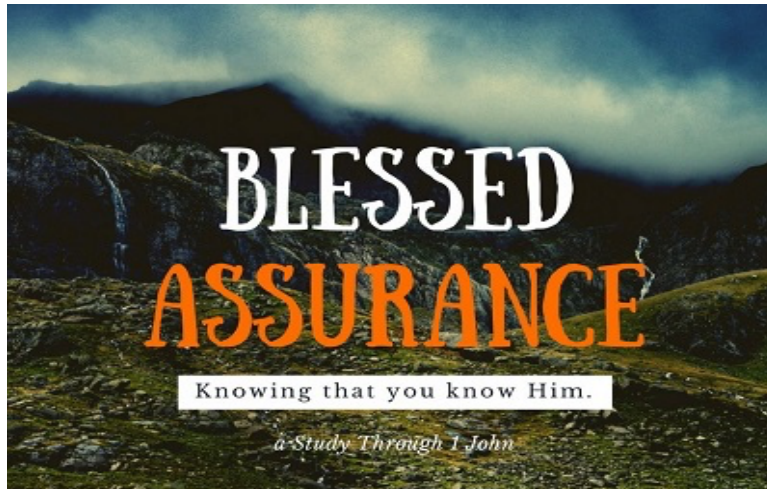


He Turned the Lights On



Bro. Ricky Cunningham
1 John 2:7-11

Many of you have been with me long enough to know that Celisa and I hired Hershel McKendree, a local carpenter, in the spring of 1994 to literally build or frame the house of our dreams. We had the blueprints from an architect, we took them to Hershel, we agreed on a price, and he started to build. The foundation was laid and he had started putting up the walls when he came to us and said, "Ricky, there is no door from the outside to the inside of your garage. It's no problem. We can put one in if you would like for us to." Well, we hadn't thought about it. I mean, we had a door from the garage going into the house, but he was talking about the little door on the side you can use to go outside. See, we started out with a 14 by 70 mobile home; no garage attached. Then we moved from that to a 960 square foot, 85-year-old farmhouse, no garage attached, so we didn't have experience with a garage. We just said, "The architect drew it that way, I am sure we don't need it." Man, was that a mistake! I mean we hadn't hardly moved in when we realized that we should have put the door from the outside to the inside of the garage because there are just times you don't want to open the big rollup door and pull the vehicles in; you just want to park on the outside. It was a mess! So within two years we were remodeling the home of our dreams to add that new entry door from the

outside to the inside of our garage, and now we could come in that new door through the garage and into the house.

Second problem. Because the new door wasn't supposed to be there, there wasn't a light switch there connected to the light above — the only switch was on the door that goes into the house. Are you all getting this picture? Now we have a decision to make. Do we want a light switch by the new door? Well, when the electrician explained the way our house was built, there was no way he could run up the wall and over to the light. We would actually have to tear out the sheetrock, so I said no. So, option number two, which I thought was good, was we would just take conduit, go from the light on the outside of the sheetrock, down to the wall panel, and over to the light. Immediately, Celisa said no. So to this day, there is no light switch beside the door going into our garage.

Third problem. The last several years Celisa has upgraded trucks. When we built our house in 1994, trucks were only so big, but now trucks are bigger. So when she pulls her truck into the garage (my truck sets out, mind you) she stops four inches from the front wall, so when we put the garage door down that leaves us about fifteen to sixteen inches to go between it and the back bumper of her Ford 350 Dually. Can I remind you it is dark in the garage? Can I just remind you that after living somewhere for twenty something years, you just get a lot of stuff? Sometimes the stuff no longer fits on the shelves and it just kind of sets wherever you can find it. So get this picture. We open the door and it is pitch black. We have to navigate into the garage and down her truck, and it is kind of hilarious because whoever goes first, you can just hear them bumping and stumbling. You hear a ding. You hear something fall off a shelf. You hear us kick something. Finally, they get to the door and they turn the light on. Now, I just want you all to know that I love my wife so much that when we come home together, I always go first. I fight through the darkness to get around her truck and through all of the stuff. She has big mirrors, so that is why I have bruises on the side of my face sometimes. I finally get to that light switch, and as soon as I turn it on, she thanks me for turning the light on, and then she safely navigates where she is supposed to be. Praise the

