

# Live as Jesus Did - 1 John 2:3-6

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. If I could ask you to turn in your Bibles, please, to the letter of 1 John. The letter of 1 John, not the Gospel of John, but 1 John, which is further on the New Testament, towards the end of the New Testament, actually. And it's page 1225, if you're using the red church Bible.

So 1225, 1 John. And we're going to be reading from chapter 2 and verses 3 to 6 this morning. 1 John 2, and reading from verse 3.

We know that we have come to know Him if we keep His commands. Whoever says, I know Him, but does not do what He commands, is a liar.

And the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys His word, love for God is truly made complete in them.

This is how we know we are in Him. Whoever claims to live in Him must live as Jesus did.

[1:17] And we pray that the Lord will bless the reading of His word through His Spirit. The book, *The Shack*, is a phenomenal bestseller.

It has over 200, no, 20 million sales, not 200 million sales, 20 million sales. And it's also been made into a Hollywood film. I don't know if anyone saw it when it came out.

For many Christians, and indeed non-Christians, who come across it, it is like a breath of fresh air, challenging and changing their idea of what it means to be an authentic Christian.

It's the fictional account, the book is a fictional account of an emotionally broken father who has a meeting with all three persons of the Trinity in a shack, which is where the book gets its name.

The meetings with each member of the Trinity transform this father's understanding of faith forever, as he has helped to heal from his pain by God Himself.

[2:23] Now, each of these three characters, who represent Father, Son and Spirit, dispel many supposed misconceptions about who Jesus is, what the Bible is about and what Christianity looks like.

But the shack does this by separating faith in Jesus from any hint of organized religion. This is a quote from the shack.

The Bible, and this is one of the members of the Trinity speaking, the Bible doesn't teach you to follow rules. It's a picture of Jesus, is how the book puts it. God doesn't want us to look for rules and principles.

Look for relationship, a way to coming to be with us. No rules, just relationships. Religion-free faith is the message.

So in the world of the shack, rules and principles get in the way of knowing God. Another author, Leonard Sweet, puts it like this, faith is not ritual, dogma, religion, or spiritual weirdness.

[3:36] It's authentic experience made personal through our full participation in what God is doing. So how do we react to such sentiments or ideas or statements?

It does awaken something in us, doesn't it? Part of us might feel, though, that there's a danger in drawing the line like that. I think it's reasonable to want to have a clear line between authentic faith on the one hand and dead religion on the other hand.

And it's certainly much easier in today's culture to emphasise a life of grace and of being true to yourself over any idea of living by a set of rules or of any kind of ritual.

But as we draw that line to determine authentic Christianity on one side, do we draw the line in the right place? Do we put that line in the right place?

Or to put it another way, as we are drawing that line, are we drawing the same line that Jesus is drawing? This is a big topic.

[ 4 : 49 ] And this morning, we want to look at one small but important aspect of it. That is the place of obedience, good works, and faithfulness in relation to authentic Christianity.

So whether we've been following Jesus since childhood, or we're just starting out in our Christian walk, or simply wondering if following Jesus is for me, I want us all this morning to see that obeying what Jesus commanded is a necessary and good part of the Christian life.

Like verse 5 tells us in 1 John chapter 2, obedience, good works, and faithfulness are an assurance to us that we are in a complete relationship with Jesus.

And verses 3 and 6, I believe, will show us that the line, the line that we want to draw between authentic Christianity and dead religion, it's not faith versus religion, it's not even law versus grace, but rather we want to see that true religion, that is obedience, is a necessary part of true faith.

Have you ever wondered how long we know what a metre is? Have you ever thought about that?

[ 6 : 21 ] I mean, has anyone gone and checked all of the rulers in this school? Or checked all the rulers in the world? So we're all using the same metre? If I order a metre of, you know, material from the UK, how do I know I'm going to get a metre?

Well, the international standard for the metre was set in the 1890s. A precision engineering firm in London was tasked with creating metal bars, and they were 90% platinum and 10% iridium, because that was the best mix to get a bar that wouldn't change with temperature or pressure or climate.

