

1 John 2:1–11

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[0 : 00] It was the last year of my undergraduate studies. In this final year, I had assumed responsibility over a campus ministry. Early on in the academic school year, a distraught underclassman shared with me that a student leader in her church, someone instrumental in leading her to faith, had declared that he was now abandoning the faith.

She sat me down and shared with me the passage that he had shared to her, claiming that he was one of those recorded in 1 Timothy chapter 4.

As it declares, the Spirit says in later times, some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits. Afterwards, she shared with me, or she asked me, what was she to do?

What was she to say? How should she respond? Underneath, I came to realize that one of the burdens upon her was the genuineness of her own conversion.

If he, who she perceived to be more mature, stable, and Christian, could assert the falsity of his faith, what was she to think of her own?

[1 : 16] The recipients of this letter, 1 John, are experiencing something in the same vein. The recipients are observing, I'm in this movement, this early church movement, this religious revolution.

And while we march and travel together, I'm beginning to notice a few things. That there are losses as our group grows. Yet at the same time, things are dwindling.

Furthermore, people were leaving, but they were not leaving quietly. Instead, they were very outspoken in their departure. As they were leaving, they were also deceiving, according to chapter 2, verse 26.

They were trying to lure out those in the faith community by infusing doubt, question, and concerns regarding what they had first received.

The question that challenges and confronts us this morning is this. How do I know that what I've heard is authentic? And how can I know that what I've received is genuine?

[2 : 25] This is one of the purposes that the epistle was given. There are a number of purpose clauses in this epistle, but perhaps the most encapsulating one is found in chapter 5, verse 13.

The writer writes this, I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

How does one know? How do you know? Perhaps there are single moments in your life where you sense that you've come to know. I've witnessed, I've been in large stadiums in Southern California, where I've witnessed friends make their way up from the bleachers all the way to the infield in front of well-known evangelists professing faith.

They would say it was that moment that they knew. It may have been a procession in a church service similar to this, that you made your way to the front. You were greeted and you prayed a prayer.

It may be a certificate of baptism that sits in a file cabinet in your house. For a young person in this room, you may assume that, well, I know because my parents have faith and isn't it a genetic thing that I just inherit this?

[3 : 48] Well, actually, no. It's not passed down in that way. Because faith, unlike genetics, you can actually deny. I don't want to belittle these experiences, for to many they are meaningful.

But this is not the criteria the letter presents. Not at all. This morning we continue our series in 1 John, and with this in mind, you don't have to live long to observe this phenomenon.

The entering and the exiting of people into the community of the faithful. Naturally, we're distraught. But we shouldn't be surprised. The Bible is quite open about this reality.

We are then caught up by these discussions of, well, concerns over statuses of others. But what it should cause us to do is steer us toward personal contemplation and reflection.

It is always beneficial, always beneficial, to take inventory of one's own personal life, particularly regarding matters of faith.

[4 : 55] You see, the temptation for Christians is this, that over time, as you age and hopefully mature, you become confident of your standing before God, sometimes proudly.

We ignore the threat of temptation and loss of faith. But we're given a warning that if we perceive ourselves to stand, we're exhorted to take heed lest we fall.

It's much better to approach these questions and perform a diagnostic of one's own life. And since what is being written is to assure that the Christian is truly Christian, then what is written here must be true of me.

There are three assertions that the genuine Christian should be able to make according to this passage. They're marked out by the ESV with the phrase, whoever says.

You see it in chapter 2, verse 4. Again in chapter 2, verse 6. And lastly in chapter 3, verse 9. As Christians, our profession should be, I know Him.

[6 : 00] I abide in Him. And I am in the light. And if these three are not true, then the logical conclusion is that you may not be the Christian that is described by the Scriptures.

This morning, though I could have framed the sermon with these three whoever says statements, I've chosen to go another route. My aim is to develop one thought which unfolds in these verses.

It is this. A genuine Christian life is distinguished by obedient conduct exemplified by love.

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It's distinguished by obedient conduct. Verses 3 through 6. If you assert you know Him, it is visible by your adherence to His commands.

[7 : 09] Verse 3 is quite plain and clear in its declaration. By this we know that we have come to know Him if we keep His commands. If this is true, then the opposite is true.

