

1 JN. 2:7 – 2:27

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III. 2:7-11 – An old and new commandment

A. Writing an old commandment (2:7) – ⁷*Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word that you have heard.*

1. John has been writing about the Christian obligation to keep God's commandments, and now he narrows the focus to the particular commandment to love one another. That he is referring to that commandment is clear from the fact love is the subject of vv. 9-11, 2 Jn. 5 specifically identifies the "old commandment" as the commandment to love one another, and 3:11 says "For this is the message which we heard from the beginning, that we should love one another."

2. In John's battle with the false teachers, who showed no brotherly concern for the faithful Christians to whom John is writing, he again is appealing to the origin of the command he is binding. The command to love one another is not something he recently dreamed up but is something they had learned from the very beginning of their Christian experience. It was part of the ethical instruction they received from the very start.

B. Yet a new commandment (2:8) – ⁸*Yet I am writing you a new commandment which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light already is shining.*

1. ⁸*Yet I am writing you a new commandment* – While the command to love one another was old in the sense it was a part of the original message they had received, an original ethical requirement, it was in some sense new with Jesus Christ. Jesus said in Jn. 13:34: "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

a. The requirement of love in general was not new with Jesus Christ (see, e.g., Lev. 19:18 – "you shall love your neighbor as yourself").

b. But Jesus enhanced – the content of the command, having invested it with a richer and deeper meaning. In other words, he commanded a qualitatively new kind of love, a love that rested on the example of God's supreme love in Jesus himself.

(1) As Kruse states in his commentary on the Gospel of John (TNTC, 293), "In the OT the Israelites were commanded to love their neighbour as

they loved themselves (Lv. 19:18), but Jesus said to his disciples, *As I have loved you, so you must love one another*. This raised the ante considerably. The measure of love for their neighbour was no longer their love for themselves, but Jesus' love for them." And, of course, Jesus' love for us was one of selfless sacrifice even to the point of death.

(2) In addition, a disciple is to love anyone who needs our compassion and help, regardless of race or rank, even to the point of loving our enemies.

2. *which is true in him and in you* – John says that the newness or difference of this command was a reality in the life of Christ *and* in the lives of John's readers. They were exhibiting true Christian love or "kingdom love." In this they differed markedly from the false teachers.

a. Notice that there is power in Christ to live morally distinctive lives. These Christians, like countless others throughout history and today, were doing it. They were, in the terminology of Mat. 5:16, letting their lights shine in this dark world that others may see their good works and give glory to God.

b. We have allowed the danger of self righteousness to muffle the truth that God transforms lives. We rightly emphasize our continual dependence on the grace of God for salvation, but we must not leave the impression that Christ does nothing to free us from the practice of sin, that the only difference between us and the world is that our sins are forgiven and theirs are not. As Paul says in Rom. 6:17-19, we who once were slaves of sin have been set free and become slaves of righteousness. See also, Rom. 8:1-13, Gal. 5:16-24.

c. When we give the impression to converts that they should not expect a changed life but only a changed standing before God we do them a great disservice. By depriving them of the expectation of God's transforming work in their lives, we cause them to lower their sites and to be content with the status quo. They thus miss a rich blessing of God.

3. *because the darkness is passing away and the true light already is shining* – This realization of Christian love or "new love" in their lives was a result of the passing of the old age or old order of reality. Jesus' coming inaugurated the new age, the kingdom of heaven, but its consummation awaits his second coming. Thus, we presently live in an overlap of ages, a time in which the age to come has broken into this present reality. The presence of "kingdom love" is fruit of that invasion.

C. Obeying "the commandment" as a test of being in the light (vv. 9-11)

1. ⁹*The one who claims to be in the light while hating his brother is still in the darkness.*

a. The false teachers apparently did not believe that their unbrotherly treatment of the orthodox (implied at 3:11-17, 4:20-21) was a sin; as far as

they were concerned, it did not constitute walking in darkness. John specifically rejects that view. Those who "hate" fellow believers, meaning those who do not love them, are in the darkness and, according to 1:6, are lying about having any fellowship with God.

b. John assumes that if a person does not love his brother or sister he hates them. There is no neutral territory. Marshall states (p. 131), "His concept of love is caring for the needs of others, even to the point of self-sacrifice. If I am unwilling to do that for someone in need, I love myself more than him; I am not merely being neutral, but actually am hating him."

c. John's focus on loving fellow Christians is dictated by the circumstances of his letter. He's dealing with the fact the false teachers were not loving the faithful Christians.

