

## Sermon 15, Brother Love, 1 John 2:9-11

**Proposition:** Darkness and blindness is the fate of everyone who refuses to love his Christian brothers.

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### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, you and I need to love each other. That is a fundamental implication of the truth that God is light. If you live in God’s light, you need to love your Christian brothers and sisters. If you don’t, you are still in the dark, and you are blind. You’ve heard of double chocolate cake, in which a chocolate cake has chocolate morsels sprinkled within it. Well, the kind of darkness that applies to ostensible “Christians” who don’t love each other is a double darkness — a thick, choking darkness in which blind people are scattered like the chips in double chocolate chip cookies. Is that what you think the church ought to be? Is that the kind of church in which you want to live your life? Of course it’s not. But the warning is so clear that even a morally blind person ought to be able to see it: If you don’t love your Christian brothers and sisters, you will be consigned to darkness and blindness.

#### I. Darkness, v. 9

The first verse of our text this morning tells us about a man who claims that he’s in the light but hates his brother. That person is really in the darkness. Let’s unpack both the claim and the activity that so clearly negates the claim.

### **A. The Claim: “I am in the light,” v. 9a**

The claim is simple: “I am in the light.” What does it mean to be in the light? Well, we talked about this at length about 10 weeks ago. What we saw is that to walk in the light means to be fully exposed to God and appropriately exposed to your brothers.

#### **1. I am fully exposed to God**

So really, the claim “I am in the light” is the same thing as saying “I am fully exposed to God.” That is, I let God see the truth about me.

Now, this is only another way of looking at the emphasis on confession that we have seen in the second half of ch. 1. To let God see the truth about you is to admit to Him who you are, and to freely confess your sins before Him. To walk in darkness is to say “I have no sin.” That’s a lie — obviously. But to walk in the light, as He is in the light, is to let Him see your sin. Now, this does not mean that you just sin and say “Well, I’m making no effort to resist sin but at least I’m not a hypocrite! I know that I’m doing all these things right in front of God, deeply offending Him, and I’m okay with that.” If you’re really aware that what you’re doing is right in front of God, you won’t be okay with sin. If you genuinely understand God’s character and think about the reality that He can see you perfectly, and that you need to maintain a relationship with Him where you don’t mind Him seeing you perfectly, then you will hate sin. Adam *hid* from the presence of Yahweh God among the trees of the garden. Are you so much greater than the ur-man? Will you not mind sinning in front of God when every other human being in history has moved heaven and earth to hide from the God against whom they sin? Brothers and sisters, recall, if you would, the claim loudly repeated by the queer lobby that conservative churches are not welcoming to people living sexually “alternative” lifestyles. Why do they make that claim? Because in conservative churches, you are constantly reminded that you live life in front of God and that He disapproves of your sin, whatever kind of sin it is. To someone who’s hell-bent on keeping their sin and normalizing their sin, that is highly unwelcoming. That’s because when we really know that God is watching — when we are in the light, seeing Him and knowing that He sees us — we are cleansed from all sin.

So to say “I am in the light” is not only to say “I am fully exposed to God” but also to say that it’s mutual, that it’s reciprocal. God sees me, and I see Him and know that He sees me. And so, I cheerfully confess my sin and receive His forgiveness and cleansing. To say that you are in the light, then, is to say that you are living the Christian life, confessing sin, finding forgiveness, and deliberately walking in the knowledge that God is watching.

#### **2. I am appropriately exposed to my brothers**

It’s also the statement that I’m appropriately exposed to my brothers. Walking in the light does not mean dumping all your sins and problems on every Christian you know, or even every Christian at your church. It does mean, however, that you have definitely dropped the pretense of being a good person who doesn’t need any help or any forgiveness. To be appropriately exposed is to walk in humility, making it clear that you know you’re a sinner and therefore have grace for other sinners. If you walk in arrogance, you’re not appropriately exposed to your brothers. If you

act like other people's failings are completely absurd and ludicrous, you're not appropriately exposed. This, in turn, leads us to John's further point: If you hate your brother — and that can include looking down on him — then you aren't really walking in the light. Why? Because if you were walking in the light, you would have nothing but pity, compassion, and sympathy for your fellow Christians and even fellow human beings when they stumble.

