

Bible Greek VPOD - Intermediate Greek

Lesson 7

The commandment recalled (2:7-8)

1 John 2:7-8

Brothers, I am writing to you no new commandment, but an old commandment which you had from [the] beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from [the] beginning. 8 Again, I am writing a new command to you which is true in him and in you.

Ἀγαπητοὶ, οὐκ ἐντολὴν κρᾶφω ὑμῖν ἀλλ' ἐντολὴν παλαιὰν ἣν εἶχετε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἢ ἐντολὴ ἢ παλαιὰ ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος ὃν ἠκούσατε. 8 πάλιν ἐντολὴν καινὴν γρᾶφω ὑμῖν, ὃ ἐστὶν ἀληθὲς ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν ὅτι ἡ σκοτία παραγεται καὶ τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν ἤδη φαίνεται.

Introduction

At the height of John's reasoning concerning proper Christian behavior comes the heart of his argument – the new commandment of love that forms the basis of the Christian faith. This section will introduce the reader to the main subject of the rest of the letter to the Church in Ephesus, a Church already familiar with the command, but emphasis will be placed upon the truth and outworking of the commandment.

The new commandment is not from John (2:7a)

2:7a. Ἀδελφοὶ οὐκ ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν ἀλλ' ἐντολὴν παλαιὰν ἣν ἔχετε ἀπ' ἀρχῆς (Brothers, I am writing to you no new commandment, but an old commandment which you had from [the] beginning). ἀδελφός (adelphos) v.m.pl., “brothers,” “brethren,” brings the force and hence the importance of this section to the front. The vocative is the case of direct address and serves to ascribe to the object of address special definiteness. To heighten the importance of the force, the particle οὐκ (ouk) “not” along with the object and its modifier is placed at the head “Brothers, not a new commandment I am writing to you.”

Again the word for commandment is ἐντολή (entole) a.f.sg., and speaks of “an order,” “command,” “charge,” or “a commandment.” Notice John tells them he is not giving them a new command, he is not adding anything to the message that has already been received, nor has John been given “a special message” “a new command for them.” The Gnostics claimed “special knowledge,” but there is nothing new to be added concerning the subject of how one is to live a spirit filled life.

What John is writing concerns an old command, a παλαιός (palaios) adj., a.f.sg., “old,” “ancient,” “one no longer new,” or “worn by use.” Notice the mathematical precision of the Greek as the relative pronoun matches the subject exactly ὅς (hos) rel. pron. a.f.sg., “who,” “which,” “what,” “that.” The imperfect tense of εἶχω (eicho) Impf. Act. Ind. 2pl., “to have,” “hold,” provides the fact that they were given the commands from the start and it is incomplete though reflecting continuous action in past time. I take this as an inceptive imperfect which means continuous action but emphasizes the initiation of a process, the beginning of an action rather than its progress.

The point at which the command was given is said to be ἀπ' ἀρχῆς “from [the] beginning.” The Greek word ἀρχή (arche) g.f.sg., “beginning,” or “origin,” points to the new command that Christ Himself gave when He came in the flesh, John 13:34:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

New commandment defined (2:7b)

2:7b. ἡ ἐντολὴ ἣ παλαιὰ ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος ὃν ἤκουσατε. (the old commandment is the word which you heard from [the] beginning). This phrase serves to clarify the previous phrase. The commandment is defined in a two phrase manner providing the reader the understanding that, first the commandment came by word of mouth, and second the commandment came from Christ. The first phrase says the commandment is παλαιός (palaios) adj., n.f.sg., “an old one,” and came by λόγος (logos) n.m.sg., with def. art., “the word” of Jesus Himself which, ἀκούω (akouo) Aor. Act. Ind. 2pl., “you heard” from the beginning. The aorist “you have heard” is ingressive, that is, viewed from the standpoint of its initiation, and works hand-in-hand with the imperfect “you have.” They had the commandment and continue to have it (the message does not change as it is the same message that was given by Jesus Himself).

A better translation might be to break this phrase into two complete sentences: “the commandment is the old one,” and “the word [is] what you have heard from [the] start.” The time reference refers to the beginning when they first heard it. Paul is said to have started the church in Ephesus and this message that John preaches is no different than Paul’s. Notice what Paul says to the Romans:

For the commandments, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, You shall not covet, and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Romans 13:9).

