

1 John 2:3-11

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[0 : 00] It's a Thursday afternoon. You've just left work and you're sat upstairs in Starbucks! with a coffee. You're nervously waiting for your friends Tom and Angie to arrive. They're! running late but the traffic was kind of heavy so maybe that's all it is. It's a while since you last saw them. They used to come to church with you. But several weeks ago now they along with quite a few others stopped coming. They just up and left. You don't really know why they did that. They didn't seem particularly angry about anything that was happening. They weren't complaining about any wrongdoing. They clearly didn't think much of the pastor though but as far as you could tell he was preaching the Bible faithfully. When they finally show up you spend a few awkward minutes sort of catching up on work and progress on their new bathroom and how their kids are doing. And then you eventually get round to what the deal is with their leaving church. Because they've been reading this book that some friends of them in church have recommended and these friends had also left that with them. And they say we just realised that we didn't need all this. We didn't need all these rules and all these kind of church services and meetings. We just didn't need all of that. We realised that the pastor, I mean bless me, he just doesn't really get it. But we're just so happy now. We feel like we can really connect with God, you know? We feel like we really know him now. What do you do? Is it possible that they've got it right?

They seem so happy. They seem so satisfied with everything they've got. And frankly you could do with all the difficult people in church and you know being on the rotors and getting out of the house on time to get to the services and meetings. Not to mention all the stigma and weirdness about going to church with your non-Christian friends. Is it possible that Tom and Angie are right? Not to mention the 30 odd friends that also left with them. Is it possible you're wasting your time here tonight? Well this is the dilemma that was facing the people John was writing to. That it wasn't just that they had heard some false teachings, but there was that real emotional pull on them. With their friends leaving. With that real disturbance in the church.

They have suffered that and they don't know what to do. And John needs to protect them from that. He needs to assure them that they are right to stay in the church. He needs to assure them that they are on the right track. And so he's beginning in chapter, well from the beginning of chapter one through to the end of our passage today. He's laying the groundwork. He's establishing the teaching, the basic doctrine that they need before he goes into some of the specific details of their situation later in the book. So in the prologue from verses one to four of chapter one, he's highlighted the message that was preached by the apostles.

As that is preached, that message creates the church. And then the church has fellowship with God. We've seen the last week that crucial order. The word creates the fellowship. It transforms people into church members. And then this is the community that has fellowship with God. So if you want to know God, it's through this community. And then he summarized a key point of that message in verse five of chapter one, God is light. And then in verse five, chapter two, verse two, he's traced out some of the implications with a particular focus on their view of sin. If God is light, this is what you must understand about sin. And in this section, he's tracing more implications of that message that God is light.

And he's wrapping up the introductory section, but here he's focusing on assuring them that they are right to stay where they are. So last week was a section focused on sin and today he's focusing on assurance.

[4 : 44] And the whole book will have these themes running through. So as I mentioned, we have this opening statement in verse three, and then the three sections that begin with the words, whoever says. And so the opening statement sums things up well. How do we know that we have truly come to know God?

Verse three, if we keep his commandments. He's very simply echoing Jesus' words in John 14, 15. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. So it's quite clear from Jesus' teaching, and John is passing that on, that true knowledge of God produces obedience in us. And presumably this wasn't the case in the false teachers and the people that had left the church. So he needs to highlight this.

The people left behind, they were concerned with obeying God, and John needs to assure them that they're doing the right thing. And he's going to elaborate on that in three different ways. So first, in verses four and five, he explains to him that the Christian keeps God's commandments because he knows God. The Christian keeps God's commandments because he knows God. Verse four, whoever says, I know him, but does not keep his commandments is a liar. Tom and Angie were saying that they feel they really know God now, they can really connect with him. [6 : 20] They were lying. They seemed so happy, but they were lying. If you were to spend more than just the occasional awkward coffee with them, if they would allow you to do that, you would notice patterns of unrepentant sin in their lives.

That was actually probably the case in their lives before they left the church. But you only really saw them once or twice a month, and they would usually arrive late, and they would often leave halfway through the benediction.

So you'd never really get a chance to see that. And so it was with the troublemakers in John's day. John sees in this church a real desire to obey the Lord Jesus.

Their claim to know God actually proves true in the way they live. He sees that they keep God's word, verse five. And so he sees God's love at work in them.

I think that's what he means by the love of God perfected or completed in them. Love fully works in them by God. Love for him and for their neighbours.

[7 : 31] They love God and their neighbour with a divinely worked love. I think this is something similar to what Corrie ten Boom describes.

She was a Dutch lady who lived during the Second World War. And she and her family hid Jews in their watch shop in Harlem. You can go and visit it.

I've stood in the hiding place where some of the Jews stood for, I think, two weeks, waiting for the Nazis to pass by. And she was one of the few.

She went to the concentration camp along with her family, and she survived. And she was released, actually, by mistake. And she lived for many years after that and went around the world telling her story that she had come to know Jesus.

