

August 6, 2017

Walking in the Light

"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

I John 1:5-10

The Apostle John makes it clear in his first letter that our relationship with God is defined by our obedience to his commands. He writes, ***"We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."***

Ultimately the measure of our relationship with God is found in our obedience to his commands. We tend to translate John's meaning here as broadly as we can so that it encompasses all of those commands that we have deemed most essential. In the churches of Christ we tend to call these commands 'salvational'. I have become convinced that John is, in fact, much more narrow in his focus on our obedience to the 'commands' of God than we might otherwise think.

He continues, ***"Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command, but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining."***

Now, if we were unfamiliar with John's gospel we might not understand what the Apostle is talking about. However, if we know that in John's gospel, chapter 13, verses 34 and 35, Jesus says, ***"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."***, then we will understand John's message. One of the two commands that every Jewish child learned was ***"Love your neighbor as yourself."*** Jesus himself called this one of the two greatest commandments.

But during the last night with his disciples before his death our Master gave us what he calls a ***"new commandment"***. I am convinced that John is playing word game to make his point abundantly clear. If we are claiming to know God the proof will be in our obedience to his commands, especially obedience to the command to love others as we love ourselves, or even more demanding, as Jesus has loved us.



The common trait that will be shared by all true believers will be our capacity to love others. And, this is, in fact, John's conclusion. He says, *"Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him."*

I believe that John is making it quite clear that the real test of our faith, our ability to *"walk in the light"*, is not found in our rules-keeping, but in our capacity to actively love others. Jesus taught us that this would be the mark of our discipleship, and John is underlining that when he writes that anyone claiming to live in the light, while hating others, is a liar.

So, why does this matter so much? If we think about our culture as it now exists I think we will see the importance of John's message. Our society wants us to believe that hating others because they are different is totally acceptable. We are encouraged on all sides to join in this attitude of hatred. But Jesus calls us to a much higher standard.

As his disciples, as those who have chosen to follow him, how we treat others makes all the difference. We cannot claim to be *"in the light"* and join our society in practicing hate; not of anyone and not for any reason. For believers hate is simply not an option.