

September 20/21, 2025

Are You Dancing in the Darkness?

Face to Face series

1 John 2:7-11

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One can only imagine what was in the mind of Jesus on that night when He met with His disciples in the Upper Room. He knew, in a matter of hours, that He would be arrested; He would be tortured, and He would be executed. If there was ever a time when He needed the *koinonia*—the community of His friends—it was that evening. But it was not to be. His disciples were busy arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom.

It was common in that day, that when people entered a house, either the host or a servant would wash the feet of the guests because of the dust from the road. On this particular occasion there was no formal host; there was no servant, and none of the disciples were going to disqualify themselves from possibly being the greatest in the kingdom by stooping to wash feet. So the God of the universe, who had taken on human flesh, picked up a basin, filled it with water, picked up a towel and He washed their feet. It's really a pretty stunning moment when you think about it. Then Jesus looked at these men and He said to them, "***A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I "just" loved you.*** In the language of John, they are to walk as Jesus walked.

And that's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 John, Chapter 2, as we continue our study in 1 John. Last week, John introduced us to the concepts of light and darkness, and to the reality that God is Light. And if you're going to dance with Jesus, you have to dance in the Light. It's the only option on the table. The problem is the Light exposes our rats, and we don't like that. So many people just scurry back into the darkness in order to hide the rats. But if we stay in the Light, and we confess our sin, we agree with God, "Yes, there's rats. I don't want them," ***He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,*** and to invite us into a deeper, more soul-satisfying relationship with Him. To walk with Him, to obey Him, and to walk as Jesus walked. That's where we left the text in chapter 2, verse 6 last week. We pick it up there this morning. Verse 7:

Beloved, 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.

So there obviously was something going on with the false teachers. Maybe they were claiming some sort of a new, enlightened belief. So John starts with the idea that this isn't new; this has been around since the beginning. As we read on, what he's talking about is the commandment to love God and to love one another. The idea **from the beginning**—like with chapter 1, verse 1—can have a couple of different interpretations. So it could go back to God, who, before there was anything else, existed in a love relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit loving

one another, celebrating one another, what we called *The Dance of God*. The idea of the Scripture is not that, at a point in time, God became loving. It's that God is love. It's His essence. It's who He is. This is the eternal life that defines God. All love ultimately flows out of God as the fountainhead of love. So this, then, has always been part of the story. The Old Testament Law commands us, ***to love the Lord our God, and to love our neighbor as ourselves***. So this is not a new commandment.

But it also could be captured in the idea that from the beginning of the story of Jesus, when God took on human flesh, He walked among us to unveil this eternal life to us. Jesus was once asked, "What is the greatest commandment?" He didn't hesitate. He says, ***To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. The second is like it. To love your neighbor as yourself***. This was nothing new. Verse 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.

So John says, "This is not a new commandment." Then he says, **On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment.** (It is a new commandment!) It's like, "So what does that mean?" The Greek language is actually a very precise language. So, for example, there are two different Greek words for **new**. One is a Greek word for **new** that means *brand new*. It's a chronological "new". That's not this word. This is a word that carries more the idea of *new in quality*. Maybe we would use the word *renew*. So, what does John mean by that? What John is saying is when Jesus walked on this earth, He cast a renewed vision for what the commandment to love meant. The religious leaders of His day had become very clever at becoming very selective in who we were supposed to love. So, for example, they had no problem hating the Romans. They had no problem hating the Samaritans. They had no problem hating the sinners, and the prostitutes, and the tax collectors. They had a very select group of people to be loved. Then God takes on human flesh and unveils a completely new vision for love. He touched the untouchables. He loved the unlovable. He loved the Romans. He loved the Samaritans. He loved the sinners and the tax collectors and the prostitutes, often spending time with them. He even loved the religious leaders. He said strange things like, "Love your enemies," and "Do good to those who persecute you." We might say this morning, "It seems like it's asking a lot, this whole love your enemy thing." But before we get too far down the path, it is a lot! It's really important we remember: we were that enemy that He loved.

