



Lesson 3 – The Command and the Encouragement

1 John 2:7-14

Effective leaders know both how to push their group while also providing encouragement. Those who think they have nothing left to accomplish will become lethargic and unmotivated. Those who feel like they never make any progress at all will become discouraged and give up. In the verses we will be looking at today, John both pushes his readers as well as encouraging them.

What are some other ways in which Scripture strikes the balance of both pushing while also encouraging believers?

In today's lesson, we will look at two sections that for the most part could stand on their own. The first section, 2:7-11, will continue the lesson from last week by making clear what commandments God has in mind when He tells us that we need to keep his commandment. In the second section, 2:12-14, John provides encouragement for the church by reminding them of what God had already done in their community.

I. The Great Commandment (1 John 2:7-11)

At the end of our last lesson, we warned that those who refuse to keep God's commands are demonstrating that they don't really know God and that His love has not been perfected (i.e., matured) in them.

What types of commands do people typically think of when you think of those who are disobeying God in such a way that they demonstrate they aren't truly born again?

Based on 1 John 2:7-11, what command did John have in mind?

While John does come right out and say it explicitly, a careful reading of this passage makes it clear that the new commandment and the old commandment is the same commandment: the command to love.

A. The new and old commandment (2:7-8)

John paradoxically states that this is old commandment from the beginning and also that this is a new commandment.

How do you think it is possible for this to be both an old and a new commandment?

John says that this old commandment is “from the beginning.” It’s possible that means from the very beginning of time, but it’s also possible that he means from the very beginning of the church or from the beginning of their new life in Christ. This is not something new that John is telling them for the first time. Ever since they started their Christian journey, they have known this commandment.

So what does it mean that this is a new commandment? After all, the Old Testament taught love of neighbor. Jesus claims that all the law can be summed up in “love

God” and “love other” and a scribe commended his answer (Mark 12:32-33). So if the Old Testament taught us to love others, the question becomes “In what way is this commandment new?”

Read John 13:34-35. In what way does Jesus see this command to love as new (look especially at the end of verse 34)?

Jesus taught a commitment to love others that went far beyond what was being taught in the synagogues. Jesus demonstrated a life of sacrificial love to others that went far beyond what anyone else thought was expected of them. The command to love is “new” not because no one knew to love before Jesus, but because Jesus showed us exactly what God meant by “love,” and it was a far higher bar than we realized.

What are some ways that Jesus loved others? How did the love he demonstrated go beyond anything we see in the Old Testament? How should this impact the way we love?

B. Walking in light or darkness (2:9-11)

John has already talked about living in darkness and living in the light before.

What did John connect living in darkness with before? What does he connect it with here? How do these two themes overlap?

We often think of sin as a personal matter, something I do that’s wrong. We might also think of sin as something

between God and myself. We don't always think of our sin as something that impacts others, but many sins are sins that directly relate to our relationships with others.

What are some examples of sins that hurt our relationship with others?

It has been said before that no man is an island. No man lives to himself and no man dies to himself. The choices we make impact more than just ourselves, and those who walk in darkness by choosing to continue in their sin are also those who will find their hearts hardened by hatred for others.

How can we as Christians keep our hearts from being infected by hatred?

This passage warns that hatred and walking in the darkness can blind us. How can hatred being blinding and work like a stumbling block to trip us up?

If we want to live in fellowship with God and others, we can't allow hatred in our lives. Instead, we are called to live like Jesus by loving others. Many Christians can give a long list of rules they have been careful not to break. But John goes deeper. John reminds us that the old commandment is the new commandment of Jesus – the command to love. If we find our hearts filled with hatred, especially hatred for other Christians, John warns us that we are self-deceived and are walking in darkness.

II. The Needed Encouragement (1 John 2:12-24)

This section of the letter stands out as being somewhat unique. Some see it tied to what comes before. Others see it as introducing what comes after. It's probably best to see it as a transition that moves from the introductory note of fellowship with God and others to the more combative tone against the enemies of the church that follows in the rest of the letter. It also serves to encourage the churches after a lot of instruction about the need to live rightly and before some pretty stern warnings about the world and false teachers.

Scan verses 12-14. What do you see that is parallel? What do you see that is different?

I write to you... ¹	Little children	Your sins are forgiven for His name's sake
I write to you...	Fathers	You have known Him who is from the beginning
I write to you...	Young Men	You have overcome the wicked one
I have written unto you...	Little children	You have known the Father
I have written unto you...	Fathers	You have known Him who is from the beginning
I have written unto you...	Young Men	You are strong, and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one

¹ There is some debate about the significance of John switching from the present tense to the past tense. Although several plausible options have been given, the most likely candidate is simple stylistic variation.

