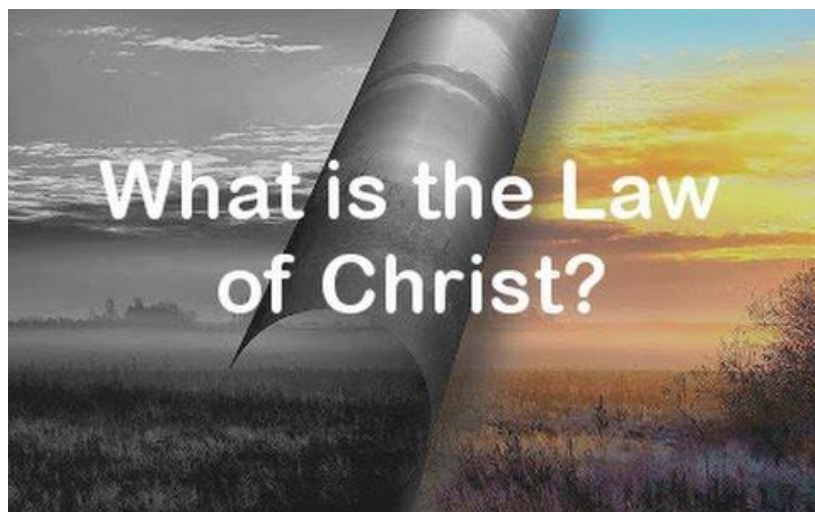


Bible Study Notes

The Law of Christ and The Mind of Christ



By Craig M White
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The Law of Christ and The Mind of Christ

Authored by Craig Martin White.

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Our purpose and desire is to foster Biblical, historical and related studies that strengthen the Church of God's message & mission and provides further support to its traditional doctrinal positions.

Suggested Reading (articles and studies by C. M. White):

- *Christians Helping Each Other*
- *Jealousy & Envy in Scripture*
- *They have their Reward*
- *What is Inspiration?*
- *What is Justice? The Biblical Requirement for Neutral Judiciaries*

Introductory Remarks and Relevant Scriptures

In this short Bible study (it is not a paper or an article) an answer to the question of what is the “law of Christ” and “mind of Christ” is attempted.

In the first instance, the particular Scriptures that mention “law of Christ” should be quoted and examined:

“... to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the **law of Christ**, so that I might win those who are without law.” (1 Cor 9:21)

“Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the **law of Christ**.” (Gal 6:2)

In addition to those two, there are also those verses referring to the “law of liberty” which may be referring to the “law of Christ,” otherwise they could be referring to the overarching law of God:

“But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the **law of liberty**, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.” (James 1:25)

“So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the **law of liberty**.” (James 2:12)

Scholars and Bible students have been debating the meaning of these Scriptures for centuries – but this straight-forward Bible study will, hopefully, be helpful in understanding the concept.

Discussion

A review of some of the literature on the meaning of “the law of Christ” results in several interpretations. In addition, the reviews provide insights into the thinking of researchers and scholars and why they have come to the various conclusions that they have.

All Christians with the holy spirit have a citizenship that emanates from heaven (Phil 1:27) and are a “new man” in Christ. Just as the Old Testament saints possessed the spirit of God and evidently had their citizenship in heaven.

They practice the “law of faith” (Rom 3:27) and fulfill God’s law by loving others (Rom 13:10).

Is the phrase “law of Christ” merely another term for “the law of God”? Or is it an allusion to the “love your neighbour” requirement. Or even to the “new” commandment to “love one another, as I have loved you”? Refer also to John 21:15-17.

For understanding 1 Cor 9:21 we should delve into other areas of the writings of Paul to understand this concept.

For instance, Paul upholds the 10 Commandments where he refers to idolatry etc (refer to Acts 17:16-21; 19:23-41; 1 Cor 5:11; 6:9-10; 10:7, 14; Gal 5:3; Eph 5:5; Col 3:5;) or observance of the seventh day Sabbath (Heb 4:9).

The Law of God is also advocated in verses such as Acts 24:14; 25:8; Rom 2:12-16; 3:31; 7:12; 8:7-8; Gal 5:3.

