

Sermon Notes

Series on First John
First John 2:3-11
“Living and Loving”

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Introduction: (For the introduction to this message I alluded to information found at this website: www.reserveaplaceinheaven.com. I do not endorse this website or suggest that believers utilize it. The website advertizes itself as a Christmas gag gift option.)

Just as we saw in chapter 1, the false teachers give three more false claims in chapter 2.

Comparative Chart of the Claims In 1 John 1 and 2

Chapter 1	Chapter 2
Verse 6— <i>if we say</i>	Verse 4— <i>the one who says</i>
Verse 8— <i>if we say</i>	Verse 6— <i>the one who says</i>
Verse 10— <i>if we say</i>	Verse 9— <i>the one who says</i>

Following John’s discussion of the basis of fellowship with God 1:5-2:2 which he states is grounded in the very nature of God as *light* (1:5), John gives instruction that sin hinders fellowship (1:6-10) & concludes with the cure, God’s provision for maintaining fellowship with Him and fellow believers (2:1-2). Now, in First John 2:3-11 the Apostle John reveals three actions that should characterize Christians who already *know Him*: (1) obeying; (2) walking & (3) loving. Actually there is a 4th if we include last week’s study of 1 John 2:1-2 and that would be renouncing sin! These four can also be considered signs of fellowship. Looking ahead to the passages that we will eventually examine, John articulates a couple more principles that underlie fellowship with God: rejecting worldliness (2:12-17) and keeping the faith (2:18-29). Our previous studies in 1 John have shown that fellowship results from *walking in the light*. The above is a good summary yet let me add this super summary by Mr. Smalley: “The author is explaining to the members of his church, in answer to developing heretical tendencies, the nature of true Christian belief and practice, and the way in which these interact. To do this he first chooses as his theme and for his exhortation the necessity of ‘living in the light’ (1:5-7). The first (negative) condition required for a genuinely Christlike existence, the writer suggests, is the renunciation of sin (1:8-2:2). The second (positive) condition he now proceeds to discuss: it is obedience especially to the law of love (2:3-11).” [Smalley, Stephen S., *1, 2, 3 John*, Word Biblical Commentary, p.42]. Therefore as we examine today’s section, believers should be characterized by:

#1 OBEYING HIS COMMANDS 1 JOHN 2:3-5A

Verse 3: The Apostle John uses the word *know* twice in this verse, a key word in this book, used 36 times in the NASV and 28 times in the KJV. John is dealing with the “knowists,” first century Gnostics who were claiming to have some mystical meditative kind of knowledge. These Gnostics were basically saying something like this; ‘if you only knew what I *know* about God....’ These false teachers thought that they were the only ones who really *knew* God having been enlightened with the true *knosis*—knowledge, so they said. But John goes for the jugular attacking this kind of super spirituality by focusing on