If you fail to keep His commands, you do not know Him. Plainly stated, you do not know Him if you do not obey Him. The Bible actually declares you to be a liar if you say you know God but live disobediently.

We know that talk can be cheap. And so here is a grave warning. Listen carefully. Not all who self-identify as Christians are Christians.

Early on, and now I'm going on in my 12th year of pastoral ministry, early on, in my first year of pastoral ministry, someone said to me, Bing, do not be alarmed when you find yourself serving many who are professing unbelievers.

It made me do a double take, even a triple take, and I still do multiple takes. What in the world is a professing unbeliever? Well, I've come to understand there are those who profess faith verbally, but they are not members of the community of the faithful.

[8 : 34] Here in this passage, we find something of that sort. It's a fig leaf, or a fig tree that is budding olives. It makes no sense. It's a freshwater spring that is spewing salt water.

Here the passage calls them liars. See, in a day and age when self-identification seems to mean everything, it seems to be the golden ticket, the Bible says no.

Wait. Let me add my voice, the Bible says, not so fast. Though you may self-identify as a Christian, that does not make you a Christian.

So that we're not mistaken, obedience is not the prerequisite of knowing God, but it is an outcome of knowing God. Because I know God and I believe in Him, I will behave in a manner that reflects that I know Him.

One writer put it this way, obeying God's commands is not the condition, but rather the characteristic of the knowledge of God. See, the writer can't be saying, oh, you have to be perfectly obedient to God's commands before you can say that you're a Christian.

[9 : 44] Rather, the genuine believer is characterized by obedience. We don't do it perfectly. None of us will in this life.

But we are doing it progressively. We are getting better and better and better at obedience. When one comes to faith, obedience is the fruit of that faith.

Not perfect obedience, but progressive obedience. See, underlying this premise is that when you and I encounter God, when we truly know Him, it's transformative.

It's not a far-off thought. You observe it in your daily interactions. Those who are most influential or transformative on your life are those that you know the best and who know you the best.

This is what is at work in the life of the believer. This relationship with God is altering your affections, your will, desire, and moral composition. True knowledge of God results in alteration, a reconfiguration of one's life that will be manifest in obedience.

[10:50] Moreover, obedience to His commands is keeping His word, according to 2 verse 5. In so doing, the love of God is perfected. It's an interesting phrase here.

A little, a lot of discussion has revolved around this. What does it mean? It does not mean that God's love is somehow not perfect or lacking, but it does, or deficient or inadequate. Rather, it means this, that God's love is fulfilled and displayed through our obedience. Commentator I. Howard Marshall puts it marvelously.

God's love is expressed perfectly in obedient people. Therefore, our obedience serves as a witness to onlookers, to the observing world.

See, if our disobedience ruins our Christian witness, which it does, then our obedience actually does the opposite. It serves as a witness and an assertion that we know God.

[11:55] Even the world observes this. They yell hypocrite at the church. Why? Because what we do does not match what we say.

Inconsistency is the indictment on the church. And the epistle is asserting the same. If one's belief does not alter their behavior, then their belief is not a genuine belief.

See, Israel's history actually vividly illustrates this. The people of God did not know God and it was observable in the outworking of the nation's social life.

As God pronounces judgment on Israel through the prophet Hosea, He indicts them for their lack of knowledge of God. And I want to read these two verses because they're so striking.

Hosea chapter 4. The Lord is actually accusing and judging Israel. He says, Hear the word of the Lord, O children of Israel. For the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants, the nation, of the land.

[13:01] There is no faithfulness or steadfast love and no knowledge of God in the land. But wait, how does He know there's no knowledge of God in the land?

It's actually worked out in society. There is swearing, there is lying, murder, stealing, committing adultery. They break all bounds and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

See, where there is an absence of the knowledge of God, there is a prevalence of darkness and evil. If you would like to assert that a particular nation is Christian, then you must find little traces, maybe no traces, of swearing, lying, murder, committing adultery, bloodshed.

See, this knowing of God is not merely intellectual, it is a life-changing knowledge. It's an applied knowledge. Here we sit next to a university where knowledge is idolized.

