

7. “Resulting in salvation” – to be identified with Messiah (“in Messiah”) is to be **saved** from the just penalty of sin.

Thus, we see that the Apostolic message includes obedience to God as an essential component of the Gospel. If, as we witness to others by giving them the Gospel message, we neglect to include the need for repentance toward God (i.e., a turning away from sin) and a confessed desire to obey Him, then we have failed to give the Gospel message in its fulness.

Indeed, when Paul summarizes his proclamation of the Gospel in Asia, he describes it this way:

...solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Yeshua Messiah. (Acts 20:21)

Thus, the “old commandment” of which John writes is the commandment of the Gospel: the command to repent of sin, to believe in Yeshua, which issues in a heart that both desires and is enabled to live in obedience to God’s commands.

8 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.

Here it seems that John is talking in contradictory terms. In v. 7 he said he is not giving a new commandment but an old one. Here, however, he admits to “writing a new commandment” to his readers, and thus to us as well. How are we to understand John’s statements here?

The “old commandment” is the commandment of the Gospel: repentance toward God and faith in Yeshua the Messiah. The commandment of the Gospel which requires repentance and faith issues in a life ready and willing to obey God’s commandments:

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. (1Jn 2:3)

We first must remember that the whole of God’s revelation in the Tanach can be summed up as (1) loving God (the *Shema*, Deut 6:4–9; 11:13–20) and (2) loving one’s neighbor (Lev 19:18). This was the clear teaching of Yeshua:

One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Torah?” And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH

ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’
 This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is
 like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ On these two
 commandments depend the whole Torah and the Prophets.”
 (Matt 22:35–40)

With this in mind we should understand that the “old” can give birth to the “new,” and in doing so, the “old” does not cease to exist or become useless. Or to say it another way, “old” can mean “prior” and “new” can mean “current.” Thus, the old commandment which is summed in the very message of the Gospel, commanded to love God and to love one’s neighbor. But the question that would inevitably arise in the minds of the Jewish community was how to define who was one’s “neighbor.” From the Apostolic Scriptures we know that the inclusion of Gentile believers into the synagogues of “The Way” presented a problem to the Jewish community. It was not a problem in terms of what the Scriptures stated on the matter, for the Torah had already clearly taught that both the native born and the foreigner who desired to worship the God of Israel, were to be received as equal members of the covenant.

As for the assembly (*kehilah*), there shall be one statute for you and for the foreigner who sojourns with you, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the foreigner be before ADONAI. (Num 15:15)

9–11 The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

We can see a very obvious structure in these three verses, for John once again shows his fondness for contrast. He gives us three pairs of opposites: light and darkness, love and hatred, walking and stumbling. Light, love and walking characterize the true believer while darkness, hatred and stumbling are marks of the person whose confession of faith lacks reality.

In the previous context John has given us a primary characteristic of the true believer in Yeshua, namely, that genuine saving faith is seen in obedience to God’s commandments which He has revealed to us in His word.

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. (1Jn 2:3)

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. (1Jn 2:6)

Thus, the one who confesses to believe in Yeshua “walks in the light” (1:7), that is, lives in a manner consistent with the truth (the “light”) of God’s word, seeking to become more and more like Yeshua.

Now John gives us a second test of faith. Not only is the life of the true believer characterized by obedience to God’s commands, but they are also known by their love for one another.

By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (Jn 13:35)

The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. One of the first questions we have is how we should understand John’s use of “brother” (ἀδελφός, *adelphos*) in this context. We may note first of all that the one who hates his brother confesses to be “in the Light.” Second, it would appear that John has the same “brother” in mind when in the first chapter of our epistle a person claims to have “fellowship with God” (1:6) and that he “knows God” (2:4), but the pattern of his life does not match the confession of his lips. He may claim to obey God’s commandments, but he fails to “love his neighbor as himself” (Lev 19:18). Or to put it another way, he champions himself as fully obeying the *Shema* (Deut 6:4–9), i.e., loving God, but fails to love his neighbor, thus narrowing his focus to the first half of the Ten Words while neglecting the second half. Finally, it seems quite obvious that John writes these words to communities of believers in Yeshua. Since epistles in the first century were often circulated from one community to another, John surely has in mind a broad spectrum of communities, some of which may have had clear difference between each other. We hear Paul, for instance, describing divisions among Yeshua followers, some saying “I am of Paul,” and “I am of Apollos,” and “I am of Cephas,” and “I am of Messiah.” (1Cor 1:12).