one's *knowledge* of Christ. The phrase, *we know that we have come to know Him*; the Greek is γινωσκομεν οτι εγνωκαμεν αυτον, ginoskomen hoti egnokamen auton, speaks of an inner personal and living acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ. John uses this verb *know* in much the same way as Paul uses it in his epistles, for it transcends intellectual *knowledge*. If all it takes is comprehension, then unbelievers could meet this criterion for *knowing* God. One scholar writes this about *know*; "It points to an inner progressive *knowledge* or assurance that believers have entered into a state of *knowing Him*." [Hiebert, D. Edmond, An Introduction to the New Testament, Moody Press, p. 190]. Here John uses the verb *know*, a present tense in the Greek γινωσκω, ginosko, to refer to *knowledge* gained by experience or instruction that brings intimacy to relationships. There is a different Greek verb that John uses (15 times, eidenai), often in the perfect tense and is translated "to know as a fact;" not by experience or perception. John's point is that our personal experiential *knowledge* of God will affect the way we live and the way we live will reveal how well we *know* God. **But** some Bible teachers use this verse and this section as a way of knowing whether we are really saved and insists that, although a Christian has already come to *know* Christ, he/she needs confidence that his/her *knowledge* of Christ has resulted in salvation. Therefore they conclude that John is writing that we can know Christ has saved us if *we keep His commandments*. However, as I have emphasized, here John proposes a test to measure our experiential *knowledge* of God; not a test of the saving *knowledge* of God but of the experiential *knowledge* of God. Students going through final exams can relate to John's exam. John's test is this: *obedience* is one way of *knowing* you're a Christian—if *we keep His commandments*. Like a chemist in his lab, John is writing that the authenticity of our lives can be measured by our obedience to the *commands* of God. Christianity is about *keeping His commandments*. Illustration: C. T. Studd, a famous missionary (and favorite missionary of mine) who served on three continents from 1885-1931, had a friend who was walking by Dr. Studd's home quite early one morning. Noticing that the light was on at that incredible time of the morning, his friend knocked on C. T. Studd's door. When asked what he was doing up so early, Dr. Studd replied: "Jesus said, 'If you love Me, keep my commandments.' So I'm searching the Bible to see if there are any I'm not keeping." That's a fantastic perception of truth. By the way, Charles Thomas Studd's father was saved during one of the revivals in England where Drs. Moody and Sankey preached. His son, C. T., believed that missionary work was so urgent that he emphasized a life of faith. Having been raised in an extremely wealthy family he gave his entire fortune away including gifts to Moody Bible Institute and the Salvation Army prior to venturing overseas. He encouraged Christians to take risks in planning missionary ventures, trusting in God to provide. Wow! I'm glad that Grace Community Church is a mission minded church; pray for our Missions Committee and what God wants each of us to do for local and world outreach and evangelization. John R. W. Stott adds, "John does not deny the possibility of knowing God since both the Old Testament and the Gospel promise it (e.g. Je xxx1. 34; Jn. XVII. 3). But he insists that no religious experience is valid if it does not have moral consequences (cf. Tit. i.16). [Stott, John R. W., The Epistles of John, Tyndale Bible Commentaries, p. 90]. John's use of

another one of his conditional sentences, *if we keep His commandments* implies that this may not be true of some who loudly claim to *know* God. There is a huge difference between John’s word for *keep* and the word “do” as it relates to *His commandments*. A person may do certain commands of God and yet not be saved **but** it is not possible to *keep His commandments* and not be saved. The Greek word for *keep* [τηρωμεν, teromen, from the root verb τηρεω] conveys the idea of a careful and watchful obedience to God’s requirements. Rather than emphasizing the negative fear ‘if I don’t obey His *commandments*,’ this is a holy passion to obey because we love Him. This is vastly different from doing something for fear of the consequences. ‘The emphasis of *keep* is on guarding something as precious.’ [Henry Alford, The Greek Testament, Vol.4, p. 434.] Here’s one final comment on this verse concerning the word *commandments* as the Apostle John did not use the Greek word *nomos* [νομος] which refers to the Mosaic Law, but John uses the word *entole* [Greek is εντολας, cf. Matthew 22:36, 38, 40; John 11:57; Romans 13:9; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Colossians 4:10, etc.] which means “commands,” “orders,” “precepts” and/or “decrees” of Jesus. A true believer will submit to the authority of Christ and demonstrate that Lordship by an obedient life. [These *commandments* are His and not our own man-made and/or self-chosen practices. In addition, I am reminded that Paul writes in Ephesians 2:2 that unbelievers are characterized by disobedience; *sons of disobedience*.] There is no better example than that of the driver who exceeds the speed limit; continually glancing in the rear-view mirror to see if the police are on his/her tail; obey the law if he/she must but not because he/she wants to. The Christian *keeps His commandments* because of that inner personal and living acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ. We just love Him! Again Smalley helps with a succinct conclusion to this verse; “In other words, to ‘know’ God is not a matter of correct thought-processes, but of a genuine spiritual *relationship*. The knowledge of God, and fellowship with him, are complementary aspects of Christian experience.” [Smalley, Stephen S., 1, 2, 3 John, Word Biblical Commentary, p. 45].