A. Encouragement for the whole church

The world “children”² probably refers to the whole church. It’s possible that John is using this term to refer specifically to those who are recent converts, as distinguished from those who have been saved longer (young men and old men). But John uses this designation several times throughout his letter (2:1, 12, 13, 18 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21), so it makes sense to keep that sense here in this passage.

1. You have been forgiven (2:12).

The greatest comfort and encouragement that any believer could be given is the reminder that their sins have been forgiven because of the work of Jesus. John starts off this beautiful truth as he encourages the churches he writes to.

How do we keep this glorious truth from being a cliché? How do we keep from “getting used” to the idea that all our sins have been forgiven because of Calvary?

2. You have known the Father (2:13).

John has stated at the outset of the letter that the goal of his writing is so that those he is writing to

² While the KJV has “little children” in both verse 12 and verse 13, there are two different Greek words that are used at this point: *teknion* (v 12) usually carries the idea of child in the sense of “descendant” whereas *paideion* (v 13) focuses more on the age of the child. The terms have a lot of overlap, however, and both are used of the whole church throughout the letter of 1 John (*teknion* – 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21 versus *paidion* – 2:13, 18). Although some see this difference as significant, the fact that both are used of all Christians means that in our study we will just assume they are synonyms.

would have fellowship with God. Here he commends the entire community for knowing the Father. For John, knowing God and knowing Christ are some of his key goals, but as we see elsewhere in Scripture, this is something that is both already the case and also something where people need to grow.

B. Encouragement for those who are mature in the faith (2:13, 14).

The word “old men” refers to those who are mature and have been saved for a while. While this term and the following term probably have spiritual maturity in mind, it’s also true that spiritual maturity typically comes with time, and so those who are oldest in the congregation and have been walking with God the longest will be the most mature.

This group that John refers to is interesting because in this case and this case only he repeats word for word what he said in both addresses to the same group. Those who are “old men” (and old women) and have matured in the faith are known specifically as those who have “known him that is from the beginning.”

Who do you think this is a reference to? (cf 1 John 1:1 and John 1:1)

Why do you think there is such a strong emphasis on this characteristic of mature believers?

The goal for believers should be a rich, growing, experiential knowledge of Jesus. A long life of following Jesus should mean that we know Jesus better and better. The call to Christians is to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter

3:18). John looks at the aged among those he is writing to and acknowledges that they have done that and commends them for such in his writing.

How does a believer come by this kind of knowledge? What could prevent someone who is a believer from growing in their knowledge of Jesus?

The goal for any believer should be that as they continue on in their Christian life, they would see more than just an increase in holy living, or in bible knowledge, or wisdom to live rightly. All of those things are important, but all of those things happen as a result of a growing knowledge of Christ, and all of those things should lead to a greater knowledge of Christ.

C. Encouragement for the young in faith.

John has addressed the entire congregation and has commended the older and more mature members of the congregation. Now he turns his attention to those who were young in the faith but had seen victory

1. You have overcome the wicked one (2:13).

This is the first reference to Satan in 1 John, although there will be several more. The young believers in John's group had overcome Satan.

In what ways did these believers overcome Satan? How do we beat Satan?

2. You are strong and victorious through God's Word (2:14).

According to this verse, what gives us the strength to overcome Satan?

What does this look like practically?

This section adds more to what John had said earlier. How did these young Christians overcome Satan? By being strong through the word. As we study God's Word and get to know our God, it gives us the strength we need to resist the devil and to live a holy life.

John has carefully laid out his purpose for writing 1 John – so that his readers can have fellowship and joy (1:1-4). He's gone on to address what can most quickly destroy that fellowship – sin (1:5-7). He then talks about how to address sin (1 John 1:8-2:2) and talked about how we ought to live instead (1 John 2:3-11). Finally, we have seen him encourage the congregation (1 John 2:12-14) after exhorting them to live for God and before he begins to warn them of other threats (1 John 2:15ff).

Christianity is a unique religion in that it is about what God has done for us, not primarily about what we must do for God. But once God has saved us, He does expect us to walk in the light and to follow Him. John strikes this balance by reminding his readers of what is already true of them in Christ, but also by reminding them of what they needed to do going forward.

How do we strike the proper balance of focusing on what God has done and is doing and what we must do?