

LOVE FIRST: 2012 Summer Messages from 1 John

“Back Up Your Claim” 1 John 2:1-8

Intro: How do you tell authentic followers of Jesus from the fake ones? How do you authenticate your faith? How do you back up your claim to know Christ? Love, love, love, love, love, love L-O-V-E!!! You’ve got to tell it, you’ve got to show it, you’ve got to feel it, you’ve got to touch it.

Love you mother, love your brother, love your neighbor, love the stranger, love your enemies. Love is the act which authenticates the gospel in theology and in life.

My father witnessed to a man who came by our house when I was young—12 or 13 years old. The visitor was a Jehovah’s witness. He and my Dad stood in the driveway. I remember my father leaning up against the car fender, talking to this man.

I came into the conversation at the end, as the man was leaving. I remember my father telling him, “When your religious lets you down, come back here and I will tell you more about Jesus. He will never let you down.” That was an occasion when a man with great zeal but limited knowledge came upon my father who had both zeal and knowledge of the Scriptures.

Dad taught us the Scriptures. He did so systematically, faithfully, and intentionally. I literally sat at the feet of my father as he did this. He also taught us occasionally, as circumstances brought things up. His encounter with the Jehovah’s witness was one such occasion which taught me a lesson I have never forgotten: our faith is in Jesus, not a religious system.

John is an elderly gentleman writing an occasional letter. The occasion, as with my father’s witness, concerned false doctrine. John addresses the readers as “My dear children” because he truly feels that way about them—they are his children.

I. Walk in Forgiveness: *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sin* (1 John 1:2).

A. We want to be holy. We want to avoid sin. “I write this to you so that you will not sin (1 John 2:1). But personal holiness is not simply a factor of overcoming temptation.

B. Holiness includes receiving God’s forgiveness.

1. This forgiveness involves the “atoning sacrifice for our sins” which Jesus gave. *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins*, the Bible says (1 Peter 4:8).

“Atonement” is the covering of our sins by the blood of Jesus.

***It snowed in New Orleans back in December. We are all worried that it will cause a hurricane. The last time it snowed was the Christmas before Hurricane Katrina struck. When I told me mother, she commented, “That’s great, David. The snow will cover up all the scars from Katrina.” Snow does that. It falls like a pure white blanket over the mud, leaves, and debris.

2. This forgiveness also involves Jesus speaking for us—being our advocate. Since his blood has covered our sin, we cannot be accused about it anymore.

These two truths—the covering of our sin and the advocacy before the father—are great comforts every day.

C. Forgiveness bathes you and your day with the love of God. If you walk in condemnation, you will not enjoy the love of God and God’s joy will not be complete in you. You will not enjoy the fellowship of other believers or of the Spirit of God because you are not appropriating the forgiving grace of God for your life.

1. John is looking for completed joy (1:4). That joy will only be complete as we live in the reality of God’s forgiveness.

D. Forgiveness identifies you as a child of God. It is his magnificent expression of love for you. The covering which he provides for your sin was bought at great price. It is a waste and an insult to live under sin’s condemnation when Christ has paid so much to liberate you from its guilt.

II. Walk in Obedience: v5. This is an old command which is also the new command that Jesus gave us: *love one another as I have loved you* (John 13:34).

A. It is “new” because loving one another is now defined by the example of Christ dying upon the cross—*as I have loved you*. Any time we are asked to explain love, we can point to the cross. John the Beloved internalized this statement of Jesus in a powerful way. It became the center of his morality and ethics and his way of life. The way that Jesus loved John was just unimaginable to him. Even in his old age he was still astonished by it.

B. It is “new” because loving one another is now explained through Christ’s exposition of the OT law. Everything goes to the heart. Jesus has expanded the law so that external behavior is connected to heart condition. The law intends to get at the heart which is the source of our problem.

C. It is “new” because every day it is a new experience of giving and receiving the divine love.

D. You have ONE COMMAND to obey that will keep you busy the rest of your life and lead you to complete fulfillment of the law and the prophets: *love one another as I have loved you*. Your obedience to that command will indicate the true nature of your faith and the true nature of your heart.

III. Walk in Imitation: *Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did* (1 John 2:6).

A. This call to imitate Christ is all the information you need to fill out the definition of this “new command.” What does it mean to love? It means to walk as Jesus did.

***Thomas a Kempis, “The Imitation of Christ,” is second most popular book ever written, second only to the Bible.

B. The imitation of Christ is a true and useful road to take.

1. “Follow me” is just such an invitation to imitate. Jesus began his ministry by inviting 12 key individuals with these words, “Follow me.” He ended his associations with them on the Sea of Galilee one morning by reiterating to Peter, “Follow me.”

2. The example of Jesus’ life is the stellar revelation of God’s nature on this planet. If we conform our behavior to that which we see in Christ, we will certainly be closer to God’s ideal.

3. This call to walk as Jesus did does not mean that we are all to be First Century single Jewish men. The principles which we draw from the behavior and relationships of Christ are those which apply in all cultures at all times.

C. Jesus said, “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). To really understand the teachings of Jesus you must practice “on the job” training—you must imitate his behavior. It is no good simply to examine and study his life and teachings—you must follow.

D. Any knowledge of Jesus gained without this practice of follow-ship is in danger of being incomplete or warped. Just as you cannot learn carpentry without getting into the workshop, so you cannot learn the way of Christ without implementing a daily walk of imitation. In fact, it is not learning facts and information, including the teachings of Jesus, that makes a person holy and just. It is the practice of those teachings.

I would rather feel contrition than know how to define it. I would rather be humble than know the synonyms of humility. I would rather love my brother than know the three Greek words for love and all their nuances. What good would it do for you to know the whole Bible by heart and still live without love and grace?

1. The inner necessity of “must walk”: If you want the assurance, you must walk as he walked.

2. The outward necessity of “must walk”: If you make the claim to know him, you must walk as he walked.

IV. Walk in Love—*Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble* (1 John 2:10).

A. Love gives you a true perspective on life and the world that comes no other way. If you are not loving your brother, you are not seeing the world rightly. Love is light in a dark world.

Darkness descends upon your life and your world when you stop loving the people around you.

***We are battling such dark spiritual forces in New Orleans. Already this year a young man has killed his two-year-old son. Another man has killed his 73-year-old mother. Just this week three 15-year-olds killed a lady in the French Quarter. The slaughter continues in our city week after week at a rate twice that of any other city in America. We wonder why—why do we have such violence? The answer is this—we do not know Christ and we do not know how to love.

B. You “Remain in him” (from 2:27 and John 15 “abide in the vine”) only as you love your brother. When you hate your brother you are no longer connected to the vine.

C. Love gets rid of the self-destructive tendencies: *there is nothing in him to make him stumble* (1 John 2:10).

***The word “stumble” actually refers to a trap stick—the actual stick that trips the trap. If you love your brother, you will not get trapped because the trap stick is hate. It also refers to an impediment in the way, like a rock, that causes one to stumble.

We have a lot of stumbling going on in our world because we have lost the light of love and the path of love. Our way is filled with impediments and traps.