

## **SOMETHING OLD MADE NEW**

### **That You May Know - I John Series - Week 4**

#### **Ben Rudolph**

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Good morning Life Fellowship. I am so glad to have you join us again this Sunday morning on our live stream. Today we are going to continue our series on I John, 'That You May Know.' I John is a letter that the Apostle John wrote to believers toward the end of his life and there is so much in this letter to learn about.

Many years ago I visited my wife's family for the first time in Tucson, Arizona. One of the things that I got a chance to do was visit the West for the very first time, and Tucson just has this old western feel to it. The family took me to this steak house called 'Webb's Steakhouse,' and because the line was out the door we had a long wait. But it was one of the best steakhouses in all of Arizona. There is just something about being in the mountains, in the desert with cactus all around, and going to a steakhouse. It just felt real and it felt good. And it certainly lived up to its reputation because it was one of the best steaks I have ever had.

A number of years later we went back to the area, and we were trying to decide what to do during our trip, so I suggested going back to Webb's Steakhouse to have a great steak. My father in law said, *'Well it is under new ownership now, and it isn't really that great anymore.'* And that was really sad, because this restaurant had previously had a great reputation because it served great food and the steaks were excellent. But new people took over and started doing things in a cheap way, they lost customers, and then they lost their reputation as being a great steakhouse.

And it just made me contemplate where we are today as believers. I think of what Jesus said in the Upper Room with His disciples, when He told them that people would know that they were His disciples by the love they had for one another. Jesus said that the distinguishing mark of our reputation in the world was going to be our love. And a lot of what we read in I John is almost like he is writing a commentary and remembering back to the experience he had when he was a teenager sitting at the feet of Jesus. He was just telling this next generation about Jesus, those who had never heard Him personally or saw Him with their own eyes. And John is telling us: *'Listen, I want you to be in that Upper Room with me. I want you to hear this and understand what we need to be known for.'*

And what John is trying to let us know in this passage is he wants us to be known by our love. And if we think about where we are today, going through this pandemic, through this experience of the last three months, I wonder if our love has grown, or if it has gotten colder. So we need to ask ourselves those hard questions, because I think sometimes Christians might be known more for what we are against, or we might be known more for our political views, or we might be known more for our moral standards. And those aren't necessarily bad, but Jesus wants us to be known by our love.

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So we are going to be in Chapter 2 this morning and verses 7 through 11. Before I read it, just to give you some context, I want to tell you that the people who made the dividing sections of the chapters made I John Chapter 2 unique. And that is because John gives four tests of whether or not someone can truly check whether they are a believer. And this is what we have been talking about. John wants all of us to evaluate whether or not our relationship with Jesus is real or not.

We looked at the first verses in Chapter 2 last week about our lifestyles and what our relationship to sin was. If you are someone who doesn't really care whether you sin or not, or whether you are sinning more and more, that should say something about your relationship with Jesus. And now today is the second part of that because there are two kinds of sin that theologians talk about. There are sins of commission and there are sins of omission.

And here is what the differences are of those two kinds of sin. Sins of commission are when we do something evil, when we do something wicked, when we do something rebellious. Sins of omission are the right and good things that we do not do. Both sins of commission and omission are disobedient, and both sins are rebelling against God. But sins of commission are active ways in which we are doing something bad while sins of omission is when we are refusing to do something that is good. And that is what we are going to talk about this morning.

Last week we talked more about the sins of commission and what we should do when we sin. And today is going to be a lot more about what happens when we don't do what we should do. And that leads us to this passage in I John Chapter 2 and beginning in verse 7. It says: ***“Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever 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.”***

This section that John is writing is all about how we as believers need to be known by our love. True believers have a reputation of love. It is as simple as that. And if we are going to evaluate ourselves and check our hearts, then we need to ask, *‘Am I known as a person of love? Has this pandemic caused me to be a more loving person or a less loving person?’*

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My wife was making some purchases in a store the other day, and there were some people behind her waiting to be checked out. As the cashier was checking my wife out she turned to the lady behind her and asked her to take a step back to maintain social distancing. And this woman just lost her mind at the cashier. My wife described it as being very uncomfortable and very sad. She didn't know what was going on with this woman, but her frustration or tension about the Covid 19 crisis made her reaction not be what it should have been.

