

“God’s Love Language” (1 John 2:3-11)

What is your love language? How do you give and receive love? It has been suggested that there are five primary ways people perceive love from others.¹ For me, I give and receive love best through words of affirmation. My wife communicates her love to me through acts of service. In our marriage if we had not identified our primary love languages conflict could arise. Here is how: If Lori serves me to death but never tells me how much she loves me I might feel depressed, even slighted. On the other hand, I may tell Lori in colorful expressions just how much she means to me, but if I never lift a finger to help her she may feel my words are empty when they are not backed up by deeds.²

Have you ever considered that God may have a primary “love language?” Is it possible that you have been trying to show God you love Him but have not been speaking His love language? Could it be that intimacy with Him will be difficult to achieve if you don’t learn to speak His love language? I would like to suggest that God *does* have a primary “love language.” His love language is obedience. I realize this doesn’t necessarily fit the categories of “love languages” but it’s not supposed to. God plays by His own rules and makes His own categories. As a result, John, the beloved disciple, will instruct us how to speak God’s love language. He will insist: *To obey God is to love His kids.*

The book of 1 John is a book about how to experience an intimate relationship with God and others. Thus far, John has called this “fellowship” (1:1-2:2). However, now he transitions to discuss knowing God.³ Fellowship with God and knowing God are virtually synonymous.⁴ Both concepts deal with experiencing intimate fellowship with God, not eternal salvation. In 1 John 2:3-11, John will teach us how we can come to know God. In 2:3-6, John will challenge us to...

1. Live a life of obedience (2:3-6). John begins this section with a positive assertion: “**By this** [what follows] **we know that we have come to know Him** [God],⁵ **if we keep His commandments**” (2:3). John comes on so strong that it appears he is telling us that the way we can tell we are born-again is if we keep God’s commandments. In other words, the way to get assurance of one’s salvation is to look at the fruit of your life. If you keep God’s commandments,⁶ you are a Christian and will go to heaven when you die; if you don’t keep His commandments, you are not a Christian and will go to hell when you die. While this may seem like a correct deduction, if we take John’s words at face value and apply them to our salvation, I would dare say that few, if any of us, could be confident that we are going to heaven.

It is important to understand that in 2:3 John begins a new section that begins with a main message or topic sentence. In summary form, John ties knowing God with obedience. However, we need to make sure we know what the word “know” means. In the context of 1 John, “know” refers to experiential knowledge. This means the *quality* of one’s relationship is in view, not the presence of a relationship.⁷ This is a legitimate use of “know” in both Greek and English.⁸

There is a difference between knowing *about* God and knowing God.⁹ Occasionally, a person who has been married for a long time and then gets a divorce will say of his or her spouse, “I never really knew him or her.” Obviously, they knew each other in one sense but their knowledge of one another was not intimate. John’s point is that our personal, experiential knowledge of God will affect the way we live, and the way we live will reveal how well we really know God.¹⁰

So why do we have such a hard time obeying God? We have not really come to *know* Him! In other words, we don’t have a real love relationship with God. If we understood God’s love for us and His character we would obey Him. We would understand He is a good God and He wants what’s best for us. Thus, in order to be obedient from the heart we must trust God. We must become convinced from His character and purposes that obeying Him will fill us with joy like nothing else in this life.

After affirming a positive statement, John turns to a negative assertion in 2:4: **“The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”** Ouch! As usual, John doesn’t mince words. He doesn’t use diplomatic, nuanced language. He’s like a prize fighter who works the body with kidney punches. He is brutal! But please don’t get mad at me, I’m just the mail man. I deliver God’s mail—His message to you and me. So let’s take this on the chin as best we can.

In 2:4, and again in 2:6 and 9, John uses the catch phrase “The one who says.”¹¹ Each claim is followed by three responses. In this pointed verse (2:4), John does not say that the Christian under consideration is mistaken or unaware; he says that he or she is a liar! Furthermore, God’s truth is not him—does not have a controlling influence over his life (cf. 1:8, 10). These are pretty severe words!