Paul is very clear in Romans, chapter 5: ***But God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners,*** (still in rebellion against God), ***Christ died for us***. Two verses later, chapter 5, verse 10: ***...while we were enemies, Christ died for us***. So, before we voice our opinion that seems too much to ask, we can't ever forget the enemy that Jesus loved and died for was *us*. Ephesians 2 says, ***We were children of wrath***. We learned last week, not only did Jesus become our defense attorney, He became the propitiation—the very payment—made to the Father for our sins. Then Jesus says, "Yeah, this is a new commandment. I'm re-upping the vision. I'm asking you to love as I have loved you."

But it's actually more than that. It isn't just a re-visioning. It actually is a new capacity to love. When Jesus stood before His disciples and He said, "A new commandment I give to you," He understood that soon, through His death, burial and resurrection, He would usher in something radically new. At His resurrection, He would usher in the beginning of *new creation*. New creation would ultimately culminate in the ushering in of the new heaven and new earth, which is yet to come. It's the world we all long for. It's the world as God intended it to be. But it actually started when Jesus rose from the dead.

As a result of your decision to trust Jesus as Savior, some really radical things happened to you. I am constantly stunned by the language of the New Testament that describes what happens when we come to Christ. According to Paul's writing to the Corinthians, we have become a new creation. There it is. We're not experiencing simply a makeover. It's not, "You need to clean up your act a little bit." You are the beginning of new creation. Old things have passed away; all things have become new. That's what Paul says.

In his conversation with Nicodemus in John chapter 3, "Nicodemus, here's the deal. You have to be born again." Some of these words we're so familiar with, we don't really think about them. That is as radical as it gets. "Nicodemus, this isn't about cleaning up your act. It's not about getting a makeover. Man, you've got to be born again." Paul says, "We go from death to life as a result of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus." We begin as a new creation, which includes Christ in us, which includes the very presence of the Spirit of God in us giving us the capacity to love in a way that was previously not possible before that. So, what is new is radically new! A new capacity to love as Jesus loved!

Now go back to what John said in verse 8: **...I am writing a new commandment, which is true in Him and in you.** (There's the language right there. What's radically new is now you are **in Him; He is in you.**) **...because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining.** The Light has come into the world to shine into the darkness. As of your rebirth, you are the beginning of a new creation, a light shining into the darkness, giving people just a glimpse of the new creation that is coming. Verse 9:

The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now.

We've learned that the code language for referencing something that the false teachers are teaching is this phrase: **The one who says.** We saw it in chapter 1, verse 6, verse 8, verse 10, and now we see it again. Something they were saying, "We've been enlightened...we're in the know...we walk in the Light," causes John to say, "No, actually it's not what you claim. It's not what you say. It's how you live. It's how you walk. It's how you treat people. And I just have to tell you, if you hate others, no matter what you claim, you're walking in the darkness!" He goes on, verse 10:

The one who loves his brother abides in the Light (dances in the light) and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

But the one who loves is walking in the Light. The idea of stumbling is: If I choose to love as Jesus loved, I'm not going to stumble into darkness, nor am I going to cause others to stumble into darkness.

The whole idea of love and hate in the Bible can get confusing. For us, those are terms filled with lots of emotion, and most people would say, "I don't hate other people." But, biblically, they're not primarily terms of emotion. They're more terms of what I might call orientation. In other words, is my orientation outward, toward others, or is it selfish, self-absorbed, toward me? Love is the idea of thinking of someone else as more important than me...caring more about the interest of others...doing for others...serving others...caring about others. Hate carries just the opposite of that. It's a term of contrast. I'm just absorbed with myself. Everything in life comes through the lens of me and how that affects me and, what about me?

