

December 13, 2009

1 John Series - 1 John 2:3-11

Alright – good morning! And welcome back. Grab your Bibles and turn with me to the book of 1 John. A few weeks ago we wrapped our vision series up together. And when I say wrapped up, I mean we finished the series of sermons where God was developing what it means for us as His church to move people to life in Christ one step at a time together. But what it doesn't mean is that's it. The end of the series is the beginning of the living – that you and I must now follow God in the steps of worshipping Jesus, learning truth, building community, and reaching our world together. But in terms of our Sunday morning Bible studies, we have moved into a chapter by chapter look at the letter of 1 John.

Last Sunday we focused on chapter 1 verses 1-4 where John begins his attempt to build the assurance of salvation in the believers in the church in Ephesus. And that issue of assurance and the joy that comes with it runs through the whole letter of 1 John. Remember we saw last week **one of the things that had caused the insecurity among the believers. Basically it was a church SPLIT based on a wrong view of Jesus.** In **1 John 2:19** he tells us, *“They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.”*

You can hear their struggle in John's response. “John I thought you said that when the sheep hear the voice of Jesus He gives them eternal life and no one can snatch them out of His hand? But here this group has left us – they've forsaken your doctrine – what should we think about that?”

And John's response is to not change anything he's said. He says “the sheep *are* secure in the hand of Jesus. He *has* given them eternal life. What's happened there in Ephesus is that they were never part of the sheep. They were never ‘of us’” he says. “If they had been, they would have continued with us.”

If John didn't believe in the eternal security of the believer, he would of said – “yeah, once they were of us, but now they aren't.” But he didn't. Because he does believe. Once of us – always of us. Once a sheep – always a sheep.

So now the people are left wondering, “well if some of our own church leaders can abandon apostolic doctrine and be lost, how can we be sure who is genuine? How can we even know about ourselves?” Issues of assurance there, obviously.

But there is **a second thing that has forced this question of assurance in the church of Ephesus is what these false teachers who left the church were SAYING.** You can hear their spiel behind statement after statement in this letter. Look at it with me to get an idea. Start in:

1 Jn 1:6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie

1:8 - If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1:10 - If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar

2:4 - The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar

2:6 - Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

2:9 - Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness.

4:20 - If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar

You can see the false teaching behind these statements. In a nutshell they are saying you can know God and have fellowship with God – but also that your life has no bearing on your standing before Him. How does all this fit together?

Evidently the same type of liars that Paul had to deal with in Romans and Galatians are what John is dealing with here – people twisting the doctrine of justification by faith. That truth is that by faith in Christ, a man can be forgiven of all his sins and can stand righteous before God on account of the death of Jesus.

And many people in the early church tried to distort that doctrine and taught things like Paul addressed in Romans 6:1 where you hear people say, “if that's true, then let's go sin so that grace

can abound.” They taught that faith can justify a person whether that faith results in good works or not. That’s what we saw in our study of James remember? In James chapter 2:14, he says “*What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?*” and of course the answer was no, it will not.

That’s what is happening here. **1 John 3:7** gives us a clue into the argument. Read that with me. “*Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.*”

When he says “don’t be led astray” it means someone is saying the opposite of what John is saying. The opposite of what he writes there that he who does what is right is righteous, is to say ‘you can be righteous even if you don’t do what is right.’

That’s why John responds – don’t be led astray – they are wrong – he who does right, is righteous. **What you DO is a test of what you ARE.** That truth is kind of an umbrella of all we are going to see today.

So you can see the second reason why the issue of assurance was forced into the open in this church. **The false teachers were saying that you can enjoy the assurance of standing sinless before God in righteousness and light, even if you walk in darkness, DISOBEY God's commandments, and HATE your brother.** This did not square with Paul's teaching or John's or the Lord's. And so the issue had to be dealt with. That is why we have this letter. And **why we have 2:3–11.** Let’s read that together.