2. ¹⁰*The one who loves his brother abides in the light, and in it there is no cause for stumbling.*

a. John states the opposite truth, the other side of the coin: one who loves fellow believers, unlike the false teachers, is in the light.

b. In the light ("it") there are no pitfalls, no traps. There is nothing to cause one to fall short of the blessings given by God in Christ. According to 1:7, the blood of Jesus continually cleanses all who are in the light.

c. The phrase "in it" could be translated "in him," in which case the meaning is that there is nothing in one who is walking in the light that will cause him and/or another to fall into sin.

3. ¹¹*But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.*

a. Repeats the claim of v. 9 but adds the notion of "walking" in darkness because of the reference to the absence of pitfalls or stumbling blocks in the preceding verse. As there are no pitfalls in the light, no threats to one's security, one who walks in darkness does so at one's peril. Danger lurks with each step because one cannot see.

b. John also adds the idea that those in darkness are blind and therefore do not know the way to go. This is aimed at the false teachers who were claiming the role of spiritual guides. They had evolved beyond the orthodox (to the point of having seceded from them) and were apparently claiming deeper insights. According to John, anyone who follows these teachers is following a blind guide!

IV. 2:12-17 – Assurance and warning

A. Assurance of their salvation (vv. 12-14)¹

1. First address (vv. 12-13) – ¹²*I write to you, little children, that to you the sins have been forgiven on account of his name.* ¹³*I write to you, fathers, that you have known the one [who is] from [the] beginning. I write to you, young men, that you have overcome the evil one.*

a. John addresses his readers in terms of three groups: little children, fathers, and young men. From the order it seems likely that "little children" expresses the whole, the entire group of faithful Christians to whom John is writing. "Fathers" and "young men" are two subdivisions of that group (the old and young). Most modern commentators understand the terms in this way. John elsewhere in the letter addresses *all* his readers as "children" or "little children" (2:1, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21), which confirms that it is a collective term.

b. Does *hoti* mean "because" or "that" in this context? In other words, does the *hoti* clause explain why John is writing to his readers or what he is writing to them? The latter seems more consistent with the conclusion that John's audience was demoralized and unsure of their status (so Brown and Kruse). He is writing to assure his children *that* their sins are forgiven, *that* they know the Father, etc.

c. I think John addresses all of his readers in two ways, first with a collective term ("little children") and then by addressing the two groups that were understood to comprise the whole – old and young ("fathers" and "young men"). As Marshall notes (p. 138), there was no category of "middle-aged" in the language of the New Testament times; one was either young or old. This subdivision is, in my view, a rhetorical device through which John emphasizes their security by expressing it in different words. It's as if General Eisenhower wrote to the soldiers who stormed the beaches at Normandy and said: "I say to you *men* that you honored your county; I say to you *officers* that you fought bravely; I say to you *enlisted men* that you won the victory." What he says is true of all, but he divides it up for rhetorical purposes.

d. John says to all of them that their sins have been forgiven on account of Jesus Christ. He says to the older men that they have known Jesus Christ, the one on whose account sins are forgiven. ("The one who is from the beginning" is best understood as a reference to Jesus, see Kruse, 90-91.) He says to the young men that they have overcome the evil one, meaning they have overcome his agenda of death through their relationship with Jesus Christ.

2. Second address (v. 14) – ¹⁴*I write to you, children, that you have known the Father. I write to you, fathers, that you have known the one [who is] from [the] beginning. I write to you, young men, that you are strong and the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one.*

¹ My edition of the ESV has v. 14 begin with "I write to you, fathers" rather than with "I write to you, children."

a. John varies the statement to the "children" and repeats the statements to the fathers and young men, with an addition with regard to the young men. It seems to me he is going out of his way to emphasize their status. He wants no question that they are right with God. As he states in 5:13, he wants his readers to know they have eternal life, despite any suggestions to the contrary from the false teachers.

b. He says to all of them (referred to now as "children" rather than "little children") that they have known the Father, which relationship is through Jesus Christ. He again says to the fathers that they have known Jesus Christ, the one through whom one receives a relationship with the Father. And he again says to the young men that they have overcome the evil one. But he adds that the young men have done so because they are strong, and they are strong because the word of God abides in them. They allowed the message proclaimed by and embodied in Jesus Christ, the message they heard from the beginning (2:24), to remain in them, despite the efforts of the false teachers, and thus maintained their relationship with Christ and thereby overcame the evil one's agenda of death.

c. It is interesting that the verb tense is changed in the repetition (I "write" or "am writing" to I "wrote" or "have written"). Most commentators see this as just a stylistic variation with no substantive difference.