So they made these bars with marks on them that wouldn't alter or change to measure out a metre. And these standard metal bars, the standard, were then distributed all over the world to make sure that each country had the same measure of what a metre was.

Now, the Apostle John isn't interested in measuring distances, but he is concerned about measuring hearts. And his letter gives us three standards, or three measures, by which we can know what authentic Christianity looks like.

And throughout his letter, these three things come up again and again. And if you're any way familiar with 1 John, some of these will ring a bell. First thing is, do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God?

[ 7 : 45 ] You can't be a Christian if you don't believe that. Do you obey the commands of Jesus, which is what we're looking at this morning? And do you love the people of God?

The three measures, the three standards, the international standards of Christianity. All three, John says, are a necessary measure of authentic Christianity.

The place where we should draw the line. And as much as we intuitively know and think it should be just about relationships, and there shouldn't be any rules or religion, the reality is this.

There is a standard for the rule of faith within the church. And that's a standard that Jesus himself has laid down. The Apostle John is well-placed to help us understand what the measure should be. He's probably the closest follower of Jesus Christ who ever lived. He was known in the Bible, in the Gospel, as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

[ 8 : 46 ] Imagine being called the disciple whom Jesus loved. He was one of the first disciples to be called by Jesus, to leave his job. He was one of the fishermen with his brother James, and to come follow Jesus.

And John then is beside Jesus for all the three years of Jesus' public ministry. And he's one of the inner circle of three. Along with his brother James and Peter, who were brought along by Jesus to special events and occurrences that the other disciples weren't at.

So you think of the transfiguration. John was there. John, he reclines next to Jesus at the Last Supper. Jesus, mere hours later, as he hangs on the cross, uses his final words to entrust the care of his own mother Mary to John, the disciple whom he loved.

John lived right to the end of the first century. And he had the task as the last living apostle of Jesus to see out the completion of the New Testament that we have with us today.

He had his own eyewitness account of Jesus, what it was like to be with Jesus, all that Jesus taught and said, which we know is the Gospel of John. He writes Revelation as a witness to the risen Jesus, the last book of the New Testament.

[ 10 : 08 ] And he also gives us these three short letters, first, second, and third John. John is well-placed to tell us what the measure should be.

And he says in verse 3, in chapter 2, we know that we have come to know him, that is Jesus, if we keep his commands.

John is clear. Authentic Christianity must include obedience. And of course, what John says isn't an invention of John's. He didn't come up with the standard.

Listen back to Jesus' own words. We've read some of them already. If we go back to the Gospel of John, so if we flick back in our Bibles, it's page 108.2. 108.2 to chapter 14.

So John, chapter 14. And these are the words of Jesus speaking in verse 15. If you love me, keep my commands.

[ 11 : 09 ] Jesus says, if you love me, keep my commands. And then just over the page, chapter 15, and verses 9 and 10, we read these words, which help us to understand it even further.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love.

just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. Excuse me. Both Jesus and John tell us, they're in agreement, that we cannot say that we love Jesus on one hand, and on the other hand, ignore what Jesus says.

You cannot say that you love Jesus and ignore what Jesus says. John has made the positive association, hasn't he, in verse 3, between knowing Jesus and obedience.

And in verse 4, the question is flipped around for us, isn't it, in verse 4. Whoever says, I know him, but does not do what he commands, is a liar, and the truth is not in that person.

[ 12 : 30 ] What about those who claim to be Christians, but by their actions show that they are not? Well, John uses very strong words.

He calls such a person a liar. And even more fundamental than that, the truth, the truth is not in them, so they can't do anything else but lie. Right thinking about Jesus must be accompanied by right living.

We shouldn't separate the two. Pastor and author Mark Dever illustrates it as follows. This isn't my illustration, but I think it's really helpful. Suppose that Bob starts a business, and he, wisely or foolishly, he puts me in charge of it.

Bob then goes off to Asia for a multi-month trip to drum up some new business deals. So he leaves me in charge of the office, with a very careful set of instructions for what should happen while Bob is away.

While he's away, Bob sends me on a few further emails with additional instructions about what should be done in the office. Now, after a while, a couple of months, Bob returns to find the office in ruins.