If you were here when we did our study through the Proverbs, we saw two terms used repeatedly: the *righteous* and the *wicked*, and we talked about this a lot. These are very similar to the ideas of love and hate. The righteous are those who are willing to disadvantage themselves in order to advantage others, to advantage the community, whereas the wicked are those who will disadvantage others, take advantage of others, in order to advantage themselves. That's the idea of the contrast between love and hate. As long as your orientation in life is self, you have no chance for true community, this *koinonia* with others.

Think of it this way. Let's imagine four people at a coffee shop, and all four of them have this selfish, self-absorbed orientation that so defines our culture today. All of them have thirsty souls, longing for something to satisfy. They're together, yet they're alone, which describes so many people in our culture. Yet each one of them is there to get something, there to use the other three to get something to satisfy their thirsty soul. They're not there to care. They're not there to give. They're not there to think about somebody else. They're like consumers, wanting to consume the other three, hoping they'll somehow give me something that will satisfy me. As long as that's true, there is no possibility for community. All they're going to do is continually suck the life out of every relationship, and that is where we're at as a culture. Verse 11:

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.

I think verse 11 is a frightening verse. Here's what John just said. The one who hates his brother is not only in the darkness but walks in the darkness. That means behavior; that means life; that means lifestyle. This is now what has come to define this person. And eventually they become so blinded by the darkness, they can't figure out where they're going. In other words, at some point the darkness becomes so dark, you no longer understand the difference between right and wrong, and good and evil. You've just completely lost your way in the darkness. What John is saying in this text is, "If we are going to walk as Jesus walked, if we are going to love as Jesus loved, the only way to do that is you must be radically out-of-step with the rest of the culture"...and that's not easy. That takes a lot of courage! But you do have the capacity to do it in Christ!

I want to end my message this morning by spending a little time talking about the events of the last couple of weeks. And I want us to think about it through the lens of what we've learned from John last week and this week. In other words, how do we think biblically about the death of Charlie Kirk? So, some of you in the room have been significantly influenced by Charlie, and as a result of that, you feel a deep sense of grief and loss. A lot of those are going to be young people. There are others in the room who would say, "Up until a couple weeks ago, I'd never even heard of Charlie Kirk." And then there's going to be a lot of people somewhere in between them.

This week, I listened to a podcast by a man named Frank Turek. You may be familiar with that name. He's written a bunch of books, and I've read a bunch of his books. He is a well-known, faithful Christian apologist, and he would certainly be a voice I would trust. There's a lot of information on the internet, some of it true, some of it untrue. But this would be a voice I would trust. I was surprised to learn that he was actually Charlie's mentor. He was Charlie's friend and that they did life together. Charlie wasn't just someone he had on the podcast a couple times. They had a deep relationship. He actually said he's become like one of my sons. And he speaks of Charlie as a very passionate follower of Jesus. I really don't know that much about Charlie, but Frank would be a voice I trust. But this is not an endorsement of Charlie or his views, or what he was doing. I really don't know enough about that. That's really not my point.

The point is the violent killing of any human being deeply grieves the heart of God. And my heart goes out to his wife, Erika, their children, and a lot of people who have been deeply affected by this. According to texts sent by the gunman as to his motive, his reason was he'd had enough of the hate. It's not hard to hear how convoluted that is. He's accusing someone else of hate, but he's the one that picked up a gun and killed another human being. But it actually is more than that.

Let's think back to what Jesus said in John chapter 3 last week. Jesus said, "The Light has come into the world," meaning Jesus. You'd think that'd be a good thing. But what Jesus said is, "No, it's not a good thing in the sense that people hate the Light." Why do they hate the Light? Because they love the darkness. And why do they love the darkness? Because their deeds are evil. So, any voice that represents Jesus, that represents God's view, that represents the Light, is immediately identified as hate because people hate the Light, because the light exposes their rats.

I can't even imagine, over the years, how many times I have said things from this platform that the culture would identify as hate speech because I'm just trying to represent what Jesus said, or what God has said. It is the Light, but people hate the Light.

I think the shooter could also be characterized by verse 11 from our text this morning, that when you hate, you end up walking in the darkness and, at some point, you become so blinded by the darkness, you've completely lost your way. You can't tell the difference between right and wrong and good and evil.