Claim	Condition
Verse 4— <i>I have come to know Him</i>	Verse 5— <i>whoever keeps His Word</i>
Verse 6— <i>he abides in Him</i>	Verse 6— <i>walk in the same manner as He walked</i>
Verse 9— <i>he is in the Light</i>	Verse 10— <i>the one who loves his brother</i>

Verse 4: John quits the “iffy” stuff and replaces the hypothetical with an example of someone’s false claim. Here is a striking contrast between a person’s claim *to know Him* and his conduct emphasized by the two Greek present tense participles under one definite article, marking this sharp contradiction between claim and conduct—*the one who says...does not keep*. His conduct invalidates his claim and results in God’s two-fold assessment of such a person: (1) he/she *is a liar* and (2) God’s *truth* from the Word of God *is not in him* as it has no controlling influence in his/her life. It’s easy to claim to be a Christian in word but it’s much more difficult to back that up with a passionate heart to obey the Lord (read Luke 6:46; Titus 1:16; James 2:14 & cf. 1 John 1:6—*we lie*). Here’s a great succinct statement on this verse; “...who is not keeping God’s commands does not

know God experientially no matter what he claims verbally.” [Wilkin, Robert N., “Knowing God By Our Works?” *Grace Evangelical Society News* 3:10 October-November 1988):3.]

Verse 5a: John’s choice of the word, *whoever*, refutes the Gnostic heresy that claimed a super spirituality for only certain people and doesn’t restrict the ability to *keep His word*. The Christian who obeys all of God’s *commandments* and God’s Word, gives evidence that we have a passionate *love for God*. How is our *love of God perfected*? The word *perfected* [Greek here is τετελειωται, teteleioutai from the root verb τελεω] meaning “complete” or “bring to an end;” the evidence that a Christian begins to fulfill all that is meant by *loving God* by habitually obeying Him. The phrase *the love of God* is interpreted in two totally opposite ways by good Bible students and scholars, both of which are possible here: (1) our *love for God*, which would require that we understand this phrase as a Greek objective genitive. Bible teachers support this view by stating that John is writing about obedience and the proof of *love* is loyalty and devotion. Our *love for God* is *perfected* in obedience (cf. 1 John 2:15 & 5:3). But some commentators question whether obedience really supplies the evidence of a *love for God* that is *perfected*. (2) *God’s love* for us, requiring a Greek subjective genitive. This seems to be John’s emphasis in his gospel (read John 14:21). Kistemaker writes “...the parallel in verses 4 and 5—‘[God’s] truth is not in him’ (v.4) and ‘God’s love is...in him’ v.5,” as well as the fact that in ‘the epistle John explains the origin of love: ‘love comes from God’ (4:7)... God is the source and giver of love.” [Kistemaker, Simon J., Exposition of the Epistles of James and the Epistles of John, in the New Testament Commentary, Baker, p.257]. The resultant meaning would be that in the believer whose habit is to obey, *God’s love* has been *perfected*, having obtained its goal objectively in him. From studying John’s writings we ascertain that he can be called the ‘apostle of *love*’ because of how often he uses *love*. There are no fewer than 46 references to *love* in 1 John; the Greek verb [αγαπω, agapo] appears 28 times and the noun form occurs 18 times. (Similarly to John’s designation, Paul is sometimes called the ‘apostle of faith’ and Peter ‘the apostle of hope.’) In the latter part of verse 5, the Apostle John identifies a 2nd action that should characterize Christians who already *know Him* and are in *fellowship* with Him. Such believers are

#2 WALKING IN HIM 2:5b-6

Verse 5b: The phrase *in Him* is similar to Paul’s characteristic description of a Christian, *in Christ* (cf. Romans 3:24; 6:11, 23; 8:1; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 4, 30 etc.), yet John’s phrase is more restrictive, focusing on the obedient believers, just as Jesus’ words in the Upper Room Discourse to describe those who *abide* in Christ (read John 15:1-10).