They were a Christian believing family, and they were trusting in Jesus. And she spoke at one place, I think, in the 70s. And after she had spoken about Jesus' forgiveness and how the Lord throws our sins away and casts them into the sea, never to look at them again.

[8 : 38] Just after that, a man walked up to her, and she recognized the face immediately. It was one of the officers from the concentration camp. He didn't recognize her, but she mentioned which camp she was at, and so he was interested, he wanted to go and speak to her.

But she knew exactly who he was. She had vivid memories of seeing him, having to walk in front of him. And he came to say, you mentioned that you were at Ravensbrück.

I was at Ravensbrück. But since then, I've become a Christian. I've come to accept God's forgiveness. But I would like to ask for your forgiveness as well. It's one thing to stand up in front of people and tell people about forgiveness.

It's another thing to actually offer that in that situation. She talks about how she could feel the cold and the hatred grasping her heart.

And he's put out his hand by now. He's wanting to shake her hand. And so she prayed, Jesus, help me. I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.

[9 : 50] And so she writes, And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

I forgive you, brother, I cried with all my heart. For a long moment, we grasped each other's hands. The former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then. I know that's quite a radical example. But this is what John sees in them. God's love is at work in their lives. And it's only if you know God that you're truly empowered to love him.

And to love our neighbours as the law requires. If you do know him, and you know his words, and you have his love at work in you, then you find that there's nothing else you can do. There's nothing else you want to do. And John sees that happening in the church. John knows they are truly abiding in Christ. So when his word is in you, and his love is in you, the result is obedience. [11:02] And it's important to note that the Bible never pits law against love. Now the Bible has law and love always going hand in hand. We see them, maybe as contradictory, but for God, they go hand in hand.

And Sinclair Ferguson writes very helpfully, Law is love-shaped, and love is law-shaped. Explaining that love provides motivation for obedience, while law provides direction for love.

So love provides the motivation, and the law provides the direction. Law is love-shaped, and love is law-shaped. And we saw this morning, in Luke 10, the law, in all it says, is about love.

Love for God, love for our neighbours. And it's only when we know God's love for us, and we come to know him, that we can have his love producing obedience in us.

So that first thing he says, the Christian keeps God's commandments, because he knows God.

Second, in verses 6 to 8, the Christian walked the way Jesus walked, because a new day has dawned.

[12:19] The Christian walked the way Jesus walked, because a new day has dawned. Whoever says he abides in him, verse 6, ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

And that sort of makes sense, doesn't it? What was Jesus always calling people to do? Follow me. Anyone who would want to be his disciple, he said, would have to deny himself daily, take up his cross, and follow him.

Luke 9.23. The church I grew up in had a club for year 7 to 9, it was called Club 9.23. We'd start at 7.30 and finish at 9.23.

And it was all because of that one verse, Luke 9.23. If anyone would be my disciple, let him deny himself daily, pick up his cross, and follow me. But verse 7 and 8 make it, I think, clear that John is specifically thinking of what Jesus said in John 13.34.

It says of walking the way he walked. In John 13.34, we read earlier, a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

[13:34] What is the way Jesus walked in? Verse 6. His way was loving his disciples. And of course, in a sense, this isn't new, verse 7.

There's always been a command to love each other. It's an old commandment which you have had since the beginning, the words that you have heard. And we saw this morning, it is very old.

It's there in Leviticus 19.18, love your neighbour as yourself. And I think, out of the two things that John is saying, it's an old commandment, it's a new commandment.

We can probably understand the old commandment a bit easily because we know, yes, it's an old commandment. Well, how can it also be a new commandment? What does he mean in verse 8?

At the same time, it is a new commandment that I'm writing you. Well, he's fairly thinking of Jesus calling it a new commandment. But what does it mean?

[14:33] Well, unsurprisingly, the rest of the verse helps us understand. So first he explains that the commandment, he says in verse 8, it is true in him and in you.

Jesus pointed out, didn't he, that our love was to imitate his love. We love just as he loved. Let us say, Jesus himself kept the commandment.

Jesus fulfilled the law. It is true in him. And believers in the Old Testament knew that the law was given on the basis of redemption.

When we read the Ten Commandments, it doesn't begin with the rules, it begins with, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the house of Egypt. They knew they were loved by a holy God.

And it is the law that is given on the basis of that love that they have experienced. But in the Old Testament they were still led by sinful men, weren't they? They knew it wasn't Moses' obedience that was going to be able to stand in their place.

[15:41] They knew it wasn't David's or Abraham's obedience that would save them. But in Jesus we actually see the one who obeyed the law fully in our place.

In Jesus this commandment was true. And he is the one who truly enables and inspires us to love. Because it is true in him it can be true in us.

And second in verse 8 it says because the darkness is passing away. That's another reason it's a new commandment that darkness is passing away. A professor of mine said quite helpfully once

why is the commandment new?

Because Jesus makes all things new. In John 9 Jesus says that we must do the Father's work while it is light before the darkness comes.

