

Love is *Not* Blind

Letters from John, Part 5

1 John 2:7-11

I have read that in the United States, somebody goes blind every twenty minutes.

There are now 25 million adults in this country, according to the National Federation of the Blind who suffer with significant vision impairment, including total blindness.

For years, before her death, my godly mother-in-law was legally blind as a result of diabetes. My wife still displays in our home the magnifying glass that her mother would use as she held her Bible up close to her face and then, with that magnifying glass, read the Bible.

My wife and I had lunch some time ago with a couple and the wife was learning to manage now that she was legally blind – a condition that had developed from birth.

Some time ago I talked to a man in our church undergoing extensive testing because of the ever impending threat of blindness.

If you and I were told by God to choose a physical disability, I am quite positive that very few would choose to live with eyesight.

According to Letters from John, the Apostle, the Christian makes decisions every day that affects his ability to see; decisions that either allow him to walk in the light, or live in the darkness of self-imposed blindness.

In one of his most confrontational, hard hitting paragraphs yet, in *chapter 2 of 1 John*, he challenges us to leave the shadows behind.

And he begins his hard hitting message with the first word – *verse, 7* – and it's this affectionate term for us all, *beloved*.

Which is sort of like a parent saying, "I'm going to give you a spanking, but it's because I love you."

And the child says, "I wish you didn't love me so much!"

John begins in *verse 7* as the paragraph opens with the word *agapetoi* (αγαπητοι); he'll use it six times in this letter alone.

You immediately recognize the noun form, *agape*, buried in that affectionate title.

It's the Greek word for deep, caring, faithful, self-sacrificing, in-it-for-the-long-haul-committed-love.

Agape isn't fickle or temporary. It isn't driven by emotion, it is determined by the will – and the will then bears the fruit of emotion and affection.

The loss of this *agape*-commitment-love in our culture today is the reason you can now lease a wedding ring one year at a time.

To the average person on the street, love is something as changeable as the weather and as replaceable as a pair of shoes.

And it was no different in the first century; in fact, Seneca, the Roman philosopher who lived during the lifetime of John the Apostle, wrote that Roman women of high society named their passing years by the names of their passing husbands; they came and went with the seasons.

To this day, the world is all about falling in love . . . but they fall out of love as quickly as they fall in love.

That's why God uses a word that doesn't talk about falling in love; He uses a word that talks about choosing to love.

Warren Wiersbe comments on this term here by writing that biblical *agape* isn't about attraction, it's about determination.¹

It's not a matter of working it up . . . it's a matter of willing it out.

And the surprising thing is that this kind of self-sacrificing love isn't just for our spouses and family members, it's for the entire body of Christ and beyond.

So it's no coincidence that as John begins telling us all that we are commanded to love each other – he opens by telling us that he loves us too – and he loves us with this kind of deep affection and fidelity and commitment – expressed in this term, *beloved*.

What is surprising, and I'm sure John's childhood friends thought the same thing, is that John would grow old and affectionate, rather than old and bitter and irritable.

That was John when Jesus called him as one of His disciples.

John was nicknamed early on as a son of thunder, by Jesus, because of his temper (*Mark 3*).

Luke chapter 9 records that John wanted to call down fire from heaven on a village that had refused

to give them shelter for the night – Lord, let’s torch all of ‘em . . . they deserve it!

It was John’s mother who came to Jesus and said, “What can we do to make sure John and his brother James get to sit next to you in the kingdom . . . they want to be at the top of the ladder.”

Fiery, passionate, self-centered, judgmental . . .

But now you read this old Apostles letter and although John is still passionate and fearless and confrontational, he makes sure we all understand, underneath it all is agape . . . he loves us dearly.

With that, he begins to tell us how to make sure we avoid the darkness of hatred and walk in the light of love.

Verse 7. Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard.

In other words, the concept of loving one another is not new stuff.

The truth was, by the time John wrote this letter, the command to love God and one another wasn’t new, but it *was* neglected.

The rabbis had long since started on their vast work of elaborating on the Law of Moses. They scoured the Torah – the first five Books of the Old Testament, written by Moses – and they looked for every command, every mandate, every charge, every prohibition and every rule and from them they created many of their traditions along with their long lists of do’s and don’ts.

For instance, they catalogued 613 commandments from the Old Testament law – which they believed matched the 613 things that made up a human body; they also catalogued 365 negative commandments or prohibitions which they also found significant because that made one prohibition for every day of the year.ⁱⁱ

They loved this stuff.

The problem was – all that stuff replaced love.

John says, effectively – you remember the great commandment – it’s really old – it goes all the way back to the beginning – ***To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind . . . and love your neighbor as yourself (Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19)*** – you guys are praying this every morning and evening.

In all of your lists, have you overlooked the commandment to love?

Well unbury it . . . dust it off . . . it isn’t new . . . it goes all the way back to God’s original design.