Verse 6: John writes that *abiding in Him* is necessary in order for believers to *walk...as He walked*. John’s frequent use of this word *abide* (*abide* six times; *abides* 18 times and *abiding* one time) in First John emphasizes the believer’s *abiding* relationship in this book. *Abide* [Greek is μενειν from the verbal form μενω, meno] means ‘staying in a given place, state or intimate relationship.’ John is describing believers who have an active habitual fellowship kind of a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. One writer states; ‘*abiding in Him* is letting Christ’s life flow in and through us.’ Whenever we read that word *abide* our

minds immediately go to Jesus' words in John 15:4; *Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.* As a result of *abiding in Him*, we will *walk as He walked* and *ought* is not the same as "must" so John is telling us that we are morally bound to act according to our relationship with Christ. For us *to walk in the same manner as He walked* (literally "even as that one walked") doesn't mean that we will be exactly like the Lord Jesus Christ but John does write that we *ought*. Jesus *walked* in obedience (Luke 22:42; John 4:34; 8:29); in submission (John 5:19, 30; 9:4); in humility (Matthew 11:29; Philippians 2:5-8); in love (John 27:22-26 & Paul reminds us to *walk in love*; Ephesians 5:2.) John deals a blow to the false teachers, the Gnostics, who tried to divorce their super-spiritual enlightenment from their daily behavior. John Bunyan applies *walking as He walked* with these words: "Wherever I have seen the print of His shoe in the earth, there I have coveted to put mine also." The four gospels give account as to the way Jesus *walked*; His pattern and His example—we *ought* to read the gospel accounts so that our behavior is like Christ's which is explained in the next few verses.

Beginning in verse 7, the Apostle John identifies a 3rd action that should characterize Christians who already *know Him* and are in *fellowship* with Him. Such believers are...

#3 LOVING OTHERS 2:7-11

Verse 7: John desires that we not only apply his test to the moral aspects of our lives but also to the social; those interpersonal relationship with one another. Here is John's command about brotherly love. John calls us *beloved*, another one of his terms of endearment, an affectionate address which he often uses six times in 1 John: 2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7 & 11. The *beloved* were the objects of God's *love* as well as John's. When John states, *I am writing a new commandment*, he doesn't stop to give the content of this *new commandment*. Recall that in verses 3-6 John wrote about *commandments* in general but now he narrows his focus down to one single *commandment*, no doubt the *commandment to love* spelled out in verses 9-11. John's statement about the *new* and the *old commandment* sounds paradoxical, doesn't it? Interestingly, the word *new* is not the Greek word [νεος] *neos*, meaning "new in time," or "new in kind." We might use this Greek word today to describe the latest model car. Instead John uses the Greek word [καινος] *kainos* meaning "new in quality," fresh" or as we might use it, a really different model car, still a car but revolutionary like the Prius. So the Apostle John is saying; 'I'm not giving you something you've never *heard* of before but just telling you about the *old commandment* that you've *had from the beginning* with a different emphasis. When we read this, we might be inclined to think that the Apostle John is referring to the Old Testament teaching on love for neighbors and strangers/aliens (Leviticus 19:18, 34 & Deuteronomy 10:19) but that's not the interpretation that most Bible scholars take, although it is a possible interpretation. John is not giving them a *new* responsibility or formulating some further obligation but something *new* in emphasis. As Dr. Hiebert writes; "The beginning here cannot refer back to the beginning of the human race, nor yet to the command's proclamation in the Old Testament Law (Lev. 19:18), but correctly relates to the church in its earliest stage. Most natural is the view that John was thinking of