Thus, it would seem clear that in these verses (2:9–11) John, when talking about “hating one’s brother,” is using the term “brother” to refer to someone who openly confesses Yeshua and participates within a believing community, but whose life does not demonstrate the marks of true saving faith. Quite obviously, John could not be referring to those adhering to Gnostic teachings, for Gnosticism rejected funda-

mental teachings of the Scriptures, including the humanity of Yeshua and His incarnation. Rather, it seems to me that John is addressing the spirit of pride that some with a given community acquire when they are certain they have found the truth to which others have been blinded. And when others refuse to receive the truth, the prideful heart responds with hatred.

This, then, is a second question: what does John intend to convey by utilizing the word “hate”? Besides the two times John uses the word “hate” in our current text, he uses the verb “to hate” (μισέω, *miseō*) three more times in this epistle: 3:13, 15; 4:20, two of which reiterate the issue of hating one’s brother.

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (1Jn 3:15)

If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. (1Jn 4:20)

But what does it mean to “hate” one’s brother or sister,” that is, to “hate” someone who openly confesses faith in Yeshua but whose beliefs and practices seem clearly to contradict his or her confession? We know that the biblical use of the word “hatred” (e.g., שׂנֵא, *sanē’*; μισέω, *miseō*) can denote the desire to physically murder someone,¹ but it seems highly unlikely that John has this idea in mind. When, in 3:15, John describes one who “hates his brother” is a “murderer,” he is no doubt relying upon the words of Yeshua when He taught:

You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. (Matt 5:21–22)

The point Yeshua is making in this text is understandable if one interprets His words in view of His teaching regarding the “weightier” matters of the Torah:

1 E.g., the brothers of Joseph “hated” him (Gen 37:4–5, 8) which apparently included the desire to kill him by abandoning him into a pit.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe the mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. (Matt 23:23)

The Pharisees apparently considered that what “graded” the commandments was the penalty prescribed for breaking them. Thus, murder would be a weighty commandment since capital punishment was its penalty. But what is the penalty for withholding mercy, or breaking an oath? It may be merely a payment of reparations, or perhaps the Torah prescribes no penalty at all, making this one of the “lighter” *mitzvot* of the Torah in the eyes of the Pharisees. Granted, the Pharisees’ outward signs of being careful with even the “lightest” commandment was commendable. They tithed produce about which the Torah did not require a tithe, i.e., plants that grew from seeds one did not himself plant, and thus which one did not himself own. Indeed, it would seem that the outward giving of tithes to the Temple priesthood was what motivated these Pharisees because in giving the tithe they would be viewed by others as especially pious. They polished the outside of the cup but left refuse on the inside of it (Matt 23:25–26). Motivated by the applause of men thus identified the reality of their heart. Indeed, the Tanach teaches us that one’s outward actions are in fact the fruit of one’s true beliefs, i.e., the true condition of one’s heart.

Do not eat the bread of a selfish man, or desire his delicacies;
For as he thinks within himself, so he is. (Prov 23:6-7a)

Thus, what Yeshua is teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is that one ought to be extremely careful regarding what transpires in one’s mind or heart, for it is from the heart that one’s actions proceed. Or to put it simply, hatred is the seed-bed of murder, which includes not only taking the physical life of another, but also “murdering” another person’s reputation through gossip or slander.¹ If one intends to keep the “weightier” commandments, which Yeshua identifies as justice, mercy, and thankfulness, then one must be extremely concerned about the thoughts and intentions of one’s heart.