So far . . . so good. What John writes makes sense – the commandment to love isn’t new, it’s old.

But then . . . John writes in the very next verse – **verse 8, *On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you.***

Wait a minute . . . I thought it wasn’t *new*?!

Well, the word John uses for “new” here isn’t referring to something new in *time* (kairos); but something new in *quality* (kainos).ⁱⁱⁱ

In other words, John isn’t saying, “Look, here’s something brand new that’s never come along until now; no, John is actually saying, “Look, there’s a brand new quality – a fresh demonstration – of agape/love that is totally unique.”

Notice, he goes on to tell us how – ***middle part of verse 8 – I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him.***

In other words, Jesus Christ has shown us new, fresh quality to love. And He expects us to imitate His demonstration of love in our own demonstrations of self-sacrifice.

That’s how He could say to His disciples, ***“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you.” (John 13:34)***

So, don’t let your list of 613 commandments – your 365 prohibitions and your 248 affirmations – get in the way of *the* most important command of all.

In other words, believer, give your life a fresh slate, every day, and write agape at the top of it and live it out in new and fresh ways as you see the opportunity.

Frankly, the world will not know what to think . . . and the church won’t either.

Many of you know of the rise and fall of televangelist Jim Bakker – convicted of financial miss-dealings and fraud – sentenced to prison where he would serve for a number of years. He as interviewed by Christianity Today years ago after being released from prison. He said that Franklin Graham had visited him and told him that if he ever got out of prison, he and his family wanted to sponsor him with a job and a car. He said, “I thought it over and then told Franklin . . . “Look, if you do this for me, it will hurt your [reputation] . . . your family doesn’t need my baggage.” Franklin insisted. And when Bakker was released from prison, the Grahams paid for his lodging and a car. His first Sunday out, Ruth Graham called the halfway house owned by the Salvation Army and asked permission for Bakker to drive to their church in Montreat, North Carolina and attend services with

them. Bakker said, “They gave me permission, and when I arrived at the church, I was seated with the Graham family – two rows of them – aunts, uncles and cousins were all there. Then, in walked Ruth Graham. She walked down that aisle and sat next to me – inmate 07407-058 – and told the whole world she was my friend.

After church, she invited me up to their cabin for dinner. There in their cabin home, she asked me for some addresses and I pulled this envelope out of my pocket – in prison you’re not allowed to have a wallet, so you just carry an envelope. She asked me, “Don’t you have a wallet?” I said, “Well, yeah, this is my wallet – after years in prison you think an envelope is a wallet. She just got up and walked into another room and then came back and said, “This is one of Billy’s wallets . . . he doesn’t need it . . . here, you can have it.”^{iv}

What a fresh, Christ-like demonstrations of agape love.

Maybe you noticed John’s laser application in *verse 8 – On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him – and we can all say “Amen!” – and, in you.*

And we all say, “Oh my!”

This isn’t just for Jesus . . . it’s for all of us to demonstrate too.

John is actually informing us that this a bigger deal than we might think; we’re not only demonstrating the *love* of Christ, we’re demonstrating the *light* of Christ.

Notice the last part of *verse 8 – because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining.*

Luke’s gospel recorded the prophecy that the coming of Jesus Christ would be the dayspring from on high – in other words, sunrise would take place. *And the light of Christ would shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. (Luke 1:78-79)*

The birth of Christ marked the sunrise of eternal light.

There’s still darkness yet, but as the light of Christ’s gospel spreads, the darkness is replaced with light.

To John, love and light are part of the same gospel – and they should be a part of every believer’s life.

Notice the warning in *verse 9. The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now.*

Now there are some who would like to believe that John is now shifting his perspective to talk about an unbeliever.

I mean, there’s no way a Christian can hate another person.

Oh?

The word John uses here for ‘hate’ simply means to detest – to harbor an underlying attitude that despises someone else and views them as an enemy.^v

Is it possible for a Christian to detest someone in that manner?

Afraid so . . .

The problem with that view is that it isn’t consistent with John’s audience – the beloved – or even in his vocabulary.

He writes, notice again *verse 9, if he hates his brother.*

He doesn’t use the generic term for neighbor or mankind in general; the context doesn’t allow for him to be referring to a biological sibling who has the same parents.

John is referring to someone who has an affinity of character by being members of God’s family by virtue of the new birth.^{vi}

He is actually, specifically talking about *us*.

If we, brothers and sisters in Christ, detest one another, act hatefully toward one another, despise one another; we have virtually gone back into the shadows of the darkness.

And John is effectively saying, Beloved, none of you belong in the shadows . . . get into the Light . . . demonstrate the Light of Christ and the love of Christ.

Get out of the shadows of hatred and unforgiveness and bitterness and jealousy and all those things that belong in the dark.