Think back to your school days for just a moment. Do you recall ever boasting about your superior knowledge of a particular subject matter? “If there’s one thing I know it’s that I *know* my history lesson.” Then came the exam...and you didn’t fare so well. Why? It’s a simple matter to profess the confidence, but the test always proves the reality.¹² The test of knowing God is lifestyle not conversation—it is the course of your life. Unfortunately, a lot of Christians are long on lip but short on life. They can quote the Bible by the yard, but they live life by the inch. They’ve got a lot of talking religion but no practice. John responds to folks like this and says, “If you want to know if believers know God intimately check out their feet not their lips!”

In 2:5a, John will now contrast (“but”) what he wrote in 2:4: **“But whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected.”** Again, John hits the theme of obedience. He uses the verb “keep” referring to the one who “keeps” God’s Word (cf. 2:3). This word “keep” (*tereo*) means more than to just obey.¹³ The word implies diligence and effort and contains the concept of watching over, guarding, or protecting. It is used of a sentry walking his post. It implies that the enemy is attempting to invade and dominate your life with temptations that will destroy you. To resist him you must be vigilant so as to obey God’s Word. A faithful sentry is not laid back. He is alert and diligent. This word “keep” is also used of a shepherd who watches over his sheep, a banker who guards his treasure, or a fiancé who protects his bride-to-be.¹⁴ Do you have this type of zeal for God’s Word? Are you committed to obeying God’s Word even when it inconveniences you? Are you willing to honor God’s Word when it disagrees with your feelings?

John writes that if we possess this commitment to God’s Word the love of God has truly been “perfected” in us. Now, this could mean our love for God or God’s love for us. Most likely it means both. Since God’s primary love language is obedience, when we obey God our love for Him is perfected. Additionally, when we obey, Jesus tells us that He and His Father will love us. In John 14:21 Jesus said, “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him” (cf. 14:23-24; 15:10).¹⁵ It is certain that John has Jesus’ words in mind as he writes 2:5. His point is simple: Love is “perfected” (i.e., reaches its goal, becomes fully mature and complete) when we obey.¹⁶

John continues his theme in 2:5b-6 with this statement: **“By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”** John’s use of the phrase “in Him” is different from Paul’s phrase “in Christ.” Paul uses this phrase to describe every believer’s relationship to Christ. The saved are “in Christ” while the unsaved are not “in Christ.” However, John uses “in Him” as Jesus did in the Upper Room Discourse to describe only those disciples who abide in Christ (see John 15:1-8). Abiding in Christ is another synonym for having an intimate relationship with Him, as having fellowship with God and knowing God.¹⁷ To abide in Christ means to obey Him and experience fellowship.

Listen to Jesus' words in the gospel of John 15:9-11: "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full." Notice the close connection with abiding, love, and full joy. This should remind us of the stated purpose of 1 John: fellowship and full joy (1:3-4).

This past week, I read about an amazing phenomenon: blind people who enjoy skiing. How do they do it? They wear bright colored vests, stay directly behind an instructor, and listen for directions on how and when to turn. If these blind skiers simply listen to their instructor and follow the directions they will make it safely down the mountain. Remaining, or abiding, in Jesus means following Him in the same way.¹⁸

John says that the believer who abides in Christ "ought" to walk as Jesus walked. The word "ought" is significant.¹⁹ Slaves *must* follow the commandments of their masters or they will be punished. Employees *need* to do their work to keep their jobs. However, the Christian as a child of God *ought* to obey God because of a sincere desire to do so.²⁰ Thus, the natural response in the Christian life ought to be gratitude to God for who He is and what He has done. Is your natural response to God to love His kids? If so, you understand God's love for you.

To walk as Jesus walked means that our lives ought to be characterized by daily dependence on God, submission to Him, and obedience to His will. Our overall aim in life will be to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Matt 6:33). We will seek to please Him by our thoughts, words, and deeds (1 Thess 4:1). While we will never perfectly walk as Jesus walked, it should be our constant aim and effort to do so. Now I must say that walking is not as spectacular or swift as running, leaping, or flying, but it is a steady, sure movement in one direction. It implies progress toward a destination or goal. A walk is made up of many specific steps, but it points to the overall tenor or general quality of a life, not to any one step.

