



## **What Is Your Spiritual Operating System? *What Drives Your Soul?***

Years ago when I was in my early teens I was playing baseball with my best friend at an elementary school in my neighborhood. Suddenly, off in the distance we saw a large group of teens, maybe fifteen to twenty coming towards us. We knew this was not good, so we scurried about trying to get all the kids playing on the playground to run away. By that time the gang was upon us. I got on my bike and tried to escape but a large group of the guys surrounded me, grabbed me by my left arm and yanked me off my bike. They kicked me and punched me and then suddenly disappeared, leaving my bike behind. My friend had a bat, but they snatched it from him and hit him several times with it. My shoulder was separated and the pain from it wakes me up still in the middle of the night. At the time we both were new Christians, our faith developing and reshaping us. There were two miracles that took place for me. One, I never felt an ounce of hatred towards the gang that beat up my friend and me. Two, I could not recall afterward how a single one of them looked. Thus I had no object against whom my anger could be directed, either in my dreams or as I sat alone remembering it all. Somehow God replaced my anger with genuine love and a complete lack of desire to in any way get even with those who hurt me.

Our Bible passage for today is rather esoteric and perhaps even too mystical for some but it is in fact quite practical and just what we need to hear. In a world filled with anger and bitterness, inhumanity, and disdain for the rights of others, this passage is in fact inspiring and of great value to us. **Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old command that you have had from the beginning. The old command is the word you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. The one who says he is in the light but hates his brother or sister is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother or sister remains in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother or sister is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and doesn't know where he's going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.** (1 John 2: 7-11 CSB)

What we have here are two different operating systems for the soul. One is called light and the other darkness. Light and darkness are often the way John the Apostle pictures being with or without eternal life. The Gospel of John has three brilliant moments described in Jesus' life that use light and darkness to say something profound. Let's begin with the famous Nicodemus interview he had with Christ. In John 3, the text says that Nicodemus, a pharisee and a well-trained religious leader approached Jesus in a very specific way. **He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."** (John 3: 2 NIV) The precise wording is fascinating. Literally John reports that Nicodemus came to Jesus in a "night kind of visit". Nicodemus, who very much thought he knew God and was "in the light" was in fact in the dark, literally in the night, and when he came to Jesus, he went into the light both physically as well as spiritually for it was there the Lord told Nicodemus he needed to be born again.

The second instance was the description of Judas leaving Jesus to betray Him. The text reads, **As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.** (John 13: 30 NIV) In a subtle way, John tells us that after Satan entered Judas, he left the light (certainly the room where they met was lit but more importantly he left Jesus who is the light) and went into the darkness or the "night". Leaving Jesus literally and figuratively led Judas into the darkness. The third incident to consider is the almost humorous description of the disciples, after having met Jesus resurrected at least two times previous deciding to go fishing on the Sea of Galilee. They went "at night". However they didn't catch a fish. But something

transformative took place when the light arrived. **When daybreak came, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not know it was Jesus.** (John 21: 4 CSB) He told them they should throw their nets on the right side of the boat and when they did the disciples were astonished by the magnificent catch. They then realized it was Jesus and together they ate bread and fish Christ provided them. You see, it was when they were in the dark that the disciples were unsuccessful. It was only after the light appeared and they were met by Jesus that it all came together for them. “In the light” we have Jesus and all He has for us. “In the night” or “in the darkness” is all the world without Jesus, life with Satan at the helm.

The operating system of darkness looks like this. Life without love, or as John puts it, **But the one who hates his brother or sister is in the darkness...** (1 John 2: 11a CSB) Real hatred or at least a lack of love infiltrates the relationships of those who are in the darkness. Those in the darkness think they know what they are doing but they are living blindly and each one in darkness **doesn't know where he's going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.** (1 John 2: 11b CSB) Those in the darkness stumble about trying to figure out everything but without the clear, wise direction of God and the Bible, they are making failures of their lives. The good news is that the darkness says John is moving out of here but as long as it exists, the darkness brings wreckage to communities, families, and the lives of those who live without Christ as Savior and Lord. In contrast to the operating system of darkness is the operating system of light.

John insists that those in the light possess one over-arching characteristic. Love is the backbone of their lives because, **God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.** (1 John 4: 16b NIV) There are four categories of people God says we are empowered and called to love. 1. Our family members. **Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...** (Ephesians 5: 25 NIV) **Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children,** (Titus 2: 3-4 NIV) 2. Those around us. **"Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.** (Romans 13: 9b-10 NIV) 3. Those in the Church, what the Bible refers to as “brothers”. **Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart...** (1 Peter 1: 22 NIV) 4. Those who treat you badly, your “enemies”. **"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."** (Luke 6: 27-28 NIV)

Now this is critical. John makes it clear that the only way to stay in the light is by loving those God puts in your life. **The one who loves his brother or sister remains in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother or sister is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and doesn't know where he's going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.** (1 John 2: 10-11 CSB) “Hate” as used here and by other Hebrews is not necessarily what we think of as “hate”. Our picture is often of someone who becomes violent or passive aggressive, who talks badly about the one hated and wishes evil for that person. Hate for Hebrews usually meant simply that you don't love. To not love your family members or your neighbors or even your enemies is what John means by hating. Love is proactive. It does something, it acts in a certain manner. It shows love in real and tangible ways. The clearest example of what sort of love we are to show others is the time when Jesus washed the feet of the disciples—even those of Judas Iscariot, the betrayer. **It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.** (John 13: 1 NIV) Notice that this is how He showed them, even His enemy, the full extent of His love. **After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.** (John 13: 5 NIV) If you want to stay in the light, remain close to Jesus and be led by Him most perfectly, then find ways to love others, regardless of whether you like them or not. Let a simple towel be your cue for staying in the light. Each time you see a towel, think about how you can show your love toward someone in a practical, Christ inspired way.