Corrie ten Boom and her family were caught by the Nazi’s and sent to a prison camp for hiding Jews in their upstairs bedroom. After Corrie’s release and the end of World War II, she traveled to Germany to give her testimony of God’s love and forgiveness. As she stood before that congregation and shared her testimony, she recognized a man sitting in the audience. He was one of the most brutal guards at the Ravensbruck concentration camp where she had been imprisoned; the same concentration camp where her sister had died.

She wrote that it was one thing to talk about God’s love and forgiveness . . . but another thing entirely to demonstrate it yourself.

At the close of the service, much to her dismay, the man came to front and stood in line with others

to meet her. His hat and dark brown overcoat washed over her memory and she could still see him in his black overcoat, wearing his cap with its skull and crossbones emblem. Her blood ran cold.

When his turn came, he came toward her and quietly spoke “I have become a Christian. I have asked God to forgive me for all the cruel things I did in that camp where you were; I have come tonight to ask you to forgive me, too.”

How could she forgive this man, when her sister’s emaciated face seemed to appear and the memory of her cruel death lay an icy hand upon her heart. The former Nazi guard held out his hand, and the seconds seemed like centuries. She writes that the indwelling Christ prompted her response and she reached out her hand and took his. Immediately, warmth, supernatural and sublime flooded her heart and with tears streaming down her cheeks she said, “I forgive you, my *brother*, with all of my heart.”^{vii}

This is what John is talking about . . . this is what it means to leave the shadows of hatred’s darkness behind.

The truth is, although is far less dramatic situations, you face decisions of darkness and light every single day. Will you choose to walk in the shadows or in the sunrise?

Now with that, John provides two timeless principles of truth to live by in the *next 2 verses*.

Life-Principles of Love and Hate

Here’s the first principle:

1. A life of love sheds insight on the path ahead

John writes in *verse 10, The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.*

To *abide in the light* simply means to live in – to walk in – to be at home in – the light.^{viii}

You want to walk in such a way that light is shed on your pathway? Well, here’s a fascinating discovery. John effectively says, Love happens to be the light bulb.

You want insight on the path ahead? Turn on the light bulb of love.

And how bright would you like the light? Well, what kind of light bulb are you burning!

How much wattage is in your love lamp? I know, it sounds like I’m stuck in the 60’s. I didn’t say “lava lamp” I said “love lamp.

How bright is it burning?

John informs us that the brighter your love, the brighter the light for your next few steps ahead.

So, you don’t want to see how *little* love you can demonstrate – do you? You want to see how *much* you can love!

The more love – the more light along the path.

And the more light, the less of a chance of stumbling along the pathway of life.

Moffat translates this phrase, “In the light there is no pitfall.”^{ix}

There’s a body of scholarship that also believes John may be referring to not only avoiding our own stumbling, but helping others avoid stumbling as well, by loving them.

John may very well have both ideas in mind – and both are true. When you love the brethren you avoid so many pitfalls and when you love others you end up helping them avoid the pitfalls as well, right?

When you choosing to see the best in them . . . when you choose to act in love toward them . . . you just might direct their path as well toward something better – more glorifying to God.

Dr. Howard Hendricks passed away not too long ago. He literally touched millions of lives in the believing community and beyond. He taught at Dallas seminary for sixty years to more than 10,000 students. I’m so glad God allowed me to be one of them.

I read the biographical vignettes posted online as I watched his Memorial service online as well.

“Howie” was raised in a broken home where his parents separated soon after he was born. He used to say that he split up the family. His grandmother tried her best to raise him, but he was difficult to say the least. He described himself as a troublemaker during his younger years.

His fifth grade teacher in Philadelphia once commented that Howard Hendricks was the most likely student to end up in prison.

Today a teacher would be sued for doing this, but that same 5th grade teacher on one occasion became so exasperated by his trouble making that she tied him to his seat with a rope and taped his mouth shut.

His troubled heart would radically begin to change when he met his sixth-grade teacher – a teacher who profoundly impacted him with her first words.

At the beginning of his 6th grade year, when he was introduced to Miss Noe, she looked down at him and said, “I’ve heard a lot about you. But I don’t believe a word of it.”

Hendricks would later say, “Those words would change my life.”

Light was shed on his path, saving him perhaps from one pitfall after another, all because a teacher demonstrated grace and love.

One author summed up this verse so well when he wrote, “Love makes us stepping stones instead of stumbling blocks.”^x

A life of love sheds insight on the path ahead.

2. A lack of love diminishes insight on the path ahead

Notice verse 11. But the one who hates his brother (get this, we’re still talking about Christians) – the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Again, John’s use of the present-tense participle translated “*hating his brother*, simply depicts a persistent, characteristic attitude.^{xi}

This person is known for simply being hateful.

John says, this person has chosen to live in the shadows – to turn off the light and walk a dark path.