As such, Paul is revering the Law of God and actually states “though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ.” Does this mean that he observes God’s Commandments but not under its penalty due to the sacrifice and shed blood of Christ? After all “under the law” can refer to its penalty – that is under the penalty for disobedience – which is death. But if we obey Christ and follow God’s ways and laws and are washed in His blood, then we are under that penalty – which negates death?

Then in Gal 6:2 we are told that we are fulfilling the law of Christ when we bear one another's burdens. I think this is telling us that the law of Christ is the law of love. And this principle is found in **both** Testaments (as is almost always the case with various concepts and principles). After all, the New Testament does not supersede the Old Testament.

From this it could be deduced that:

1. the Law of Christ does not contradict or do away with the Old Commandments;
2. the New Testament does not do away with or replace the Old Testament because it is merely the next stage in God's revelation;
3. the beatitudes, fruit of the spirit, gifts of the spirit etc are all in the Old Testament and are nothing new at all.

According to www.gotquestions.org/law-of-Christ.html Galatians 6:2 has the following meaning:

“What exactly is the law of Christ, and how is it fulfilled by carrying each other’s burdens? While the law of Christ is also mentioned in 1 Corinthians 9:21, the Bible nowhere specifically defines what precisely is the law of Christ. However, **most Bible teachers understand the law of Christ to be what Christ stated were the greatest commandments** in Mark 12:28–31, “Which commandment is the most important of all?’ Jesus answered, ‘The most important is, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The second is this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.” [emphasis mine]

Another who has delved into this is theologian Thomas Schreiner, whose view is as follows:

“The law of Christ for Paul includes the moral norms of the OT Law, focusing particularly on the commandment to love one’s neighbor. Paul emphasizes that this law cannot be fulfilled apart from the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life.” (“Law of Christ” entry in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, pp. 542-43) [emphasis mine]

Other Bible helps explain Galatians 6:2:

“Galatians 6:2

One another's burdens (ἀλλήλων τὰ βάρη)

The emphasis is on *one another's*, in contrast with the selfishness which leaves others to take care of themselves. The primary reference in *burdens* is to *moral* infirmities and errors, and the sorrow and shame and remorse which they awaken in the offender.

So (οὕτως)

By observing this injunction.

Fulfill (ἀναπληρώσατε)

The verb denotes, not the filling up of a perfect vacancy, as the simple πληροῦν, but the supplying of what is lacking to fulness; the filling up of a partial void. Comp. 1Co_16:17; Php_2:30; 1Th_2:16.” (*Vincent’s Word Studies*) [emphasis mine]

Herbert W Armstrong called this the way of GIVE versus the way of GET – outgoing concern for others, equal to oneself – if at all possible. A goal that is difficult to reach, but it must be striven for.

Another is the Jamieson, Fausset, Brown *Commentary on the Whole Bible*:

“Galatians 6:2

If ye, legalists, must “bear burdens,” then instead of legal burdens (Mat_23:4), “bear one another’s burdens,” literally, “weights.” Distinguished by Bengel from “burden,” Gal_6:4 (a different Greek word, “load”): “weights” exceed the strength of those under them; “burden” is proportioned to the strength.

so fulfil — or as other old manuscripts read, “so ye will fulfil,” Greek, “fill up,” “thoroughly fulfil.”

the law of Christ — namely, “love” (Gal_5:14). Since ye desire “the law,” then fulfil the law of Christ, which is not made up of various minute observances, but whose sole “burden” is “love” (Joh_13:34; Joh_15:12); Rom_15:3 gives Christ as the example in the particular duty here.” [emphasis mine]

The law of Christ is not made up of man-made burdens and additions to God’s Law. Rather it is accomplishing the Law which end is to not only develop Godly character but to also assist others on the road to salvation.

"The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat,
so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they

preach, but do not practice.

They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger." (Matt 23:2-4)

"And he said, "Woe to you lawyers also! For **you load people with burdens hard to bear**, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers." (Luke 11:46)

Instead of bearing the burden of others, the pharisees and scribes added burdens to God's Law and way of life. How opposite to the way of God found in both Testaments (refer to the **Appendix. The Old New Commandment by bible.org**).