I think we also need to acknowledge this morning, these things don't just happen. For decades, as a culture, we have hated the Light and we have loved the darkness. This is who we've become.

You cannot love the darkness without consequence. You create an environment that breeds hate. And I'm quite certain this isn't the last time we'll see such behavior. It's been pretty eye opening in the last couple of weeks, the volume of people that have celebrated the death of Charlie. Just to word it differently, celebrated the violent taking of another human life. That is a very high level of darkness. I am quite certain most of those people would consider themselves good. They would consider themselves virtuous. They would consider themselves enlightened. Some, perhaps, would identify as Christian. But what God says is, "If you hate your brother, you walk in darkness." If you're going to celebrate the death of another human being, it's because you hate that human being. I do wonder if the story was reversed a bit, and the person that was killed was a left-wing socialist or atheist, an outspoken activist of some sort, how many people who are currently grieving the death of Charlie would celebrate that death? Oh, maybe not as publicly, maybe not on social media, but maybe quietly in their own hearts, there's a certain sense of satisfaction. "You know he had it coming." I can assure you the death of that person would grieve the heart of God, just as much as Charlie's death.

This is the problem with hate. Hate is contagious; it's infectious. The next thing you know, we're hating back. And before you know it, we are walking in darkness. It's pretty clear that if you hate your brother, you're walking in darkness. The taking of any human life certainly grieves the heart of God.

About three weeks ago, August 27 to be exact, there was a group of elementary-aged children that had filled the pews of a Catholic Church in Minneapolis to have a time of prayer before they entered into their school year when a gunman unleashed over 100 rounds into those children. Two were killed, 17 were wounded. I think we could all agree that it is just as tragic. What could be more tragic than the mowing down of children like that? It doesn't make any difference if someone's a celebrity or not a celebrity. It equally grieves the heart of God.

But what's interesting about that is, that story barely made the news. It's shocking to me how quickly we just move on. Two days later, there's another story, and that's all forgotten history. The internet didn't blow up over that one. I wonder how many people grieving Charlie's death even noticed that one. God noticed. Here's the deal. We've just become so used to the darkness we've become indifferent. We don't even notice it. These stories come and go and come and go, and people hardly even think about it. It's just a concession to the fact that there's evil in the world.

My prayer is that Charlie's death will wake us up to the reality of the world we live in, to get us off the sidelines, get us away from our apathy and just watching this stuff happen. The answer does not come from the government. The answer comes from us as the church. We are the new creation. We're called to be a light in the darkness. That isn't easy. It takes courage! But maybe this will motivate us to realize, "Man, this mission is serious! The darkness is overtaking us!" At some point we have to be true to what God has called us to be, and let the Light shine in the darkness, regardless of the consequences. The reality is, we can't do much about what lies ahead.

There's a lot of talk right now about revival. I hope that's true. We certainly need it. My question will be, "Will the revival be toward Jesus, or will the revival be a re-entrenching of the political wars that already divide us?" I think only time will tell. We may not be able to do much about all that, but we can do a lot about ourselves, and our own hearts, and our own response.

Here are the things I know for sure. I know for sure that God is sovereign. I know that! I know for sure that Jesus wins. I know for sure the Light prevails, and I know for sure if you have invited Jesus to be Savior, you are part of the new creation that's been called to be a light into the darkness, to rise above all this hate, and to love others as Jesus has loved you, that we, together, would walk as Jesus walked. May that be so for us. *(Clapping)* Let's pray.

