

Affirming Signs of Life

1 John 2:7-14

In this passage John models something for us that is very simple yet powerful. In this passage John basically tells his readers, “I see abundant evidence that you have eternal life. I see it in your relationships with each other and in your relationship with God. That’s why I am writing you: I want you who believe in Jesus to know that you have eternal life.”

My goal this morning is for this passage of Scripture to have the same impact in your life that John wanted it to have in the lives of his readers. That’s what we go for in expository preaching.

And so today, I also want you who believe in Jesus to know that I see overwhelming evidence that you have eternal life. I see it in the way that you relate to each other, and I see it in your relationship with God. Just like John’s original readers, each of us needs to know that someone else sees signs of life in us. That’s what you’re going to hear from me today.

The problem with this message, of course, is that I don’t know all of you; I only know a small percentage of you on a personal, spiritual level. I wouldn’t be too surprised if you dismissed my affirmations thinking, “That all sounds nice, but if you knew me you wouldn’t be so flattering.” That’s actually a valid point. Therefore, I am going to encourage you to get together with a few of your closest believing friends so that you can talk about the signs of life you see in each other.

In 1 John 2:7-14 John mentions two ways that he saw in them signs of life in them: 1) by their love for one another, and 2) by their spiritual health in different stages of life.

Love for One Another (2:7-11) In these verses John reminds his readers of the core command that he had brought them.

7 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.

There was a sense in which he wasn’t writing them a new command, but an old commandment that he had been telling them from the beginning of their walks with Christ. He identifies the old commandment as “the word” they had heard; that is primarily a reference to the gospel. Over in 1 John 3:23 John writes:

23 And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

We see a dual command here. Along with the gospel (“believe in the name of Jesus Christ”) was the command to love one another. In today’s passage John seems to have

in mind this dual commandment when he speaks of the old commandment that they had from the beginning of their walk with Christ.

In verse 8, John makes a very nuanced statement, telling his readers that there's a sense in which the **old** commandment they'd heard is also a **new** commandment.

8 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.

When he mentions "a **new** commandment," John is making a reference here to a statement Jesus made in John 13:34 where Jesus told his disciples this:

34 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.

This commandment was new because **His love** was now the standard: "just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." Nobody had ever loved like Jesus had loved them; because of who He was and where He had come from, nobody **could** have loved like Jesus. Bringing this understanding back to 1 John 2:8, let's notice what else John is teaching.

8 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.

John says this new commandment "is true in him [Jesus] and in you." Do you see what he's saying? John saw in his readers the same love he had experienced from Jesus. John saw them loving one another as Christ had loved him. Hearing this from John would have been a powerful affirmation. We'll see in verse 10 that this is evidence they have eternal life! [See Note #1]

In verses 9 through 11 John says that our love (or lack thereof) is a litmus test of whether we are "in the light" or "still in darkness."

9 Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.

Anyone can say, "I'm in the light. . . I'm good with God. . ." But, John says, if they hate believers they are still in darkness. John isn't merely talking about Christians who are disappointed and frustrated with other believers; we all experience that along the way as many Scriptures acknowledge (Eph. 4:32, Phil. 4:2-3, etc.). He is talking about genuine hatred. Whereas love wants the best for others, hatred wants the worst for others. John is saying that if you legitimately hate other believers, you are still in the darkness; you do not know God who is both light (1:6) and love (4:8).

By contrast, John writes in verse 10:

10 Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.

If you love other believers “there is no cause for stumbling” in you in the sense that you don’t cause others to turn away from the faith. It tends to be mean, judgmental “Christians” that make people turn away from Jesus and the church. Loving others sacrificially draws people closer to Christ instead of pushing them away. [See Note #2]

11 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.

Spiritually speaking, if you hate other believers, you are wandering around blindly in the darkness without a clue where you’re going. [See Matthew 24:9–10.]

Love for One Another at Faith: As John affirmed his readers’ love for one another, I say to you this morning: I see many, many of you embodying the love command.

As a pastor here at Faith I get to see things that many of you never see. I’m thinking about “the good, the bad, and the ugly.” As in all churches (and all organizations really), I sometimes see people act in petty, self-centered ways. At times I see it in myself; at times I see it in the things others say and do. Please know that I know that Faith is not the perfect church.

But as I look at Faith, “the bad and the ugly” are like the garnish on the side of the plate; “the good” is like the entree in the center. I see people pouring out their lives for others week-in and week-out. I see people loving one another sacrificially in many different contexts. I’ll give just a couple of examples.

First, those of you who serve in our Care and Recovery Ministries at Faith invest massive amounts of time talking with others, praying with them, developing relationships that bear fruit . . . solely because of your love. You’re not getting paid and you’re not getting recognized publicly (for confidentiality reasons). You are simply loving others the way Christ has loved you.

Second, in these divisive times when it’s safest to stay in relationship only with people who agree with you politically and theologically, I see some of you staying in relationships with other believers with whom you disagree. I see you avoiding the type of harsh words that divide and injure people. I see you being willing to listen and learn. That’s a type of humility that’s rather rare in the world today.

In other words, I see embodied in you the old/new command John wrote about. I see you loving one another as Christ has loved you. That’s evidence of life - eternal life. I say to you what Paul said to the Thessalonians (in 4:9): “. . . you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another. . .” The love you have is a supernatural love that comes straight from God who is love. Be encouraged because I see signs of life everywhere.

