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Welcome to the New Life Podcast, a ministry of New Life Presbyterian Church in Ithaca, New York. Today we have this week's sermon, preached by Tim LaCroix, our senior pastor. Join us for worship each week at 10 o'clock at 950 Danby Road, Ithaca, New York. You can also visit us on our website, [www.newlifepodcast.com](http://www.newlifepodcast.com). Now here's this week's sermon.

00:44

A reading from the first epistle of the Apostle John, chapter 2, verses 7 through 17. 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.

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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. I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. 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.

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because you know the Father. 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. Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

02:12

and the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. This is the word of the Lord.

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This year is the 50th anniversary of Saturday Night Live, and because of that, there's been a lot of commemorations in print media and other forms of media. I was reading one article this week. It was going over 50 phrases that either originated with SNL or became very well-known, popular through SNL. And...

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There were 50 because there's 50 years. So not all of them were equally as famous or popular. But there's some good ones in there. Like the church leader, the church lady. Church lady who says, well isn't that special? You know, some of these you have to be older to get. How about the wild and crazy guys? You know, those Steve Martin and Dan Aykroyd. These are all very dated.

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So, but those of us in my generation know what they are. I don't think there were any, there weren't really any more recent ones to have, but one of my favorites, I'll tell you about. One of my favorites was this skit. The skit was played by Al Franken. Al Franken was a writer on SNL and he also did some of the acting and some of the skits. And this skit was called Daily Affirmations with Stuart Smalley.

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Daily Affirmations with Stuart Smalley. And Al Franken, he looks like a complete dork. He's got a cardigan sweater on. And this is a talk show, like a public service talk show, like public access talk show. And this is the talk show. He first starts talking in front of a mirror. And he says it to the mirror. He says, I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and dog on it, people like me.

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And after he affirms himself, gets himself affirmed, and feels that he has affirmed himself, he tells himself, you are going to have a great show today because you deserve it. Then he has on a guest. Now, the most famous and my favorite of these episodes, his guest was someone who really needed affirmation, Michael Jordan. Now, this was in the early 90s. This was at the peak of Michael Jordan's popularity, his athletic prowess, his potential. He is literally one of the most famous people on Earth.

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and probably the least, the person on earth who needed affirmation the least. But that's what makes it funny. Michael Jordan appears on the show. Stuart Smalley has no idea who he is. All he knows is he's a professional basketball player. So he wants to affirm, he wants to encourage Michael Jordan. He says, you know, it's okay if you can't dribble the ball fast or throw the ball into the basket, you know. And then he gets Michael to say the famous phrase. He gets Michael Jordan to look in the mirror.

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and say, I'm good enough, and he's chuckling. I'm smart enough, and dog on it, people like me. And after he said that, the crowd erupted in applause and laughter because it was just hilarious that Michael Jordan would say that he needed to have that affirmation that he was good enough and people liked him. Now, this skit was a humorous version

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what we might see in therapy. And it was not making fun of therapy, but certainly bringing it into the sphere of humor.

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And there's a part of therapy that I've talked about before that is like this, similar to this, but it's the most effective therapies, the most effective therapeutic methods have to do with telling yourself something that is true in order to replace something that is not true. There's cognitive behavioral therapy, there's cognitive processing therapy, there's exposure therapy. And so for those who are struggling with depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress,

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fear of things. This kind of therapy works. I mean, it's proven to work, scientifically proven to work. And the catch is you have to really believe the affirmation, though. Like Stuart Smalley has to keep telling himself, I'm good enough.

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I'm smart because he doesn't really believe that. It only works if the thing is something that's really true, that you really believe, and then if you can tell yourself that truth and you can get through a hard time or exposure to something you're afraid of, it'll change your brain. It'll actually stick and it'll make you feel better in those situations.

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The Apostle John was not trained as a psychotherapist, and he did not have access to these modern psychological methods. But the Apostle John is authoritative, speaks with apostolic authority, and as a spirit-inspired writer. But what he's writing to us today is affirmation.

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It is a positive affirmation that is intended to encourage us. It is intended to tell us what is true. It is intended to move us away from what is false and to embolden us into greater faithfulness, greater maturity, and that sort of gung-ho spirit that you might have after hearing the St. Crispian's Day speech in Henry V. So this is what John is attempting to do.

