

"Defining the Narrative"

1 John 2:7-17 on Feb 15, 2026
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1 John 2:7-17 7 Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. 8 Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true

in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. 9 He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. 10 He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. 12 I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. 13 I write to you, fathers, Because you have known Him [who is] from the beginning. I write to you, young men, Because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, Because you have known the Father. 14 I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him [who is] from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one. 15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that [is] in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

John begins this section of his letter by emphasizing that what he had been saying herein was not in anyway a “new” concept. Those who are uncomfortable with what John had so plainly been saying will even today claim that John was simply “operating on the fringes”...or that he was speaking in hyperbole. John apparently saw that coming and reminded the readers that he was not alone in what he had said and would say: in fact, he was just reiterating what Jesus Himself had already taught in John 15! With that fact established, John now goes back in for more, declaring that, “He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now.”

In this letter, John is repeatedly “calling us out” ...no hiding under a façade of religiosity or a general church-goer defense. No one is getting a “free pass.” Today John is declaring that if one claims to be a Christian, and yet hates his brother...he is lying about his position in Christ. In other words, he is not a real Christian! Here is where we begin our attempt to dance around that bright light of interrogation. What I have found ...practically speaking, is that those in the ‘hot seat’ in this matter will invariably say that they don't actually *hate* their brother, they just don't *like* him. But that is an extremely dangerous game to play! The whole of this letter is about avoiding being deceived. Any spiteful, abusive, and hostile actions towards a brother or sister and then claiming that such is not ‘hate,’ is certainly the height of self-deception!

It is critically important that we understand that what we *say* is of little consequence in light of what we *do*. What we love...and what we do not, defines the narrative ...*the story*...that is our lives.

Robert Yarbrough says - "Being in the light means being in fellowship with both God and other believers as the result of the cleansing effected by Christ's death (1Jn 1:7). It is a condition made possible by the nature of God, who is light (like Christ himself; John 12:46), as the gospel message goes forth and is received (1John 1:5). It is fitting and natural that believers should openly claim their allegiance to the light that is God and Christ; 1 John is itself an extended example of such testimony. But the claim can be bogus....The claim is one thing; the reality



is something else....Such a person's spiritual and practical condition is out of conformity with salvation-historical possibility...and indeed divine expectation. In 1Jn 2:11 John elaborates on this sorry state."

H A Ironside - "In 1John 2:9-10 the apostle speaks very seriously and very solemnly concerning something that may well convict some of us. "He that says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness even until now" (1John 2:9). If you hate your brother, no matter what you profess, you are still in darkness. Notice he did not say you may be a real Christian who has fallen into darkness; but he said, if you hate your brother you are "in darkness **even until now**." You have never been anywhere else. You have never been in the light at all. You cannot have divine light or the Holy Spirit or the love of God dwelling in you, and still hate your brother. And yet we often see people professing the name of Christ while showing hatred toward others." (1 John 2 - Ironside's Notes)

This truth is absolute, according to John. If we lose love, then we lose everything. There is nothing left. You can do all the right things, believe all the right truths, but if you do not love other Christians then all is lost. (Guzik) While we are all standing like deer in the headlights over this matter, John 'goes in for the kill shot' saying "... *he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.*" This would certainly lead one to believe then, that in most cases it does little to scold or try to correct such an individual. John says such a person is "blind." Thus he *cannot* see ...he *cannot* understand what you are even implying. He is **IN** the dark, ***always has been*** in the dark, and has ***never come out into the light*** to even understand what light is. How can one explain to a man born blind what light is like? Such is outside of his grasp. A supernatural work must occur first, and that is John's point! How often we can call out folks to "love others" when we would better to actually encourage salvation so one might experience the light and see his way to loving. It's profoundly easier to love when we have experienced the "author of love."

Often, we can be witness to some wicked behavior such as this that comes forth from confessing church-goers. We are left wondering about such...often really left baffled about such...when John just comes out and clearly identifies these folks. He says they are imposters. When you step back and look at the situation in ***that*** light, suddenly there is clarity and understanding where there was none before.

But let us realize that John was not just writing to us so we might go hunting for pretend Christians. He is writing also so we might look in the mirror and confirm whether we are actually a genuine Christian ourselves. I will be the first to acknowledge that love does not always come readily to me. I can only love because God has so empowered me to do so, and I have to ask Him regularly for such a love. And that "God of love" is faithful to equip me to do so, but such will not and cannot happen if I am blind and do not know light. As John stated in the last chapter "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." The only way to be a Christian...to know love...to know light, is to do so with my "eyes wide open."