Lord for iPhones now, amen! When you buy an iPhone you get a camera, calculator, and you get a flashlight! So, now I pull out my iPhone and I turn on the light. Do you wonder where I am going with this? Aren't you so thankful we don't have to navigate the darkness of this world, but that God sent Jesus? And the life He lived for us — do you know what He really did? He turned the light on. That's going to be our message this morning. When I examined these verses, we are going to talk about in 1 John chapter 2 verses 7 through 11, that is the picture I got — God turned the light on.

Scripture

"Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever 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 is ultimately writing so that we who believe in Christ may know that we have everlasting life. John does not want a believer paralyzed with uncertainty. He knows that the way to live the full meaningful Christian life, to have unspeakable joy, is to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you have eternal life. Eternal life is not something that begins when we die and get to Heaven, but eternal life is something that begins inside of us. It is not just a quantity of life; it is a quality of life that starts the moment you turn from sin and put your faith in Christ. John wants us to know we have this one-of-a-kind God kind of life. So, in his letter he is going to test us in three different ways. He is going to give us a moral test, a spiritual test, and then a doctrinal test.

Now, last week we talked about how those of us who know we know Him will walk as He walked, and one of the things the Bible tells us is that there are people who say they know Him but don't really know Him. The way you know you really know Him is by obeying His commands. So if you say you know Him but you don't keep His commands then John calls you a liar and he says the truth is not in you. Now, if you know that's the first test — that John says it is not what you *say* that matters, it is what you *do* that matters — then John is saying each one of us who claims the name of Christ ought to understand our life ought to look like Jesus's life looked. Does that make sense? So, we should be obedient to Him. What He tells us to do we are to do. I don't know about you, but I always struggled when my kids would tell me how much they loved me and I would just say something simple and they wouldn't want to do it. That always hurt my feelings. I just kind of always had this thought that if you really loved somebody and they tell you do to something, if you really love them, you will want to do it. Agreed? That is how simple John makes this — do you want to do what Christ commands you to do?

See, that test, a behavior test, a righteousness test, a moral test, if you will, leads John into the second test he is going to give in the second chapter, and that is what I am calling the social test or the spiritual test. Our spiritual test involves our social skills. Here is what John says, I am writing to you, but I am not writing to you a new commandment but an old commandment, which you heard from the beginning. But this new commandment that I am writing you about....*Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute John, you told me it wasn't new; you told me it was old. Now you are telling me it is old and new at the same time?*

If you remember last week I shared with you that in Greek class at seminary Bible college, we start out in 1 John because 1 John is considered baby Greek. John was a fisherman! He had a simple language, a simple vocabulary. But I want you to understand that even though John's words and style may have been simple, don't think his thoughts are necessarily always simple. Don't associate it with shallowness. John is getting ready to tell us something really, really deep. See, he is going to give us a command

that we ought to be following, and according to John, if we are not following this command then it is evident we are not who we say we are if we say we know Christ. Are you with me? Are you with John? What he is going to write and command them he says is not new, it's old — as a matter of fact, he says you have heard from the beginning. He doesn't just come out in verses 7 and 8 and tell us what the command is, but we know what the command is by the examples he's going to give in verses 9-11. Here is basically what the command is: If we say we know Christ and we are in a saving relationship with Him, we ought to love one another. In 1 John 3:11, he is going to say this is the message you have heard from the beginning, to love one another. In 2 John, verse 5, he is actually going to say to the lady he is writing to, I am not writing a new command, I am writing an old command, one that you have already heard — that you love one another. So this old commandment that they have heard from the beginning is that they love one another.