## TEXT

What John teaches us here and what we’ll see today is that **the depth and reality of man's fellowship with God can be tested in two areas. One: his OBEDIENCE to God's command; and two: his FELLOWSHIP with his fellow man.** The depth of your real spiritual experience can be tested on those two grounds: whether you're obeying God's word, and whether you're living in peace and harmony and love with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Now please don't misunderstand what I'm saying. I will not be expounding the word of God to say that you have to obey God's commands to be saved, or you have to love your brother to be saved - that is not what this passage, this letter, or this Bible teachers. **John’s not talking about how you can be saved, but how you can know that you're saved, what the signs of ASSURANCE are.**

Now in chapter 1, in the first four verses we saw last week, what we looked at you might call the doctrinal test of whether we are true Christians. We have to believe what is right concerning the Son of God, we have to believe in the historical and the biblical Christ. But today we see a couple more practical tests of authenticity – of assurance. Our Christianity is only authentic Christianity when it is practical Christianity in both a moral and a social sense.

So let’s look at **verses 3-6** first.. Verse 3 – we know that we have come to know Him – to know God. First of all, knowledge of God in the biblical sense is not merely intellectual or speculative, but experiential and dynamic. To know God is not merely a matter of correct thought processes but of genuine spiritual relationship.

And when John says we know that we have come to know Him, there is a change in verb tense there. The first one – “*we know*” – is present tense. “*That we have come to know Him*” is in the perfect tense. The perfect tense refers to an event that started in the past but continues into the present. So he is saying that we know that we came to know God at a point in the past through faith in Christ (our conversion) and that that knowledge of Him continues to today – whenever today is. And that way that we know that in the present is what John says next: if we obey His commands.

**To “obey His commands” refers to more than just OUTWARD observance of the letter of the law** – remember even he Pharisees would do that. **It is defined by a sympathetic obedience**

**to the spirit of the law as well – in other words, an INWARD delight and cherishing of what God says.**

Now when you read those verses, you might say ‘well then no one really knows God because no one perfectly keeps his commands!’ But what John is talking about is that there should be in the Christian a habitual desire to please the Lord. It doesn’t mean you please Him all the time, it doesn’t mean you’re perfect, it doesn’t mean you never sin. It means there is a deep desire which is powerfully at work in you because of the Holy Spirit to please the Lord.

So John builds on that in verse 5 – *“if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him.”* And when he says “obeys His word” it helps us understand what I just said. His word is not just keeping all His specific commandments – those are scattered all throughout Scripture – instead “His word” has a deeper implication of actually God’s will. If you claim to be a Christian and you want to test the authenticity of your Christianity, it will be tested through this moral test. **The moral test is: that you KEEP HIS WORD. You live in his will. You fail from time to time, I know, but generally speaking you have a greatly dominating desire in your heart to please the Lord.**

And that is how His love is made complete in us. There are two ways of looking at that. In Greek it could be a subjective genitive so that it means God’s love for us or it could be an objective genitive which would make it our love for God. In one sense, our love for God is only complete when it ends in our obedience. In John 14:21 Jesus says, *“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me.”* But here in 1 John I think he is referring to God’s love for us. And here’s why.

The word John uses is God’s agape – love – for us. He uses that type of love ‘agape’ 18 times in this letter – more than any other book in the whole New Testament. **The whole force of what John is saying here is the goal and aim of God’s love is that you would do his will, obey his commands, that his word would be in your heart so that his LOVE comes down from heaven and CHANNELS through you to those around you.**

And that’s the next basis of the assurance John is rebuilding for these people. Go back to **verses 7-11** and as I re-read them, listen and be thinking about what command is being referred to here without actually being said?