the initiation of his readers into the experience of love when they first heard and accepted the gospel preached to them.” And Hiebert again comments about the *old commandment* (literally, “the commandment, the old one”: “It is identified with “the word” λογος, logos, the apostolic message as first proclaimed to them, which embodied this commandment of love. “You have heard” in the aorist rather than the perfect, points back to the time when they first heard the message.” [Hiebert, D. Edmond, An Introduction to the New Testament, Moody Press, p. 190]. So, the *beginning* is when they first heard the gospel as spelled out by Jesus as recorded in John 13:34-35 (read also 1 John 3:14). That’s the *new commandment—love one another* which is not something tacked onto our Christian experience as an afterthought by God. In fact, *love one another* is repeated more than a dozen times in the New Testament (e.g. Romans 13:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 Peter 3:11, 1 John 3:11 etc.) plus all the references to *brotherly love* as we will see in our text today. Now, taking John’s argument one step further let me rhetorically ask, ‘how is it possible for one *commandment* to stand head and shoulders about all the others? I believe that Paul explains that in Romans 13:8-10 where he writes that *love* is the fulfillment of God’s law. This *commandment to love* one another (read 1 John 3:11; 23; 4:7, 11, 12 & Romans 13:8 etc.), is a fulfillment of God’s law. When we *love* others, we won’t lie about them, steal from them, kill them, or *hate* them (v.9). As one writer comments, ‘*Love* for God and *love* for others motivates a person to obey God’s commandments without even thinking about them!’ Therefore, is this *commandment new* or *old*? It is both. Could we liken it to the wedding custom; it is *old, new, borrowed* and true? In fact, someone has written that it is as *old* as the sun and as *new* as the sunshine.

Verse 8: Here John provides another sense in which this *old commandment* is *new*. The idea of *love* in general wasn’t *new* but the Lord Jesus Christ invested it with a deeper meaning by His life and teachings. The phrase *which is true in Him and in you*, verifies this *newness*. The Greek neuter pronoun, *which*, cannot relate directly to *commandment* which is a feminine noun, but instead points to the *newness* which John is emphasizing. This *newness* exists as a reality *in Him and in you*. The Greek present tense, *darkness is passing away*, emphasizes the action in progress which is God Himself, as *the Light*, impacting the *darkness*. By His coming, Jesus Christ began to dispel *the darkness* of sin and continues to do that today, even in our own lives. The *darkness* isn’t totally gone but is in the process of going *away*. Dr. Hiebert writes, “The verb ‘is passing away’ may be either middle or passive in form. If passive, the meaning is, ‘is caused to pass away.’ It is generally taken as the middle voice, thus stressing the part that the light plays in the action of the darkness passing away. The darkness is being expelled by the power of the light (emphasis mine.) [Hiebert, D. Edmond, An Introduction to the New Testament, Moody Press, p.190] John’s explanation is actually what Christmas is all about! John writes that *the true Light* has come and *is already shining* which is a reference to the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ; the incarnation, God in the flesh has been born (read Hebrews 1:1-3 & Luke 1:78—*Dayspring* means “sunrise”). Again, we should note the *true Light* as opposed to the false *light* of the Gnostics. This was a *new commandment* in that it belongs to the *new age* that Jesus inaugurated in Himself (John 14:6). Jesus is *the true Light*; *true* not in

the sense of *true* opposed to the false but in the sense of the real thing! Check John's use of *true* in 1 John 2:27; 5:20 & John 1:9; 3:33; 4:23, 37; 5:31-32 etc.—one of John's favorite words. Now there's a sense in which this is applicable to us as well for what is *true* in Christ ought to be *true* in each one of us (1 John 4:17). As recipients of His salvation, we are to also dispel *darkness* by *walking in the Light*. Consider also Jesus' love for even sinners (Luke 15:1ff); the upper crust like Nicodemus ((John 3:1-21) and the multitudes (Mark 8).

Our passage continues this illustration of *light* and *darkness* in verses 9-11 begun in 1 John 1: 5-7, in order to show that as we *walk in the Light* we not only have fellowship with God but our fellowship is rich with others. *Love* and *light* go together; think of it as a couplet, like night & day, bacon & eggs, mom & pop, cookies & milk! *Love* and *light* go together!