John seeks to speak to them about the outworking of love, love in word and deed before he finally defines what the commandment is in 1 John 3:23:

This is His commandment that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.

Notice also, that the overriding commandment in view is that one believes in Jesus Christ and only after this commandment is satisfied can the other follow. How can a command of God be performed outside the grace principle of faith? It cannot! Mankind is responsible, but only God can bring about the change of heart. This does not seem right to natural man, but that is the revelation that comes from God. That is the command from God – believe in the name of Jesus Christ and you will be saved (cf. John 3:14-19). Man is responsible but it is God’s sovereign choosing.

New commandment Jesus gave (2:8)

2:8. *παλιν ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν*, (Again, I am writing a new command to you) : John very deliberately repeats what seems like a contradiction as he writes, *παλιν* (palin) adv., “again” and which means “looking at it once more,” that is, John means to look at this ἐντολή (entole) a.f.sg., “order,” or “command, commandment,” a *καινός* (kainos) adj.a.f.sg., “a new one” to you, once more. What John is reflecting upon in this section is the reality of truth and light. He is building up the argument, making the reality of God’s truth penetrate to the heart so that the word will move to deed. He has already said: “if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

ὃ ἐστὶν ἀληθὲς ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν, (which is true in him and in you) : The relative pronoun *ὃς* (hos) rel. pron. a.n.sg., “who,” “which,” “that,” is neuter matching the gender of the abstract accumulative message given. John is giving us a message packed with application that had its root in the original commandment Jesus gave concerning the love principle. This message is *ἀληθής* (alethes) adj.a.n.sg., “true,” “in” or “with” Christ because in Him is truth. Jesus is our type, our walking example of truth, the application side of truth that is called the love principle. He said He loved the Father (cf., John 14:31) and is “in” the Father (cf. John 10:38; 14:10, 11; 17:21). That is the first principle, namely, love your God with all you heart (cf. Deu. 11:13). The second love principle is love your neighbor as yourself (cf. Matt. 22:39; Mark 12:31,33; Luke

10:27) this too, He satisfied as He spread the message of the love of God (cf. John 3:16) to a dark world.

This truth is given as a living, walking example to mankind as it presents what is called the type, or example that believers are to live by so John includes “is true in Him and in you.” Make no mistake the most important truth has to do with the message. That is, Jesus came in the flesh, died on the cross as the perfect Lamb of God, taking upon Himself the sins of the world, was buried and resurrected. It is clearly explained that He truly died, and was raised up for our justification, and He is right now sitting at the right hand of the Father (cf. Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb 1:13; 10:12; 12:2) demonstrating His power over life and death (1 Cor. 15).

But biblical truth also has to do with action. What the message defines, the walk reflects. What one believes as a new creature in Christ, a change in heart produces a walk consistent with the belief. That is the core of John’s message in this letter. He emphasizes man’s sin and his or her need for a Savior, namely, God’s supernatural work in the believer, and man’s new ability to listen and accept the things of God. A transformed person now is included as one who hears - a person of the ear. This is what the Jews call themselves, the people of the ear. What the Jews refer to as the great *Shama*’ “hear”:

4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deu. 6:4-9)

ὅτι ἡ σκοτία παραγεται και το φῶς το ἀληθινον ἤδη φαινει. (because the darkness itself is passing by and the true light is now brought forth in the light). The conjunction **οτι** (*hoti*) identifies the reason for light’s progress as it is translated “because” the **σκοτια** (*skotia*) n.f.sg., “darkness” is passing by. The word for passing is **παραγω** (*parago*) Pres. Mid. Ind. 3sg., “to pass by,” “go by,” from the compound of **παρα** (*para*) “from,” “besides,” “near,” and **αγω** (*ago*) “to lead,” “take with one,” and translated, “itself is passing by.” This is the same construction as verse 2:17 where John points out that the world is also passing by.