The Mind of Christ

If we have the mind of Christ we will also fulfill His Law. Replace inactivity with action such as justice, fairness, equity and to stand up to abuse and slander by false brethren – this is all part and parcel of being a Christian warrior. They are an aspect of living like Christ did and having our sins forgiven so that we are spiritually white as snow. Lying down and taking abuse or not standing up for others, is not being like Christ. Instead we must put on the mind of Christ

"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, **any affection and sympathy**, complete my joy by being of the same mind, **having the same love**, being in full accord and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but **also to the interests of others**.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." (Phil 2:1-5)

The New Testament talks about putting on the new man – about developing the mind of Christ. Whom was God on earth and thus attributed all of the Godly attributes in the flesh.

So, the mind of Christ fulfils God's character, nature and will that is found throughout the Bible in both Old and New Testaments.

The term may well be from the Isaiah 40:13 - so much of the New Testament is based on the Old, after all. ICor 2:16 quotes Isaiah:

"For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ."

It is actually the iteration of an old concept! YET AGAIN, the New Testament and Christ's sayings are based on the Old and explains it. There are no changes nor is there a new religion. The "mind of Christ" must be the same as the "mind of the Lord" – His character and the understanding of and adherence to His way with the assistance of the indwelling of the holy spirit.

In contrasting the worldly man to what we should be like, Paul explains that we are to have His mind. That is, we should be looking at our walk and observing/comparing the world's ways from Christ's perspective – which is God's perspective. In other words, His character, love, laws, beatitudes, fruit of the spirit, empathy, justice etc. We must act and think like He does, not how the world does.

As such we must eschew injustices, abusiveness, cronyism, unfairness, jealousy and the spirit of competition, imagining rivalry where none exists.

Instead, Paul says, we must be spiritual or act as a Christian who is a follower of the ways of Christ – becoming like Him by developing His mind in us through the holy spirit (1 Cor 2:15).

One aspect of the mind of Christ and fulfilling His Law is justice which means that God eschews cronyism, nepotism, unfairness and making decisions based upon slander and without a fair trial.

God is love and is so just that He cannot be unjust.

As such we little bits of human flesh must strive to become like Him. So, as He sets the standards of justice, this we must follow. In other words, we must do what is right, regardless.

Justice is not one thinking one is like a priest or that one has a double portion of the spirit or that one supposedly sits on Moses Seat. Such thinking is haughty demonstrating great pride, puffing one up with arrogance - "an inflated sense of self-importance" as Herbert Armstrong used to teach about these sorts of people.

This sort of self-centred thinking and inflated self-importance leads to abuse and making decisions or running a congregation in a way that leads to fruitlessness or negative growth.

So, to return to the subject of the mind of Christ – it is a reflection of God Himself with attributes we should all be growing in. Caring for others, having empathy, thinking of other's needs, ensuring justice etc all reflects God's mind.¹

As no human can be the accuser, policeman, judge, jury, jailor – it is simply impossible with or without God's spirit – we must resort to what God has revealed one must do - deferring to neutral judiciaries or panels to make decisions with just outcomes.

Anyone thinking that they are above God's laws and requirements as sort of priests sitting on

¹ "The combination of justice and righteousness appears often in the Bible, frequently in connection with ruling powers. A dominant theme associated with this ethical idea and practice is the obvious relationship between the doer of these good deeds and the LORD. Jeremiah 22:11-17, an address to Shallum the son of Josiah, king of Judah, challenges the king at that time to review his reign. "Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness (vesmu ypan)? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; Then it was well. Was not this knowing (,gsv) me? (Jer. 22:15-16)." Why does a king who performs justice and righteousness know God? According to Jeremiah 9:24 the one who knows (gsh) God, understands that God himself does justice and righteousness (vesmuypan). **To do deeds of justice and righteousness is to act out the very character and desires of God. Therefore, a king who truly knows God will seek to emulate the LORD; justice and righteousness are one facet of God's constitution.** Conversely, one is deemed wicked if he does not perform justice and righteousness, yet if the wicked turns from his evil ways of oppressing the poor and needy, he will live (Ezek. 18:1-27, 33:12-16)." (G. L. Alley, *Good News to the Poor: From Jubilee to Judgement*, p. 29) [emphasis mine]

Moses Seat with a double portion of the spirit is not just fooling themselves, they are not just operating well outside their jurisdiction and Church teaching/policy, they are greatly in violation of Biblical principles.

Such an approach leads to injustices because the one with such arrogance is actually lazy. He prefers not to spend the time going through due process but wishes to make snap decisions based upon his 'inspiration' and even preferential outcome (based upon gossip, who he is friends with, jealousy or his personal views of the accused).