### **B. The Claim Negated: You hate your brother, v. 9b**

So here's the deal so far: It's good to walk in the light. In fact, since God is light, in order to walk with God it is necessary that you be in the light. So far so good. Even to say "I am in the light" is not a problem. In fact, every Christian should be able to say that. But the problem arises when you say "I am in the light" yet you don't act like someone who's in the light. Essentially, the situation John envisions is that of a blind person passionately yelling "I can too see!" and then proceeding to do some incredibly stupid things to try to prove to everyone that his eyes are working just fine. So you say "How many fingers am I holding up?" and he wildly yells "8!" when you were only holding up 1.

In other words, if you act like someone who's still in darkness, your behavior completely and radically contradicts your statement that you are in the light. It will be as obvious to the people around you that you're in the darkness as it's obvious to all of you that I am standing on this platform. There will be no question about it. Failure to live like someone whose sin is exposed to God and your fellow saints is proof positive that you aren't in the light. That failure is best expressed by the term "hatred." Hating one's brother is the clearest possible sign of darkness.

#### **1. Hatred: Passionate hostility**

Now, when we think "hatred," we think of how Hitler felt about Jews, or how Osama bin Laden felt about the World Trade Center. And we look around and say, "You know what? I don't see very much of that in my society. 'Hates his brother'? Maybe someone somewhere is passionately hostile and homicidal toward another Christian. But it's not in my church." To which I would respond, "Thank God!" But though this hatred that rises to the level of murder is a real thing, and alive and well in our world today, it is indeed largely absent from every part of the church.

#### **2. Hatred: Benign neglect**

But what about the other kind of hatred — the hatred that silently passes over, neglects, or excludes those from whom we really don't expect any benefit? I know you by sight, but I never speak to you. Or, I speak to you, but I never offer to do anything with you, never invite you to any of my parties, never deliberately include you in any conversation or event . . . Brothers and sisters, this, I think, is the more common way of "hating" a brother that John is talking about. He's saying that unless you are actively seeking the good of a Christian in your church, you are actually harming him. In other words, what he's doing is eliminating the idea that neglect is good, or that leaving someone alone to go their own way is acceptable within the church of God. We tend to think that leaving someone alone is, if not the most loving thing we could do, probably the second most loving thing. We think "Well, the golden rule says 'Do unto others as

you would have them do unto you, and I wish people would just let me be so that I could live my life.” But in John’s conception, there is no loving by ignoring. There is no loving by neglect. To love your brother is to desire what’s best for him and to exert yourself to do it. You can’t love by default, in other words. You actually have to do something.

This is a paradigm shift for us Wyomingites. We tend to think “The people I’m actively trying to hurt are the ones I hate. Everyone else I love by default.” That’s not how it works. You have to do something to show love. You have to love, not with word and tongue, and definitely not just with good intentions and positive thoughts, but in deed and truth, as John will go on to say in this letter.

This sounds like a tall order. How can I reach out and do things for all the people in my church, even a church this size — never mind all the hundreds of millions of Christians throughout the world? The answer is that you can love and encourage your fellow believers in this church by coming to worship. Even if you can’t talk to everyone or include everyone, your presence is a way of encouraging and loving them. As for the saints at large, you can and must pray for them. If you don’t pray for the whole church, do you really love the whole church? What would we think of a Christian who never prayed for his parents or children? Would we say that he was obviously very devout and devoted? Of course not. Indeed, we would say quite the opposite. But come to church and pray — that is one way to love in deed and truth. Later on John will tell us that gifts and contributions are another good way to love one another. If you see a Christian brother who doesn’t have housing or clothes, how can you close your heart against him? If you can, your “religion” is worthless.

## **II. Light: The Only Way to Be a Christian, v. 10**

And so John goes on to tell us that to live in the light is the only way to be a Christian.

### **A. Love Your Brother**

First of all, you must love your brother. What is love? To give up your life for another’s. Jesus loved and gave — and didn’t just give stuff or money, but Himself. Love means giving yourself to another. To say “I love you” and only give money, or even time, but to withhold your heart and thus yourself, is not to love but to posture.

So give yourself in love to your brothers. In other words, this love is going to cost you something. It is going to cost you carpet stains. It is going to cost you time. It is going to cost you money spent on food. It is going to cost you time you wanted to spend with your favorite TV show or book. If you cannot think of a time in the last year when you’ve paid any of those costs to bless your fellow saints, then I ask you this question: Are you sure you’re loving the brothers? If Jesus loved with a love that cost Him everything, what sort of love are you loving with that costs you nothing? It doesn’t take a genius to see that such a love is really what the apostle is calling “hate.”

So love your brother — yes, by showing up to church and by praying for the saints and their needs. But further, love by opening your home, your heart, your life. Love your brother.