And then later we see Judas went out in John 13 that we read and what does he say and it was night. Darkness has arrived. Jesus' suffering has come.

[16:48] But here we're on the other side of the resurrection. And so the darkness is passing away. And the true light is shining as John tells us here. A new age has dawned.

The new creation is breaking in. And the followers of the risen Jesus walk in his footsteps And they love just as Jesus loved them.

It makes me think of something you'll see on a film or a documentary. I think it's probably on the start of The Lion King as well. You can see the African Saharan plains and it's dark and the light just starts to come up and then just that second you just get a glimpse of the sun.

This huge great fiery ball and it's just a tiny glimpse just breaking through. There is no way that's going back down is there? It is just going to keep coming up.

And the light has come. God who is light has come and we walk in his light and we love as he loved.

[18:01] When all this talk of light gets you thinking about your friends Tom and Angie again because they talked about light they felt like they'd really stepped into the light and John has a third thing to say in verses 9 to 11 so we've seen that the Christian walks the way Jesus walked because a new day has dawned and then we come to verses 9 to 11 Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness Whoever loves his brother abides in the light and in him there is no pause for stumbling But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes So the third and final thing we see is that the Christian loves his brother because he can see The Christian loves his brother because he can see Tom and Angie can talk about light all they want but that doesn't change the fact that they are blind and so they're in darkness

Being blind doesn't help you when you're in a room full of light They look like they're walking in darkness even though the light is shining They're sort of stumbling around and the clear giveaway sign of that is that they don't love their fellow believers Verse 9 The Christian loves his brother in verse 10 and he doesn't trick him up he doesn't lead him astray There is no cause of stumbling loving in him Isn't that a wonderful thing that just to know that you're not causing anyone to sin you're not stumbling people up you're not confusing people John sees this to be the case in his readers They are concerned to live in the light of the risen Christ that's already shining I think part of what this is is that we see what love is One of the more popular thinkers in France

I quoted him in the prayer meeting two weeks ago He's a very prominent thinker He's called Luc Ferry He was the education minister under Jacques Chirac Now he's a famous writer philosopher And so it's important in France where I'm hoping to minister long term but I think a lot we can see a lot of his thinking certainly emerging in the UK and already grasping a lot of the culture on this side of the channel So he has a book where he traces through the history of Western thought Western philosophy He has five stages He looks at the Greeks and then the Judeo-Christian view and then obviously we've moved on from that to humanism with the enlightenment and all kinds of things and the revolution of course But after that there's a time of deconstruction where it sort of fell apart a bit but now we have the great wonderful second humanism And the key principle in this second humanism is this thing called love

I wonder if you've ever heard of it So his idea is that when things like the industrial revolution took hold and capitalism grew and people were moving further and further away from their villages where they grew up People were getting to know more people mixing with people of different classes People were not marrying so much for status or for money or arrangements but people were marrying for love As though they somehow had never been married for love before that This is the great development Marrying for love It's all about love now Apparently the first time in history And one of the great results of putting love at the centre of everything is easy divorce and high divorce rates That's that result of love being at the centre And he explains It's not all that bad Before people were stuck in their marriages because they married for status or power or money or whatever it was But more divorce is a sign that we really married for love now And after all love is fragile and it changes all the time And he has this amazing line Of course children suffer from it sometimes terribly But that is the price of freedom The other side of the coin Do you see what he's

done?

[22 : 50] He's confused love for selfishness It's hatred isn't it? We see that in our society What love what people call love is just me feeling nice me feeling happy But it is selfishness And that's proper humanism The human specifically this human is at the centre It's all about me It reminds me of a quote I heard from MP Jeremy Thorpe said in Parliament after the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan had fired most of his senior cabinet members I think it was at Prime Minister's questions He said Greater love has no man than this than that he lay down his friends for his life And he was joking of course But I think that's actually what people believe now Put yourself at the centre And that is the truly loving thing to do

But Christians love their brothers and sisters because they can see what love truly is In Jesus and in his light we see true love we love as he loved us John John sees in this church a love for one another He sees a pattern of sacrificial other centred love And he's not encouraging them to boast in their love boast in their obedience But he's not encouraging them either to pretend as though the spirit hasn't been working in them They do see how Christ has loved them They do get that They are seeking to obey him They can't deny that And they do love each other However happy and satisfied the friends who left this church may have seen or thought they were they can be assured that the people in the church they can be assured that they are in him

If you feel maybe this isn't you you're not sure that you're in him you're not sure you understand what this is about And of course none of us here embodies this perfectly and so in a sense we're here as well that the solution isn't just to keep more rules but the solution is to look to Christ and to look at his love for us We look at the light of his resurrection life we look at how Christ loved us and see there that first seeing that it is for us and then we can go on and love We saw that this morning didn't we It's when we understand that Christ has loved us that's the only time when we can know how we can then go on to love others And so we look to him We look at his love We look at his light and we ask for his love to be perfected in us and we follow him Let's pray