And the assumption is that if everyone just thought rightly or thought clearly, all the social ills of society would be corrected.

[14:19] Well, yeah, thinking rightly is a positive step. But it's not the only step one takes. We are not to be those who think and talk. We are those, according to verse 6, who are to walk in the same way in which He walked.

Jesus was not only a moral teacher, a talker, for He was also an obedient Son, a walker. A genuine Christian life is a transformed life manifested in our moral conduct.

A genuine Christian is distinguished by obedient conduct and exemplified by love. This obedient conduct is exemplified by love, according to verse 7-11.

As I alluded to earlier, there is a schism, a division in the early church, at least in the receiving context of this epistle. There were some who had departed from their company, possibly because of variant beliefs, according to chapter 2, verse 19.

Some have proposed Gnosticism had taken hold, this idea that there was some secret knowledge, unobtainable, that you had to be part of this religious tradition to obtain.

[15:41] Some scholars have proposed, oh, maybe Docetism had taken place, emerged, claiming that Jesus wasn't really a man, He just kind of appeared like a man. That's why John opens up with this epistle that we saw Him, heard Him, touch Him, you know, He was actually a man.

whatever was leading these people to leave or divide this early church, one of the outworkings was hatred.

Hate is how John describes it. Within this community of faith, there were those whose posture was hatred. Not much is given here to define it, but enough has already been said in these first two chapters.

Hatred for the author and the writer is the absence of love and light. Love is likely the commandment being expounded upon here according to verses 7 and 8.

It's both an old commandment and a new commandment. It's old in the sense that it was a commandment that they had from the beginning. Not only from the beginning of their conversion, but it was embedded in the Mosaic Law in Leviticus 19 which reads, You shall not hate your brother in your heart, and it goes on, You shall not take vengeance or bear grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

[17:02] I am the Lord. In some sense, this is old. It was something familiar. It was something they had already heard. But it's new in this sense. It was fully exemplified by Christ in His living, dying, rising, and ascending.

Love was displayed completely and fully in Christ. The words of the fourth gospel may echo in your mind. A new commandment I give unto you that you shall love one another.

John Stott describes the newness in three ways. It's new in what it emphasizes. All of a sudden, it summarizes the entire Old Testament in really two commands.

Love God and love one another. In emphasis. In quality. because all of a sudden, the people of Israel can now see what does it mean to love?

Well, let me show you. It's bound up in the Lord Jesus Christ. Love is self-sacrifice unto death. It's new by extent.

[18:07] Who am I to love? Well, definitely the community of believers. But also your neighbor. this is the age in which we live.

We live in this space of darkness passing away and the true light that is already shining in verse 8. See, love in the community of faith is demonstrated in many ways, but one of the ways is that it safeguards us from causing one another to stumble or be tripped up in verse 10.

The English word here is scandal derived from the Greek word skandalon. Of course, it means why would you do something that leads, that results in something that is different from what you believe.

In other words, within the community of faith, we are to behave in such a way that does not entice others to stumble and to sin. We are not those who jeopardize the well-being of one another.

See, for people who do so are traitors. They're sabotaging the work being done and that's actually what's taking place in this letter. He's most likely alluding to chapter 2 verse 26 where as these people leave, they are deceiving the people in the congregation.

[19:21] They're causing them to stumble. They're causing them to sin. They were not leaving quietly. They were not exiting quietly. They were actually disrupting the faith by embedding false teaching.

John writes, this is hate. To act in love is to act in such a way to preserve the faith and serve the well-being of one another. We are, according to Paul, to walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

A genuine Christian is distinguished by obedient conduct and exemplified by love. To fail to love is to fail to obey and to fail to obey is to fail to really know God.

So that we're not mistaken to believe that if we simply behave morally and obediently and practice social etiquette and loving acceptance, it's worthwhile in our closing moments to revisit a foundational component to Christianity.

Because you can read this and say, oh, okay, is it just legalism? Just obey all the laws and then love everyone to the greatest of my capacity?

[20:44] Actually, it's not. The author has opened up this epistle with a foundational component. It's intermingled in the text, but I don't want us to overlook it, to think that if we were just moral and socially loving, I would ensure divine acceptance.