I know many believers who don't seem to be on-fire for God. They never seem to get very excited. It's easy for those of us who tend to be more exuberant to look down on the lack of enthusiasm of these believers. But they faithfully move forward one step at a time, while many of us who are hot for Christ often have the tendency to grow cold. Therefore, it is often the turtle who wins the Christian race and not the hare! "Slow and steady wins the race." Are you committed to walking out your spiritual life? Are you willing to give up the flashy fanfare and simply walk? Will you set goals that are realistic and achievable? If so, you will be more prone to persevere in your faith.

This past week, one of my mentors sent me a video of a man walking on water through a swimming pool. It is rather convincing when you view it on your computer. The crowd that gathered was amazed at what this man was able to do. Of course, there was some mirror trickery going on. While it was entertaining, I was reminded that most of us have a vision for the impressive feats of Jesus' public ministry (e.g., the authoritative preaching, the healings, the walking on water). However, what we fail to recognize is this only constitutes three years of Jesus' earthly life. The other thirty years were spent working as a carpenter and living His life with His family. When John speaks of "walking as Jesus walked," he's referring to faithful obedience in the small duties of life, particularly in loving others in our sphere of influence.

One of the greatest novels ever written is *In His Steps* by Charles Sheldon.²¹ The whole thrust of the book is simply this: A group of people in a church began to try to do what they thought Jesus would do in every situation. It changes their lives and the life of their church. This can happen in our church and any other church. The Christian life is rather simple; we are the ones who complicate it. God wants us to love Him and love others. Remember, *to obey God is to love His kids*.

[If we truly want to know God in the here and now we must live a life of obedience. This life of obedience is made manifest when we fulfill 2:7-11 where John coaches us to...]

2. Live a life of love (2:7-11). In 2:7-8, John explains what he means by keeping God's commandments: **"Beloved,²² 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. On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining."**²³ Four times in 2:7 and 8, John refers to a specific "commandment." What commandment does John have in mind? It is here that John seems to take us on a wild goose chase. In 2:7, John says that it is not a "new commandment"; rather it is an "old commandment." Then in the very next verse (2:8), John comes back and says, "I am writing a new commandment to you." What's going on here?

John can say that the love commandment is "old" because it dates back 1400 years to Lev 19:18 where God said, "...you shall love your neighbor as yourself..." In John 13:34-35, Jesus followed up these ancient words by saying, "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." Jesus called the love commandment "new" (*kainos*: "fresh") in the sense that it sets a new standard. It raises the bar for love. The new standard for love is embodied in the phrase, "even as I have loved you." That's the new part. Jesus is not just saying, "Love your neighbor as yourself." He's saying, "Love one another *as I have loved you*." That's new.²⁴

Please notice a very crucial phrase in 2:8: "On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you..." Because the Christian has been rescued from darkness he or she possesses a new supernatural ability to love. Those people we think we are not capable of loving we can love. The truth is—we must love these people. For this is how all men will know that we are Christ's disciples. As Francis Schaeffer said, "Love is the mark of the Christian."

In 2:9, John now contrasts love with its counterpart: hate. John writes, **"The one who says he is in the Light²⁵ and yet hates²⁶ his brother is in the darkness until now."** Again, it is not our claims but our conduct that reveals our character. There are a lot of Christians who can "talk the talk," but only those who "walk the walk" experience God's light in this life. John informs us that genuine Christians can indeed hate fellow believers.²⁷ The question is: What does the word "hate" mean?

The Greek word for "hate" (*miseo*) can mean pretty much the same thing as the English word does. But it can also mean something else—something that does not really convey strongly negative emotions at all. *Miseo* can mean to "disregard"²⁸ or "to slight" or to express "indifference."²⁹ This is not a negatively-charged, emotional hatred. This is a hatred that simply chooses to regard others as relatively unimportant. It's a hatred that overlooks people because we're so focused on ourselves. John uses hate as the contrasting opposite of agape love.³⁰ Agape love is not an emotion. It's a decision. It's choosing to disregard ourselves purely for the benefit of others. So, if agape love is not an emotion but a choice then its opposite cannot be an emotion; it must also be a choice. Therefore, the logical opposite of agape love is choosing to disregard others purely for the benefit of ourselves. To hate, then, is to fail to love in a higher way. That's the hate John is talking about.³¹

