

This is a true story. Paul and William decided that they really wanted to become godly men. So they started meeting with one another to pray and encourage one another; they even set goals for themselves and their behavior, and were accountable to each other.

At one point Paul decided that he wanted to break his habit of using profanity. He decided he was going to put five dollars in the offering for every time he swore during the week. To stay accountable, he would tell his friend William how many times he'd failed. The first week cost Paul \$100. Now, Paul must've been doing ok financially, because that didn't stop his swearing. In fact, while he improved somewhat over the next couple weeks, he really wasn't having the success he wanted and was losing more and more money every week.

After the fourth week, William told Paul he had decided that the deal needed to be changed for the coming week, but he wasn't going to tell Paul how it would change. He just said, "Trust me. It will cost you both less and more."

When they met the following Sunday before worship, Paul admitted he had failed again. William put a hand on his shoulder and said, "Paul, I told you this was going to cost you both less and more. It's called grace." William took out his checkbook, and made out a check to the church, leaving the amount blank. He gave the check to Paul and said, "Your sin still costs, but for you it's free. Just fill in the numbers, and next week there will be more grace."

William's grace cost \$55 the first week; the second only cost \$20. There was no third week. Paul couldn't bear to see what his sin was costing his friend, so he quit using profanity.

What we as Christians believe matters a great deal, how we live as Christians, reveals who we really are.

John continues in his thoughts on faith here in the book of first John. Right here he sets out some practical conditions for living our faith. John asks us do we love others in the church or do we not love others in the church. Love is evidence of our faith, whereas absence of love is evidence of our lack of faith.

We have seen John teach us three very valuable things concerning our faith so far: First our faith is placed in a person and not in a concept or a philosophical theory -

and that person we place our faith in is Jesus Christ; Second we also saw that confession of our sins helps us maintain our relationship with God as it is a reality check, we truly need God to be a righteous people; Third we also found that one of the ways we can know that we are indeed believers, indeed Christians is that we take the sin in our lives seriously, we don't make excuses for our sin, we recognize our sin, we are concerned about our sin and deal with it before God.

Today, John shows us another way we can analyze if we or others in the church are doing well in our Christian walk - love.

John starts off in verse 7 by stating that he is writing about an old command, a command that was there from the beginning and it is a command that has been heard. Many of the believers in the church had been around for a life time and everyone of them was very familiar with John - they knew what command John was referring to here: [John 13:34](#) "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." This would be a teaching this church would know from the onset, and they would know it so well that John only has to 'the command' and everyone knows it is the command of love.

Previously, in the last few verses John has been saying the plural, the commands of God - but now John summarizes all the commandments into one in the singular, "Love one another as I have loved you." Love is the summation of all commands - this is an old message that they have heard, and lived with for years.

But now in verse 8, John tells us this old command is new. How is this command both old and new at the same time? This is an old command as it goes all the way back to the time of Moses, [Lev. 19:18](#) " 'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.'"

So it is an old command, in the sense that God had commanded it years before, and it is also an old command because the congregation members have heard it for years, yet it is a new command also. It is a new command in two ways: First this command of love was realized and lived out by Jesus Christ and second, it is a new command as we are to expected to love as Jesus loved. It is new as we are also expected to love as Jesus loved.

It is the idea of the realization. John is trying to communicate to us that though the command is not new, it is the depth of understanding that is new. Anyone can say they love....but the proof is seen in the actions of your life. The emphasis in the

Greek in verse 8 is on the newness of the command, not the truth. So we see in verse 8 that the truth will be seen in you, yes, but by emphasizing the newness of the command of love John tells us this: It is not that Christians believe in the command of love that is shocking, but that they actually live out the command of love, that is what is shocking.

It turns out that the Nazi elite were very good fathers. These were high ranking Nazi officers. They made special time for their family, many, making sure they were always home for a child's birthday. They expected good conduct, good manners, and excellent hygiene from their children. We have home movies showing the Nazi elite as very gentle loving and affectionate with their children - they would then of course leave home and proceed with the command of the torture and murder of millions. These men only lived love at home - which wasn't love at all....

John is referring to the law of mutual love between believers. John has spoken on love of everyone elsewhere in the Scriptures, but here, in this text, John is only speaking of love between brothers and sisters in Christ. Though we as Christians are to show love to everyone, today, in these verses, John is only speaking of love between Christians. Love is to start at home, here in the church, and then must extend outside these walls or, we will live be living a lie like the Nazi officers...

John knows that the detractors in the church would undervalue the importance of ethical behavior. They would talk about love, but not worry about its application in life, in the same way as we saw last week that they would not be concerned about their sinful behavior. John is telling us today that another way we can analyze our Christian walk is to see if we follow the command of love from Jesus.

Further, here in verse 8 we see John saying that the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. We know that darkness represents the dominion of evil and light represents the dominion of God. We have seen that we choose to walk either in the darkness or in the light. We each make a spiritual choice to either walk in the darkness or walk in the light.

John in trying to paint an image of the spiritual reality he is speaking of. So John speaks of a world that was in darkness but, just over the horizon, the sun has JUST started to rise. The rays of light are just starting to pierce the darkness, here and there. We live now in twilight. We live in a world that is neither total darkness nor total light. Therefore we can chose to step out of the darkness into the new light, or we can choose to step into the darkness of the remaining shadows.

The point of John's image is - we chose to live in the darkness or the light. The choice is reflected by how we live.

So in verse 9, 10, 11 we see the negative and the positive aspects of this choice. Remember, John loves to contrast two opposites for it highlights and give stark emphasis to what he is teaching.

Verse 9, If we claim to live in the light, but hate our brother, we in reality, are living in the dark - verse 11, this reiterates verse 9 but adds that the person is also spiritually blinded.