In contrast to the fact that the darkness is passing by, John proclaims that the true **φως** (*phos*) n.n.sg., with def. art., “light” is now **ηδη** (*ede*) adv., “now,” “already,” in fact already being exposed for what it is. The Greek **φαινω** (*phaino*) Pres. Act. Ind. 3sg., “to bring forth into the light,” “to appear,” “shine,” is what Dr. Robertson calls a “linear present active ‘is already shining.’”¹ This is what God is doing now in what is called a mystery (something not revealed in the OT, but now revealed), the mystery is the church (cf. Eph. 5:32) and it is the gospel of Christ that is the message of the Church to be spread throughout the world today and those who receive the message also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The true light is the message and the action is pictured as being spread and superintended by the work of the Holy Spirit. The picture drawn from the verbs is that the message is spreading, exposing the hidden things that are covered by the darkness. The light is present now, and the darkness is slowly passing. The doctrinal implication is what is called the imminent

¹ Robertson’s Word Pictures

return of the Lord. No one knows the time or hour of Christ's return but the reality is that darkness is here and will continue until Christ comes - it is indeed passing, but will not pass away until He returns, deals with the darkness and establishes His kingdom. There are many scripture references for the kingdom of Messiah, but one that is particularly relevant to this message has to do with restoring the message:

8 Therefore wait for me, declares the LORD, for the day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them— all my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger. 9 Then will I purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him shoulder to shoulder.

(Zeph. 3:8-9)

And Jeremiah 31:34, "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

The process has started with the incarnation and will continue until He puts his last enemy, death, under his foot (1 Cor.15:25-27).

Detailed Analysis

2:7 – αδελφοι ουκ εντολην καινην γραφω υμιν αλλ εντολην παλαιαν ην ειχετε απ αρχης (Brothers, I am writing to you no new commandment, but a commandment an old commandment which you had from [the] beginning) : αδελφος (adelphos) v.m.pl., brother, brethren; ουκ (ouk) part., not; εντολη (entole) a.f.sg., an order, command, charge, commandment; καινος (kainos) adj.a.f.sg., new; γραφω (grapho) Pres. Act. Ind. 1sg., to write: I am writing; συ (pers. pron. 2d.pl., you; αλλα (alla) conj., but, nevertheless; εντολη (entole) a.f.sg., an order, command, charge, commandment; παλαιος (palaios) adj., a.f.sg., old, ancient; ος (hos) rel. pron. a.f.sg., who, which, what, that; εχω (echo) Impf. Act. Ind. 2pl., to have, hold: you were having; απο (apo) prep., from, out of; αρχη (arche) g.f.sg., beginning, origin.

η εντολη η παλαια εστιν ο λογος ον ηκουσατε απ αρχης (the old commandment is the word which you heard from [the] beginning) : εντολη (entole) n.f.sg., an order, command, charge, commandment; παλαιος (palaios) adj., n.f.sg., old, ancient; ειμι (eimi) Pres. Ind. 3sg., to be, exist: he/she/it is; λογος (logos) n.m.sg., with def. art., word, saying; ος (hos) rel. pron. a.m.sg., who, which, what, that; ακουω (akouo) Aor. Act. Ind. 2pl., to hear: you heard; απο (apo) prep., from, out of; αρχη (arche) g.f.sg., beginning, origin.

2:8 – παλιν εντολην καινην γραφω υμιν (Again, I am writing a new command to you) : παλιν (palin) adv., again; εντολη (entole) a.f.sg., an order, command, commandment; καινος (kainos) adj.a.f.sg., new; γραφω (grapho) Pres. Act. Ind. 1sg., to write: I am writing; συ (su) pers. pron. 2d.pl., you.

ο εστιν αληθες εν αυτω και εν υμιν (which is true in him and in you) : ος (hos) rel. pron. a.n.sg., who, which, what, that; ειμι (eimi) Pres. Ind. 3sg., to be, exist: he/she/it is; αλητης (alethes) adj.a.n.sg., true; εν (en) prep., in, by, with; αυτος (autos) pers. pron. 3dm.sg., him; και (kai) conj., and, even, also, indeed; εν (en) prep., in, by, with; συ (su) pers. pron. 2d.pl., you.

οτι η σκοτια παραγεται και το φως το αληθινον ηδη φαινει (because the darkness itself is passed by and the true light is now brought forth in the light) : οτι (hoti) conj., that, because, since; σκοτια (skotia) n.f.sg., with def. art., darkness; παραγω (parago) Pres. Mid. Ind. 3sg., to pass by, go by, from the compound of παρα (para) from, besides, near, and αγω (ago) to lead, take with one: he/she/it self is passed by; και (kai) conj., and, even, also, indeed; φως (phos) n.n.sg., with def. art., light; αληθινος (alethinos) adj.n.n.sg., true; ηδη (ede) adv., now, already; φαινω (phaino) Pres. Act. Ind. 3sg., to bring forth into the light, to appear, shine, he/she/it is bringing forth in the light.