B. Warning not to love "the world" (vv. 15-17)

¹⁵*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* ¹⁶*For all that is in the world – the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world.* ¹⁷*And the world is passing away, also its desire, but the one who does the will of God lives forever.*

1. The command (v. 15a) – ¹⁵*Do not love the world or the things in the world.*

a. This is particularly appropriate in view of the fact the false teachers were "of the world" (4:5). "World" here does not mean the material earth or the people who inhabit it. The word is used in various senses, and often in John it signifies mankind in organized rebellion against God. That's why John refers to Satan as "the prince of the world" (Jn. 12:31, 14:30, 16:11) and says that "the whole world lies in [the power of] the evil one" (1 Jn. 5:19). Kruse writes (p. 94), "There can be no doubt that in the present context ['world'] means 'worldly attitudes or values that are opposed to God' (cf. Jas. 4:4)."

b. "Things in the world" refers to the specific things that embody those attitudes or values that are opposed to God. It is a particularization of "the world."

c. The word "love" has a different shade of meaning here than in 2:10. There it signifies outgoing care and compassion, a concern for the benefit of the

person loved. Here, however, the thought is of the pleasure the person hopes to get from the object of his love; the thought is of appetite and desire (e.g., Jn. 3:19 speaks of people's "love" for darkness; see also, 2 Tim. 4:10).

d. So the exhortation is that we not long for or desire that which is opposed to God. Burge explains (p. 115), "Christians are to avoid an infatuation with worldly godlessness, with the realm of darkness that brings base pleasures."

2. First reason not to love the world: Love for the world is incompatible with love for the Father (v. 15b-16) – *If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* ¹⁶*For all that is in the world – the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world.*

a. If we are engrossed in the outlook and pursuits of the world, it is obvious to John that we have no love for the Father. Jas. 4:4 says the same thing: "friendship with the world is hatred toward God." In Mat. 6:24 Jesus says that no one can serve two masters, and if we can't serve God and money, neither can we love the Father and the world.

b. Verse 16 elaborates on why love for world is incompatible with love for God – the things in the "world" are not from God. There are two opposing camps: the world and the Father. One cannot love the Father while loving what is opposed to him.

c. Examples of things "in the world"

(1) Desire of the flesh - This may refer to cravings for sensual pleasure or to a more general pursuit of a self-centered independence from God, a selfish human desire.

(2) Desire of the eyes - The basic thought is probably of greed and an improper desire for things that is aroused by seeing them.

(3) Pride in possessions - The idea here is one of boasting and pretentiousness, trying to impress people by one's external situation.

(4) It may be that the first is a broad inclusive concept that is filled out by the other two. Selfish human desire is stimulated by what the eye sees and expresses itself in outward show.

(5) Clearly we all need possessions, and it cannot be wrong to want and to take pleasure in what God has provided for our needs (Marshall, 146). What John is condemning is a warped desire for things, a boasting in possessions (allowing things to cut one off from one's fellow humans), and a false belief of self sufficiency. These types of things characterize the sphere of rebellion, i.e., "the world."

3. Second reason not to love the world: The world is doomed (v. 17) –
¹⁷*And the world is passing away, and the desire of it, but the one who does the will of God lives forever.*

a. The world, as both the origin and goal of wrong desire, is passing away, and it is a loser's move to hook one's wagon to that which is expiring. Those who opt for the world will suffer the world's fate, but those who opt for God – described as the one who does the will of God – will receive God's gift of eternal life.

b. Kruse explains the verse this way (p. 96-97):

Because of all that has been set in motion by God through the coming of Jesus Christ, the world is passing away and its days are numbered (cf. 1 Cor 7:31). All that is antithetical to God and his grace is passing away; it is doomed. There is no future in worldliness. While the author says that the world and its desires pass away, he adds, **but the man who does the will of God lives** [lit. 'remains'] **forever**. There will come a time when the world which is passing away will have passed away, but those who do the will of God will not have passed away with it, for they will remain forever.

