

Kampala International Church, 31st July 2011

Text: 1John 2:7-17

Theme: The New/Old Commandment

Jewish stories often combine wisdom with humor.

Two brothers went to their rabbi to settle a longstanding disagreement. The rabbi got the two to reconcile their differences and shake hands. As they were about to leave, he asked each one to make a wish for the other in honor of the Jewish New Year. The first brother turned to the other and said, "I wish you what you wish me." At that, the second brother threw up his hands and said, "See, Rabbi, he's starting up again!"

[introduction]

We all know that it is not always easy to love your brother or sister. There can be lots of reasons to ignore, avoid or even hate a brother in Christ but that is not an option according to the apostle John. His is giving us an old but also new command to love one another. That is more easily said than done. How can I love that irritating person in my home group who is drawing attention to himself all the time? And how can I respect that sister that is really making a mess of her life? Well, we need to ask John for the answer. Where is the magic key? How can I do this? Where do I find the will and the strength?

Because it is important to be a 'new commandment church', a church that is known for the love among its members. Jesus said in John 13: By this (by loving one another) all men will know that you are my disciples... So us loving one another will be known by the world out there.

The apostle John also talks about 'the world' in our passage this morning and he seems pretty negative about the world. Since we are called to show our love to the world, how can we do it if we have to keep our distance from the world? At least that is what 1John seems to say, isn't it?

So let us look at these 2 points this morning:

- 1. A new command that is actually not so new**
- 2. A love-hate relationship with the world**

[about 1John]

First a few general things about John's 1st letter. John wants to protect and warn his readers against false teaching. There were people denying that **Jesus** was truly man and truly God at the same time. But if that is true, then He could not have been an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. It is important what you believe.

The false teachers had also redefined **sin** as something which seems wrong to some people but it is not really wrong because it is just a matter of perspective! If this doesn't make sense to you, that's okay, because it doesn't make sense. Simply

don't sin, says John and walk as Jesus did.

The third issue is **love**. Love is a key feature in christian faith. God loves us and we love others. False teachers suggested that love is all about fuzzy feelings and it has not much to do with how you behave or how you relate to other people. John is not the person that does politically correct language: he calls these false teachers 'deceivers' and even 'antichrists'.

John also wants to make sure we are really understanding what he is saying, so he is revisiting these issues several times in the letter. So that you don't miss it.

This morning's passage we can divide in 3 parts:

Vs 7-11 – about the new/old command & about light and darkness

Vs 12-14 – he is addressing children, fathers and young people

Vs 15-17 – our relationship with the world

I will only talk about the first and the last part.

Our 1st point: A new command that is actually not so new

It seems like John is playing a word game: I am writing you **not** a **new** command, but an **old** one. **Yet** it is new! Okay John, we give up: what is it, old or new? He is using this kind of style to make clear that it is both true: it is an old commandment but it is also kind of new.

He was doing a similar thing talking about sin earlier: if we claim to be without sin; I don't want you to sin; but if you do sin...

What is the command that John talks about? It is not explicitly mentioned. But vs. 9-11 is about love so we can safely say that he is referring to the command to love one another (2John 5). This command is not new: they have had it since the beginning, since they first heard about the Gospel of Jesus. And it is also something that was written in the OT: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul & strength (Deut 6) and "love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). Nothing new.

But does it work? Are we able to love one another? We have seen the story of Cain & Able repeated over and over again through history. Also in the church we are not always setting the right standard. I came across a link to a website with *SGM-leaks*: a document of 600 pages (!) about years of arguments and disagreements between leaders within Sovereign Grace Ministries, a large denomination in het USA. So much time was spent on trying to get along, hours that were not spent on the core business of the church: sharing God's love. Don't look this story up, you'll get depressed.

So we are in need of something new, since the old command has limited power. What is the new thing here, John? Well, we need to dive into the Greek to discover that. In Greek you have two different words which we translate as 'new': *neos* and *kainos*. In English we just say 'new' for both but in some situations in the NT these words have a different connotation or meaning. *Neos* is something that is new like it has not been there before. I could say: I saw a *neos* type Toyota in the showroom at the car dealer. It is a car that wasn't there before, it is a new model. But if I buy a second hand care that has been refurbished, I can say: I bought a *kainos* Toyota. It is a used car, but since it has been fixed and refurbished, it is as a new car.

