



## ***The Motivation For Selfless Love – 1 Jn. 2:7-11***

(Expanded Sermon Notes)

As they started out heading back to Galilee, something felt off. They knew where they were supposed to go and how to get there. This wasn't the first time they had made this journey. They have made it several times over the last two years with Jesus. And they had been making it for their entire lives with their families. But, this time, something was different. They weren't on their usual route. But, something they have come to expect is that the unusual happens when they are with Jesus. Water gets turned to wine. The sick are healed. Religious scholars who always seem to have an answer or a retort are silenced and left stumbling over what words they could muster. The unusual should be expected. However, even they weren't prepared for where he would take them and what would happen there.

Being led by the power of the Spirit, Jesus sensed that he (and his disciples who were with him) had to go through Samaria. A place that they would *literally* walk out of their way to avoid on any normal journey from Jerusalem to Galilee. *They should not be there.* She should not be there. ***And they should not be talking to her.*** But, he (Jesus) is, and what is about to happen is unusual. It will change her life. It will change the lives of so many in her village and region. The day that selfless love and grace came in-person to town is a day to remember. It struck John so significantly that he wrote it down so that generations could read about it. Now, as he is writing a letter to a church he loves and cares for, he will express a truth that he saw so vividly that day.

***Loving our neighbors with selfless love is an essential mark of a follower of Jesus.***

### ***Selfless love requires a right view of self. (vv. 10-11)***

This morning as we go through our passage in 1 John, we will reference John chapter 4 and the story of the woman at the well. The story of the woman at the well will help give us a clear picture of the way Jesus loved selflessly. So, who is she? She was a Samaritan and meets Jesus and the disciples at a well in the middle of the day. She shouldn't have been there, not at that time of the day. All of the other women would have come early in the morning when it was still cool out to draw water. She's an outcast from that community, and so, she comes at noon. What becomes painfully clear in her story is that not only did she have a distorted view of herself, but the disciples did too. And even more painful, the disciples had a distorted view of themselves! **One of the first things we see this week is that selfless love requires a right view of self.** Rewinding to last week, we saw that Jesus is our model for authentic obedience. And what do we watch him do here at a well in Samaria? **We see him selflessly loving and giving away grace to his neighbor.**

We all have a distorted view of ourselves. In that, we either error in not seeing enough of ourselves or in seeing too much of ourselves. Either way, we are in error. And what ultimately results is sin. Again, last week we learned that our obedience matters and mature Christians will take their sin seriously. John tells this group of believers that he loves the same truth. Mature Christians take their sin seriously. **And that in order to have selfless love, which is a mark of a Christian, we must have a right view of self, which requires a right view of sin.** So, what is sin?

#### A. What is sin?

##### a. The fundamental unbelief, distrust, and rejection of God and human displacement of God as the center of reality.<sup>1</sup>

##### i. Sin has deeper roots of distrust and displacement of God that are expressed through my behavior.

1. I.e., Sin is not just the wrong actions I willfully do or the right actions I willfully ignore.
2. **If I am the center of my reality, how can I love someone else selflessly?**

##### a. Instead, I need to put God at the center, and then from and in and through Him (the one who loves selflessly), I can begin to love selflessly.

##### ii. Rich Villodas – “Sin is a principle of captivity to a power that permeates and contaminates our human reality. Sin is the word Christians use to name not simply our failed acts but also our inner and outer captivity.”<sup>2</sup>

- b. As an inherent part of the human condition, sin is universal, and it is both corporate and individual.<sup>3</sup>

#### B. What is corporate sin?

- a. Sin also has massive effects on the relationships between humans.
- b. **Since sin makes one increasingly self-centered and self-seeking, there will inevitably be conflict with others.**<sup>4</sup>

#### C. Expressions of corporate sin:

- a. **Competition:** “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet, but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight” (James 4:1–2).<sup>5</sup>
- b. **Inability to empathize:** Being concerned about our personal desires, reputation, and opinions, we see only our own perspective. We cannot step into the shoes of others

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, [\*Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms\*](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 107.

<sup>2</sup> Rich Villodas, *The Deeply Formed Life* (Waterbrook, 2020) 99.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, [\*Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms\*](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 107.

<sup>4</sup> Millard J. Erickson, [\*Christian Theology\*](#), 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 563–564.

<sup>5</sup> Millard J. Erickson, [\*Christian Theology\*](#), 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 564.

and see their needs as well, or see how they might understand a situation in a somewhat different way.<sup>6</sup>

i. cf. Phil. 2:3-5 → “In humility value others above yourselves.”

c. **Rejection of authority:** If we find security in our own possessions and accomplishments, then any outside authority is threatening. Since it restricts our doing what we want, it must be resisted or ignored. In the process, of course, many others’ rights may be trampled.<sup>7</sup>

d. **Inability to love:** Since other people stand in our way, representing competition and a threat to us, we cannot really act for the ultimate welfare of others if our aim is self-satisfaction. **And so suspicions, conflicts, bitterness, and even hatred issue from the self-absorption or the pursuit of finite values that has supplanted God at the center of the sinner’s life.**<sup>8</sup>

i. Corporate sins are often expressed in various ‘isms.