V. 2:18-25 – Warning against false teachers

A. False teachers are antichrists of "last hour" (vv. 18-19) – ¹⁸*Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, from which we know that it is [the] last hour.* ¹⁹*They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they were of us they would have remained with us. But [this happened] that they might be exposed, for all [of them] are not of us.*

1. John's readers had heard that "antichrist" was coming prior to the consummation of the kingdom of God, prior to Jesus' return when the final, eternal state would be established. This was part of apostolic teaching. In 2 Thess. 2:1-12 Paul speaks of a future coming of "the man of lawlessness," the final opponent of God, whom Jesus will destroy at his second coming. With many commentators and theologians, I believe that is the same figure referred to in Revelation 13 as the beast rising out of the sea. He is a Satan-inspired ruler of a powerful, worldwide, and violently anti-Christian empire who draws people from God through deception.

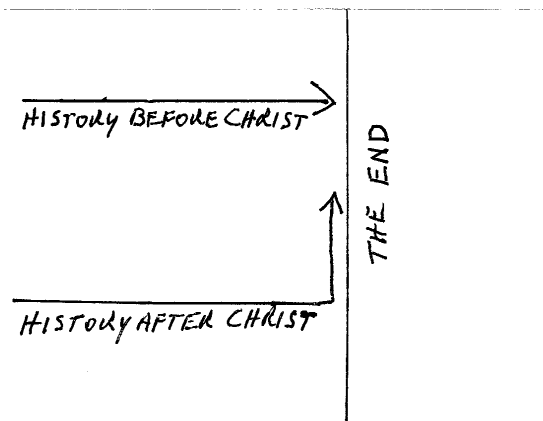
2. John says that *even now*, before the coming of the antichrist they had heard about, that climactic opponent of God, many antichrists (plural) have come. John is referring to the false teachers. They are "antichrists" in the sense they share the spirit of the antichrist (4:3), that spirit that opposes God and his Christ. This is evident from their denial of Jesus as the Christ (2:22; 2 Jn. 7).

3. When John says it is the "last hour," he is not making a statement about the length of time until Christ's return. The last hour is the time of antichrist, and John says

they have entered that time because the spirit of antichrist (4:3) already is present, "Exhibit A" being the false teachers. The "last hour" to John is a theological rather than a chronological category. It is not the moment before Jesus returns but the time when the spirit of the antichrist is at work, a time of unknown duration that will end when Jesus overthrows antichrist himself by the glory of his second coming. Stott writes (p. 113-114):

[John] was expressing a theological truth rather than making a chronological reference. In view of our Lord's clear words about the uncertainty of the day and hour (Mk. 13:32) and of 'times or dates' (Acts 1:7), it is *a priori* most unlikely that the apostles would have presumed to speculate precisely *when* the end would come. John could state on theological grounds that the last hour had struck, but this was not the same as affirming chronologically when the last hour would end.

4. The fact is that since Christ's coming this world has been on the verge of the end. This (poorly drawn) diagram may help you in conceptualize the idea. It's from J. H. Newman, a 19th-century pastor, and was cited in the commentaries by Bruce, Marshall, and Burge. As long as this reality, history as we know it, continues, it does so on the brink of Christ's return and the consummation of all things. However long God in his purposes extends the time since Christ, Christ's coming is ever at our door.



5. Here's how Douglas Moo puts the idea in *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 224:

With the death and resurrection of Jesus and pouring out of the Spirit, the "last days" have been inaugurated. This final age of salvation will find its climax in the return of Christ in glory. But – and here is the crucial point – the length of the age is unknown. Not even Jesus knew how long the "last days" would last (cf. Mark 13:32). What this means is that the return of Christ, as the next event in the salvation-historical timetable, is, from the time of the early church to our own day, "near," or "imminent." Every generation of Christians lives (or should live!) with the consciousness that the *parousia* could occur at any time and that one needs to make decisions and choose values based on that realization. So it was as true in James's day

as it is in ours: we need to *be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.*

6. John clearly identifies these antichrists as the false teachers by stating that "they went out from us." (In 2:26 he specifies he is writing about "those who would deceive you.") Lest this fact of origin be misunderstood as giving the false teachers some legitimacy, John makes clear that the false teachers were not part of the church. They were outside the boundaries of acceptable beliefs; they were heretics.

a. John uses their act of secession to prove this point. By leaving the true church, they demonstrated they were not part of it.

b. John is not concerned here with the doctrine of eternal security. He is not necessarily saying that these false teachers never were part of the church (see Smalley, 103). He just wants his readers to understand that the false teachers are now heretics; they are not a subgroup within the church. He does not want the fact "they went out from us" to mislead anyone into thinking they were an acceptable offshoot. Note v. 19 says their going out made it plain that none of them belongs to (present tense; Gk. "are of") us. See, Heb. 6:4-8, 10:26-31.