Now, it is possible that when John says you have heard this command from the beginning, it may refer back to the beginning of God's people, Israel, when God gave Israel the law. In the book of Leviticus, chapter 19, verse 18, God talked about human relationships and the kind of relationships He wants everybody in the nation to have, and finally He just summarizes it at the end and says love your neighbor as yourself. Later, Jesus is going to be asked which is the greatest commandment. Jesus is going to say first of all, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind, quoting Deuteronomy chapter 6. Then he is going to say AND love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commands, all the law hangs. Wow! So please know, ever since God put together His covenant people, here is what He has expected his covenant people to do — love one another.

Now, from the beginning may refer to the beginning of the church. In the beginning of the church, Jesus made it clear that we are supposed to love one another, and this is how the world would know we were His disciples...by the way we loved one another. Or, this may refer to the fact that when they come to faith and then came into the church, it was

obvious that the first and great command of God is what? To love one another. So John is making it clear he is not writing anything new. If you came to Hardin this morning expecting to find out something new, you are not going to find out anything new because you should know from the beginning you are to love one another.

Now, how can something be old and new at the same time? Good question. It is an old commandment, but it is new in this sense (John goes on to say) that the true light is now in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Everybody knows that I didn't quote the gospel exactly right when I said Jesus said by this, the way you love one another, is how the world will know you are my disciples. Do you remember what He really said? He said I am writing to you a new command. Love one another as I have loved you. Love one another, and by this — loving one another the way I have loved you will reveal to the whole world that you are my disciples. Do you see how this command to love one another is new? It is new in the sense that it has a whole new standard. See, the old commandment to love one another was based on I was to love John the way I love myself. But the new standard is I am to love John the way Christ loved John and the way Christ loved me. Whoa! Does everybody get that? It is one thing for me to love you and when I disappoint you, I can just say, "Hey, that's the best I can do." A Christian doesn't have that excuse. I don't love you within my capability; I love you with the capability of Christ, because this new love that the light of God has revealed to me is not only in Christ it is in me. And what John wants us to know is the darkness is passing away, the way people used to think is passing away, and now the true light of God is already shining. I think John is borrowing this thought from the writer Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 60, verses 19 and 20. Isaiah referred to a time when we would no longer turn to the sun or the moon to give light, but we would turn to God as our everlasting light. Where do we Christians derive our light from? Where do we derive our ability to love from? We derive it from God in Christ.

We aren't going to go in a lot of depth here because John is going to do this in the next chapters, he is just telling us what the test is this morning,

and I want you to get ready for the test. So listen, if you know the material, no problem — if you don't know the material, you are going to flunk. In flunking, it will just save your life because when you flunk the test, it should bring you to realize you don't know Him — you are saying one thing, but you are doing something completely different. Now, catch this. If you are saying one thing, but doing something completely different, don't go with what you are saying go with what you are doing. Amen? So what John is saying is if you are saying you know Him but you are not following His commands...if you say you know Him but you are not loving as Christ loved, don't go with what you say go with what you are doing, because you will never have assurance of salvation until what you say and what you are doing align. If they don't ever align, you don't have eternal life.

Now, I want to give you three brief characteristics of the love of Christ. I want us to talk about its extent, its intent, and its content. When a preacher says something like that, that means it is a good sermon, amen? Why are we talking about the love of Christ? Because I am supposed to love like Christ loved. What was the extent of Christ's love? Do you know the thing that the gospels make clear? It is that the religious world could not figure Jesus out because He hung around with the sinners more than He hung around the religious group. Jesus didn't go from Bible study to Bible study to Bible study. He didn't attend all of the worship services of His day; He hung out with sinners. As a matter of fact, they would ask His disciples...*Does He not know who He is hanging around with? Does He not know what they are drinking? Does He not know what they are eating? Does He not know what they are doing? He is being called the friend of sinners!* And Jesus is going...*cool!* That is cool because do you know what He was revealing? He was revealing the love of God. In a society where men would not talk to women, Jesus actually entered into a conversation with a lady at a well! He actually let a sinful woman anoint His feet with a perfume that would cost almost a one-year salary! When the treasurer of His disciples said wouldn't it have been better to sell it and put into the treasury for us minister to the poor, Jesus said you will always have the poor with you, but what this lady just did is a memorial forever.