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We come to chapter two, verse seven here today, and one of the things when we're looking at first John is it can be difficult to preach on and teach on because it's very repetitive. You're gonna see this as we go through. He keeps circling back to the same themes, and then what's hard for a teacher or preacher is, okay, what do I say now? He's already said, love your brother, like eight times. How do I say this now? Well, what's key to realize,

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is that as John is circling through the same themes, you have to look at what's different, what's changing. Here we see, starting in verse seven, what is changing is that John is moving from the third person to the second person. So far, John has been describing the sins and the errors, especially the errors of the false teachers who had led people astray and divided the church. He has described them in the third person. Here he moves directly to his hearers.

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He begins to address them in the second person, and he begins to tell them positively what they are to do and what they are not to do. And as we do this, we're going to see three things. And as I said before, this is very, John's exhortation and encouragement is very simple. In fact, it's even more simple.

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than Stuart Smalley's daily affirmation. We have these three sections of this passage we read today. They may be a little bit difficult to fit together in a rhetorical hole, but this is what I think is going on.

John is saying to his hearers, you know this, you got this, and you don't need that. So you know this, you got this, and you don't need that. So first, you know this.

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Starting in verse 7, we find John saying, I'm writing to you no new commandment. He said, you know this already. This is stuff you already know. I'm not writing to you a new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning. He is reminding them that their faith is actually grounded in something very ancient, something ancient.

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This is one of the criticisms that the Romans had about early Christianity, is that it was novel. It was new. About this time, Rome was celebrating its 1000th anniversary as a city. And they looked at Christianity and said, you're so new and novel compared to our antiquity. That may not be what's going on here. It may be that the false teachers that were trying to spread their division

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were also saying that this Christianity was a novel teaching. But at the very least, John is pointing out that actually this commandment, this way, is an ancient way.

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And that ancient way is grounded actually in the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, of the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 6.5 we see this commandment, that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our mind, all our strength. We find in Leviticus 18 where it says, love your neighbor as yourself. So when Jesus is asked, when Jesus is asked,

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What are the two greatest commandments, or what's the greatest commandment in Matthew 27? Jesus says, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself. And John is saying, that's not new. I mean Jesus does say it's new, he does say it's new in the passage we just read from John. But it is new because Jesus is bringing a new emphasis. It is new because Jesus is bringing this commandment to the fore. You know, maybe it was buried amongst all the six hundred and something commandments that the Jewish people had identified.

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But Jesus is saying this is the most important one. But it's not new. It's actually old. It's one that you've had from the beginning. So you know this. You know this. This is not anything new. He goes on to say in verse eight, at the same time it is a new commandment that I'm writing to you which is true in him and in you in Christ, in him is Christ, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. So what's new?

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What's new about the commandment, even though it's old, even though it was given by Moses and Deuteronomy and Leviticus? What's new is that Christ has overcome the darkness. What's new is the light is beginning to grow with Christ's appearance, with his advent, with his death and resurrection. What's new is the light is growing and the darkness is passing away. So what John says is...

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Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in the darkness. So we see this theme of light and darkness come back. But John, as he swings back around to it, is pointing out that what his love is light and what his darkness is hate. And we cannot hate, we must love. We are called to love. He says, whoever hates his brother is in the darkness. He walks in the darkness and does not know where he is going.

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These are things that he says you already know. You know these things. You know what you are to do and you know how to do them. When we think about love, we think about love and the command of love, we may think this section would be pretty easy to keep because he simply says, do not hate. If you don't hate, you love. But John puts it, and you may say to yourself, I don't hate anybody. I don't hate anyone. I haven't hated anyone.

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But John makes it a little more specific. John puts it in more positive terms. In effect he's saying, if you're not positively loving, if you're not actively loving, that's what love involves. And so we have to ask ourselves, the call to love, the call to walk in the light, the call to walk in this ancient command, is a call to love, actively, actively to love. And

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not just not hate someone, but actively love someone. So that's the first part. And this is the part that we know. The second part is you got this. So we move on to this section. And he talks about

these affirmations. And these affirmations, as I said, are pretty simple. They're maybe even more simple than Stuart Smalley's affirmations.