John continues with this "defining of our narrative" in verses 15-17. In verses 9-11, the condemnation concerning hating a brother is, again, generally answered with "*well, I don't LIKE that person but I don't HATE them...*", while verse 15 goes on with this "dance" generally eliciting a response of "*well, I LIKE the world but I don't LOVE it...*".

This is certainly one of the most dangerous practices in our lives, where we rationalize and justify and excuse ourselves from the standard we are called upon to produce. The heart of man is indeed wicked and is like a deep dark well that nobody wants to look down for fear of what they might find! So we adopt a predominantly moderate view of who we think we are: *we aren't "saints" in the classic sense, but hey...we aren't wicked heathens either!* We are just...well, somewhere in the middle! We're "pretty good people!"

Yet one cannot escape the clear words from the apostle John at the end of our text today ...*if you love what is passing away, **you** will pass away.* In other words if your life is composed of loving the desires of the world which are passing away, so too will you!

Mt 6:24 further supports this premise before us, saying that one cannot “love God **and** money.” Love of the world will always displace love of God. But conversely, love of God will naturally displace love of the world. So many in this world desire eternal life and absolution of sin’s guilt upon them, yet they still love and desire the world here and all that goes with it. This, of course, is going to cause a life ‘rub.’ It’s going to make you spiritually neurotic. Our response to such a dilemma is usually to move into the realm of charades. You know...wherein we pretend and masquerade our faith. But not merely in an attempt to persuade *others* concerning who they are, but also to try to persuade *ourselves*!

In John 5:42-44, Jesus challenged the Jewish leaders saying “I know that you have not the love of God within you. I have come in my Father’s name and you do not receive Me ... How can you believe, (you) who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?” Clearly Jesus was looking for more than a mere verbal affirmation as to any professed love coming His way. No...He wanted to **see** the proof in the narrative of their lives...He wanted to **SEE** that love in action!

These to whom John was speaking apparently had a *hate problem with their brethren*...no matter how they tried to explain it away or to excuse themselves. Furthermore, they loved the systems of the world—the praise and the glory of men—instead of the glory of God. So Jesus...and the apostle John these years later, were effectively stating that there is no saving faith in these folks.

As Billy Graham has said "*No man can be said to be truly converted to Christ who has not bent his will to Christ. He may give intellectual assent to the claims of Christ and may have had emotional religious experiences; however, he is not truly converted until he has surrendered his will to Christ as Lord, Savior, and Master.*"

It seems that many of us have so attempted to breach the walls of redemption by "some other way" (John 10:1). Jesus said these are "thieves and robbers" because they seek salvation and eternal life while withholding their love, their loyalty, their commitment, and their passions. It's as if many of us have got on that train and then we spend the rest of our lives attempting to repeatedly and constantly 'renegotiate the fare.' We are however mandated to "come in through the gate," which is Christ and the gospel. We are generally quite willing to **share** our lives with Christ, but can't seem to make the leap to "all in" ...to "*love the LORD your God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength.*"

Romans 6:22 tells us "*But now having been set free from sin, ...and having become slaves of God, ...you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.*" Does that describe your relationship? How do you know if you are indeed a "slave?" Well...according to this, if you are, you will produce the "fruit of holiness." Thank God He is gracious and patient with us in our human shortcomings, but where truly is our hearts? Luke 13:24 calls us to "**Strive** to enter through the narrow gate..."

The fact is, love for the world's systems "pushes out" love for God. We can try our best through self-discipline and self-control to not love the world, however the best "antidote" in our fight against this pervasive powerful pull is to be zealous to love the Father! This is a critical aspect of the very gospel of Christ! It is our love of Christ...the positioning of our lives and passions to look to Him and spend time with Him that shall overcome our desires for the world and the flesh.

Again, in our 'middle road' moderate approach, we would tend to claim "well, it's not that I LOVE the world...I just LIKE it." But James takes care of that one by saying in his letter (James 4:4 NLT) that "*Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.*" In light of that clarification, there is not a one of us that stands innocent today outside of the Holy Spirit. Not one of us is naturally "there." This fact shines a profound bright light on even our activities as believers in the political realm, where whole segments of Christendom today is intensely involved in claiming or at least reclaiming government and earthly organization back to our own, to make "this world" a more palatable place for us to live. How can we rectify these two roads? We cannot.