John is describing falling into our own trap. John gives us the image here that if we sin we walk into the shadows and if we continue with that sin we walk into the dark and eventually we fall. In practical terms, unethical behavior contributes to a spiritual downfall as we drift further and further from the light. At some point, God will let us pursue our course. He will try to guide us through the Holy Spirit, but the farther we go, the harder it is to see spiritually as we are away from the light.

Here in these verses John is directly referring to [Is. 6:10](#) "Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

There is a little bird in Kentucky that is called a Killdeer bird. It builds its nest beside the road in the gravel. The eggs look gray and white speckles like the gravel on the roads. When you get close to her nest she will move off and act like her wing is broke so you will try to grab her. She will flutter the wing and look like it is broken. Each time you get close she will move a little further off until you are away from the nest. Then she will just fly off.

This is what happens to us with our sin. We follow it into the darkness and then....we are alone.

John is not saying that we lose our salvation here. John IS saying that our heart can become so hardened that we cannot see spiritually anymore, we become spiritually blind. He tells us that those in the church who claim to be in the light but live

unethically, are just fooling themselves, it can be plainly seen by the sin in their life that they are in the dark.

Remember, John says we will sin - but the people he is referring to here claim that their sin is not sin at all. Since they do not see their sin as sin, they walk deeper and deeper into the darkness until, they are blind and alone.

But it does not have to be that way, we have a new possibility in life. Before we were Christians we could not understand spiritual things and we were in the dark. We can be like the person in verse 10, "Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble."

Why doesn't he stumble? Because he has spiritual discernment. The person who does love will not stumble because he will not easily succumb to temptation as he has his principles right and will not be detracted by self centered existence. He recognizes sin and rejects it. Christian conduct is expected to be habitual and mutual. Notice that Christian conduct is not perfection.

Last week we saw in verse 6 that we are to walk as Jesus walked. Applied to our verses today, we are to love as Jesus loved. We learn best by imitation, so for us to love like Jesus, first we have to experience His love, then we have to see it. The best way to see the love of Jesus in action is to read about and learn about the life of Jesus. When we read about the life of Jesus we see the love of Jesus in action.

It is difficult for a deaf person to learn to talk, because we learn to talk best through imitation. If you cannot hear words, it is difficult to make it intelligible. The same with learning another language. If you hear the language spoken, it is much easier to learn. We need a comparison to learn - it doesn't come to us naturally. Our comparison is the Word of God. When we read the word of God we understand the love of Jesus.

Take for example Egyptian hieroglyphics. In seminary I had plenty of brilliant folks for classmates, just amazing people. One man, Kevin was with us on our trip to the Holy Land. Kevin finishing his M.Div at Princeton and was soon on his way to Harvard for a Ph.D. In biblical languages. Kevin knew the standard Greek, Hebrew, Latin, German, French, Spanish and Ugaritic, but in his spare time Kevin taught himself Aramaic and Egyptian hieroglyphics. Egyptian hieroglyphics? This guy

could read the stuff on the tombs and temples in Egypt. How cool was that? In fact, at one point he got into an argument with the Egyptian guide in Luxor about the meaning of a text. The guide became furious and then broke out in laughter - Kevin was the first person in 30 years of being a guide who could read the hieroglyphics. They were inseparable after that.

Kevin said that in the past it was assumed that each glyph, or picture, stood for an idea or a whole thought. Wavy lines were assumed to mean 'water', a round disc to mean 'sun' and an image of a bird lying meant flight. However, scholars now know that each glyph, or picture, stands for a sound. For example the image of a round disc stands for the sound 'Ra'. It turns out that Egyptian hieroglyphics are just a complicated ancient alphabet, Egyptian hieroglyphics are simply ancient Egyptian Coptic language written. Kevin said that, "all" he had to do was learn Egyptian Coptic and then Egyptian hieroglyphics were easy.

I'm sure, just a piece of cake.

Yet, Kevin learned by imitation, once he knew the sounds, it was easy. Once we know the one who is love, even the most difficult thing can be overcome.

See, all the small things we do in secret in love and obedience to God, will play out in public at some point. Our true heart will be revealed. If we secretly harbor hard feeling against our brother and sister in Christ, John tells us that that is a sin, and as such if we, continue in our sin without attempting to deal with it we become blind as a result of sin, our heart becomes harder and harder - we cannot respond to God and fall away further away.

In verses 12-14 John sums up what he has said adding a very valuable spiritual key at the end. John writes to children, fathers and young men. Some have attempted all kinds of interpretations of these three categories but the categorization is simple: Children = all believers, fathers = mature believers, young men = new believers.

John reminds us that so far he had told us that we as Christians are forgiven, that if we believe once, we will always continue to believe; by acceptance of Jesus into our lives we have overcome the evil one...and we are strong.

Why are we strong? Because we are spiritual? Because we love? Because we believe in the truth?

No. We are strong because “the word of God lives in you”.

Behind all of what we are talking about is knowing the word of God. How do we do that? First and foremost ----read it. As a Christian, the Holy Spirit will help you understand and apply it to your life. But, understand, behind all that John has said today is the assumption that you know the word of God. Knowing the word of God will help you apply it. You may have assumed your spiritual strength comes from many things - but here it says that it comes from the word of God.

Let me say as a final wrap up: This is not about a possession of salvation that needs to be retaken at every opportunity, that is a faith that lacks self confidence, rather John is giving us lasting analysis that our strength and power depends upon the power and promise of God.

We need to be vigilant about our sin. We need to be realistic about our sin. John again shows us another way how: Am I loving my brother and sister in Christ...or not?