Verse 9: The word order in the Greek text stresses the flagrant contradiction between one's claim and one's conduct. *The one who says he is in the light*, Greek is φωτι, photi, declares that *the light* is the very sphere or center of his/her life. John places the words *his brother* next to this claim that *he is in the Light*, speaks of fellow believers with whom there should be a close relationship. Note that the Greek uses a present tense participle for *hates*, which is best translated *is hating*, denoting a sinful characteristic of life, rather than a rare form of anger or ill will toward someone. Some Bible teachers believe that John's reference to the one *hating* to be a reference to an unbeliever. Unbelievers *hate* Christians but so can Christians. Last Sunday's (12/09/07) tragic events when Matthew Murray killed two staff members at "Youth With A Mission" headquarters where at one time he desired to be trained and then went to New Life Church in Denver where he once attended services, killing one person and wounding four others, illustrates this. This young man was raised in a loving Christian home, was home-schooled, even planned to go on a missionary trip to Bosnia next year but for some reason he grew to, as he said, *hate* Christians. On his website he said 'this is for all those young people still caught in the nightmare of Christianity...this evil sick religion.' *Hating his brother* is a concrete example of John's message on *love* but not applied; it is another claim to intimate fellowship with God while one's actions prove it to be a lie. It is impossible to be in fellowship with God and out of fellowship with another believer at the same time—*light* and *love* are couplets! They go together—always. What happens to a believer who *hates* other Christians? Tragically John writes that a *hater* is living *in darkness* even though that Christian thinks he's in *the Light*. An application that the Apostle John suggests can be in the form of a personal question; *is the darkness passing away in our hearts, attitudes and actions?*

Verse 10: In this *love* letter of John's, he's challenging us to ascertain whether or not we are Christians. **First** John writes that the doctrinal test to ascertain whether a person is a believer or not is this: are we confessing the Lord Jesus Christ and confessing sin. **Second**, John writes that the moral test to ascertain whether a person is living as a Christian is whether he/she *loves* others. *The one who loves his brother is abiding in the Light* and won't have hatred in his heart that will be a *cause for stumbling* (read Proverbs 4:19). When the Lord Jesus Christ is our whole motivation for living and breathing, then there will be no *hatred*, nothing that causes us to *stumble*. As I understand how John uses the

noun here, it is translated *cause for stumbling* [the Greek is σκανδαλου and in classical Greek is used to denote the trigger stick that releases a deadly trap; therefore a dangerous entrapment]; John's using it to refer to some kind of a serious offense. *Hatred* of any kind is sin but *loving* is God's way for us. *Loving* the *brothers* and sisters! What a privilege! We don't do enough; life is too busy, hectic and crazy! We quickly forget about demonstrating *love* to our fellow believers. The way to spell *love* is t-i-m-e! Christmas is right around the corner. Could it be that our best gift doesn't need to be wrapped in colorful paper and given to someone? How about the gift of time; or forgiveness; or a cup of kindness; or a phone call of grace to someone who would never expect it...with no strings attached. One more comment: Mr. Hiebert writes; '*the Light*, unlike *the darkness*, has no adverse or destructive impact on the one living in it...it is generally accepted that the pronoun [Greek αυτω, *in him*] is personal, since in these verses John's thought is centered on the individual rather than on the light, "and cause of stumbling in him is there none!" [Hiebert, D. Edmond, An Introduction to the New Testament, Moody Press, p. 190].

Verse 11: John closes this section with one more illustration. *Hates his brother* and *walks in darkness* is in the present tense indicating that *darkness* remains that persons usual manner of living. The next phrase, *does not know where he is going*, is a fascinating way of expressing the characteristic of too many believers who have no idea concerning direction in life. Anyone who *hates* another believer, in any way, is living and *walking* without *light* and without sight—they're *blinded*. The Greek verb *has blinded* is a Greek effective aorist, stating the result without calling attention to the time duration involved. The moral of this illustration is, 'don't persist in the sin of *hating*' because the *blinding* is a result of *darkness* as a result of *hatred* in the heart. That person is like the famous fish in the Echo River of Mammoth Cave, Kentucky. Not only do they swim in the *darkness* but they don't even have eye sockets! A *blind* believer will never find his/her way; will never grow in grace. When we are *walking in the light* and showing *love*, spiritual growth is possible.

Note: It is my prayer that these printed notes will encourage serious Bible students to do further study on this passage. If you find any typos, errors or have any questions, please contact me. Thank you. Pastor John A. Eastman