

Evident Love or Secret Knowledge? Christ vs. Social Justice Scholarship

Max Fernandez

Certainty: Absolute Truths that Produce Joyful Assurance
Love; Critical Theory; Assurance; Confidence / 1 John 2:7–11

When our son was young, he had a Lego prison set. It had walls, prison bars, moving doors. It even had a police dog, Lego criminals...etc. Part of the fun of playing with that set was coming up with a story and acting it out. In the story, the criminal in prison always wanted to escape.

In the time of John, there was a group of people who saw life this way. They taught that our souls were like this prisoner trapped inside the physical, material world. They taught that the soul was pure, but the material world was evil. They were called **Gnostics**. For them, it was inconceivable to think that God would have a physical body, because they considered the material, physical world to be evil — including the body. Thus, for them, salvation was through a secret knowledge — *gnosis*. They viewed the physical body as a prison which malevolently trapped the “divine spark” within humanity (Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*, 12–14).

Today, there is a new form of Gnosticism. While Christians have a moral obligation to get to know their culture around them, this is not what Social Justice Scholarship is teaching, nor is this the tone of what is being communicated. Social Justice Scholarship teaches: (1) those who are oppressed have access to experience-based knowledge that others do not, (2) epistemic violence is repressing this knowledge or not making an effort to know this knowledge, (3) those who do not have this knowledge are simply ignorant, and (4) experience-based knowledge (emotion included) is superior to evidence-based (scientific-method) or reason-based forms of knowing.

If you are not one of the oppressed, you are simply trapped in your ignorance. This kind of thinking is manifesting itself in the extensive apologies being made by those who do not meet the oppressed stereotype. A simple reading of this scholarship will tell you a couple of things: positively, there is a context from which we should listen and learn; negatively, this knowledge of the oppressed is a like a renewed form of Gnosticism. This renewed form of Gnosticism is Social

Justice Scholarship (Critical Theory), and there is a conditional love that is connected with it. It is set with a tone of anger and hatred that I have only seen rivaled by those who idolize Nationalism. As Christians, we should not find our confidence and assurance in fleeting philosophies or worldviews of the day.

As review, the previous sermons in this series were: (1), the word of God preserves the absolute truth of Jesus Christ, (2) the unchangeable message is that *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all*, (3) there is no confident assurance apart from accepting our utter sinfulness, and (4) loving obedience to the commands of God is proof of eternal life. **Today, true love as highlighted by Jesus is the mark of true believers.** Are you marked by this true love?

(1) Let the true Light manifest who is keeping the old command.

1 John 2:7 KJV 1900

⁷ Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.

The command to love is an old command biblically:

Leviticus 19:18 KJV 1900

¹⁸ Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I *am* the LORD.

Notice though that John calls them “Brethren,” meaning beloved or near kinsman. John told these loved ones this command when he first came to them. It is an old command that he is telling them again. Do you know what the “when you get home” talk is? This is a conversation you have when you are in the car with your children. You tell them, “when you get home:” change your clothes, put your dirty clothes in the hamper, do your homework, pick up your room...etc. Do you know what talk comes after the “when you get home” talk? It is the “how many times do I have to tell you?” question. This is the parent’s way of saying, “This is the same thing I already told you.”

For John, he is speaking in a loving tone, but he is reminding them that this is nothing new. Loving one another is the command from the very first time he came to them. In spite of this, notice that there is something new:

1 John 2:8 KJV 1900

⁸ Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.

Children, imagine that when you get home after the “when you get home” talk, your parents walk to your room and say, “Now, watch what I do so that in the future you know exactly what I mean and what I do not mean.” Then, your parents proceed to pick up your clothes and put them in the hamper, and they clean your room and show you every detail. If you did not fully understand what your parents were saying, now you understand what they meant with the “when you get home” conversation. Adults actually have a phrase that they use for this. It is that they “shed light” on the instruction. This means that they helped you understand what they were commanding you to do. This is what 1 John 2:8 is helping us to understand.

First, the true expression of love is found in you and in Jesus Christ. This is one of the evidences that you know you have a relationship with Jesus Christ. As Pastor, I can confidently say that I have witnessed Christlike love in many of the members of Grace Baptist Church. It is a love that has weathered tremendous difficulty, and it is evidence that should bring you confidence that you have eternal life. This is evidence that should bring you a complete joy! Second, “the darkness is past” is actually active and should be read as *the darkness is passing away*. In terms of world history, the coming of Jesus has brought about a new time. Jesus has dealt a definitive death blow to the prince of darkness — Satan. Third, and more personal to these beloved people, the true expression of Christlike love is now more clearly seen because it has exposed those who have left.

Sometimes, it is difficult to see the difference between Christlike love and hatred because hatred has many disguises. You must always see that the measure of true Christian love is Jesus Christ the true Light:

John 13:34 KJV 1900

³⁴ A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

Jesus gave us the “when you get home” talk, and he showed us how to do what he has commanded of us. Yet, we often confuse what this looks like. Why is this so difficult?

(2) Let the true Light distinguish what is love and hate.