These sorts demonstrate carnal preferences for people. That is not the mind of Christ nor justice.

Some have actually stated that they are "as Christ before you" sitting in judgment (others no longer openly state that, but evidently think that way). This is both blasphemy and heresy and they will face the consequences for such extraordinary arrogance and pride unless they openly repent. Nor is it the doctrine of most Church of God groups, but is a false doctrine that has crept in and has caused horrendous abuse.

On the other hand, some mean well and sincerely attempt to be a good judge but cannot help themselves – they seem to default to backing up their colleagues regardless "because God backs up government" and that somehow is permissible and trumps justice.

The only way to minimise human nature's effects whether in converted or unconverted people in this regard is by setting up neutral judiciaries.

“... that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:16-19)

The aforementioned discussion of justice and due process provides us with one aspect of the mind of Christ and the Law of Christ.

Concluding Remarks

From the study I conclude that the “law of Christ” reflects the “mind of Christ” – it is all part of the character of God and does not alter the teachings, doctrines and principles of the Old Testament. It continues them and in fact shows us through Christ that they can be adhered to and developed if we have the indwelling of the holy spirit and God's help.

But Christianity is a community and therefore we should be helping one another. Because salvation is not merely a personal thing – we are all in this together – and can help or hinder the salvation of others.

In the final analysis of course, we have responsibility for our decisions and salvation. However, what we do and say can affect – positively or negatively – the salvation of others.

Note again

“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the [*penalty of the*] law...
“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.
Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.
For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor.
For each will have to bear his own load.” (Gal 5:18; 6:1-5) [cp Dan 12:3; 11:33; Prov 11:30; Ps 51:13]

However,

“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.
“Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!” (Matt 18:5-7)

Do we have the mind of Christ and fulfill His Law – or are we of another spirit?

Appendix. The Old New Commandment by bible.org

<https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-7-old-new-commandment-1-john-27-11>

The Old New Commandment (1 John 2:7-11)

I think that we all chuckle at the Peanuts cartoon strip because so often we see the truth about ourselves there. That is especially so when Linus protests, “I love mankind; it’s *people* I can’t stand!” Love in the abstract is a cinch. It’s loving those irritating people that I rub shoulders with that is not easy.

In 1 John 2:3-6, the apostle gives a test by which you can know that you truly know Jesus Christ, namely, if you walk in obedience to His word. In 2:6, he states, “The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.” Then, in 2:7-11, John goes on to apply this test of obedience more specifically to the area of love. If Jesus’ life and especially His death epitomized love, then those who claim to follow Him are obligated to live in love.

In the Upper Room, on the night He was betrayed, Jesus demonstrated His great love for the disciples by taking a towel and a basin of water and washing the disciples’ feet. After that unforgettable object lesson, He drove the point home (John 13:14-15), “If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.” He was not instituting a ceremonial foot-washing service, where everyone comes with clean feet to be washed! He was saying something much more difficult to practice, that we who follow Jesus must set aside our rights and serve one another out of love.

In that same chapter ([John 13:34-35](#)), Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Obviously, those words of Jesus were behind John’s words about the old, new commandment. It may be that the heretics against whom John was writing claimed to have some “new” truths. **Using an obvious play on words, John counters them by saying that we don’t need new truth, but rather the old truth that his readers learned early in their Christian experience.** On the other hand, if you want “new” truth, John says that the old commandment is the new commandment, which Jesus gave to us. In short, **Loving one another is an essential mark of a true Christian.**

Having said that, I must quickly add that that we *must* define “love” biblically, not culturally. Culturally, if you mention the word “love,” people think of “niceness.” They picture a loving person as always being nice and sweet towards everyone. He never confronts sin or error. He never gets angry about evil or says anything that might upset someone.

But if you are at all familiar with the four gospels, you will immediately see that by this cultural definition, Jesus was not a loving man! Jesus *loved* the Jewish religious leaders when He said to them, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites” ([Matt. 23:15](#)). He *loved* Peter when He said to him, “Get behind Me, Satan” ([Matt. 16:23](#)). He *loved* the multitude when He said to them, “You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?” ([Matt. 17:17](#)). The apostle Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit, whose first fruit is love, when he said to Elymas, “You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?” Then, he struck him blind (see [Acts 13:9-11](#)).

