

# 1 John 2:3-17

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[0:00] Good morning everyone, I'm Shui Ting, an artisanal apprentice and a student at Regent College. I'm glad to be able to share the word with you all today. Today we'll be continuing the sermon series on 1 John.

Specifically, we'll be looking at chapter 2, verses 3 to 17, which was just read for us. The themes of light and darkness run through 1 John to help us understand our walk with God.

Today's passage comes with a message so simple that it can be challenging in its clarity. These are the two main points I'll explore today.

First, if we know God, we will have the love of God in us. Secondly, the love of God is the light of life that animates us. So I don't have a way to show you an image now, but I want to describe this image to you.

It's a funny image that was circulated on the internet. It was a photo that someone had taken of a vending machine, but the light had gone out and it was all dark inside.

[1:08] There was a sign taped over it that said, The light inside has broken, but I still work. So this image was shared by thousands of people who lamented along with it.

Me too, vending machine, me too. It was funny and relatable, but also sad because it showed just how many people related to having a lost sense of light, purpose, joy and meaning.

Don't we feel that way sometimes in our walk with God as well? It can be easy for us to go through the motions, but we may feel like something is missing.

So our passage today begins with a certain word mentioned repeatedly throughout. No. So if I were to ask all of you today, without looking at 1 John, how do you know that you know God?

I'll probably get a variety of answers. Believing in the right doctrine. Knowing scripture. Or maybe you can point to a time in your life where you encountered God.

[2:12] Here, John lays it out very clearly. Knowing God means keeping his commandments. Knowing God means living as Jesus did. So this is our first point.

If we know God, we will have the love of God in us. We are liars if we say that we know God, but we don't do as he commands. And that's challenging, isn't it? John doesn't mince his words.

What he's trying to say is that the hallmark of someone who knows God is someone who has the love of God in him. Let's look at verses 7-8.

Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command, but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard.

Yet I am writing you a new command. Its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

[3:12] It was taught by Moses in Leviticus and later taught again by Jesus. And when Jesus teaches it, he makes it new in certain ways.

He reframes it as the second greatest commandment, meant to be lived in the light of loving God with everything you have. And on top of that, his own death on the cross shows us the true meaning of loving our neighbors as ourselves.

This command also penetrates into our hearts and intentions. Verse 9 says, Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness.

So hate is not an action word. It is a state of the heart. Even without doing anything to harm the person, my heart can be in the state of hating them.

If that state of the heart remains, we walk in darkness. This is also what Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount. Anyone who is angry with his brother or sister and curses them is in danger of judgment.

[ 4 : 20 ] The same as one who murders. So God doesn't stop at setting boundaries for right or wrong actions. He penetrates the thoughts of the heart. In Christ, the standards are rewritten.

Loving one another goes beyond acting right. God doesn't intend for us to just go through the motions in our spiritual life. Rather, walking with him is about deep heart change.

Okay, so let's get honest. If at least one person has come to your mind so far, then I think you are in good company.

The thing is, with all our flaws and failures, it's impossible for us to live as Jesus did, unless we know the love of God. If we try to do it by our own strength, we will find ourselves being like that vending machine.

Our light is broken, but we still go through the motions. We feel empty. For example, you may attend church faithfully but hold a grievance towards someone there.

[ 5 : 29 ] Or perhaps it's someone in your family or a co-worker that you refuse to speak to. At the end of the day, despite our best efforts, we still struggle with the same hatred, resentment, envy, and unwillingness to forgive.

I've been there. What do we do when we feel like this? Do we just grit our teeth and suck it up?

Thankfully, no.

What enables us to love sacrificially is an ever-growing knowledge in the love of God. The second point is this. The love of God is the light that animates us.

The love of God is the light that animates us. In verses 12 to 14, John details his reasons for writing the letter.

Though it seems like he's addressing different groups of people, we realize that these are spiritual riches that are for the people of God as a whole. In doing this, he reminds us of the foundational spiritual realities that we live in, rooted in the love of God, so that we can resist sin.

[ 6 : 42 ] First, he reminds us of the forgiveness of sins on account of Jesus. The first reality is that our sins have been forgiven.

Jesus' self-sacrificial love is not just a model that we are called to follow, but it's something that has been concretely done for us. Just take a moment to think about that.

If we have any grievances that we're holding against anyone, God has not held his grievances against us. Our sins, even those towards one another, are ultimately grievances towards God.

And yet, he doesn't hold us guilty because of Christ's death on the cross. Whether we may struggle with self-condemnation, because we feel like we're not doing good enough, or self-justification, because we feel justified to hold on to this resentment or this state of heart, the truth is that God has met our need for forgiveness with undeserved generosity and love.

Secondly, God reminds us that we have known him whom is from the very beginning. The second reality is that we know God.

[ 8 : 03 ] So does this feel a little confusing? In the beginning, John writes that we know God if we obey his commands and we live like Jesus. But here, he's telling us and reminding us that we know God.

How can we understand this? Imagine with me a poor man who has spent his life on the streets begging for money.

He only gets to eat if people toss a coin his way. But one day, it surfaces that someone, a benevolent benefactor, has left in his inheritance a huge amount of money, more than he could ever need.

For the first time in his life, he has ample riches to enjoy. Yet often, he finds himself forgetting that. His first instinct is still to think, people are stingy, I can't share with them what I have.

In reality, he's free to share and enjoy everything, but his past is still the narrative that is animating his thoughts and decisions. Well, the truth is that if you have believed in Christ, you do know God.

[ 9 : 16 ] But living in his love is a process of continual abiding. We need to be reminded again and again of who God is. And we need to live according to the truth of his promises.

Lastly, John reminds us of another spiritual reality. We have overcome the evil one.

Though we may often feel defeated in the process of fighting sin, including hatred and resentment towards others, we are, in fact, not defeated.

Verse 14 says that the word of God lives in us, and we have overcome the evil one. Even though we are flawed and weak, being in Christ and sharing in his victory means that we have, at the core, overcome the devil.

We know the trajectory that we're set on. We're able to fight knowing that we're not fighting a losing war. So John knows that it's impossible to resist sin and hatred without knowing that we are forgiven, without knowing that we know God, and that we have overcome.

[ 10 : 33 ] We learn to ground ourselves in these spiritual truths, not letting the love of God just bypass us. Rather, I pray that we can linger and abide so that we can be filled to the same measure of love.

Obedience is what characterizes the people that know God, but knowing God arises from lingering in his love. Let's pray.

Dear God, we come before you today bringing you our hatred, resentment, and sin. We've been forgiven much in ways that we don't deserve. When we struggle, remind us of the riches that we have in Christ.

May we grow in understanding your love, encountering it afresh, and let that animate our lives. Amen.