[ 13 : 45 ] The phone, the reception, is not being answered because the receptionist has her earphones on and is listening to Spotify on her mobile. Nobody has emptied the bins. They're just overflowing with rubbish. There's no office supplies left when he goes to the cupboard.

People show up when they like, go to the canteen and play Jenga and chat. Bob's inbox is full of angry notes from unhappy customers.

So Bob walks up to me and he asks, Ralph, what happened here? Didn't you get my emails? I smile in a reassuring kind of way and say, yes, I got the emails.

Bob, not only did I get the emails, but I had them printed out and I handed copies to everyone in the office. Actually, some of them were so good we decided to frame them and to hang them up on the walls for inspiration.

Some of us were so dedicated, Bob. We used to meet after work and gather together to study these letters. Some of us have even memorized parts of them with our kids at home.

[ 14 : 49 ] And we started putting them into songs and uploading them to YouTube to share with people. Oh, we can imagine what Bob would say at that point. Ralph, why didn't you do what the emails said to do?

And what do you mean you love the emails? Of course you don't. You see, despite my efforts at email study, memorization and song creation, I can hardly say that I'm an authentic employee of Bob's.

And likewise, John is saying that we may have all of our doctrine right about Jesus. And we might shout loudly or sing loudly to all who will listen that we know him, we know him, we know him.

But John says, then why aren't you obeying his commands? If you're not a Christian, if you're an atheist, if you don't believe there is a God, then you don't get any email instructions from the boss. The only given in your world is that we are all the products and the whole universe is a product of time plus chance plus energy. That's it.

[16:03] They're the only given. And it's very easy in many ways to be authentic in that situation. You see, you get to be your own boss when there is no God.

And you can write your own email instructions. It's very handy. So, if you struggle with authenticity, don't worry. You just get to send yourself a new email and update who the authentic you is. But, of course, the endless chasing for authenticity down the spiral of self doesn't ever bring lasting completeness or lasting peace.

It's a never-ending update of emails to be the authentic you apart from God. Now, the alternative to being our own boss or being an atheist isn't to revert to dead religion.

Okay? I want to be very clear in this. The alternative isn't to revert to dead religion. This is not a call by John or by me to pompous, self-justifying and insincere legalism.

[17:14] Legalism is trying to earn the boss's favor by obedience. And John makes it clear in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 2 that sinless perfection is not what's in view.

Let's read those verses. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father.

Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Sinless perfection is not what we're being called to. That's not what's in view. Rules-based religion is not the answer, according to John. We cannot, we cannot earn our salvation by our own efforts. Our salvation, verse 2, our forgiveness of sins, is only because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross. And that is crucial.

[18:27] That is foundational. We are not moving from that rock. We come to a God as a sinner knowing that we cannot earn His forgiveness through our obedience.

And we simply ask for His free forgiveness at the foot of the cross. So in terms of a sacrifice for our sins, our works, our obedience, our faithfulness count for nothing.

They give no merit in the great transaction where Jesus takes our sin and gives us His righteousness.

We are justified, declared not guilty in God's court because of Jesus alone. This is the good news of the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Come today. Come today. Without needing to bring money without gifts, without good works, without obedience to the foot of the cross and find forgiveness for all of your sins.

[19:47] Only then do we also see from verse 3 to verse 6 that obedience to the commands of God is required. But again and again in our lives, if we've lived one day as a Christian, we know this.

Again and again we fail as Christians to keep those commands that we are to obey. And sin is still present. So how do I know, and this is a struggle for many of us as Christians, how do I know that I'm not one of the people of verse 4?

the liar, the hypocrite, the fraud, the one who is not authentic in their Christian walk. And what place then do my own efforts and my own works have in this authentic Christian life?

Well, John has an answer for us. Remember, our hope verses 1 and 2 is not in a sinless perfection as a means of being an authentic Christian.

That is not our hope, that is not our measure, that is not the line that we draw. Verse 5, but, but if anyone obeys his word, love for God or God's love is truly made complete in them.