There is actually an order of operations present here. because when I say, please excuse my dear Aunt Sally, you know what that means. Right? Everyone who paid attention in math class knows P-E-M-D-A-S means when I see a math problem, the first thing I'm looking for are parentheses. And afterwards, yeah, afterwards, exponents, and so on and so forth. because you would have learned in math if you don't take the order into account, you'll never arrive at the right solution. And here it is also in matters of faith. Because you could think, okay, I'm going to do this a little out of order. I'm going to work myself obedient, work obedience into myself and out of myself and then I'm going to love and then I'm going to arrive at the right solution because the divine hand is, you know, it doesn't matter the order.

It actually matters immensely. The pistol has given this to us. God is light. And if our assertion that we are in the light, that we walk in this light, however, there is a matter that's unresolved by you and I.

[22 : 21] It is not resolved by fulfilling moral or social obligations. It requires actually something outside of ourselves. For we are those who are meandering in the darkness according to verse 11.

The darkness has actually blinded our eyes. We must acknowledge that our true plight, that we are both morally and socially corrupt, fallen, we are sin-filled, sin-stained, sin-bound.

To deny this fact is to make God out to be a liar for what God has purposed in Christ was to resolve our sin issue. Because if you say you have no sin, what you're telling God is, God, you actually have misdiagnosed the human condition.

Where the Bible is saying, the heaviest plight on man is the condition of your sin. See, the sending advocacy of the Son is that which He addresses our greatest need.

You see it. Forgiveness of sin, atonement, appeasement of divine wrath, propitiation is the word in 2 verse 2. The text has made it so clear up to this point.

[23 : 32] The blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin. If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous.

See, our sin is the problem. His Son is the only solution. It's put this way in Colossians. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and actually transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

See, a true Christian is not only someone who's been transformed so that they can obey and empowered to obey and love, but they actually have been transferred.

They've been divinely relocated so that we are no longer meandering in the dark. It's a divine pronouncement.

And as much as we may self-identify as Christians, there is a greater sense in God's Word and work that it is God who pronounces us to be Christian.

[24 : 42] In a lot of ways, it's a declarative act. It's entirely two different things. If I were on trial as a defendant for all my sins, I can plead not guilty.

I can say I'm not guilty. I'm clean. That's one plea. It's entirely different for the judge of the court to declare that I'm not guilty.

guilty. This is the glory of the gospel. We are all on trial. We are all defendants.

You, regardless of what you may plea, guilty or not guilty, in the end, it is actually the judge's pronouncement that stands.

And this is one of the greatest assurances of knowing God. The higher you esteem the Word, the higher you hold it in confidence, and you receive that what God has declared to be true of you, it alters everything.

[26 : 05] Because the day will come, and I mean, I was in youth ministry for 10 years, and as young people started to get baptized and profess faith, I always, there's this pattern of their testimonies.

I came to believe. I walked up down the aisle. My parents asked, and I prayed the prayer. And I began to notice that the testimony of young people always started in the first person pronoun.

And I began to ask the question, have they missed the entire gospel? The gospel is that he made him who knew no sin be sin for us so that we may become the righteousness of God.

It always starts with God. Don't you see it? he is the propitiation for our sins. And so, as we come to this table, as you reflect on the glory of the gospel and the certainty of how you know and the assurance of where you stand, yes, it requires and is manifest in obedience.

yes, it is demonstrated and assured in how you love one another. But dare never forget, the judge has pronounced the guilty to be not guilty.

[27 : 52] How could he possibly do that? Well, we have an advocate. we have someone who pleads on your behalf, even when you don't even plea on your own behalf.

We have an advocate, Jesus Christ, the righteous. Rest assured, his word asserts it in Christ.

Let's pray together. Father, Father, oh, it is our great joy in the mystery of God that how we, the condemned, might be set free.

And Lord, as we come to your table, may our eyes gaze upward may our hearts respond to your word.

May our hearts leap because we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. And he is not only the appeasement, propitiation for our sins, not only ours, but the whole world. [29 : 18] help us to know that we know, to be assured that what we have received is true, and would you confirm it in our hearts as we continue to bow in your presence.

We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. God