However, I must add that "hate" can intensify into actions even more damaging. Many Christians live with an unforgiving spirit. They refuse to extend forgiveness to those who have sinned against them or who they perceive have sinned against them. Some Christians will take vengeance on other Christians. This typically manifests itself in passive-aggressive behavior. She hurt me so I won't take out the trash, help with the dishes, or give her any verbal or physical affection. These behaviors can result in a root of bitterness which can defile many of those around us and keep us from enjoying the forgiving grace of God (Heb 12:15). Maybe your bitterness comes from your parents or a pastor. God longs for you to release your bitterness and lay it at the foot of the cross.

In 2:10, John offers the positive side of the equation: **“The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling³² in him.”** If we love our brothers and sisters we will experience fellowship with God and we will make forward progress in our spiritual lives. Elsewhere, the apostle Peter writes, “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet 4:8). If we want grace in our Christian experience, love God’s people.

Yesterday afternoon, Neil and Karla Shaw came over to our house and constructed a fort for my children. They had a busy weekend planned and a long to-do list to accomplish, but instead they invested their time and energy in me and my family. They showed us practical Christian love. They also did the one thing that every parent appreciates the most—they loved my kids. John would have been proud. After all, he said, *“To obey God is to love His kids.”*

This is just one example. Perhaps we could show Christ’s love by reaching out to someone we don’t know, or by sharing a meal, or by listening intently, or by praying for someone, or by writing a note, or by complimenting something you admire, or by writing a check, or by being a mentor, or by volunteering your time, or by visiting someone who’s sick, or by checking in on a single mom to see if she could use a break from the kids. Are you willing to ask God how He wants you to love His kids?

Now, you may be saying to yourself, “I don’t really like people.” Most of us can relate. We love to joke, “I love mankind; its *people* I can’t stand!” Love in the abstract is a cinch; it is trying to love that irritating person that I rub shoulders with that is not easy. To complicate matters many Christians can be the hardest people to love. Nevertheless, these are people for whom Christ died, and we will be spending eternity with them. It is imperative that we foster a love for our fellow, spiritual family members.

John closes out this section in 2:11 with these words: **“But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going³³ because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”³⁴** The hater’s sin affects him in three ways. (1) It places him in darkness outside God’s fellowship. (2) It leads to aimless activity in which he is in great spiritual danger and in which there is the possibility of a fall. (3) It also results in mental confusion (cf. John 12:35). The Christian who hates his brother loses his sense of spiritual direction in life, partially or totally. No course of life is more dangerous for a Christian than one that includes hatred toward another believer.³⁵

When we display a lack of love it seriously distorts our outlook and gradually blinds our vision. Slowly but surely we begin to feel at home in the dark. The tragedy is we become used to groping our way through life, constantly stumbling and being ensnared by all kinds of problems. Such people are often blissfully unaware of how dark it really is and how short-sighted they have become (see 2 Pet 1:9). If we keep an animal underground for long enough, eventually it loses its sight. If you take a flower and put it in the dark it will shrivel. If you lived in the darkness you would eventually go blind. How much more so is this true of our inner person? Take a soul and let it live in the darkness of hate and that soul will become ugly, drab, and dull.

Earlier this month, I went to the eye doctor. As the eye doctor walked me through a battery of tests I became very disturbed because I could not read some of the lines that he asked me to read. Yet, he kept saying, “You can read that line. Just take your time. No, those are not numbers...they are all letters.” This guy worked me over. The harder I tried the less I could see. I began to wonder if I was losing my sight. It was a terrible thing. I was a bit apprehensive because my eyes mean everything to me. They are my most valuable physical feature. It turned out that the doctor was just pushing me. I still have my physical vision. Now, as valuable as physical vision is how much more important is spiritual 20/20? If we want spiritual 20/20 we must live a life of obedience and love. For John says, *“To obey God is to love His kids.”*