I’m not saying that we should go around blasting people, while claiming that we’re loving them! I’m only pointing out that our definition of love, in a practical sense, must encompass all that the Bible says about love, not what our worldly culture says. John makes two points in our text:

1. To love one another is to obey our Lord’s commandment (2:7-8).

In these two verses, John makes four points:

A. JESUS’ COMMAND TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER IS BOTH OLD AND NEW.

John never specifically identifies the old, new commandment in these verses, and he only mentions love once in this entire section (2:10). But his reference to the new commandment makes it obvious that he is referring to Jesus’ command to love one another.

This commandment was old in two senses. First, it was old in that Moses taught it in the Law, “... you shall love your neighbor as yourself” ([Lev. 19:18](#)). Jesus identified this as the second greatest commandment, after the command to love God with all your being ([Matt. 22:37-40](#)). So in that sense, this command had been with God’s people for 1,400 years.

But the main sense in which this was an old commandment is that these believers had heard it from the very earliest days of their Christian experience (2:7): “... which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard.” John uses the phrase, “from the beginning,” in the same way in [1 John 3:11](#), “For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another” (also, [2 John 5](#)).

But, John says (2:8), the commandment is also new, in that Jesus had issued it as the new commandment ([John 13:34](#)). John Stott (*The Epistles of John* [Eerdmans], p. 93) suggests four ways that this old commandment became new when Jesus issued it. First, it was new in its *emphasis*, in that Jesus brought it together with the command to love God as the summation of the entire Law. Second, it was new in its *quality*, in that His own self-sacrifice on the cross became the standard. Third, it was new in its *extent*, in that in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus extended the definition of neighbor to go beyond race

or religion. Anyone in need who crosses our path is our neighbor. He said that we should love even our enemies. Finally, it was new in the disciples' *continuing apprehension* of it. **The love of Jesus on the cross is inexhaustible. We can never plumb its depths. And so as we grow in our understanding of His great love, we will grow in our apprehension of how we must love one another. So Jesus' command is both old and new.**

B. FROM THE BEGINNING OF YOUR CHRISTIAN WALK, YOU SHOULD LEARN HOW TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN LOVING RELATIONSHIPS.

John tells his readers that they have had this commandment "from the beginning," and then identifies it as "the word which you have heard" (2:7). It was part and parcel with the gospel that they had believed at the outset of their Christian experience. When we hear and respond to the good news that Jesus Christ died for sinners, at that point the love of God is "poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5:5). The first fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal. 5:22). As I mentioned, the entire Bible may be summed up by the two great commandments, to love God and to love one another. So learning how to establish and maintain loving relationships is not "graduate level" Christianity. It is basic, beginning Christianity.

Many of you came into the faith from backgrounds where you did not experience love. Your parents abused you verbally or physically. Maybe you were in a series of abusive relationships with the opposite sex. You've had no models of how to love other people. It is urgent, once you trust in Christ as your Savior, to learn from God's Word and from more mature believers how to love others in a practical, daily manner. You will need to unlearn many bad ways of relating to others that you brought with you from the past. You will need to relearn how to think and speak and act in loving ways, especially toward those who wrong you. If you do not learn to love others, you will fester with anger and bitterness, and your relationship with Christ will suffer.

It all begins with how you think about others. Instead of thinking first about yourself, your feelings, your rights, and your needs, you must learn to think first about others. How can I show this difficult person the love of Jesus Christ? How can I serve this person in love? Rather than thinking angry thoughts about how he wronged you and how you'll get even, you begin to think about how Jesus wants you to think about the one who mistreated you. You begin to pray for this person, that he would come to know Jesus. You look for opportunities to return good instead of evil. I recommend that you write out Paul's description of love (1 Cor. 13:4-7) on a card and read it over several times each morning, until you have in your mind how a loving person acts. Do the same with 1 Peter 3:8-12.

Then, love extends to *your speech*. You put off abusive speech that tears down the other person, and you put on speech that builds him up (Gal. 5:15; Eph. 4:29, 31-32; Col. 3:8). You stop lying or stretching the truth to your own advantage and begin speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15, 25). You cease from gossip and slander (2 Cor. 12:20).