I think that in the midst of the current climate when all of us are so concerned about what we believe about this virus, or how the government, businesses, churches or people should be responding to this crisis, many of us have forgotten that our first priority is to be a people of love. So this morning we are going to look at how to have a different understanding of love, a deeper level of love and then a directed plan for love. We need to understand what it means when John says, *'Listen, this is not a new commandment; it is an old commandment, yet it is new in some ways.'*

What does John mean by that? It means there is something old that is made new. The commandment John is talking about is, *'Love your neighbor as yourself.'* And all throughout Scripture in both the Old Testament and the New Testament this commandment is talked about. The entire Bible can be summed up in this commandment, ***"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself."*** Paul says this in Galatians Chapter 5 and verse 14: ***"For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"***

So we know as a Christian this is what we should be doing, but are we doing it? How do we evaluate whether or not we are doing it? Let's look at how we can do this this morning. The first thing we need to do is have a different understanding of love. Notice John says, ***"Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling."***

John is just basically saying, *'Hey, either love people or hate people.'* Now when we hear those words, 'love' and 'hate,' we have to remove our cultural understanding of what those words mean. And we have to understand what the biblical usage of those words 'love' and 'hate' mean. You know what you and I do - when we say we love something, or we say we hate something, we attach feelings, strong feelings to it. If I say I love something it means I have a strong feeling of affection for that. If I say I hate something it means I have a strong distain or disgust against something.

We associate love and hate with feeling. But when it comes to the biblical understanding of these words, what they try to explain is there is something greater than

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feeling involves. And when you love someone, the word for love in the Greek is ‘*agape*’ and it means that you are going to show favor to someone beyond your feelings. It means that we are willing to do what is best for you, that we care about what your needs are above our own. That is love.

John Chapter 3 and verse 16 says: ***“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”*** He is saying that He looked at the need, He looked at how the world was filled with sinners, and He wanted to do something about it even at the risk of sacrificing Son on the cross. God sent His Son to pay our penalty for sin because of His love. Love motivated Him to do that. It wasn’t just warmth He felt inside when He looked down and saw us; that wasn’t His motivating factor. He saw the need we had and then His actions did something about it. That is the biblical understanding of love.

Likewise, hate is the absence of favor. It is putting ourselves first, caring only about ourselves. It doesn’t necessarily mean that we hate that person, or that we have this strong feeling against them. When you think about love not being a warm fuzzy feeling and hate isn’t this disgust inside, then it makes us have to evaluate whether or not we are really loving or hating people. So when you hear we are to love our brothers, and if we love people we are true believers, and if we hate people we are not believers, you may think that you don’t really hate anyone. But we have to bring in the biblical understanding of what it means.

For example - there are two things that Jesus gave us in the gospels that if we bring our American cultural idea of love and hate into them we won’t understand what He was saying. He said we are to love our enemies in Matthew Chapter 5 when He was giving the Sermon on the Mount. What did He mean by that? Did He mean we have to have this warm affection for the people that are against us? No, it simply means that even if we have people attacking us, even if we have people that hate us and are doing things against us, we still need to respond with grace, mercy and forgiveness. We still need to desire what is best for them regardless of how we feel. That is what it means to love your enemies.

In Luke Chapter 14 Jesus talks about what it means to follow Him. He tells us we are to hate our mother, our father, our spouse, our children, our brothers, our sisters and even our own lives if we want to be His disciple. Was He saying that we have to have distain and disgust against our family? No, what He is saying is when we compare the way in which we prioritize our relationship with Him, our love for Him, it will look like hate to the people around us.

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So it is a comparison. The word hate is a word in comparison to the high level of love. And when we bring in our biblical understanding of this, what He is saying is we are not to hate our brothers and going around like this horrible, wicked person doing mean things to other people. That is not what He is saying. He is asking us if we are the type of person who only cares about ourselves. Are we the type of people who even though there are needs all around us, people who are hurting all around us, we just don't care about them because what we want to do is prioritize what we want and what we need above everyone else around us. That is what it means to hate your brothers.