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Before we get into this though, I want to address the language here because the language is not inclusive, but the rhetoric is. The language is not inclusive, but the rhetoric is. You may have noticed that he only addresses young men and fathers. So the language doesn't really have room to say, well, when he says young men, he really means young men and women. You can do that with the word for brothers. The word Adelphoi in Greek often means brothers, ancestors. But

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These ones don't really do that. But the rhetoric John is using is inclusive of both men and women. We know this because there's no distinction anywhere in this text that lets you know that he's only talking to men. There's nothing about the context that says that this church was only a church filled with men and that women weren't there.

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There's also this inclusive language that it begins with, with little children. And the word is gender neutral, so it refers to everybody. If he's referring to all the little children, boys and girls, why would he then skip to refer only to men, young men and fathers?

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So, because John refers to women inclusively in other parts of this letter, and indeed if we look at 2 John, we see him writing to the elect lady and her children. Now elect lady refers to the church, but it shows that it's gender inclusive. So point being, this is referring to everybody, not just men, not just women, but everyone. So why does he use the word young men?

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I think the reason why he uses the word young men here is to refer.

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to David's mighty men or at least a mighty warrior in the Old Testament. But if you look at the Chronicles, there's this list of mighty men that David has. And David's inner circle, there's 30 mighty

men and they're called the gibberene for a mighty person, a mighty man. So I think what John is saying here is that if you, men and women in the church, once

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point of childhood, you are like one of David's mighty men. You're a mighty warrior, you're able to be used by God. So I think that's what's going on. With fathers, it doesn't make much sense that he would only refer to older men and not older women. So I think that older women are included here. So what's in view? What's in view is we have different stages of the Christian life. Everyone is referred to as little children. He does this several times in the letter.

17:03

Everyone is referred to as little children, but especially those who are new in their faith. Those who are fathers and mothers are the ones who are mature in their faith. They're older in their faith, they're wiser in their faith. And those who are young men and young women are those who are in the prime of their faith. They're like Michael Jordan in their prime. Okay, so with that, let's go through it. What's going on here is he is affirming these three groups. He is affirming these three groups. So what I told you before is that John does not single out.

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a list of sins. He does not single out a list of sins, but he wants to focus on what is most important. What is most important is that we love one another, that we love each other. And here he wants to encourage everyone in the church that we got this, we can do it. So here's how he does it. He first writes to the little children. He says, little children, your sins are forgiven. You got this. You can do it. Your sins are forgiven.

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You have what it takes. You got this. Then he writes to the fathers and he says, fathers and mothers, I want you to know that you know him who was from the beginning. You got this. You have the knowledge of the Almighty, the eternal in your heart. You got this. Then he writes to the young men and the young women, you have overcome the evil one. You're strong, you're mighty. You got this. So this is the encouragement he's giving.

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He's encouraged them that they have what they need to continue in their faith and to do what God has called them to do. Little children, your sins are forgiven. Mothers and fathers, you know God. Young men and young women, you have overcome the evil one. These are things that are true about



them. And by telling them things that are true, that they can believe because it comes from the apostle, it's going to bolster their faith. But he's not done. He's not done. He's about halfway through.

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He's going to come back for another wave of encouragement. And actually, the tense changes. I don't think we should make too much hay of the tense changing, unless we want to make it intensifier. So he goes through again. He says, I write to you children because you know the father. Guess what? Not only do the old people know the father, so do the little children.

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You know the Father. Your sins are forgiven, children. You got this. He writes to the mothers and fathers because you know Him who is from the beginning. This seems to be the most important thing that he could tell them is you know God. You got this. And then he writes to the young men and the young women, the mighty warriors for God. You are strong. And the Word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one. You got this. So it is an encouragement to them.

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And not only is it an encouragement to them that they have what it takes to live the Christian life, to persevere in the truth against this false teaching that is around them. But there is also an implicit encouragement that if you're a child you need to move on to being a mighty one. A young man, a young woman. If you're a young man, a young woman, there's a future for you as well. You move on to a wise sage. And so there's a progression here. John is affirming where they are.

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He's telling you where you are. He's telling you, you have what it takes to live the Christian life. And He's saying you also move forward to the next phase of your life where God is calling you. So I hope you hear that encouragement. Not only do you know the truth, this commandment...

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That to love our brothers and sisters is the most important commandment, but also this encouragement that you have what it takes. You got this. Thirdly, John is saying, you know this, you got this, and you don't need that.

