the darkness*. It's an interesting phrase. We talk about being blinded by the light. John says we've been **blinded by the darkness**, if we are stuck in the dark. Now what is he talking about there? I think he's talking about the fact that when I'm in default mode, I've enslaved myself in darkness, I've embraced my selfishness, because I think that's what's going to make me happy, that's what's ultimately going to give meaning to my life, that's what's going to heal my woundedness. As long as I'm stuck there, I stand no hope of finding what I'm looking for. I'm selfish because I think that will deliver the goods, but it will never deliver the goods. There is no chance, so everything I try comes up empty. So I try this; then I try that; then I try something else; then I try this; but nothing satisfies—and it will not satisfy, as long as you're stuck in the dark. But it's also true, that if I believe that that default mode is the way that I'm going to be happy, the way that I'm going to find joy, the way I'm going to find healing, one hundred percent of what I need is out of my control. I am at the mercy of every other selfish person around me. I cannot control anyone; therefore I have no control on what I think will ultimately make me happy, what will ultimately satisfy me, what will ultimately breathe life into my soul. So I have this sense in which nothing is working, and there's nothing I can do about it, so I just continue to wander aimlessly, hoping I find something someday that will work.

Think about how different that is for those who *walk in the light*, for those who understand that my mission, my purpose, the essence of life is to die to myself, to give myself away, to think of others as more important than myself, to breathe life into another's soul, to help others fall more deeply in love with Jesus. One hundred percent of that is in my control. There isn't a person on this planet that has the power to deviate me from that mission, unless I choose to let them. With the power and the presence of Jesus within me, on any day I can choose to die to myself, to give myself away. I can choose to think of others as more important than myself. I can choose to follow Jesus' commandment. The interesting thing is—the paradoxical thing is—that **when I choose to die to myself, to give myself away, it is there that I ultimately find the life that's so eluded me before.**

Two weeks ago, I asked you the question, “Would you say that you are experiencing an intimate, dynamic love affair with Jesus and, if not, why not?” I asked you if you were experiencing deep, rich community in your relationships with other people, and, if not, why not? And then I posed the question to you, “Would you be willing to open up your heart to the possibility that there could be more than what you’ve experienced?” What John is telling us is, “This is the secret to *more*. This is a non-negotiable.” If we continue to orient our lives in the default mode, in how we’ve been mentored as consumers, then everything in the world is about *me*, it’s about what *I* want, it’s about what *I* need, it’s about *my* hurts, it’s about *my* pains. As long as I stay in that mode, I will stay in the darkness and I have no chance of intimacy with Jesus, and no chance of deep, rich community. But if I choose, as an act of my will, to be obedient and, through the power and the presence of Jesus within me, I choose to re-orient my life to a march to a different drummer, to live my life differently, so radically differently, it would identify me to the world as a follower of Jesus. If I choose that, I **dance in the light** and, **in the light, I will experience deep, rich community with others**. The choice is yours, but the choice you make will determine whether you spend your life in darkness and despair, or whether you choose to die that you might live.

*Father, we’re thankful that You love us so much that You tell us the truth. Lord, our default mode is selfishness. I don’t think there’s probably anybody here that argues with that. It’s what sin has done to us; it’s what the culture teaches us. But, Lord, for all our selfishness, we’re a very unhappy culture. The evidence is everywhere; it just doesn’t work. Lord, help us to believe that You tell the truth, that life is found when we die to ourselves, when we worship the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, when we love our neighbors as ourselves, when we give ourselves away. Lord, my prayer is that we would die that we might live.
In Jesus’ Name, Amen.*

It's interesting to think about why we're selfish. I think we're selfish because we think it will lead to happiness. We think it's going to work in our favor. There's something within us, that thinks if we look out for number one, it's going to work in our favor. This past Christmas, I saw a Christmas ad. And the Christmas ad was promoting the idea, that this Christmas you need to buy something for yourself, and the reason is, because you deserve it. And what they were buying was a new vehicle, and I just found myself kind of sobered by the commercial, that now Christmas is about buying myself a very expensive gift, because I deserve it. I would say that's a good recipe for unhappiness. We need to live on mission. In John, we've been talking about, **we dance in the light, in order to give ourselves away, to think of others as more important than ourselves, to be like Jesus to others**. Life in the light is not like it was in the darkness. In many ways, this is counterintuitive: I have to die to live; it's there we find life. So let me just suggest, if your way hasn't worked, maybe think about trying it Jesus's way.