Our Father, we are reminded today how much You loved us. We were your enemy when you died for us. God, those words are so easy to say, but we are also reminded that Jesus said, "Okay, as a new creation as my child, I'm asking you to love others the way I loved you." Lord, that's where it gets really hard. Lord, may we capture a renewed vision of what it means to be the people of God, what it means to love, so that we would have the courage to count the cost, to pay the price, to rightly represent Jesus in a very dark world. Lord, this I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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Discussion Questions *(with your group)*

- 1) **What is meant by the old command that is from the beginning?** Check out these passages to affirm what John is saying: Lev. 19:18, Deut. 6:5, Matt. 22:37-40. **Based on these verses, what is the importance placed on this command?**

In 1 John 2:8, John says in another way the command is new. Look up John 13:34-35. **What is new about the command Jesus gave? What makes it new for the believers John is writing to and for us?**

- 2) **In verses 9-11, when you think about “walking in the light”, is being loving toward others usually what comes to mind? Do you think of hating others as “stumbling around in the darkness?” Why or why not?**

In 1 John 2:9 John speaks of “hating” his brother. At first glance it would be easy for most of us to dismiss this verse because we don’t hate others. However, the word hate is not a term of emotion as we may think. It is a contrast to love. Love is to think of others as more important than ourselves, so hate would be to think of our own needs before we think of others. **Based on this definition of hate, how often do we “hate” others? Is this something we just turn on and off or is this a way we choose to live our lives?**

In what ways do Christians naturally love like this and in what situations might they choose not to?

- 3) **Authentic Christian community demands that we think of others as more important than ourselves. John clearly states that if we “hate” others we are in the darkness. What is at stake if you are only a relational consumer? What happens to your relationship with Jesus when you remain in the darkness?**

In verse 10, the word “stumbling” can be translated as a trap. **How does selfishness trap us in a miserable life?**

How does darkness blind us?

- 4) **What is one step you could take towards living in the light the way it is described in this passage?**

How can your Life Group help you move in this direction in your life?

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so that we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you to strengthen your souls with exercises that challenge and stretch you in new ways. Choose one and commit to repeating it until you gain strength in that area.

- 1) **Scripture Reading: to listen and soak in the Word as an experience of the words washing over you.** Read or listen to the entire letter of 1 John at least twice/week. As you take it in, resist the impulse to study and parse the details. The point is not to gain “head knowledge” but a stirring in the heart as the Holy Spirit brings the Word to life in you.
- 2) **Memorization: to internalize God’s Word.** A key passage for this series is **1 John 4:7-14**. Commit to memorize it yourself and encourage others in your group to do it with you.
- 3) **Walk & Pray: to actively engage with the scripture passage.** Write out the passage of the sermon each week on a note card and take it with you on a daily walk.
- 4) **Journal Reflection: to practice remembering what God has done.** Make time in your schedule to put down in writing the feelings and thoughts that are stirring as you interact with the Word of God.
- 5) **Self-control Exercise: to help you come to stillness from a busy or hurried pace of life.** Set a timer for 10 minutes. Sit upright but comfortably in a chair with your palms open and upward on your lap. Focus on a word or short phrase about the character of God the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. When your thoughts wander to the things on your to-do list or other people’s needs, redirect them back to the character of God. When the 10 minutes is up, close in a short prayer of gratitude.

Prayer

Praying together in a group is different than praying alone with God. It's a conversation that can help you grow closer to each other as you are in God's presence. One way to pray follows this often-used pattern in scripture – acknowledge who God is, recognize the need we have for Him, and ask to partner with Him on behalf of others. When possible, use the passage of scripture from this week's sermon as your starting point, then form a prayer that follows this pattern:

God, our Father, this week we learned that you are _____ and _____ .

As I looked into your Word, I understood how I need you to _____. Help me to be faithful to _____ in the week ahead.

Other people are on my heart, and I trust that you have put them there for a reason. I ask for your will to be accomplished in their life as they _____. Help me to know how to respond well to the needs of _____, even as my first step is in praying for them right now.

Each group engages in prayer differently. Some groups go around and allow anyone to pray that desires to do so. Other groups have several people pray or maybe 1 person closes the group in prayer. Still other groups split into smaller groups of 2-3 people and those people pray for each other. How you choose to engage in prayer is dependent on your group and your choice to ENGAGE! **We learn to pray by praying and by listening and praying with others!**