[21:23] Anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. You see, our hope is in an ongoing transformation. As we obey Jesus, as we obey, as it says here, his word, that is, as we obey the scriptures, the Bible, then God is at work.

God is at work. Completing his love in us and our love for him. That's what verse 5 is telling us. Completeness. What a great word, completeness or perfection. And there's something that our hearts yearn for when it hears a word like that, to be complete.

My work, I work as a software engineer. engineer. And there's an endless set of characteristics and behaviours and skills to strive for.

You can always be better. And it's probably the same whatever job you are in or whatever work you do. It's almost impossible to become the complete engineer. But I want to be better.

[22:36] Or being a complete parent. A complete parent. protector, provider, teacher, comforter, and mentor.

It's riddled with failures on an almost daily basis. But I want to get there. I want to be complete. Completeness in anything we do, it's just always over the horizon as we sail towards it. But we know, we know we must continue to work and to act in these areas. And yet here in verse 5, we read that a love for God, if anyone obeys his word, love for God, or his love for us, here we read that love for God, the true measure of authentic Christianity, can be made complete in us. And I think of it as a virtuous circle. You know you can have vicious circles that spiral out of control and things go wrong, but you can have virtuous circles. They're a thing as well. It's a virtuous circle of love for God, leading to obedience to God, leading to a love to God, leading of obedience to God, towards completeness of love and knowing him. It's a virtuous circle that we practice. And completeness and this virtuous circle is possible because it's a Holy Spirit enabled work.

[ 24 : 07 ] Brothers and sisters, we have the Spirit. God, who began this good work in us, it's his initiative, promises that through his Holy Spirit that he will bring that work to completion.

Does that sound familiar? Are there verses in the Bible that sound like that? Because it's true. That's what the Word says. He has began the good work in us, will bring it to completion. We will be faithful to the end, and we will indeed, in the end, be perfect as Christ is perfect.

God's work is made complete in us through the means of our obedience, our good works, and our faithfulness. They are the means, or the path, or the plan that God has laid out for us to follow in order to have a complete love of his in our lives as we put off sin and put on love and obedience. Now, legalism is the error where we want to take our salvation and we want to build our own tower of goodness upon it, or we want to put our own tower of goodness in place of what Jesus has done. That's essentially legalism. But a similar but opposite claim is that, well, you know, it's all of grace, and therefore following Jesus is free of any kinds of demands.

[ 25 : 35 ] And that too is a serious error, where we dishonour God and his words and we believe that it does not matter. The solution to both legalism and licentiousness or living a life that doesn't honour God, the solution to both, both of those, is that Christ wants to continue his work in and through us.

it doesn't end when we come to faith in Jesus. He acts within us to empower us to do good works that he has prepared in advance for us to do.

All so that love for God and love of God would be truly made complete, verse 5, in us. If anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them.

Jesus is working and making us authentic Christians. What does that mean for us each day? What does it look like in the Christian life?

Well, there's many, many, many ways that we apply this every day. We put off sin and we put on the fruit of the Holy Spirit in its place.

[ 26 : 53 ] We stop practices like lying to each other when we hide behind poor excuses and instead we practice speaking the truth in love.

That's what it means to obey. We love God's people as much as God through his body the church. That's what it means to obey.

It means to love God's people. Prayer, fellowship, baptism, and the Lord's table are all commanded by Jesus.

They're all things that are elicited by God and are part of what it means to be a Christian. You see, ours is a grace-based, entered by faith, promise-filled, relational, true religion, with good practices, rules, and rituals that help to sustain and grow the authentic Christian over a lifetime.

That's what Christianity is about. Thank God for his wisdom. It's not shallow. It's shallow at the shallow end as we come to put our trust in him.

[ 28 : 06 ] But as we walk through the Christian life, there are depths and depths that God has laid out for us. And then finally, verse 6, the end of verse 5 into verse 6.

this is how we know we are in him. And this is key. Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

So we bring no merit of our own to the cross. But from the cross, by grace, God is changing us to become an authentic and complete Christian, an authentic and complete human being.

And this happens through our union by faith with Jesus as we're united to Christ. And this is where John brings us as a final confirmation of our faith at the end of verse 5.