Now, hear this...the love that the Bible is going to be talking about here that assures us that we have eternal life is a love within the family. It's talking about brothers and sisters in Christ and the love we have among each other. So, can I ask you this question? Does the love you have for your fellow brother and sister in Christ mirror the extent of Christ's love? Or have you noticed you only love the ones who are like you? Have you ever noticed that you don't know anybody that isn't like you? I would be worried if that was me. Are you hearing me? A lot of our holy huddles ultimately end up being with the people who are just like us. Now, there's nothing wrong with having friends who are just like you, but listen to me — in the church that is not the way it is supposed to be. I know we live in a society now that loves walls, but there is one place in America where there should not be walls and that is the church of Jesus Christ. I am so thankful that Christ didn't come into this world and just love people like Him or He would have never loved me. I don't want to burst your bubble, but He would not have loved you either. If we are going to love like Christ loved, if we are going to be assured of salvation, we have to love to the extent He loved.

Now, the extent of our love is because of an intent. What is the intent? The intent is Christ loved to redeem people from where they were. He entered into relationships to bring people from over there to over here — over here was where He was — because He knew where He was supposed to be. Ultimately, He knew that if you saw Him you saw God. So the intent of Christ's love, as I understand it, is to redeem the people He is loving from their sin, from their flaws, from their faults. Amen? He is not loving the people who are good; He is loving the people that are bad. When a flaw, a fault, or a sin is evident in the life of a brother or sister in the body of Christ, how do you deal with that? Do you want to separate? Do you want to pull away? Do you want to just leave them where they are? Do you think that is their problem, not yours? Or, is there something inside of you that really wants to help a brother or a sister? See, we are not talking about redeeming somebody from the penalty of sin, only Christ can do that. What we are talking about, clearly, is in the process of sanctification us having a love for our family, so much that we come alongside to help brothers and sisters who struggle. That is what Christ did. Is that rooted in

you? When you see your love, is that what you see? Now, I am not talking about how you are loving your husband, your wife, your kids, your grandkids, your sister, your brother, your mom, or your dad. I am talking about your love for your spiritual brothers and sisters, not the blood of Adam that runs through your veins but the blood of Christ that redeemed you and sealed you.

Thirdly is the content of Christ's love. Do you know what the content of His love is? He loved with everything He had. He loved with His entire being. Does everyone agree with that? He didn't hold back. Have any of you ever loved to the point that it hurt? Yeah! Man, it hurts sometimes! But let me ask you this question. Have you ever been in a relationship with a brother or sister in Christ where the hurt was so bad that it almost caused you to put a wall up and separate, pull back, and say...Stay back! Stay out! No, I cannot do that again! I can't keep letting you hurt me. You have to be careful here, guys, because what we are saying is I am going to love you until you hurt me, but when you hurt me I am going to protect myself. Does anybody see that in Jesus Christ? No, He loved us to the point that it not only hurt him, it KILLED Him! Do you know what it cost Him to love us? It cost Him everything He had. When this community sees a church that loves each other with that kind of love...WOW. Do we have any A+ students in this category? Let's suppose there are thirty-five people in your life and you are batting a thirty-five every time — in every situation you are loving them like Christ loved you. Then pat yourself on the back because you get an A+ on the test. How are you really doing?