And this brings us back to John’s point: the inward thoughts and

1 For further study on Yeshua’s teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:17ff), see my article, “What Does *πληρῶσαι* (“to fulfill”) Mean in Matthew 5:17?”, available at www.torahresource.com/search-articles.

intentions of the heart are where true sanctification begins. We seek to obey God’s commandments because we have been given a new heart—a new way of seeing life, seeing others, and viewing ourselves. We have come into the light of God’s revelation and we seek to view all things from His perspective, made evident in the light of the Scriptures.

Thus, we may gain an understanding of what John means when he speaks of “hating one’s brother” by looking at the words of Yeshua in Luke 6:22, for here our Lord gives us further explanation of what comprises “hate.”

Blessed are you when men hate you (μισέω, *miseō*), and ostracize you (ἀφορίζω, *aphorizō*), and insult you (ὀνειδίζω, *oneidizō*), and scorn (ἐκβάλλω, *ekballō*) your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. (Lk 6:22)

Here Yeshua explains being “hated” as characterized by being shunned and rejected by others, being insulted and maligned, as being mocked and disdained so that when your name is mentioned, it is associated with evil. And those who hate in this way may well be part of the wider community that confesses to be followers of Yeshua. It is in this arena of life in which Yeshua teaches us, not to hate our enemy, i.e., the one who seeks to ostracize us, who may slander, insult, or scorn us, but to love our enemy and do good to those who hate us (Matt 5:43–45). And this is precisely what John is emphasizing in our text. The heart truly won over by God’s love is able to love even the one who says he is a believer but hates those who should be accepted as true brothers and sisters in the Lord.

...is in the darkness until now. – John tells us that if someone who claims to be “in the Light” is characterized by an attitude of hatred toward other believers, then that person is, in fact, not “in the Light” but is in darkness. This means that such a person may well consider themselves a true believer in Yeshua, but they have failed the test of love.

Obviously, within a given community, if such a person is intent on causing division or seeking to persuade others into following their errant ways, they must be confronted in love with the hope that God would grant them repentance. The point is that John is not teaching us that everyone is to be received into the community of faith regardless of their wayward or sinful actions. But rather we are to love them by following Yeshua’s instructions to go to them privately, first with one and then with two if the first approach yields no change of heart (cf. Matt 18:15–17).

John tells us that someone who hates his brother is “in the darkness

until now.” What are we to understand by the added “until now” (ἕως ἄρτι, *heōs arti*)? Perhaps a better translation would be: “...is still in the darkness.” John’s point is this: if one’s life is characterized by disregard for God’s commandments and hatred toward other believers, there is no guarantee that they were ever truly a believer.

The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. – Here John states the positive side of the issue and follows up with the negative picture with which he began this paragraph. The person whose life is characterized by love of other believers shows the genuineness of his or her faith. Obviously, such love is never perfect, but when a believer fails to love his or her fellow believer, love is expressed by humbly seeking forgiveness and doing what is necessary to restore the relationship. Thus, love is also expressed in seeking and giving forgiveness.

Abiding in the Light, demonstrated by loving one’s brother, actually enhances the light, for the value and necessity of being a part of the believing community is that it is God’s purpose that the individual believers grow in sanctification through the combined exercise of the spiritual gifts extant in the believing community. Paul makes a point of this in his letter to the Ephesians, also noting that love is a prime characteristic of those who are in Messiah.

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Messiah, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Eph 4:14–16)

It is, in fact, through the inner workings of the fellowship of believers that we are enabled to see what we might otherwise miss, and thus are alerted to what would otherwise cause us to stumble.