John even adds, his eyes are blinded – a verb that records the blinding impact of hatred in this person’s heart.^{xii}

Like the corrosive effects of my mother-in-laws diabetes that slowly took her eyesight, John warns here that when a believer allows hatred to simmer and fester inside his heart, he might think he’s none the wiser, but in reality he’s slowly losing his spiritual insight and his path is growing more dangerously dark all the while.

Hate puts curtains on the windows of the soul that would have received insight from God.

With the same courageous confrontational summary, Warren Wiersbe comments on this verse – What happens to a believer when he doesn’t love the brethren? He lives without insight. He thinks he sees better than others, but he’s actually blinded by the darkness of his own hateful spirit. This is the kind of person who causes trouble in Bible studies and church assemblies; he thinks he’s the spiritual giant among them, but he’s actually a spiritual babe, with little understanding or spiritual perception.^{xiii}

Here’s the warning from John . . . in one sentence – Love is not blind; hatred is.

Love doesn’t put on blinders, hatred does. Love doesn’t refuse to see, hatred does.

Love sees . . . love opens the eyes of the heart . . . it pulls back the curtains on the windows of the soul . . . it leaves the shadows behind.

So choose to love . . . you’ll shed insight on your own pathway and the pathways of others who need the wisdom and encouragement of God as much as you do.

I was not surprised to read among the many tributes to the life and ministry of Howard Hendricks a personal tribute from Chuck Swindoll, a man profoundly impacted by Howard Hendricks, who now serves as Chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary.

He wrote, after nearly completing my seminary education – four years of intense study at Dallas – Cynthia and I were almost certain our unborn child would not see life outside the womb. The financial and personal strain of those years was difficult enough without the anguish of potentially losing our child.

I needed a friend to talk to; someone to lovingly care. So, late one evening, after studying in the library until closing, I thought I would find a professor who might put his arm around me and listen; I went to the faculty building and knocked on a door, but no one answered. I walked a little further down the hallway and knocked, but no one answered there either. I saw a light shining underneath another door, so I knocked on that door.

After a moment, a professor I had known for all those years opened his door a crack. “Yes?” he stared at me. “Yes, Chuck, what do you want?” I stood there with tears running down my cheeks and I could hear in his voice he didn’t want to talk to me. I said, “Am I disturbing you?” “Yes, you’re disturbing me – what do you want?” I said, “Nothing. I don’t want anything.”

“Fine,” he said, and closed the door.

The next morning, while still trying to find my way through the maze of emotions and get up on my own feet from my depression and my fears of losing our baby and maybe even losing my wife, I ran into Prof Howard Hendricks. He’d heard the news . . . he walked up to me and put his arms around and said, “Tell me what’s going on.” He listened . . . empathized . . . told me of their own miscarriage years earlier and how he and his wife recovered from that tragedy. From that day forward, I wanted to learn everything he knew, because I knew how much he cared. He then adds, I have learned that people will not care how much you know, until they know how much you care.^{xiv}

I find it fascinating that the Apostle John doesn't warn us that we're in danger of losing our spiritual footing and going back into the shadows if:

- we don't have our Greek grammar down pat.
- we haven't memorized his inspired Epistles.
- we've missed a service or two in recent weeks.

Instead, he says, instead, it boils down the lamp of love. Is your bulb burning brightly?

Let me rephrase the Apostle's main idea with a few questions, as we close our study:

- What pitfalls are you dangerously close to falling into because you're harboring a hateful spirit toward another?

- Who is it in your world who would be greatly encouraged if they knew you cared?
- Who is it that could use your insight to help them regain their footing on the path of light?
- Who is God asking you to selflessly serve today?
- What is God asking you to faithfully commit to all over again?
- Who is God asking you to love today?

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 3/10/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Real: I John (David C. Cook, 1972), p. 56

ii John Phillips, Exploring the Epistles of John (Kregel, 2003), p. 48

iii John MacArthur, 1-3 John (Moody, 2007), p. 64

iv "The Re-Education of Jim Bakker," Christianity Today (12-7-98)

v Life Application Bible Commentary: 1,2 & 3 John (Tyndale House, 1998), p. 37

vi Roy L. Laurin, First John: Life at its Best (Kregel Publications, 1987), p. 62

vii Corrie ten Boom, Tramp for the Lord (Christian Literature Crusade: Revell, 1974), p. 55, adapted from John Phillips, p. 46

viii D. Edmond Hiebert, The Epistles of John (BJU Press, 1991), p. 90

ix Herschel H. Hobbs, The Epistles of John (Thomas Nelson, 1983), p. 52

x Wiersbe, p. 62

xi Hiebert, p. 91

xii Ibid, p. 92

xiii Adapted from Wiersbe, p. 61

xiv Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, Insights on Luke (Zondervan, 2012), p. 280