

## 1 John 2:3-3:10

John is writing to the early church, concerned about their understanding of the Gospel. He has confronted false teaching, asserting authentic Christianity is tied to the historical Jesus, and it's followers must have lives and communities that are faithful to Jesus in word and practice. In this section John gives the church two ways to test authentic faith and reminds them to walk with their Saviour as God's children.

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## A Moral Test - Relationships in the Church - 1 John 2:3-17

Firstly, a moral test. Your allegiance to a belief system affects your lifestyle and in a lived faith observance of behaviour is a valid way of testing commitment.

I want to make an important diversion at this point. Christianity is not equivalently with moralism, but to our discredit we have often been happy to promote this idea. Why? Partly because we've got the relationship between good behaviour and Christianity confused, but also its because its far easier to accept this as your faith than to actually follow Jesus.

Moralism suggests the Gospel can be reduced to a life of behavioural improvements. It operates by everyone carrying around a list which we check off for ourselves, and compare each other against.

In the NT the rich young ruler approached Jesus asking the way to eternal life, this interaction helps us to consider the problems of moralism (Matthew 19:16-22). Jesus floats the idea that *if* you can keep the Law perfectly, then you can escape sin's penalty. When the man responds that he has met the standard, Jesus touches on an issue that proves he didn't measure up. He was not willing to follow God, if that meant giving his wealth to the poor. Thus, he was breaking the two greatest commands; he did not love his neighbour as himself, and he did not love the Lord with all his heart. He loved himself (and his money) more.

Now, God wants us to live good lives, but moralism tricks us into thinking that we gain salvation and and righteousness by just ticking off the list, it is not authentic Christianity. Moralism produces sinners who are sometimes better behaved but it can't save us, because if we sin just once we are lawbreakers. And the reality is not one of us can keep the Law.

The true Gospel is faith in Jesus for salvation and righteous standing before God (Galatians 2:16). We are justified by faith *alone*, saved by grace *alone*, and redeemed from our sin by Christ *alone*. The Gospel of Christ transforms sinners into the adopted sons and daughters of God.

Back to 1John.

Building on the idea that Jesus' people follow in his ways, a true believer keeps Jesus' commands, and conversely disobedience is evidence that a person does not truly know Jesus. Do you remember some of the last instructions Jesus gave his friends while he washed their feet in the upper room?

*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples (John13:34-35).*

This is what John is referring to when he talks about an old command. We usually think of obedience and duty going together, but here John says obedience is a result of love, it's a response to the love shown to us by God in Jesus, just as he indicated in the upper room.

Previously John spoke about sin, now he gets specific, looking at the evidence of faithfulness present in community relationships.

Authentic faith is characterised by love for others, particularly those in the church community. This is no mean feat. If you thought it was challenging getting on with your spouse who comes from a different bloodline and family culture, try getting on with the bunch of crazies the Lord lands you with in your church. Often they're a mix of good, weird and ordinary, and not always folk you might have chosen to be your friends. The Lord shakes you all up and mixes you all around, and says 'love one another!' He does understand that it's difficult, that's why he tells us to love each other so often, and why it's scattered throughout the epistles, including the advice to 'bear with one...forgive grievances, forgive as the Lord forgave you' (Ephesians 4:2, Colossians3:13).

A life where you choose to love Jesus and those that Jesus has made your family, is a life walked in the light. As a consequence of walking in the light, there's honesty instead of lies; self awareness instead of denial; and love and understanding instead of manipulation or rivalry between siblings in the Christ community. You can travel more smoothly because there is less to trip you up, you can navigate obstacles instead of stumbling over them.

Love is not just about kindness and good deeds. It is a protection against coveting other's possessions, relationships, achievements or the opportunities they have been given. Because love is unselfish, it wants the other person to succeed, it takes delight when they thrive and helps them to do so. And when love is reciprocal, as it should be in a Christian community, you see things like sharing, providing for each other in times of need, being aware of another's frailties and offering support, understanding and comfort. It means going another mile, anticipating need, giving a person space or making your time available whichever is needed. Love notices the lonely person, the one on the outside, it reaches out to include the other. Love forgives failure and encourages another try, it overlooks things occasionally, accepts difference and limitation.

Conversely, those who are only going through the motions cannot maintain this sort of community, John says they 'hate' their brothers and sisters. Hate is a strong word, but

remember John is using contrasting images to make a point - light and darkness, love and hate. So he includes things like resentment, bitterness, envy, infighting, jealousy, coldness, impatience, mean spiritedness, hard heartedness and unforgiveness in 'hate'. You don't travel well with this sort of lifestyle, you are stumbling around in the darkness, falling into the holes you have dug, kicking your toes on debris left from old interactions. When darkness that is pursued ends up blinding a person.