1. Racism – Giving preference based on race and ethnicity.

2. Ageism – Giving preference based on age or stage of life.

3. Classism – Giving preference based on economic class or wealth.

a. All of these extend from the Biblical sin of preference.

b. **All of these begin with and are sustained by a wrong view of self.**

D. A right view of self requires an internal examination. – Sin vs. sin.

a. John Calvin – “**The knowledge of God and that of ourselves are connected. Without knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God. Without knowledge of God, there is no knowledge of self.**”<sup>9</sup>

i. King David models this very truth in Psalm 19:7-14

b. **The law of the LORD is perfect,<sup>[c]</sup>**

**reviving the soul;**

**the testimony of the LORD is sure,**

**making wise the simple;**

**<sup>8</sup>the precepts of the LORD are right,**

**rejoicing the heart;**

**the commandment of the LORD is pure,**

**enlightening the eyes;**

**<sup>9</sup>the fear of the LORD is clean,**

**enduring forever;**

**the rules<sup>[d]</sup> of the LORD are true,**

**and righteous altogether.**

**<sup>10</sup>More to be desired are they than gold,**

**even much fine gold;**

**sweeter also than honey**

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<sup>6</sup> Millard J. Erickson, [Christian Theology](#), 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 564.

<sup>7</sup> Millard J. Erickson, [Christian Theology](#), 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 564.

<sup>8</sup> Millard J. Erickson, [Christian Theology](#), 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 564.

<sup>9</sup> Rich Villodas, 99.

and drippings of the honeycomb.

<sup>11</sup> Moreover, by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.

c. <sup>12</sup> Who can discern his errors?

**Declare me innocent from hidden faults.**

<sup>13</sup> **Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;  
let them not have dominion over me!**

Then I shall be blameless,  
and innocent of great transgression.

d. <sup>14</sup> Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable in your sight,  
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

e. Not the people in your life that are easy to love.

i. The reality of what we are talking about is not those who are easy to love.

ii. **John's audience is in conflict. John is encouraging them to love those that they are in conflict.**

1. **Who are you in conflict with?**

2. **Who do you disagree with?**

E. **If the evidence of love is there, you can have confidence.** → Moral Test

a. How will I see the evidence of love? → Loving my brother. → The Social Test

## **Selfless love isn't something new. (v. 7)**

Going back to verse 7, John stresses that this command to love selflessly is not a new command. The false teachers that were rampant in the body were teaching "new" truths and ideas to them. These new truths and ideas are the source of the conflict and confusion for this group. And so, John wants it to be very clear, the command to love is not a new command. John told them this command from the first time that he shared the gospel with them. Jesus has not only taught the command to love but has modeled it for them. John has seen it time and time again firsthand. That trip to Samaria is seared into his memory. Of all the selfless things Jesus had done up to that point, going there, talking to her, and watching so many Samaritans respond in belief because of Jesus' selfless love. Even more than that, though, he wants them to remember that the command to love is not new; it is old; it came from him and is trustworthy.

***When we are in the swirl and confusion of an upheaval, a disruption, or a traumatic experience, we need to reach for basic and simple truths from people we love and respect.***

John is yearning for his audience to look to himself in this way. And as they do, he wants them to see the truth that selfless love is not something new to them or to Christianity. Today, we must be reminded that selfless love is not reserved for spiritual superheroes. Instead, it is to be

standard practice for Christians. Why? Because Jesus made it a standard practice, and we are to be like him.

**Jn. 4:4 – He had to pass through Samaria.**

- A. **Brotherly love was part of the original message which had come to them.** John was not now inventing it. It was not an innovation such as the heretics claimed to teach. It was as old as the gospel itself.<sup>10</sup>
  - a. **When we are in the swirl and confusion of an upheaval, a disruption, or a traumatic experience, we need to reach for basic and simple truths from people we love and respect.**
    - i. Time, energy, and emotions are limited commodities in these moments.
- B. Selfless love is not a practice of a spiritual superhero.
  - a. Jesus models selfless love throughout his ministry as a **standard practice**.
    - i. John 13:35 – ‘**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.**<sup>35</sup> **By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.**’
  - b. John 4:4 – Jesus is seeking to teach his disciples an important lesson about selfless love and the priorities of the Kingdom of Heaven.
    - i. This comes almost two years into his public ministry.
    - ii. This is what makes the way of Jesus’ selfless love convincing for us.
    - iii. Love and grace experienced are our motivation to love selflessly.
      - 1. I.e., We have seen, heard, and touched it.
      - 2. *Why are you a Christian?*

## ***Grace is our motivation to obey the command to love selflessly. (vv. 8-9)***

**Jn. 4:28 – She experienced grace and immediately went to tell everyone about it.**

That day at the well, she had never received such a gracious offer. In fact, John tells us that she went back to her town and told everyone about the interaction she just had. Think about it; they all knew her. They knew why she was an outcast. And yet, they followed her to meet Jesus. And in turn, many believed.

