

Oct 1/2, 2011

**Me or You?**  
*Cultivating Authentic Christian Community*  
**1 John 2:7-11**  
Pastor Bryan Clark

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.

Well that's what we want to talk about this morning. 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. But last week 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 last week 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. That's where we left it last week. We pick it up in verse 7 of chapter 2.

**Beloved, I am not writing you a new commandment, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard.** (\*NASB, 1 John 2:7)

Already we've identified some of the false teaching. Last week, 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 that lives in you. It’s His power; it’s His presence that 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 in this room. Unless I choose everyday 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 in this room 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. 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, that 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 can not 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, that 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 this morning is that we would die that we might live. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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**Opening Discussion**

1. Do you believe people in our culture are generally characterized by selflessness or selfishness? Give some examples to support your answer. In what ways has Western Consumerism affected the way we approach relationships?
2. Do you believe *Christians* are generally characterized by selflessness or selfishness? Give some examples to support your answer.
3. According to Jesus, love for one another as Christians is to be the identifying mark of a follower of Jesus. Do you think the average non-Christian would identify our love for one another as that which sets us apart from others? Why or why not?
4. What causes people to pursue life with a selfish orientation? Does being selfish deliver what we're searching for? Why or why not?

**Bible Study**

1. Read 1 John 1:1-2:6. What have you either learned or been reminded of so far in our study of community? What is necessary for true deep rich community to take place?
2. The command to love one another (which is the command that is inferred in v.7) is not new. Look up these verses that affirm what John is saying. Lev. 19:18, Deut. 6:5, Matt. 22:37-40, Gal. 5:14. Based on these texts, how important is this subject? Is this issue a make or break issue for experiencing community?
3. In 2:8, John says in another way the command is new. How does this line up with what Jesus said in John 13:34,35? What was new about the command which Jesus gave? What made it "new" to the believers John is writing to? What does it mean that the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining?

4. Verse 9 speaks of “hating” his brother. At first glance it would be easy for most of us to dismiss this verse because we don’t hate our fellow believers. However, the word hate is not a term of emotion as we may think. It is a contrast to love. Love is to think of others as more important than ourselves, so hate would be to think of our own needs before we think of others. Based on this definition of hate, how often do we “hate” others? Is this something we just turn on and off or is this a way we choose to live our lives?
5. Authentic Christian community demands that we think of others as more important than ourselves. John clearly states that if we “hate” others we are in the darkness. Is he saying then that pursuing relationships with others as a consumer will prevent me from experiencing intimacy with Jesus? Can I be in the darkness and still be intimate with Jesus?
6. What do you think John means when he says that when we abide in the light there is no cause for stumbling in us? In what way does our selfishness cause a stumbling block to ourselves and others?
7. What do you think it means to be blinded by the darkness?

## **Application**

1. Describe the difference between life in the light and life in the darkness as it relates to pursuing relationships. Which is our default setting? What will be necessary to walk in the light?
2. Look at the descriptions of life in the light and life in the darkness from the previous question. Which better describes your daily walk?
3. What are some very practical things you can do to consistently walk in the light? What would that look like for you at home, work, school, etc.
4. What are some practical ways you can prevent being blinded by the darkness?