TEXT

**The command John is referring to here clearly is to LOVE YOUR BROTHER.** And it is both old and new, as verses 6 and 7 say. It is old in that they have known that command their entire Christian lives – the Old Testament law was love your neighbor as yourself. But it is new as well in that Jesus – the Christ they are hoping in and following – invested the command with a deeper meaning when he said *“As I have loved you, you must love one another.”*

And then John explains how that fits into our assurance of salvation in verses 9-11. In verse 9 when he says *“Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness,”* he means talk doesn’t matter – talk is cheap. **If you profess with your mouth to know Christ and walk in the light but you HATE your brother, that is a sure sign that you are “still in the darkness.”**

Please don’t miss the hugeness of that statement. When he says ‘still in the darkness’ he isn’t talking about just that sin coming between you and God or that your fellowship has been interrupted for a moment or two. It doesn’t even mean you’ve backslidden to some extent. **Literally that statement “still in the darkness” means that man continues to be what he has ALWAYS BEEN – unconverted, without the life of God in him. Hatred is a sign and characteristic of our natural sin nature outside of Christ.**

Then to show what the love is in contrast to that, John says verse 10: *“Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.”* **The social test is that you LOVE your brother.**

The one who loves his brother with authentic love, the true Christian, lives in the light and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. In the last part of that phrase the translators of the NIV that we are using took a stand on the meaning of the phrase. **The literal words would be ‘there is no CAUSE for stumbling in him.’**

It could mean that he doesn't stumble himself, and I believe that that is the true sense of the verse. In other words, listen to me: **if you've passed the doctrinal test** and you've believed the true gospel, and you have trusted Christ's blood, confessed your sins, He has cleansed you; and **you consistently have passed the moral test**, you're being obedient to God's word and, though you fail Him from time to time, there is within your heart an habitual desire to please the Lord; and **you've consistently passed the social test** we just talked about, you're loving your brother even though he offends you from time to time - I'm telling you, someone like that, **there's less chance of YOU stumbling into sin and backsliding than someone else who fails all those tests.**

But the other possible meaning of 'there is no cause of stumbling in him' could be that he will not be the cause of stumbling to others. In other words, if you're living by God's commandments yourself, you're not going to be a bad example to someone else. If you're loving your brother in all circumstances, no matter who they are and how unlikeable they may be at times, you're not going to be a bad example to someone else. **If you consistently pass those tests, you're not going to be a stumbling block to OTHERS either.**

And I think we need to really hear that today. Why? Because I believe, from my own personal experience mingling among people and talking to unconverted folk, that one of the greatest hindrances to people coming to Christ in this day and in every day is those who claim to be Christians yet don't live up to the name.

So here is where we are today. We've looked at these two tests of our authentic Christianity – and they are the practical ones. The moral test – obedience to his word – both keeping his commands and living according to his will. Secondly, the social test – loving your brother. And you can sum it all up by going back to verse 6. Look at **verse 6**.

*“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.”*

Jesus claimed that the law and the prophets were summed up in Him. We see in His life a love like we've never seen in any character in all of history or even in the Bible. We see in Him God's law and love in perfect harmony together. And so **the challenge for us today is verse 6 – Want assurance of your salvation and the joy that comes with it? Want to claim the name of Jesus over your life? Then walk as JESUS WALKED.**

Now don't misunderstand me – or John here - it's not that we can do what Christ did. John isn't saying that we should be able to perform the mighty miracles that Jesus displayed at times. Not do what He did, but rather walk as He walked, and that is a more profound thing. Because even those who say “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, did we not cast out demons in your name, did we not do many mighty miracles in your name” - they have displayed charismatic powers, but they do not walk as He walked and Jesus responded to them and said – “I don't know you.” That's why in this passage, Martin Luther explained: “It is not Christ walking on the sea, but His ordinary walk that we are called on here to imitate.”

### **How did our Savior walk?**

**First he walked by FAITH.** The Bible says Jesus confessed in John 5:19 & 8:28 that He could do nor teach anything of Himself. Now in that we enter a mysterious and holy piece of Scripture where in the humanity of Christ that we looked at last week, Jesus did not lose any of his divine attributes, but voluntarily chose not to use them. He chose to live as a man among men. He chose to depend as a man completely on His heavenly Father and not on what He could do. We see Him walking in

faith – submitting Himself to His Father’s will even to the extent of being obedient to death on a cross, as Philippians 2 explains.