***Grace changes hearts and lives.***

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<sup>10</sup> John R. W. Stott, [\*The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary\*](#), vol. 19, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 97.

Here is another way of saying it, grace **experienced** is our motivation to love selflessly. What was your first tangible experience of grace? Well, let's start here, grace is unmerited favor. Or getting something that you do not deserve. John is reminding us that we have experienced grace through Jesus. And, when we first experienced that grace, our lives, just like the Samaritan women, were changed. The thing about grace is that it requires truth to be powerful and effective. If there is no truth, there can be no grace. If there is no standard to be held accountable to, then there can be no chance to receive unmerited favor. Grace needs truth. And, conversely, truth needs grace so that it can be digestible. We extend grace through selfless love.

In verse 7, John comes back to the idea of the command to love selflessly being new. We know that the command to love isn't new. We know that Jesus modeled selfless love over and over again, even going to the cross. **Yet, as Christians, selfless love is to be perpetually new.** Here is what that means, **the command to selfless love is new by our fresh apprehension of it**, 'for though doctrinal Christianity is always old, experimental Christianity is always new' (Candlish). In these ways, it was 'a new command' and will always remain new. It is new teaching for the new age which has dawned, new ... *because the darkness is passing, and the true light is already shining*.

This true light is Jesus. It shines through us as evidence by our obedience. And, as we obey, our hearts are changed, and the love of God is perfected in us. As the love of God is perfected in us, and our joy is made complete, we experience grace in new ways. That grace experience is our motivation to love selflessly. The tricky part is that we are not Jesus. We are not full of grace and truth. We tend to be filled with one over the other. A way to think about this is a set of lenses, a compassion lens, and a truth lens. We all tend to overemphasize one of them. But, where they overlap, where truth and compassion are equally present, that is where grace is. That is what makes the way of Jesus so powerful.

- A. Grace and truth. → Why is the order important? (Jn. 1:17)
  - a. Because grace experienced is our motivation to love selflessly.
  - b. What was your first tangible experience of grace?
    - i. Grace is unmerited favor. I.e., Getting something that you do not deserve.
  - c. Grace **experienced** is our motivation to love selflessly.
    - ii. Jn. 4:28 → The woman's response!!!

**B. Selfless love is perpetually new!**

- d. It was also, fourthly, **to continue new by our fresh apprehension of it**, 'for though doctrinal Christianity is always old, experimental Christianity is always new' (Candlish). In these ways, it was 'a new command', and will always remain new. It is new teaching for the new age which has dawned, new ... *because the darkness is passing, and the true light is already shining*.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> John R. W. Stott, [\*The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary\*](#), vol. 19, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 97–98.

- C. **“True in him and you...”** This statement involves an unusual use of the word “true” (*alēthēs*). In the papyri the word consistently means “true” as opposed to “false” in relation to statements of fact, or “truthful” as opposed to “untruthful” in relation to persons, and this is its normal range of meaning in the NT as well (Matt 22:16; Mark 12:14; John 3:33; 4:18; 5:31, 32; 7:18; 8:13, 14, 17; 10:41; 19:35; 21:24; Rom 3:4; 2 Cor 6:8; Phil 4:8; Titus 1:13; 2 Pet 2:22; 1 John 2:27; 3 John 12). However, there are a few places in the NT where *alēthēs* is used with the meaning **“real” or “genuine”** (John 6:55; Acts 12:9; 1 Pet 5:12).
- e. **This latter meaning comes closest to what is demanded by the context in 2:8, but still does not really fit properly. The sense of *alēthēs* demanded in this context is something like “truly expressed.”<sup>12</sup>**
- D. **Truth and Compassion lenses... Which one do you look through primarily?**
- f. Grace only makes a difference when truth is equally present.
- iii. I.e., We need both lenses.
- iv. **This also means grace does not make us a doormat.**
- E. **The hunger of the world for the reality of selfless love (vv.7-11).**
- g. It yearns desperately for a balanced outlook, fair judgment, and ethical conduct.
- h. In Christ, we gain a correct perspective of ourselves and the model for that kind of life.
- i. Andreas Ebert – **“Christians have confidence that Christ has lived through all the abysses of human life and that he goes with us when we dare to engage in sincere confrontation with ourselves.”<sup>13</sup>**
- F. **If the evidence of love is there, you can have confidence. → Moral Test**
- a. Who is hard to love in my life? → Am I treating them graciously?
- i. Do I have a right view of self so that I can have a right response to them?
- b. Are there sins and Sin in my life that I need to repent of?
- i. Are they hidden, and I need the Father to expose them?
- ii. **“Jesus lives in your heart, but grandpa is in your bones.”**
- c. Which lens (truth or compassion) is my primary lens? How can I grow in the other?

<sup>12</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, ed. D. A. Carson, Second Edition., Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2020), 89–90.

<sup>13</sup> Rich Villodas, 102.