The Bible says the true light that was in Christ is also in us. See, the Bible has already taught us that God is light, but then it taught us that Jesus is the light of the world. And then, Jesus turned around and taught us that if we follow Him we don't walk in darkness but we walk in light, and that we are the light of the world. He said as lights of the world, we are supposed to so live our life to let men see our good works, which would glorify our father who is in Heaven. Which means what? As you reveal the light of God through the way you love the body of Christ, you point people to Jesus. When people come to Jesus, Jesus points them to God. Isn't that ultimately

what our life is about? Listen to me — your life is not about making a living; it is about making a life — a life, no matter what your living is, that ultimately points people to Christ so that Christ can ultimately point people to God, so that people can be made right with God! But even those who are made right with God, from time to time, are going to need you and I to come alongside them to help.

Now, it is going to become obvious, at some point, that there are some people who are not true believers. The person who continues to say one thing and do something else is not a believer. The Bible is not talking about those people. Yes, we are to have a general love for them, but we are to have a specific love for those who we are kin to. God has ordained the love that we have for the body to ultimately point people who are outside the body to Christ. Wouldn't it be neat if down at the coffee shop, the restaurant, or the hair salon, instead of the world talking about how the church fusses and fights they were saying, "Did you hear how that church loved" so and so? "Did you hear what they did for" so and so? Amen? If we would just practice this for about three months, we would have to add a fourth, fifth and a sixth service to this church because the world would truly know we are disciples of Christ. We have an old command we have to obey, and that is a new command that we live and love to the standard of Christ.

Then, John gives us examples about a person saying they are in the light but they hate their brother — he said they are still in darkness. Then he talks about a person who loves his brother is actually in the light, and in him, there is no cause for stumbling. Then he comes back to talk about the brother who hates, who is in darkness is actually walking in darkness, and the reason he is walking in darkness is because he is blind and can't see. Let me tell you what I think this primarily means. An unbeliever has an excuse to do what they do because they are blind. Amen? So Jesus, on the cross, could say, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." A believer has no excuse.

Do you remember when John wrote and said I am writing to you so that you may not commit (an act) of sin? He now tells you why we shouldn't be committing acts of sin. It is because we walk in the light of God and God's light fully reveals to us our path. You shouldn't be like me walking through a crowded garage in the dark, stumbling, falling, hitting things, getting hurt and breaking things. You should walk through life with the light of God in you, and therefore we have no reason to stumble or fall or sin. Wow! I think this is primarily meaning you have no excuse to hurt a brother or a sister. Are we still little babies? Do we still want to tell why we did what we did in the flesh, and it is because of what they did first? Are you kidding me? When they do it first, what do we do? The same thing Christ did! What did He do? Forgive! I know. I know...look what they did to Him! That's right...look how it turned out though. He got back up and changed my life! That is what God wants to do with you in somebody else's life.

Here is what John is teaching — in this world, there is light and darkness. Light is going to refer to spiritual life. Darkness is going to refer to spiritual death. What comes out of spiritual life is the ability to love like Christ loves, and what comes out of the life of someone who is spiritually dead is hate. Now, I have to be honest with you, when I was searching through this I was thinking...*ok, John, I don't fit neatly into any one of those categories. I need a third option. I need a strong like or a strong dislike.* I don't want to think I hate people, do you? But I am going to be honest with you — there are some people I don't like. To be totally honest with you, there are times I struggled in the past to say I really loved somebody, I would just say...I really like them. But it always ate at me. I just never could get assurance, because with God there is no middle road. Does not the book of Revelation say He would rather you be hot or cold? What did He say about the lukewarm church? He was going to spit them out of his mouth. Listen; there is no middle road for you this morning. If you don't love the family the way Christ loved the family, you are in the other camp, and the Bible says you are spiritually dead, you are in darkness, you are blind, and you don't see it. You aren't going to see your condition until God turns the lightbulb on. God help those who are blind and don't know they are blind. We keep stumbling and then blaming somebody for parking the truck in

the garage or not putting what we stumbled over on the shelf! Do we not get it? Those difficult people in our life are tests from God to reveal if we really get it. If we are doing what we say, we know. Get ready. The test is coming. We have no excuse from this day forward to ever fail another test because we know we have eternal life. So, let's live and love as He lived and loved.