1 John 2:9 KJV 1900

⁹ He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

First, we find it difficult to distinguish love and hate because we let what people say about themselves take priority over how we see them live. Have you ever walked into a room where a toddler was playing while a crawling infant was crying their head off? In this situation, you ask, “What happened?” Typically, the toddler will keep playing, but the funniest ones are when the toddler tells on himself. When the parent asks for an explanation, the toddler will say something like, “I did not hit them with the toy truck.” The parent did not ask about the toy truck, but the toddler has just told on himself. In that moment, the parent is hearing what the toddler is saying, but she is believing that the toddler did what he said he didn’t. The same thing is happening here, John is pointing out that one of the confusing things that can lead to a lack of confidence is that people say one thing about their love, but their love actually looks like hate and not truly Christlike.

1 John 2:10 KJV 1900

¹⁰ He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

Second, the person who loves has reason to be confident because the light has been turned on in their life. Much like a young infant who has been hurt by a sibling but within a few minutes is back to playing again, so too the person who has been changed by the love of Jesus can see clearly, and they are not hopelessly offended by another. Your life of forgiveness tells a lot about your profession of salvation. Is the kind of forgiveness you offer a Christlike forgiveness that has been extended to you? Do you make people earn your love back? Did you earn God’s love?

1 John 2:11 KJV 1900

¹¹ But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

Third, the person under the power of darkness stumbles over a lot. This is a blindness that happens even though their eyes are wide open. They just can't see the real problem. They are blinded by Satan:

2 Corinthians 4:4 KJV 1900

⁴ In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

There is actually a story in the Bible that reminds me of this kind of blindness, and I was recently reading it. During the time when the nation of Israel was enslaved to the Medes and the Persians in the Old Testament, a beautiful, young Jewish girl was selected to become the queen of the land. Her name was Esther. Now, Esther had a loving cousin, Mordecai, who would come each day to the king's gate to see how Esther was doing. One day, Mordecai overheard a couple of young men speaking of a plan to kill the king. Mordecai sent word to Esther about the evil plan. The king examined the matter and had the two young men killed because of their evil plot. A record of the event was written in the king's books and sealed.

There was yet another man who rose to prominence within the kingdom. His name was Haman. Haman was not a Jew, but rather he was an enemy of the Jews. Part of Haman's reward was that the king commanded all to bow to him when he came by. Well, Mordecai, being a good Jew only bowed to one God, and Haman was not that God. Haman was made aware that Mordecai was not bowing, so he decided he would get approval from the king to have all Jews of the land killed. He made the plan, sent out word about the plan, and made preparations. Haman went home and told his wife and friends. In addition, Haman expressed how much he hated Mordecai. His wife and friends told him to build a place 75 feet high on which to hang Mordecai for all to see. His plan was to hang Mordecai on that very gallows the next day.

Something interesting happened that night. In the palace, the king could not sleep, so he called two of his servants to go get some historical books and read them to him. One of the servants began reading the story of how Mordecai had saved the king from the two men who were going to kill him. The king asked, "How was Mordecai rewarded for this?" The servants responded that nothing was done for him. So, the king, who has no idea about Haman's plan to kill

Mordecai, decides that Mordecai should be rewarded for what he had done in the past. The king is looking for someone to carry out the task that next morning, and he asks one of the servants if there is anyone in the king's court already. Haman had arrived early that morning.

The king asked Haman what should be done for the man whom the king delights to honor? Haman responded with many noble gestures of favor: "Give him the king's ring, the king's crown, the king's horse. Parade him around the city." The king then instructs Haman, the treacherous, wicked man, to do all of this for Mordecai, the Jew whom Haman hated. After the event, Haman goes home and tells his wife and friends. Listen to their response to Haman:

Esther 6:13 KJV 1900

¹³ And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends every *thing* that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai *be* of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him.

This is the kind of blindness John is talking about. It is a blindness though you can see with your eyes. If you were deceived or blind to true love, how would you even know it? It is the blindness of sin, and it is evident by hatred that is exposed by Christlike love. Will you turn to Jesus Christ as your Lord today?

True love is what has been expressed in the Person of Jesus Christ, and what finds expression in those who have eternal life. There are many things we do not know, but true love has manifested himself in perfect, physical manner. Have you received the love of God in the Person of Jesus Christ?

Christians, there is injustice in our world, but is your starting point the epistemology of Social Justice Scholarship or is it the "true light" of Jesus Christ? **Students**, are you loving the other students like Jesus loved you, or do you stay within your clique of comfort? **Singles**, what does the use of your free time reveal about your love for the brethren? **Husbands**, do you love your wife based on her merit or based on the merit of Jesus Christ? **Wives**, do you battle the bitterness in your heart because of love or are you satisfied in your bitterness? **Mothers**, do you love the community of believers like Christ has loved you? **Retirees**, how are you loving the church body? What does your financial giving say about your love for one another?

It is not a secret knowledge that saves us. It is not experiencing what others have experienced that gives us confidence. **Confident assurance for joyful living is in the evident love of Christ to us and through us.**