We need to understand this, as it is evident that such truth is critical to not only our walk in Him but in our very eternal standing with Him. It is not 'worldly' to seek a career, to get married, to have children, to enjoy nature, to be involved in earning a living. None of these is what John has in mind by 'the world'. He is not implying that we "drop out" of society. How can we do so while remaining missional and reaching out to the lost world around us? But do we in all things "*seek first the kingdom of God,*" or is such merely a secondary consideration at best? Is our goal in all aspects of life to live for Christ and to seek to further His agenda?

Are we allowing the world's systems to set the tone, the priorities, and the agenda for our lives? When we try to walk in two worlds at once, we are, as James puts it, "*a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*" (James 1:8). John Blanchard said "*Jesus did not pray that his Father would take Christians out of the world, but that he would take the world out of Christians.*"

It is Paul that reminds us this battle is one that we will wage every day -- it is a battle we cannot win on our own but only as we begin each morning surrendering our will to Holy Spirit, and actively and intentionally pursuing a relationship with Christ. "For the flesh sets its desire (present tense = continually!) against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please." (Galatians 5:17) and "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." (Galatians 5:24)

The "**lust of the flesh**" is more than merely the obvious sexual appetite. The lust of the flesh is the desire to do something, *anything*, apart from the will of God. Thus, to avoid such, one must by necessity know what the will of God is! Not only for the corporate body of Christ, but for each of us individually! But that is not how most of us operate. We tend rather to stumble through this life and let the world and life itself dictate our directions and our decisions. Rarely do we truly seek God in His desire for us and to prayerfully move according to God's specific ordained plan for us as His redeemed slave. Rather, we want what we want and seek God to bless our decisions!

Then there is the "**lust of the eyes.**" We have apparently been plagued by such from the beginning. It was Eve who "saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight (Heb = desirable) to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate." (Genesis 3:6)

Again, should we fight ourselves as to the want of these worldly things, or should we rather seek to change **what** we want? Would not this tendency never be such an issue if, in love with Jesus, we actually **want** the things, the ways, the plan, the will of Him whom we claim to love? Where, therefore, should be our battleground? What I want in life has changed dramatically since I got married. Now I so much want what my wife wants. Why? Through determination and discipline? No. **I just fell in love.**

"the pride of life..." This is living without the critical character of humility. When it's all about me, it is certainly then not about Christ. When I believe I am the center of the world, then Christ ceases to be. And yet once again, we say we aren't proud, just self-confident...just practicing a little self-esteem! But the problem is one can't even say that without giving themselves away with the use of the word "self!" Are we not rather to be God-confident and to practice God-esteem? The bottom line is: **is it all about you or Him?** We need to acknowledge that pride in a believer's life is a killer! It ends everything 'God-in-our-life' before we even start. I have witnessed this insidious weapon destroy countless individuals. Behind every sin we commit is the gremlin of "pride!"

"The world is passing away..." When we love anything more than the true and living God revealed in the Bible, we are worshipping it. Whatever it is, **it won't last**. And it won't be able to help us when our plans shatter, our health fails, or death comes for us.

In 1989, Tom Sine wrote some insightful words that apply just as much now, as then (Christianity Today [3/17/89], p. 52): *"Whatever commands our time, energy, and resources commands us. And if we are honest, we will admit that our lives really aren't that different from those of our secular counterparts. I suspect that one of the reasons we are so ineffective in evangelism is that we are so much like the people around us that we have very little to which we can call them. We hang around church buildings a little more. We abstain from a few things. But we simply aren't that different. We don't even do hedonism as well as the folks around us ... but we keep on trying. As a result of this unfortunate accommodation, Christianity is reduced to little more than a spiritual crutch to help us through the minefields of the upwardly mobile life. God is there to help us get our promotions, our house in the suburbs, and our bills paid. Somehow God has become a co-conspirator in our agendas instead of our becoming a co-conspirator in His. Something is seriously amiss."*

So I leave you with this crucial question, for which your answer will determine your very state of salvation: **Who, or what do you love today? Because everything of this world is fading away, and most of all, so are we...**