B. Readers competent to judge the false teachers (vv. 20-23) – ²⁰*But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know [the truth].* ²¹*I do not write to you because you do not know the truth but because you know it and [know] that every lie is not of the truth.* ²²*Who is the liar except the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This one is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.* ²³*Everyone who denies the Son also does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.*

1. John is confident that they have an adequate standard from which to judge heretics. This confidence is based on several facts:

a. ²⁰*But you have an anointing from the Holy One* – I take this to mean they had received the true gospel from Jesus Christ, the original and authentic message to which John referred in the prologue, and in conjunction therewith, had received the Holy Spirit, through whom they became increasingly aware of what was and was not compatible with the gospel. I see it as a single reference to the "word-Spirit package."

(1) Regarding the "word aspect" of the reference, the anointing abides in them (2:27), and the word of God abides in them (1:10, 2:14, 2:24; Jn. 15:7; 2 Jn. 2). Also, the anointing teaches them (2:27), which is obviously true of the word of God. And as Marshall notes (p. 154-155), the word of God provides an objective basis from which to dispute the false teachers' claims of spiritual illumination. "If it is simply a matter of comparing claims to spiritual illumination, one person's claim may be as good as another's. But if John rests his case on his reader's possession of the objective testimony of the Word of God, handed down in the church, then clearly his case rests on a solid foundation."

(2) Regarding the "Spirit aspect" of the reference, the Spirit abides in the disciples (Jn. 14:17). Also, there is precedent for linking "anointing" with reception of the Spirit (1 Sam. 16:13; Isa. 61:1; Acts 10:38; see also 2 Cor. 1:21-22).

(3) That the two aspects are combined gains plausibility from the fact the distinction between the Spirit and the word is not always sharp. In Jn. 6:63 Jesus says, "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life." Compare Jn. 3:6, "What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit."

(4) As Smalley (echoing others) states (p. 107): "[I]t may well be that (again ambivalently) John is deliberately using the idea of *chrisma* [anointing] to signify *both* the Spirit and the word of God. The faithful, that is to say, are those who have (inwardly) received the gospel of truth, and made it their own *through* the activity of the Spirit (cf. 1 Thess 1:5-6); thereby they possess the antidote to heresy."

b. *and you all know [the truth].* ²¹*I do not write to you because you do not know the truth but because you know it* – This is the flip side of their anointing, their having accepted and internalized the true gospel.

c. *and [know] that every lie is not of the truth* – They are aware that lies are not part of the truth; they are opposed to one another. It's like light and darkness. Therefore, they will not be deceived into thinking that the false teachers, who lie about Jesus, are part of the true church.

2. The doctrine of the false teachers is contrary to what his readers know is true.

a. ²²*Who is the liar except the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ?* The false teachers denied that Jesus is the Christ. This means that they denied that the eternal Christ, the Son of God, actually became the historical person Jesus of Nazareth.

b. *This one is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.* ²³*Everyone who denies the Son also does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father* also – Their denial of the true identity of Jesus was also a denial of God the Father because it was the Father who sent the Son (4:10) and it is the Father who bears testimony to the Son (5:9-10) (Kruse, 106). As a consequence of their denial of Jesus' true identity, their false Christology, they have no relationship with the Father. They are without salvation.

c. John's readers, on the other hand, those who confess the truth about Jesus, are in fellowship with the Father.

C. Exhortation to hold to faith (vv. 24-25) – ²⁴*Let what you heard from the beginning remain in you. If what you heard from the beginning remains in you, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.* ²⁵*And this is the promise which he made to us – eternal life.*

1. If they resist the false teachers and hold to the original message, the message which was first brought to them, they will remain in the Son and in the Father.

2. The result of such faithfulness will be the eternal life which Jesus has promised.

VI. 2:26-27 – Restatement (characterizes, assures, exhorts)

A. Concerning the deceivers (2:26) – ²⁶*I write these things to you concerning the ones who would deceive you* – John now labels the false teachers as "ones who would deceive you." He thus makes clear that the false teachers were pressing their doctrine, posing a threat to the faithful.

B. No need to be taught (2:27a) – ²⁷*As for you, the anointing which you received from him remains in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you* – John assures his readers that they had received the true word of God and, since they were still holding to it, they were not in need of correction from anyone, i.e., from the false teachers. They were not spiritually inferior to these "advanced" thinkers.

C. Remain in him (2:27b) – *But as the same anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it taught you, remain in him* – John urges his readers to adhere to that true, original message delivered to them, just as that message teaches them to do.