Then, in *your behavior* you begin to practice loving deeds (Rom. 12:9-13; Eph. 5:2). You look for opportunities to serve others, beginning in your home. You become "zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:14). Again, this is not advanced, graduate level Christianity. This is freshman Christianity 101. But, maybe you're thinking, "I don't have the strength to do what you're saying." Then,

C. YOUR NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST IS CENTRAL TO PRACTICING BIBLICAL LOVE TOWARDS OTHERS.

John says that this old, new commandment "is true in Him and in you" (2:8). It is *true in Him* because the Lord Jesus is the greatest example of love in the history of the world. He left the splendor and perfect holiness of heaven, where He enjoyed unbroken fellowship with the Father. He came to this cruddy, sin-stained world, not as the conquering King, but as a lowly servant. He was obedient to death on the cross

at the hands of sinful men that He could have obliterated, if He had given the command. He did it all to save sinners who deserved His wrath. This new commandment is supremely true in Him.

But John also says that it is *true in you*. If you ask, "How so?" the answer is, "Because you are now in Him." It is true in Him fundamentally and true in you derivatively because of your new relationship with Him. Paul often describes our new relationship as being "in Christ." John uses the term, "abiding" in Him. The glorious truth of the New Testament is that we are joint-heirs with Christ of all His riches (Rom. 8:17; Eph. 1:19-20; 2:6)! So if you are lacking in love for a difficult person, pray, "Lord, You know that I am empty and unable to love this person. But, I am in You and You do not lack love, even for the unlovely. Please love this person through me!" Understanding your new relationship with Jesus Christ is central to practicing biblical love.

D. GROWING IN LOVE FOR OTHERS IS A LIFELONG PROCESS.

John adds (2:8), "... because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining." Primarily, John is referring to the dawning of the gospel through Jesus Christ (see Luke 1:78-79; John 1:9). His coming inaugurated a new era.

But in a secondary sense, what John says here applies to every person who has trusted in Christ. Paul put it (2 Cor. 4:6), "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (See also, Col. 1:12, 13.) Or, as Peter put it (1 Pet. 2:9), God saved us "so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." So becoming a Christian is a radical change from darkness to light, where God opens your blind eyes to see something of the glory of Jesus Christ.

Yet at the same time, there is a process involved that takes time. The darkness does not dissipate instantly, but rather it is gradually dispelled as the true Light of Jesus Christ and God's word shines more and more into your heart. When it comes to the practicalities of learning to live in love, it is a lifelong process. You never arrive at the place where you can say, "I love everyone perfectly now! Let's move on!" Paul put it this way (1 Thess. 4:9-10), "Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, ..." Or, as he prayed for the Philippians, "that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment" (Phil. 1:9).

So, don't be like the husband who grudgingly accompanied his wife to the marriage counselor. She complained to the counselor that he never told her that he loved her. The counselor asked, "Is this true?" The man gruffly responded, "I told her that 25 years ago when we got married, and it hasn't changed!" You've got to work at growing in love on a daily basis for the rest of your life. To love one another is to obey our Lord's commandment.

2. Love is inseparable from the light, just as hatred is inseparable from the darkness (2:9-11).

The phrase, "The one who says," tips us off that John again has the heretics in mind. They claimed to be enlightened, and yet, apparently, they were arrogant and self-centered. They did not love others in a sacrificial way. They were using people to build a following for themselves, rather than building people to follow Christ. So John gets out his black and white paint again, and without mixing them into shades of gray, he shows that these false teachers were not true believers. They do not love; they hate. They are not in the light; they are in the darkness until now (2:9).

But we should not only use John's words to identify false teachers. We should also apply them honestly to our own lives. Sadly, there are many that profess to know Christ, but in their marriages and towards their children they do not practice biblical love. **Many evangelical churches are torn apart by conflict because certain powerful members did not get their own way. Rather than acting in love, they viciously**

attack those who don't agree with them. So John shows that love is inseparable from the light, just as hatred invariably is bound up with darkness. He does not allow for any middle ground, where you can be sort of loving, but sort of cantankerous, too! He makes three points:

A. YOUR PROFESSION OF BEING IN THE LIGHT IS EXPOSED AS FALSE IF YOU HATE YOUR BROTHER (2:9).

You may be thinking, "Hate is a pretty strong word! While I may not *love* that difficult person, I wouldn't say that I *hate* him." But John doesn't let us go there! You either love the other person, which requires sacrificing yourself for that person's highest good, as Jesus did for us on the cross ([John 13:34](#))—or, you hate him.