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This is where he gets into the imperative, right? This is where he gets into the telling them what not to do. John is very positive, he's very affirming. He's been that way all the way through. He's told them their sins are forgiven, told them they know God, told them they're strong, told them they can do it, but now he's gonna get to the point. He's gonna tell them, there's a problem, and there's something I'm writing to correct. I don't know if you're doing this.

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I think you are, because I know this false teaching is spreading in your church. This is what he says, do not love the world. You are to love your brother and sister. You are to love God. You are not to love the world. You don't need that. You don't need it. You've already got what it takes. You've got the knowledge of God. You've got your sins forgiven. You've overcome the evil one. You're strong. You don't need that. Do not love the world or the things in the world.

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If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. The dichotomy between light and dark, good and evil, love and hate. He says in verse 16, for all that is in the world, and this is the, we're going to camp out for a second, the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life is not from the Father, but is from the world. What are these three things? The desires of the flesh are pretty, fairly obvious.

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There's sensual desires. It's not only referring to sexual immorality. It's any sort of desire that your flesh would desire. So it could be that. It could be desire for anything illicit that you want. John is saying, the desires of the flesh are of the world. The things that we desire that are not according to God's word and His commandment are from the world. The desires of the eyes, this is a little different.

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I think the best explanation is that we are depending on what we see and not what is unseen. Paul exhorts us to know what is unseen and not only what is seen.

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As Christians, we believe in a world outside the one we see. We believe that there's a spiritual world. We believe there's God. We believe there's angels. And we don't see them. Christ is ascended into heaven. We don't see that. But we believe that there is an existence of things unseen. This is one of the sort of.

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distinctions of having faith, you know, and people that are secular will call it magical thinking. But the existence of an unseen world, I think, is something that we can at least argue for in the seat of our emotions, our motivations. Where do these come from? Where do these come from? Are they purely biological interactions, neurons firing, or is there really an unseen world?

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Is there something that explains some of the things we can't explain with science? Is there an unseen world? John says there is an unseen world. And if you live according only to your eyes, you're going to miss the unseen world. You're going to miss God. And you're going to miss the things of the light. There's a bit of an irony here. You can't see the light with your eyes. It's a bit ironic, but that's what he's saying. So don't depend on your eyes only.

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Don't depend on the desires of your sinful flesh. And lastly, the pride of life. The pride of life, this is a very difficult one to discern. It seems to be.

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a lack of dependence on God. It seems to be what this pride of life refers to the fact that I don't need God. I think I have what it takes to make it, to live. And this certainly is one that is especially applicable to our culture, to our culture, because I think one of the biggest problems that we have as Americans and those who live here in this country is that we don't feel we need God. We don't feel that we need God.

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We've got everything we need. We've got wealth, we've got food, friends, whatever. A lot of people do not feel that they need God. And John is saying this is the pride of life. This is hubris to think that we have everything we need because we have possessions, because we have enough money, because we have surrounded ourselves with the things of life. That's why Jesus says it's harder for a rich man to go through the eye of a needle.

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It's harder for a rich man to enter heaven than for a camel to enter through the eye of a needle. Because if you are wealthy, you have everything you need. You have the pride of life. You don't feel

that you need God. So what is John saying about these three things? The sinful desires of our flesh, the lack of perception of the unseen world, only seeing what we see with our eyes, and the pride that we don't need God. These things are from the world. These things are not from God. All that is in the world.

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He says, is passing away. This is why you don't need it. His ultimate point is you don't need that because it is passing away. These things are not gonna last. These things are passing away. What we need to latch onto is the things that are eternal. And what is eternal? What is eternal is God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. What is eternal? The love that we have with our brothers and sisters in God's church. What is eternal? The command, the commands that God gives us.

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to live and to work out in this world. So we set our eyes on those things as Paul says. We set our eyes on the things that are eternal because those last and those will extend into the afterlife. He says, the world is passing away along with its desires but whoever does the will of God abides forever. And so we see that we know, we know the commandment. We know the most important thing.

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and the Christian faith, we know the most important thing that God wants us to know is to love one another. We understand that we got this, that we have what it takes, our sins are forgiven, we know God, we're strong, and He has given us what we need.

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to live this life and to conquer. And lastly, we don't need that. We don't need those things that our body says we need, that the world says we need, and this pride that says we don't need God is not of God, but it is of the world, and we don't need that. Thank you for listening to this week's podcast. Please rate and review us on your podcast service and share with anyone who may be interested.

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