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Scripture Reading

1 John 2:3-11

John 13:34-35

Leviticus 19:18

Matthew 22:39

1 Corinthians 13

Romans 5:8

Philippians 2:3-8

Study Questions

1. John tells us that we are to “keep” God’s commandments/Word (2:3, 5). How do I actively and consciously “keep” God’s Word? Can I honestly say that I am serious about the Bible? Do I make an effort to know what the Bible says and to apply it to my life? Read James 1:21-27. On a scale of 1 to 10 (ten being consistently faithful), what is my obedience/application quotient? In what area of my life have I been holding back obedience from God? How can I begin to obey God in this one area today? How can we emphasize obedience to God’s commandments/Word without falling into legalism? Why is a little knowledge *of* God better than a great deal of knowledge *about* Him (cf. John 17:3)?
2. In my personal fellowship with God, what does it mean to “walk as Jesus walked” (2:6)? In my corporate church fellowship, what does it mean to “walk as Jesus walked?” How can I help myself, my family, my friends, and my fellow church members walk as Jesus walked? Who am I currently providing spiritual encouragement to? Am I striving to impact my peers and encourage younger Christians? If so, give specific examples.
3. John tells us that we must love our brothers and sisters in Christ (2:7-11). What is the relationship between *loving* someone and *liking* him? Is this just a semantic debate? Are we obligated to like others? If we do not “like” others, what should our course of action be?
4. Who was the first person I remember loving (other than immediate family)? What made that person special? How would I advise a couple who claimed that they no longer loved each other? Where do they begin? Is there someone that I am currently having a difficult time loving? What steps do I need to take to establish an attitude of love toward this person?
5. John warns believers that the one who hates his or her brother walks in the darkness (2:9, 11). When have I hated someone? How did I justify my hatred? What impact did that hatred have on me (physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually)? How can I prevent this from happening again? How can I ensure that people at Emmanuel are not guilty of this behavior?

Notes

¹ Author and marriage counselor Gary Chapman has suggested that husbands and wives have five general ways in which they perceive love from their spouse: 1) Words of Affection; 2) Quality Time; 3) Receiving Gifts; 4) Acts of Service; and 5) Physical Touch. Usually one of these “love languages” is primary for a husband or wife. Unfortunately, mates usually don’t have the same “love language.” See Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages* (Chicago: Northfield, 1992).

² The idea for this introduction came from David R. Anderson, “*Simul 1 John—Relationship or Fellowship*,” Unpublished notes.

³ John’s approach has moved from a spiritual defense to a spiritual offense. In our previous passage (1 John 1:5-2:2), John said, “Don’t deny the darkness.” Instead, he said, “Let Jesus wash our feet.” In today’s passage (2:3-11), John will say, “Walk in the light and let Jesus direct our feet.” Brad McCoy, “Spiritual Stall Recovery: Allowing Jesus to Wash Our Feet” (1 John 1:8-10). Unpublished sermon notes from Tanglewood Bible Fellowship (3/10/96).

⁴ Glenn W. Barker, “1 John,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981 [2001]), Electronic Ed.; Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God’s Love* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 75-77; Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John* WBC series (Waco: Word, 1984), 45. Constable notes, “‘Fellowship’ (Gr. *koinonia*) is the less common term occurring only four times in 1 John: 1:3 (twice), 6, 7. ‘Know’ is more common. *Ginosko* (to know experientially) appears 24 times: 2:3, 4, 5, 13 (twice), 14, 18, 29; 3:1 (twice), 6, 16, 19, 20, 24; 4:2, 6 (twice), 7, 8, 13, 16; 5:2, 20. *Oida* (intellectual knowledge) appears 15 times: 2:11, 20, 21 (twice), 29; 3:2, 5, 14, 15; 5:13, 15 (twice), 18, 19, 20. The noun *ginosis* (experiential knowledge) is absent from this epistle.” Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on 1 John* (<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/1john.pdf>, 2006), 15 note 58.