That should make us re-evaluate our understanding of what John is talking about here. If we only have our own cultural understanding of love and hate, we can check off that box and think we are doing pretty good. But the biblical understanding of love really should make us evaluate things completely differently.

I remember years ago when we first bought our house in Denver in 2006. The people that previously owned the house had a deal with a termite company. And they told us if we wanted to renew this contract with them it would cost three hundred dollars. And I debated about whether I should renew it or not, because three hundred dollars seemed like a lot of money to me back then. I didn't see any signs of termite problems, but in our garage there was some wood lying over a crack. And I noticed after a week or so when I picked up these boards that there were termites everywhere on those boards. And I remember thinking, *'Oh, I have a big problem, and I need to pay that three hundred dollars to protect my house and make sure they get rid of these termites.'*

But it took seeing those termites on boards over a crack in my garage for me to know I had a real problem, and I knew that I had to take care of it. And I think what we have to do is start bringing in our biblical understanding of love and of hate and evaluate our lives according to God's Word and not our culture. And when it comes to us evaluating our own hearts, are we people who begin to distance ourselves? Do we start disengaging the moment someone comes to us with a need? Or maybe we isolate because we don't want to get our hands dirty, and we don't want to mess with other people's problems?

That is not being a person of love. A person of love goes to people who are hurting and says, *'Hey, I want to help you get what you need.'* It is modelling what Jesus did for us by sacrificing Himself. Are we people who are sacrificing? Think back over the last few months of the pandemic. Are you sacrificing more today than you did back at the beginning of March? Or are you holding onto more of your stuff, or holding onto more of your money, or holding on to more of your time, or holding onto more of your talent? Or are you looking at this as an opportunity to show your love?

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The great commandment that Jesus gave us was to love Him and to love our neighbors as ourselves. He didn't put a little asterisk by that and say, '*Unless there is a pandemic.*' No, this is when our true love for others should shine through. I think about the parable of the Good Samaritan that Jesus told about when people were wondering who their neighbor was.

And in that story there were a couple of people that walked by this man who had been robbed, beaten and left for dead. They even walked over to the other side of the road. But there was one man who stopped and he was a Samaritan. And he helped the man, he fixed up his wounds, he took him to an inn and paid for his lodging and care. And Jesus asked, '*Who was the true neighbor? Who was the one who showed genuine love?*' And it was the Samaritan of course.

I wonder how many of us are passing by hurting people by going on the other side of the street. Maybe it is our spouse, or our children, or our neighbors, or our co-workers. Are we engaging with them or are we isolating? Are we leaning into what people need? Are we present in their lives?

We need to have a different understanding of love. That is the first thing we need to do. The second thing we need to do is to have a deeper level of love. Now in verses 7 and 8 John says some things that may be a little confusing. He said, "***I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard.***" What he is referring to was the old commandment - the old commandment of love your neighbor as yourself, love God and love people, the entire Ten Commandments, the entire Law of the Old Testament.

This was not a new commandment, not something new - to love your neighbor, to love your brothers and sisters. This was not something new. But then John says in verse 8, "***At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you.***" So now we are wondering what he is saying. He is saying, '*Yes, this is an old commandment that we have heard before, but there is something new about it that we need to understand.*'

Notice what it says, "***It is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in Him and in you.***" John is saying, '*When we understand Jesus, the more we understand His life, His sacrifice, the way in which He has loved us, it gives us a fresh perspective on what it means to love others.*' You see we can have this idea of we need to love God, and love our neighbors, and love our brothers and sisters, and love our families, and of being a person of love. But we will also again default to our cultural understanding of that if we don't have our eyes fixed on Jesus.

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What Jesus does is call us to a deeper level of understanding His love. This is what John means when he says this: “*Because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.*” John is comparing and contrasting the darkness and the light. Remember he refers to Jesus in the book of John as the light coming into the world. So when he says the light has come it means it is already shining. He is saying that when we accept Christ as our personal Lord and Savior, we are given a new perspective on life, on the world, and on how to view everything. And it is also going to change the way we look at people. It is going to change the way we want to love other people. It is going to change the way we want to serve others.