Writing to a Gentile church situation, Paul contrasts the new way in Christ with the old life before he met Christ ([Titus 3:1-3](#)):

Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

He goes on to talk of how God's kindness and love transformed us through salvation. The point is, no matter how pagan or unloving your background, if you continue in a lifestyle of hate rather than a lifestyle of love, your profession of faith is suspect.

B. IF YOU LOVE YOUR BROTHER, YOU ABIDE IN THE LIGHT AND HAVE NO CAUSE FOR STUMBLING IN YOU (2:10).

Whether "light" should be capitalized (NASB) to represent Christ or whether it refers to the truth of God's Word, I don't know. It doesn't matter in that if you abide in Jesus Christ, you also abide in His Word, which sheds His light into your heart. To abide in the light means to live with your life exposed and open to God's Word. You allow the Word to shine into the dark recesses of your mind, exposing and rooting out what is evil. John says that loving your brother is inseparable from abiding in the light.

If you love your brother and abide in the light, "there is no cause for stumbling" in you. This may mean that you do not cause others to stumble in their walk with God because, out of love for them, you only say and do that which builds them in Christ. Or, it may mean that the person who walks in the light will not stumble himself, because the light illumines his path ([John 11:9-10](#)).

In both senses, walking in love preserves you from sin. Failure to love often leads you into other sins. For example, lust and sexual immorality are serious sins, but both are rooted in a lack of love for others. To lust after a woman is to desire to use her to gratify your desires. It is a failure of love. Or, take the sins of greed, stealing, and murder. They all stem from a failure to love others. Invariably, those who commit these sins love themselves quite well! None of us need to work on loving ourselves, as the "Christian" psychologists repeatedly emphasize. The task is, to love others as we all in fact *do* love ourselves!

C. IF YOU HATE YOUR BROTHER, YOU ARE STILL IN THE DARKNESS, YOU WALK IN THE DARKNESS, AND YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING BECAUSE YOU'RE SPIRITUALLY BLIND (2:11).

I'm not making up these points. I'm merely summarizing each of these verses. The plain meaning of verse 11 is that if you live for yourself with no regard for others, no self-sacrifice or willingness to be inconvenienced to meet others' needs, then you are not saved. John is not talking about occasional lapses into selfishness. We all fail in that at times. Rather, he's talking about a lifestyle ("walks"). The person who lives for himself and is indifferent towards others (which is what hatred means) "does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (2:11). He is spiritually blind, groping through life without the light of God's Word to guide him in God's ways.

I have often counseled with people who profess to know Christ, but their relationships are marked by anger, abusive speech, bitterness, and self-centeredness. Invariably, they don't have a clue as to why they keep experiencing broken relationships. While I do not know their hearts (only God does), their lives do not give evidence that they have experienced the love of God in Jesus Christ. Rather, they seem to be in spiritual darkness, blindly colliding from one broken relationship to the next. They do not practice biblical love, which is an essential mark of every true Christian.

Conclusion

Again, none of us loves perfectly. When we fail, we need to repent and ask forgiveness of the one we wronged. It is a lifelong process of being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. But those who have met Him at the cross will be growing in love for others.

Also, note that love for others is a commandment, not a warm, gushy feeling. That should give you hope, because God's commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3) and God's Spirit gives us the grace and power to obey His commands, which are for our good. *Biblical love is a self-sacrificing, caring commitment that shows itself in seeking the highest good of the one loved.* You can obey the commandment to love others!

So if you're thinking, "But I don't love my mate any more," or, "I just don't like that difficult person," the Bible is clear: Get to work obeying God's commandment to love him or her. It's not optional for the follower of Christ. It's essential!

Application Questions

1. How can a person who grew up in an abusive home learn to love others?
2. What is the relationship between *loving* someone and *liking* him? Are we obligated to like others?
3. Why is the modern psychological advice, "Learn to love yourself," completely misguided? What about someone with "low self-esteem" or someone who is "co-dependent"?
4. How would you advise a couple who claimed that they no longer loved each other? Where do they begin?

[emphasis mine]

The Law of Christ and The Mind of Christ

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