This is how it will be known that we are Jesus' disciples. This is how we ourselves will know that we have come to know Him, when we obey this new commandment and love like Jesus did.

### **B. Abide in the Light**

But secondly, abide in the light. How do you obey the law of love? By spending time in the light with Jesus Christ and His Father. That's the only way you will learn to love and give as Jesus requires. If you aren't constantly with Him, learning from Him and receiving from Him, you will find it impossible to pour out love on the people around you. Love is the fruit of the Spirit; love is fuelled by the Spirit's omnipotence. In other words, if you're hearing what it means to love your brother and saying "That's impossible. I don't have the resources to love like that," then you're understanding me correctly. Of course you don't have the resources to love like that! That's the whole point. You can't love like John and Jesus are talking about from your own strength. You can only do it from the strength of God Almighty, as given to you by His Holy Spirit. Hence John's statement that the one who loves his brother abides in the light. This goes both ways: If you love your fellow Christian, you will remain in the light, and conversely, it's only when you're in the light, receiving spiritual power to love from God Himself, that you can even begin to love your brother.

So how do you abide in the light? Confess your sin. Constantly deal with it. Meet with God in worship, publicly, privately, and with your family. Remain fully exposed to God and appropriately exposed to your brothers. And you will abide in the light.

### **C. Be free from Stumbling-blocks**

This abiding in the light will mean freedom from stumbling-blocks. A stumbling-block is anything that trips you up in your Christian walk. In the light, there are no stumbling-blocks. In you, there won't be any either so long as you remain fully exposed to the light. All our troubles come from lack of communion with God. All our problems are a result of not living fully exposed to the sin-purging light of God. If something that trips you up has cropped up in your life, it's only a signal to you that you need to get closer to God and thus be free from stumbling-blocks. If you are right up next to Him, you will be delivered from any cause for stumbling.

### **III. The Result of Living in Darkness, v. 11**

But what if you don't stay close to God, exposed to His light? Then you are in the darkness and walking in the darkness. If you hate your brother, that is proof positive that you are in darkness and not fully exposed to the light of God. This doesn't just mean homicidal rage, but also careless neglect. Either one is a disastrous, light-destroying action against your brother. It puts you in darkness so that you walk in the darkness. Just as I said a moment ago that walking in the light is the only thing that can give you power to love your brother, so I say now that any act of hating your brother is also an act which destroys love for that same brother. It's an act that puts you right back into darkness, as though you didn't know Christ.

### **A. Ignorance, v. 11b**

And what is the result of living in darkness? The first result is ignorance. You lose an understanding of where you're going. Where are you going when you're walking the path of darkness? You're going to Hell. Now, no one positively wants to go to Hell (though many do want Hell more than they want Heaven). And so if you're walking the path of death, the path of darkness, the path to Hell, you have to lie to yourself about the destination. Otherwise, you will have not the slightest desire to arrive at that destination. You'll want anything but that! So to give way to hating your brother is to walk in the darkness and choose the path of ignorance.

Does this mean that simply letting yourself believe that you love the saints by default and need do nothing further for them is going to send you to Hell? It could. If you are genuinely resistant to doing anything further for your fellow saints, if you say "No. I will not pray for them, I will not talk to them, I will not spend anything and certainly not myself for them," then yes, that attitude will send you to Hell. Any sin and every sin is a damnable sin, and any sin that you won't give up is a sin that will keep you out of the light and put you on the path whose destination you willfully ignore.

If you say, though, "I realize I haven't been loving my brothers enough! What do I do?" then however guilty of breaking this command to love one another you are, come and welcome to Jesus Christ. Confess your sins to Him, and you will find that He is faithful and just to forgive those sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness, even the unrighteousness of hating your brothers.

### **B. Blindness, v. 11c**

But if you persist in walking in the darkness, you will go blind. One thinks of the blind fish found in caves. They've apparently lived so long in the dark that their eyes just withered away. So it will be with you, Christian, if you deliberately close your eyes to the needs of your brothers and sisters.

Do you want to go blind? Do you want to be blind in the darkness, a dark chocolate chip inside a dark chocolate cake in Satan's kingdom of darkness? Then go right ahead and hate your brothers and sisters. But if you want to walk with God, if you want to live in the light, if you want the Holy Spirit to supernaturally empower you to love your brothers and sisters, then, I beg you: Love your brethren. Give to them. Pray for them. Invite them to do things with you. Don't be a blind, ignorant, hell-bound sinner. Instead, come to the light, confess your sins, and find infinite mercy in our God who is light. Amen.