The phrase “and there is no cause for stumbling in him” can be variously understood, since the pronoun here translated “him” could just as well be understood as “it.” Various English translations offer different views of this phrase:

1. “and in him there is no cause for stumbling.” (ESV, NET, TLV)
2. “And in it (i.e., the light) there is no cause for stumbling” (RSV)
3. “There is nothing in him to make him stumble.” (NIV)

The first option understands the phrase to mean that the one who loves does not put a stumbling block in the path of others. The second option, taking the “light” as the subject, simply would mean that when there is light, one is able to avoid that which, in the darkness, might cause him to stumble. The third option understands the phrase to mean that in acting in love, a person avoids the pitfalls that inevitably accompany hatred.

In one sense, all of these options seem simply to point out nuances of the same thing, that is, the value of loving one’s fellow believer and the danger of allowing hatred to grow in one’s heart. Commenting on vv. 10–11, Stott writes:

What follows shows, however, that our love and hatred not only reveal whether we are already in the light or in the darkness, but actually contribute toward the light or the darkness in which we already are....If we love people, we see how to avoid sinning against them....Hatred distorts our perspective. We do not first misjudge people and then hate them as a result; our view of them is already jaundiced by our hatred. It is love which sees straight, thinks clearly and makes us balanced in our outlook, judgments, and conduct.¹

But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes. – John concludes the paragraph by again describing the person who claims to be “in the Light” but the character of that person’s life tells a different story. It is not simply that the one who hates his brother is in the darkness, but that he “walks in the darkness.” That is, like his life of disregard for God’s commandments, he is also known as one who rejects, maligns, insults, and seeks to defame the character of others who are believers in Yeshua. For John says he “walks in the darkness,” meaning this characterizes his life.

It seems certain that people who, on the one hand, claim to believe in Yeshua, while on the other hand engage in open hatred of others who confess Yeshua, would never consider that they are in the darkness. They may feel that defaming the character of others is what is necessary in order to “fight for the truth.” But the truth is not defended by attacking the character of others. *Ad hominem* arguments are of no value when seeking to uphold the truth against false teachers. We defend the truth by showing what the word of God says and by living in accordance with its divine and eternal precepts. In so doing, we not

1 John Stott, *The Epistles of John*, in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Eerdmans, 1964), p.95.

only broadcast the truth of God but we also show ourselves to be His servants, willing to do God's work God's way.

12–13a I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

In this first direct appeal to his readers, John makes his address to all believers, then to fathers, and then to young men, repeating the phrase “I am writing to you” (γράφω ὑμῖν) as he addresses each group. The repetition of the phrase “I am writing to you” is important because it emphasizes that what John is writing is something permanent—something that can be referred to over and over again. The spoken word is more easily forgotten, but the written message can be read and considered time and time again.

little children (τεχνία, *teknia*) – This is a term John uses throughout the epistle when addressing the whole community of believers. We find *teknia* used this way six times: 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21. It is understandable that John, who identifies himself as “the elder” (ὁ πρεσβύτερος) in his second epistle (2Jn 1:1), would address those younger than he with the endearing term “children,” especially because they would have considered him as a spiritual father and an elderly shepherd who had taught them and led them in the path of truth.

because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. – The Greek gives way to various translations. The Greek phrase ὅτι ἀφέωνται ὑμῖν αἱ ἁμαρτίαι, beginning with the particle ὅτι (*hoti*), could be understood as “because your sins have been forgiven” or “that your sins are forgiven.” The grammatical and exegetical question is whether the particle *hoti* introduces the *cause* for writing or the *content* of the message written. Or to put it another way, is John indicating that what *caused* him to write this epistle was because their sins have been forgiven, or is the *content*, the *message* he is emphasizing in his writing, that their sins have been forgiven? While the grammar could go either way, it seems to me that the context itself favors the idea of *content* rather than *the cause*. He is writing to assure those who have put their faith in Yeshua, that their sins have been forgiven.

Indeed, having just written in the previous context about those who claim to know God but whose lives are marked by sin, and thus are liars and do not have the truth, in this direct appeal to his readers John first emphasizes the reality of God's grace in forgiving sin. He has previously emphasized God's grace in forgiving sinners in general (1:7,