⁵ Harris writes, “There is some problem determining whether the pronouns in v. 3 (“him” [appearing as *God* in the NET Bible] and *his*) refer to God the Father or to Jesus Christ. More likely the author of 1 John refers to God the Father here. All the claims of the opponents which the author introduces in 1:5-2:11 concern knowing and having fellowship with the God who is light (compare 2:8-9 with 1:5). Also, when John wants to specify a reference to Jesus, he uses the expression ‘that one’ (translated by the NET Bible as *Jesus* in v. 6 below). The author’s point in this verse is that obedience to God’s *commandments* gives us assurance *that we have come to know God*. (The author explains what the commandments are in 1 John 3:23.) See W. Hall Harris III, “Exegetical Commentary on 1 John 2:3-11,” *1, 2, 3 John: Comfort and Counsel for a Church in Crisis*: http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=2063.

⁶ God’s commands are spelled out later in 1 John (see 2:7-11; 3:23).

⁷ John says everyone who loves God is born of God and knows God (1 John 4:7). Yet, in 4:8 John goes on to say that not to love God does not mean that a person is not born of God, only that he or she does not *know* God.

⁸ A great example of this is found in John 14:7-9. After announcing that He is “the way, the truth, and the life,” Jesus goes on to say to all His disciples, “‘If you [plural] had *known* Me, you [plural] would have *known* My Father also; from now on you [plural] know Him, and have seen Him.’ Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been so long with you [plural], and yet you [singular] have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” See also Hodges, *The Epistles of John*, 76.

⁹ See J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 20-22.

¹⁰ It is also worth noting that John switches Greek tenses in 2:3. The first use of “know” is in the present tense (*ginoskomen*); but the second use of “know” is in the perfect tense (*egnokamen*). The perfect tense in the Greek language has the basic meaning of “completed action in the past with present results.” But, according to its use in context, a typical verb can put its emphasis on the completed action in the past *or* on the present results. If we miss this deliberate shift on John’s part, we miss his intent for the verse. So putting it into the perfect tense means “to know intensely,” “to experience deeply,” “to know fully.” It is not a test of whether a person is born again; it is a test of whether a person is having close fellowship with God. We could translate 2:3 in this way: “And by this we *know* that we *know* Him *intensely*.” See also Anderson, “*Simul 1 John—Relationship or Fellowship*.”

¹¹ This phrase is similar to the three conditional clauses in the previous section (“if we say,” 1:6, 1:8, 1:10). These phrases are spoken by John and the apostles but *may* indirectly reflect the claims of the opponents.

¹² Adapted from Paul R. Van Gorder, *In the Family: Studies in First John* (Grand Rapids: RBC, 1978), 58.

¹³ Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John: Anchor Bible series* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982), 252.

¹⁴ Anderson, “*Simul 1 John—Relationship or Fellowship*.”

¹⁵ It has been said, “The book of 1 John is the flower that grows out of the soil of John 13-16.”

¹⁶ The Greek verb *teleioo* (“perfected”) comes from the adjective *teleios*, “having reached its end” (*telos*), and so “complete” or “perfect.” Here we may use “perfected” (NASB, KJV) or “made complete” (NIV).

¹⁷ John uses the word translated “abide” (*meno*) 24 times in 1 John (see 2:6, 10, 14, 17, 19, 24 [thrice], 27 [twice], 28; 3:6, 9, 14, 15, 17, 24 [twice]; 4:12, 13, 15, 16 [thrice]).

¹⁸ The idea for this sermon illustration came from Steve Winger, Lubbock, Texas. *Leadership*, Vol. 15, no. 2.

¹⁹ Gk. *opheilo*: See also 1 John 3:16; 4:11; and 3 John 8; cf. John 13:14. The word “ought” (*opheilei*) expresses a special, personal obligation, and not as *dei must*, an obligation in the nature of things. See Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament Vol. II* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, No date), 329. Gk. *opheilo*: See also 1 John 3:16; 4:11; and 3 John 8; cf. John 13:14.

²⁰ Earl Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen, H. Wayne House, eds. *New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Nelson, 1999), 1708.

²¹ *In His Steps* was written by Charles M. Sheldon and is available in numerous versions. See www.addall.com.

²² This is the first instance of the term “beloved” (*agapetoi*) in John’s letters. However, it is used in 1 John 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7; 3 John 1, 2, 5, 11).