In our passage John talks about a *kainos* commandment. It is not *neos* because the command to love God and your neighbour had been given before. But it is new because of Jesus. In John 13:34 Jesus says: "As I have loved you, so you must love one another". Jesus gives the old command a new quality, that is *kainos*. Bible teacher **John Stott** says: "A disciple was to love others not just as he loved himself but in the same measure as Christ had loved him, with selfless self-sacrifice even unto death". I want to quote John Stott this morning. He passed away this week at the age of 90 and is now with the Lord. We pay tribute to a inspiring theologian and a humble servant of God.

Only because of Jesus, we can do this command and love one another. And that is also the key to fulfilling this command. Without Jesus, we would only think about our ourselves. But because of the love of Jesus we can love our brother and sister. I am not saying it is easy but it is necessary. And we in KIC are given a wonderful challenge to show the world that we love one another, even though we are from very different backgrounds and nationalities. Now is the time to practice and exercise that love for one another. And in the future – that future has already started in Christ – we will enjoy that love together in a *kainos* heaven and a *kainos* earth.

Our love for one another will be known to people around us. I read about a cathedral where there were 3 stained glass windows with symbols for faith, hope and love. When you are *inside*, you see from right to left that order. But if you are *outside* the church: you see from r-to-l: love, hope and faith. Others will know whether we love one another, as Jesus has loved us.

Our 2nd point: A love-hate relationship with the world

Reading vs 15-17, John seems to be very negative about the world and anything in it. If you read these verses in isolation you would think we would have to withdraw from this world. This kind of interpretation leads to this story that one of my students in S-Sudan told me. Her brother came to visit and several ladies were preparing a big meal. Then her brother said: Give me a list with the names of those

ladies preparing the food so I can see if there are any sinners among them. If there are, I won't eat the food. The sister replied: Add my name to your list of sinners!

John can't be saying that we must hide behind castle walls and start a christian ghetto. The most well know verse in the Bible is John 3:16, for God so loved the world... But here in 1John we are told *not* to love the world. The answer is that the NT uses the term 'world' in different ways: sometimes it refers to humankind (like in John 3:16) and sometimes to human culture as influenced by Satan (like in 1John). John tells us not to love the system of values, priorities, and beliefs that excludes God. That is opposite to the love of the Father. Also the world-without-God will pass away, it has no future. We want to be people that do the will of God, people of the light, people with a future.

What does that mean for us? I think we should have a love-hate relationship with the world. We are *in* the world, but not *of* the world. We love people, we love sinners, because they are created and loved by God and we hate sin, we hate pride, we hate injustice. That is not an easy position to be in. It is easier to lean to one side. Either we stay in a warm and friendly christian environment most of the time or we blend in with the world and forget about our calling to be light in the darkness. We need to help each other finding the right balance and remind ourselves again and again that we are called to be light in this world, reflecting the light of Christ.

That requires the church to be in the world and at the same time to go against culture if needed. We need to model love where there is hate, honesty where people do bribes, faithfulness in situations where marriages break down. Then we do the will of God and are we showing Kingdom values to a broken world. An african proverb says: 'When deeds speak, words are nothing'. The apostle is not too impressed with words only, we must show that we are different from the world in what we do.

I have worked in a BT project in Ethiopia. In the language group where we were working there was a despised social class of people who were making pottery. Worse was that they were eating monkey meat! They were treated as outcasts and so called 'normal' people would never share a meal with them. It was quite a challenge to the young church when a number of these lower class people became christian. How would the majority treat this minority? How to put the New Command to love one another in practice? In one church they had partitioned off part of the church where these lower class people had to sit. This church was going along with the culture. And when a preacher once explained how Samaritans were despised by Jews in NT-times, one potter-man stood up and said: We are like the Samaritans!

It took some time for the church to understand that to walk as Jesus did, they had to go against the culture: accepting the potters and eating with them. And so church

leaders went to the homes of christian potters to share a meal with them and showing the world that christians love one another. [Amen]

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