John says this sort of life is not love for God, but love for the world. It is characterised by selfishness, a pursuit of indulgence and desire, and the pride in one's success and achievements, with little concern for others. Instead, those who say "I am in the light," should walk as Jesus did. Jesus said 'No-one can serve two masters' (Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13), we cannot serve God and mammon, neither can we love the Father and the world.

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### A Theological Test - Don't deny the Son - 1 John 2:18-27

Jesus warned that false teaching would come, and John is seeing it has. A compromise on beliefs about Jesus would have enabled believers to return to the synagogues and avoid persecution. It seems false teachers were denying Jesus was the eternal Son, possessing human and divine natures. So the second test is a theological one: check the details of faith in Jesus. John restates the importance of faith in the real Jesus, the Son of God who walked on earth as a genuine man.

John is a wise old man now, who has experienced God as Father, Son and Spirit. He knows God must be accepted for who he has revealed himself to be. He speaks with urgency, perhaps because he is older, perhaps because of the intensity of the pressures on the church, or because he senses the truth of the Gospel is in danger of being lost as the current generation is lured to an easier path. Certainly he believes Jesus' return is immanent. John warns the church...

*see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father (1John2:24).*

It's similar image to the vine and the branches picture Jesus used in John 15.

*I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you (John15:1-4).*

The warning not to deny the Son remains important for us. A person cannot have fellowship with the Father if they do not confess the Son who came to earth in the flesh.

## Children of Light and Darkness - 1 John 2:28-3:10

In the start of chapter 3, John's strong message is reinforced. Those who pursue a life of sin, who pursue the ways of self, ways apart from Jesus - even if they make the noises of being a 'Christian' show they are allied with the enemy of God. Whether they know it or not. There is light and there is darkness. There is no middle ground.

So where does **our** confidence come from? Not in our ability to overcome sin. Not even a fastidious law keeper is clean before God, and not from faith in an acceptable Jesus. We have confidence in the one who has made us his own.

*See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1).*

This is the starting point and anchor for walking in the light. We follow the real Jesus, the Son of the Living God, and our holy living comes as a grateful response to his love and work on our behalf. It's time to show who we belong to.

We show we belong to Jesus by doing what is right and loving our brothers and sisters. Let us choose to love each other and the world with actions and in truth, every day in big and small ways. (1John3:8). According to John we have the resources we need - we know Jesus as Saviour and Son, we know the Father who has made us his own, we have the Spirit to teach us, and we have each other for support. Hear John's encouragement:

*I am writing to you, dear children,  
because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.  
I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.  
I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.  
I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father.  
I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.  
I write to you, young men,  
because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you,  
and you have overcome the evil one (1 John2:12-14).*

Hear are the words of a grandfather in the church, one who has loved Christ many years and loves his children tenderly.

As we go about life on our ordinary days, let us walk obediently as children of light to the glory of God the Father, so 'that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming (1John2:28).' Amen.

*Feasting on the Word/Gospels Year B; NIV Bible App Commentary; Tyndale Commentary*

## Summary

In the next chapters of 1 John, the church is given two ways to test authentic faith and is reminded to walk with their Saviour as God's children.

The moral test follows on from the teaching that words and actions must match up in the life of a believer. As belief is a core component of worldview it affects lifestyle, so observance of behaviour is a valid way of testing commitment. Christianity, though, is not equivalently with moralism. Moralism suggests the Gospel is just about behavioural improvements. But moralism cannot save us, it merely produces sinners who are better behaved. The reality is none of us can keep the Law, even for a day.

God wants us to live good lives, but moralism falsely claims that we gain salvation and righteousness by ticking off a list of rules, this is not authentic Christianity. The true Gospel says we are justified by faith *alone*, saved by grace *alone*, and redeemed from our sin by Christ *alone* (Galatians 2:16). This is faith lived in relationship with God, not in relationship with rules. Where Jesus makes sinners children of God and his Spirit transforms us into Christ's image over time.

Authentic faith is characterised by love for others, so John looks at the evidence of this in community relationships. A life where you choose to love Jesus and those that Jesus has made your family, is a life walked in the light. Love is not just about kindness and good deeds. It is a protection against coveting what belongs to others, it is unselfish, wanting the other to succeed, taking delight when they thrive and helps them to do so. When this love is reciprocal, as it should be, you see sharing and support, understanding and forgiveness, providing for each other in times of need and being aware of another's frailties. Those who live apart from Jesus light, who are going through the motions cannot maintain this sort of community.

The second test is a theological one. John restates the importance of faith in the real Jesus, the Son of God who walked on earth as a genuine man.

We have confidence in life and before God not due to the state of our moral checklist, but in the one who has made us his own. We have confidence in the real Jesus, the man who walked in Palestine, the man who sits beside the Father, the Son of the Living God. Our holy living comes as a response to his love and work on our behalf. As the body of Christ we love each other and the world with actions and in truth (1John3:8). Let us continue to walk as children of light to the glory of God the Father, so 'that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming (1John2:28).'