So when John says the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining he is saying, ‘*As you are being transformed, as you are being developed, it is the biblical word we call sanctification.*’ Sanctification is the big theological word that means the process by which we become more like Jesus. And we can be more like Jesus today than we were yesterday. And we can be more like Jesus a year from now than we are this year. We are always in this process and progress of becoming more like Him.

So the darkness is passing away and the true light is shining and John said this is a new commandment, because as we get to understand the deeper levels by which Jesus loved us, we start learning how to love people differently. I remember a story Steve Saint told us. Steve came to our church years ago when Dan and I were on staff at Northside. Steve is the son of Nate Saint who was one of the missionaries to the Auca Indians in Ecuador. There were five missionaries that were martyred there, and one of them was Steve’s father, Nate.

Steve Saint and his sister went back to the very tribe in Ecuador that had killed their father. They served that tribe and eventually led them to the Lord. Steve shared this story that when he gave his life to Christ, one of the men who had killed his father baptized him in the river. And I just can’t even imagine that I could have a relationship of love with the murderer of my father. And that our relationship would be such that he would baptise me as a follower of Jesus. I can’t even fathom that, but that is what the love of Christ does.

The love of Christ should make us look at people and situations and ask ourselves if we could ever forgive that person, if we could ever get over the offense, if we could ever love this person for what they did to us. John is saying we have to love people when sometimes we can’t understand how to do that because this person has hurt us, and we are feeling pain from it. And that is when we need to understand more about Jesus’ love for us. I believe that God puts people in our lives that hurt us, and many times the way that we have been hurt we may have committed those same exact sins against God.

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And when we can see ourselves as the offender as opposed to just being the offended, the more we can understand that we have offended God much more than we have been offended. And that gives us the opportunity, that picture, of how if God can love us that way, we can love this person that way. That is how the gospel changes us. That is how the love of Christ is supposed to get to a deeper level more and more and more.

There is a passage in Ephesians where there are a number of things that are talked about for love and I believe that our understanding of love has to expand, it has to get bigger. It is more than just feelings. And Paul talks about what we need to do in love in Ephesians Chapter 4 where he says this: ***“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness,*** (okay, I think I can do that. I am going to try really hard at that.) ***with patience.*** (Now I know that patience is going to be hard. And then here is the kicker,) ***bearing with one another in love.”***

Now nothing says love more than bearing with someone. I mean it is literally a word that means, ‘*Can you put up with this person? Can you endure the agony of having to be with this person?*’ That is what ‘bearing’ means. It means to suffer with someone. So what Paul is saying is our love is going to be stretched because to love someone means you are going to put up with them, to bear with them, to endure suffering because of them. If we can do that, we are worthy of the gospel.

A few verses down in verse 15 it is talking about the different doctrines that we hear and it says: ***“Rather, speaking the truth in love.”*** And that can be challenging in two different ways for people hearing that this morning. Maybe you are someone who just hates being honest with people because you are afraid of rejection, or you are fearful that they are going to say something back to you, or you are afraid of what they are going to think about you. So you have a hard time speaking the truth. You think you are being loving, but you really aren’t.

Others of you love to speak the truth, but you are not doing it in love. And what Paul is saying is part of the way in which we love people is speaking the truth to them. We are to speak the truth in love. One of the best ways that we can love others is to speak the truth honestly and openly with them.

And lastly, in Ephesians Chapter 5 and verse 1 it says this: ***“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*** Listen, if we are going to love our neighbors, if we are going to love our brothers and sisters, if we are going to walk in love, we do it because of the way He has loved us. It gives us this deeper level

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that we have never experienced before. But we have to turn to Him as our motivation in doing that.

And that leads us to the third point and that is we have to have a directed plan for love. Now in verses 9 and 10 John says this: “***Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.***” Right there it is plain and simple, John is a straight shooter. If you say you are a follower of Jesus but you don’t care about anyone, if you are someone who just is not a person of love, then you don’t have Christ in you.

Verse 10 says: “***Whoever loves his brother abides in the light.***” Here is what we have to understand - “***And in Him there is no cause for stumbling.***” What does he mean by that? Going back to the beginning, when we were talking about sins of commission and omission, we need to realize if we focus more on doing the right things then we won’t have time to do the wrong things. If we are focused more on loving people, then we won’t have time to hate people. We need to be actively looking for ways by which we can serve the people around us, serve our family, serve our neighbors, and serve our co-workers. We need to wake up in the morning thinking how we can love the people in our life today.