Again, since I don't know many of you, let me encourage you to get together with other believers you know well and tell them how you see them loving others as Christ loves us; and let them tell you the ways that they see loving others also.

Next John affirms the spiritual health among both young and old:

Spiritual Health among both Young and Old (1 John 2:12-14) In these verses John addresses his readers in three ways - as little children, as fathers, and as young men. Throughout 1 John the term "little children" refers to all believers; so twice in these verses he addresses everyone using that term. Then he addresses those who are older as fathers and those who are younger as young men. [see Note #3]

Everything John affirms about his readers is evidence that they have eternal life. I'll read these three verses and make a few brief comments.

12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. 14 I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

John tells the entire church that their sins are forgiven and that they know the Father. He sees all sorts of evidence that they have eternal life.

John tells those who are older the same thing twice. He wants them to rest in the confidence that they genuinely know Jesus (i.e., they are not frauds).

John wanted those who were younger to know that he saw them as overcomers, experiencing the power of God necessary to withstand the lies and the schemes of the evil one. [See Note #4] He also affirms their spiritual strength **because** "the word of God abides in [them]." They are fighting the good fight with powerful spiritual weapons.

John wasn't afraid to tell them flat out, "In both the young and the old I see evidence of eternal life in all of you who believe."

Spiritual Health among both Young and Old at Faith. In the same way, I see **many, many signs of spiritual health** among those of you who are old and among those of you who are young (and everyone in between).

Like John, as I think about those who are older at Faith, I see you as people who genuinely know Jesus. You're not grumpy old men (and women); you're humble and teachable and full of compassion. You're not know-it-alls that nobody can stand to be around; you have people flocking to you because they crave the wisdom that God has given you over the years.

I was 26 years old when Brenda and I went to seminary on the north shore of Chicago. One day I was talking with a man who was in his 80s who said to me something I'll never forget: "I wouldn't trade places with you for anything in the world." He was telling me he'd rather be in his 80's than in his 20's. I was shocked because I assumed that the opposite was true, that everybody would rather be young than old. He had something then I didn't have, namely contentment.

That's what I see in many of you who are older than me. You've experienced all sorts of suffering and loss: the loss of a spouse, the loss of a child, disappointments in your careers and in relationships, failing health, etc. And yet you haven't cursed God. You have experienced Him as good and faithful. Consequently, you experience contentment (which is very different from complacency).

One man once told me with tears in your eyes, "I am ready to leave this world. I trust in God's timing, but I can't wait to see Jesus face to face." You don't say that type of things unless you know that you know God. The fear of judgment is gone; there's only anticipation.

As I think about those of you who are younger, I see in many of you the type of spiritual strength John describes in today's passage. I see passion and zeal to follow Christ whatever the cost. And for some of you it's very costly, mainly relationally. Not all family and friends will love the fact that you want to do what pleases Jesus, not what pleases them. In that sense, following Jesus divides people with differing loyalties.

I've known lots of people whose walk with God peaked in their college years. When the support and encouragement of being with their Christian friends 10 hours a day was gone, they floundered spiritually. They didn't know how to walk with Jesus in the context of a church; they didn't develop the resilience necessary live by faith in the context of a full-time jobs and family responsibilities.

I see something very different in many of you who are younger. God is giving you a type of strength and stability that will sustain you your entire lives. You're developing a love for the local church and the body of Christ. I see many of you dealing with strongholds and addictions in very direct, faith-filled ways; instead of hoping things magically get better, you're seeking God and receiving all the grace you need. I see you persevering through the ups and downs of singleness and of marriage.

Again, I don't know many of you. And so you need to hear these types of things from people who know you well. And your believing friends need to hear these type of things from you. This week, please, get together with other believers and talk with each other about the signs of life you see in one another.

NOTES:

#1 This command is appropriate “because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.” In the gospel of John Jesus is described as the true light who has come into the world who dispels the darkness (see John 1:4-9, 8:12, 9:5, 12:35-36). You’ve probably noticed that when you turn on a light the darkness flees. Because Jesus is the light of the world and because His disciples also shine as lights in this world, the darkness is being dispelled. It certainly doesn’t always look like that’s the case, but because the light is shining, the darkness is passing away. The kingdom is advancing.

#2 John isn’t implying that if you’re a true believer that you love others perfectly and effortlessly. If that were the case we wouldn’t need specific, nuanced commands to love one another that we find later in 1 John (3:16-18, 4:7ff). But for genuine believers, the commands in Scripture resonate with our deepest desires and prompt us to engage our wills and learn to love others in tangible ways. It’s actually a sign of life if you agonize over how hard it is for you to love other believers. It should trouble you if you could care less about other believers (or whole groups of believers who are different from you).

#3 Some people understand John to be addressing three groups of believers at three different levels of **maturity** - children (young in their faith), young men (more spiritually mature), and fathers (the most spiritually mature). But most understand John to be addressing two different groups of believers.

#4 John consistently referred to the devil as “the evil one” (3:12, 5:18-19). John speaks of believers “overcoming” four other times in 1 John (4:4, 5:4 (2x), 5:5). For example, in 1 John 4:4 John says of “little children” (i.e., believers) that they had overcome the false prophets because “greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world.”