Do you? Do you walk by faith? Do you walk in total dependence on your heavenly Father?

Secondly, **Jesus walked in the WORD.** He never once doubted the authority of God’s Word. He never accepted the authority of another over it. Even when the devil himself in Matthew 4 came to tempt him – to doubt God’s Word – three times Jesus says “It is written, it is written, it is written.”

Thirdly, **Jesus walked in PRAYER.** We won’t go there today, but look up the passages in the gospels where you see Jesus getting up in the dead of the night to leave the house, go into the street, and up on a mountain to a solitary place to pray all night before his Father – the times he gets up long before the day begins to go into the wilderness and pray to God – the times you see Him withdrawing from the crowd – even though there were people to heal, disciples to teach, whatever – he knew he needed to draw strength from His Father. Do you? Do you walk in prayer?

Lastly **Jesus walked in good WORKS.** Again – you’ll not get saved by good works – but a sure sign that you are saved is that you will go about doing good, you seek to please not yourself but you will lay down your life for your brothers and those around you in the world who are dying without hope.

Do you realize what John is teaching us here? That the signs that give us assurance of our salvation in our life have a deeper purpose than just being for you and me. **The purpose of the Church in John’s day and in ours – the purpose of the individual Christian – is to exhibit the REAL PRESENCE of Jesus Christ in this world and that is done by obedience and love.**

So the test becomes, how like Jesus are you now?

A sculptor once fashioned a lion out of a block of granite, and he was asked how he accomplished such a wonderful masterpiece. He replied: 'Oh, it was easy, all I did was to chip away everything that didn't look like a lion'.

Are you chipping away the things in your life that are not Christlike? Are you being conformed more and more, by the Spirit’s help of course, but are you getting there, progressing to be more like Christ? If that’s the reason you’ve been saved, that’s the reason the church exists – that our church exists – to be moving people to life in Christ one step at a time together, what kind of picture of Christ do you give to other people?

Someone put it this way: 'God has a last name. He is called the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob'. Hebrews 11:16 says, “God is not ashamed to be called their God” - but I wonder how God would feel having your last name today? He’s called 'The God of David' – well put your name in there!

My friends, if our sole reason for existence on this planet – for being alive today – is to glorify Jesus – to magnify Christ to our brothers and sisters and to a world that is dying, what does it say if this is the very thing that we’re failing in?

I know we couldn’t help but blow it at times, for we all fall short of the glory of God - but I’m asking: is anything of Christ seen in my life and yours? James Spink said: “More evil is done to the cause of Christianity by its adherents than its opponents.”

Even in Hudson Taylor’s days in the 1800s, he said: “The inconsistencies of Christian people who, while professing to believe their Bibles, were yet content to live just as if there was no such book,” he says: “That was one of the strongest arguments of my skeptical companions.”

Nothing has changed! You witness to someone and they just point to a Christian, or to a church, and they say: “Look at them! If that’s what Christianity is, I don’t want anything to do with it!”

I know it is easy to respond and say somewhat piously, “Aww, don’t look at Christians, look at Christ.” But church what God is saying today is that they’re meant to be looking at us! They are meant to be able to see Christ in us!

**When it comes to our ASSURANCE of salvation, the doctrinal test is believing in the historical eternal real Jesus Christ and who He claimed to be, the moral test is obeying His Word, the social test is loving our brother – and it can all be summed up in CHRISTLIKENESS – doing in life in Christ one step at a time together – walking like Jesus walked.**

My friends what we have to go home asking today seriously is – **how LIKE the Lord Jesus Christ are you?** This is what God wants – this is what the church and the world need – how are you measuring up?

Let's pray

Pray to live by faith – in the Word – by prayer – and in good works – for the glory of the God born as a man named Jesus Christ.