²³ The concept of “light” (contrasted with “darkness”) introduced in 1:5 appears again (for the last time in 1 John) in 2:8-11.

²⁴ John Stott suggests four ways that this “old” commandment became “new” when Jesus issued it.

- 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.
- It was new in its *quality*, in that His own self-sacrifice on the cross became the standard.
- 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.
- 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.

See John R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John*: TNTC series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 93.

²⁵ Whether “light” should be capitalized (NASB) to represent Christ or whether it refers to the truth of God’s Word is not a critical issue. 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.

²⁶ The word “hate” is a present tense participle (2:9, 11) suggesting ongoing activity.

²⁷ If the Bible taught that feelings of hatred were a sure sign of an unsaved condition, then virtually no one in the whole church would be saved! But the Bible does not teach this. Hodges, *The Epistles of John*, 87.

²⁸ BDAG, Electronic Ed.

²⁹ Thayer, Electronic Ed.

³⁰ Hate is the absence of the deeds of love. Love unexpressed is not love at all. Love has no neutral capabilities. When it is absent, hate is present. Barker, *1 John*, 317.

³¹ Bob Kerrey, “How to Experience God More Fully: Loving One Another” (1 John 2:7-11):

http://www.moonvalleybible.org/sermons/2004-12-05_1_John_02_07-11_Transcript_Love.doc.

³² Burge writes, “. . . the Greek literally says, ‘*stumbling* [*skandalon*] is not in *him/it*.’ The original is ambiguous on two counts: (1) The pronoun can refer to the believer (“him”) or to the light (“it”) — the grammar works perfectly either way; (2) the stumbling may refer to the believer’s falling down (thus the NIV and many commentators), or it may mean that there is nothing in the believer that will cause *others* to fall down. A *skandalon* is a trap or an object that makes one trip. Metaphorically, it is something that causes one’s demise or downfall. Smalley 62 argues convincingly that in most New Testament uses, the *skandalon* word group refers to something that causes *others* to trip (Rom. 14:13; 1 Peter 2:8; Rev. 2:14). The verbal form of *skandalon* carries this meaning in the Fourth Gospel (John 6:61; 16:1). If this is the correct interpretation of verse 10, John may have in mind *Christian misbehavior* that may drive more people out of the church. Therefore, a better translation might be, ‘There is nothing in him to cause anyone to stumble.’ Naturally, such a warning would apply to the believer as well, but John has chiefly in mind indignant, persistent attitudes of anger that might widen the fissure already splitting the church.” Gary M. Burge, *The Letters of John*: NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 102. Nevertheless, the following verse (2:11) views darkness as operative within a person, and the analogy with Ps 119:165, which says that the person who loves God’s law does not stumble, expresses a similar concept in relation to an individual. This evidence suggests that the person is the referent here.

³³ The particular verb translated “going” literally means “to leave someone’s presence.” John is saying that when we fail to love one another, we are in fact running from the presence of God, and we can’t see where we’re going. It’s like driving fast in total darkness with no headlights. It’s like running in the dark through an unfamiliar home full of furniture. Stumbling and harm are bound to happen. See BDAG, Electronic Ed.

³⁴ So what about those who claim to “know Christ” but have no desire to obey His Word or hate other Christians? They may be classified in one of three ways:

- *A non-Christian*: An unregenerate person who is simply confused about salvation. Often these people were raised in the church or have been exposed to religion and are not truly saved because they are depending on their works, not Christ. They have never believed in Jesus (1 John 5:11-13).
- *A carnal Christian*: A regenerate person who has a baby’s attitude because he or she is so new in the faith (1 Cor 3:1). Or their flesh rather than the Spirit is controlling them, they are flesh dominated.
- *A tare*: An unregenerate person planted by Satan to disrupt the work of the church. Tares closely resemble wheat, but are poisonous to human beings. Until Christ returns, both genuine believers and counterfeits will be allowed to grow together (Matt 13:24-30).

These categories come from Ed Underwood, “Living in Fellowship with God” (1 John 1:5-2:11): Unpublished Study Notes from Cannon Beach Christian Conference Center 2005.

³⁵ Constable, *Notes on 1 John*, 19.