But most of us think the exact opposite. We wake up in the morning and think what can others do for me today? And that is not the way of Christ. The way of Christ means we wake up thinking of others. “***There is no cause for stumbling.***” That word stumbling is the Greek word *skandalon* which was used to describe a stumbling block that leads people to sin. John is saying that if we are walking in the path of loving other people we are not going to have time to stumble around in sin.

I got an ap on my phone a few months ago to try to help me to eat healthier. It gives me these goals to eat certain amounts of fruits and vegetables, certain amounts of greens, certain amounts of grain and to drink so many glasses of water. And the goal is to hit all twenty-one of these things, including exercise, vitamin B12, and so on every day. And here is what I found - if I am focused on checking off all those twenty-one items on my little ap to make sure I am eating and exercising the way I need to, I don’t have the time to eat the potato chips. I don’t have time to eat the brownies, because I am working on getting other items check marked. And if I am filling myself up with good food then I won’t have time or space for the bad foods.

And that is what John is trying to say here. So we need to be focused on a plan to love people more. We should not want to wake up each morning and just go through the day with whatever comes our way. No, I think what God does is He puts people in our lives that challenge us, people that challenge our ability to love them. That is how He

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can test us, how He wants to grow us in our understanding of love. So we need to have a plan daily to love the people around us. It is not just going to happen by accident.

A lot of us have been sitting around for the last three months, some of us more than others. And we all need a plan that gets us back to normal, to get back to life as we knew it. I think about how our church will be meeting next week as a church body. And how this sermon applies to our own church and our own situation is this - I think for some you are not ready to come back, you are not ready to go into public places, and you are not ready to come back to church yet. We want to respect and honor that. But there are people who are ready, and they were ready three weeks ago. They want to be meeting again, and they aren't worried about how many people are in a room.

And we have to remember the differences and the opinions about Covid 19 should not trump our love for one another. They should not trump what we think about other people. If we are going to start getting back to normal and meeting again, what each of us thinks about how we are doing it needs to be led with love. It needs to be led with love for one another, and thinking about what is best for the other person. We need to have a more understanding and gracious heart, not a heart of judgment, not a heart of isolation, not a heart of separation, and not a heart that is going to walk on the other side of the road to avoid the problem. We need to lean in and be people of love. Are you a more loving person today than you were three months ago?

Three questions and then I am done. Number one - what kind of reputation do you have? Remember I talked about Webb's Steakhouse having a great reputation and how that Christians are supposed to have a reputation of love. What is your reputation in your family? What is your reputation in your office? What is your reputation in your neighborhood, or in your apartment complex? Are you known as someone who is a person of love?

Number two - who sets the boundaries for your love? Is it you? Is it your friends? Are the people around you influencing the way in which you love others? Or is Jesus setting the boundaries for your love? Is it Jesus letting you know how far He wants you to go? And if Jesus isn't setting the boundaries for our love we are always going to have a skewed standard of love.

Number three - What is your 'above all' plan to love a difficult person today? There are a couple of passages about 'above all' in Scripture. One is in Colossians Chapter 3, and another one is in I Peter where it talks about 'above all' showing love to one another. What is your 'above all' plan for that difficult person today to love them and to show them the love of Christ?

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So this is a test for us. What we are going through is a test, it is a challenge. And I pray that God would give us the grace, the wisdom, and the understanding to know how to love the people around us well today. Let's pray.

*Jesus, no one loves us like you do. No one has loved us like you do and no one can love us like you do. I just pray that your love for us would again bear fruit in our lives. God, I pray that we would be people that are looking for ways to lean into the hurt and the pain of others. That we would be like you in loving the people around us, that we would have a reputation that is not about isolating and distancing, but we would be people that are leaning into the emotional and spiritual needs of those around us. So God we are praying for wisdom, for insight and for guidance from you today. Lord, if there is anyone that is struggling with love, show them in a beautiful profound way how much love you have for them and for us. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

*The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.*