

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

We've looked at our love for God as measured by our obedience to His commands now we look at our loving relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ as a gauge of our healthy relationship in fellowship with God. Anyone who claims to love God will also have a love for the people of God.

He who says that he is in the light

Have you ever heard the phrase "talk is cheap"? John's saying that their claim to be in fellowship with God, and letting that relationship shape their attitudes, actions, and character must be false if they can hate those Brothers and Sisters in Christ, whom God Himself loves.

And yet hates his brother or sister

This term, "and hates his brother" means hating other Christians. As we talked about last week, "hate" is a characteristic of worldliness, not godliness. The only thing we're ever told to hate is evil, sin. And we're even instructed to love our enemies: Matthew 5:44 **44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you**, Not only are we to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, but we are to love those who make themselves our enemies, trying to do good for them. This kind of animosity may begin as a dislike or disagreement, but result in actions taken against our brothers or sisters in Christ. It is worth a bit of self-reflection to see how we really feel about our brothers and sisters in Christ, and let God work to soften our hearts.

"is in the darkness until now."

Those who can hate brothers and sisters in Christ are in a state of spiritual darkness. They are out of fellowship with God, refusing to abide with Him in the Truth of His Word, and trying to maintain worldly bitterness and hatred, blinded to the truth of God's Word. The person doesn't know that they can't see. (Example: Sampson in Judges 16:20 who ended up physically blinded in verse 21). First sin blinds, then it binds, then it destroys. We also see this spiritual blindness in the Pharisees (see John 9 vs 40-41, Matthew 15:12-14. Spiritual blindness is the reason that you can preach directly from the Bible to false Christians, and they will still try to find a way that the Word you've read is applicable to everyone but them.

10 The one who loves his brother and sister

Genuine believers love their brothers and sisters in Christ. John keeps repeating "His brother" to emphasize the close relationship that should exist between true believers in Christ.

remains in the light

The person who loves his brother is doing so by letting God's character flow out of him. This outflowing of the love of God toward our brothers and sisters is proof that we're truly abiding with God in the light. Walking in the light prevents stumbling, and gives us discernment. We are protected from the snares of the wicked (see Psalm 141:9, 119:85, 119:10, 140:5).

The main difference between the false Christian, who is blind, and does not realize that he is walking in darkness, and the true Christian, who is choosing to sin, and not walking in light as they must, is the presence of the Holy Spirit. **1 Corinthians 2:14 The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.** The false Christian will tend not to choose the wisdom of God, but the vain philosophies of men. The things of they consider foolishness.

Even true Christians have areas of spiritual blindness where they refuse to allow the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts. That's one of the reasons why we're put together in churches—because our areas of spiritual blindness are different, and so you can help me see the areas where I fall short in my submission to God, and letting the Holy Spirit work on my heart, and I can help you see those areas where you're falling short, or missing the mark. So we must serve each other in love by coming along side and helping each other grow. The true Christian will turn to the Lord for wisdom, at the urging of the Holy Spirit within them (James 1:5).

Christianity isn't about feeling good about ourselves, or patting ourselves on the back for our imagined achievements, but about abiding in fellowship with God, and in fellowship with one another. We need to pause regularly to ask ourselves how we really feel about our brothers and sisters in Christ—are we loving them as Christ would love them, or are we just going through the motions?

and there is no cause of stumbling in him."

Literally John says, "and there is not a stumbling block in him." This term, in Greek is something that causes someone to stumble, whether morally or physically. This word skandalon where we get the English word scandal, describes a snare, a stumbling block, something that causes us to err or sin.

A believer who is loving and caring toward fellow believers produces nothing that would cause others to trip up, or others to sin. 1 Cor 8 vs. 7-13. Even if we have the freedom to do something that would make my brother stumble or sin, or have a guilty conscience, then my freedom is weakening my brother, and may cause them to fall into sin! When we do this, we sin against Christ, because He died to bring them a life of victory, not defeat, and we are enabling their bondage. Instead 1st Thess 5:11 **11 Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you also are doing.** And again in Ephesians 4:29 — **Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.** Or as the author of Hebrews said **13 But encourage one another every day, as long as it is still called "today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.** And again in Heb 10:24-25 **24 and let's consider how to encourage one another in love and good deeds, 25 not abandoning our own meeting together, as is the habit of some people, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.** That's our job—to encourage other Christians in the faith.

A second point that John is making is that while in the light there is no cause for the loving believer to stumble. Spending our time helping our brothers and sisters in Christ, and ministering to their needs keeps us out of trouble, because we have less time for mischief.

And lastly that loving our brothers and sisters and serving them means that if we prioritize our relationship with Jesus, and our fellowship with other believers, then there is nothing in us that will make us stumble. **Rom 8:4 so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit** God is Good, and the closer we are to Him, the more that we are in fellowship with Him, then we'll keep our minds where they need to be Philippians 4:8 **Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is [g]lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, think about these things.** And since we're continually keeping our minds where they need to be in fellowship with God and each other, not only will be producing the fruit of the Spirit Gal 5:22-23 **22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.**

11 But the one who hates his brother or sister is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

The conduct of their life is walking in darkness, without knowing that they're lacking the light. And of course that means that they "do not know where they are going". They are wandering around missing the path that God has for their life, disoriented and disillusioned, wondering why their life is so far removed from what they read about in the gospels. This is where a lot of Christians are today. Like the church of Laodicea in Rev 3:17, they are unaware of their spiritual state. And Jesus says to that church **17 Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have no need of anything," and you do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked,** Light and darkness represent two spheres of existence that a person may choose to live in. But Jesus will not dwell in darkness with someone. He commands that they come to Him, come to the light, respond to His call. And not only that—that we follow Him, and walk with Him, abiding with Him.