Live as Jesus did. And before we consider what it means to live as Jesus did, I think we need to understand a little bit of why Jesus lived on earth at all.

[ 29 : 12 ] Why did Jesus come? Well, God is always related to people through covenants, through agreements, where God comes and sets the rules and is faithful to a people through a covenant.

And he's established gracious covenants throughout all of history for the path that we should follow to be in relationship with God. And in all those covenants, they are graciously given by God.

He initiates them. We enter into them through faith in God's promises. And our lives are regulated by good laws and good principles that God gives us.

You see, it's never, ever, ever been throughout history, faith versus religion, or law versus grace. It has always been grace, leading to faith, leading to walking in the path that God has planned out.

That's always been the way it has been. So people in the Old Testament, and we struggle with this sometimes, I think, it was so different back then, and how they related to God was so different.

[ 30 : 25 ] How were they saved? How were they saved? How did they earn their salvation? How were they saved? Well, they were saved, like you and I, by a gracious act of God.

They were rescued from slavery in Egypt through the great Passover event. And in faith, they were called to trust in the promises of God for a land and for blessings and for salvation and ultimately for a king.

So their covenant was like ours. It was based on grace, entered into by faith, in the promises of God, and regulated by good law that God gave, which we summarize in the Ten Commandments. Now, it was, of course, a temporary and lesser covenant, but it was founded on the same principles, and was gracious, and was the means through which people were saved.

Only we have a better covenant, and we only have a better covenant because Jesus, the Son of God, the promised King, has come in the flesh.

[ 31 : 35 ] You see, where old Israel failed, Jesus always succeeded. They rebelled in the desert against God, and they kicked against God, and when Jesus was in his desert, and being tempted by Satan for 40 days, he obeyed God's word, and he passed the test.

Where old Israel, they took the law of God, and they turned it almost into this soulless rule-keeping with pointless extra regulation, regulations.

Jesus took the law, and he showed its true meaning in the Sermon on the Mount, and he showed a deeper meaning to it. He didn't add extra regulations on the outside, he put them on the inside in the heart, and he said, love your enemies, and he said, don't lust in your heart, or hate your brother in your heart.

So Jesus expanded the law. He expanded the law. He showed the true depth of it, and showed in his life what it looks like to obey the law when you're spirit-filled, what obedience looks like, what good works look like, what faithfulness looks like.

This is what John is saying in verse 6 this morning. Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

[ 33 : 08 ] Must live as Jesus did. Spirit-empowered, faithful, obedient, doing good works from the heart. Here is our manna from heaven.

Here is our sustenance and our hope. Jesus walked a life of self-denial and submission to his heavenly father. His perfect record means that he is the ultimate covenant keeper.

The ultimate one. Unlike the people of God who had gone before him, Jesus always kept the covenant laws and regulations. Christian, we can never achieve in this life the perfect life of Jesus. We are trying to image Jesus and to become more like him in this life. But until he returns and sin and death and Satan are done away with finally, we will struggle.

But Jesus is the ultimate covenant keeper. Jesus is the ultimate covenant keeper with a big K. But the joy of the gospel is this, that through our being united with Jesus, our union with him and the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, we become like him through that virtuous circle.

[ 34 : 36 ] And we are becoming a covenant keeper with a small K. Our works indeed are imperfect and incomplete, but nonetheless, those works, the things you do, honour God.

they are pleasing to him, they are genuine, they are necessary. Christ is being formed in you. His love is being made complete in you as you walk as Jesus walked. What God has joined together, love and obedience, let none of us separate.

Amen. Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you that in the gospel of Jesus Christ, that the manifold wisdom of God is shown to all the powers and principalities and rulers of the universe. It's on display. Your wisdom, God, is beyond ours. We could not have imagined such a great salvation. We simply thank you. Thank you for the cross of Christ.

[ 35 : 51 ] Thank you for the gift of the Spirit. Thank you for the love of the Father. Lord, we need you. Help us each and every day to be faithful, to be obedient, to do good works, to love our brothers and sisters and to become more complete in Christ and his love.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.