

06. The Epistle of 1 John—2:3-8

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In our study in 1John, we find ourselves in chapter 2 where John has just finished telling us that the blood of Jesus Christ has satisfied the righteousness of God and allowed Him to show mercy to sinners everywhere—

1 John 2:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² **And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.**

As we said last time, John is not teaching *universalism* (that Jesus' blood shed on Calvary's cross automatically saves everyone)—he is teaching that Jesus' blood paid the price for everyone's sins and made it *possible* for all men and women to be saved—but it's not automatic.

John 1:12 (NKJV)

¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name...

However, in this section of 1John, John is picking up on something his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ taught him—that not all faith is saving faith!

Matthew 7:21-23 (NKJV)

²¹ "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven...

John 8:31-32 (NKJV)

³¹ Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed [*'truly'*—implying that some of His 'disciples' weren't truly His disciples].

Of course, this begs the question, "*How can a person know if they're truly saved or not? Is there any test or criterion by which a person can know if they are truly one of Jesus' disciples or just deceiving themselves?*"

That's a very important question because—we don't want to be one of those that Jesus warned about this very issue when He said—

Matthew 7:21-23 (NKJV)

²¹ "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²² Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

That last statement of Jesus' is the one that John 'keys' in on because—it is one of the surest tests as to the validity of a person's salvation. He tells us that those who *practice* sin (unrighteousness, lawlessness) demonstrate they are not saved—no matter how religious they are and how much church they attend.

Although, John starts out his remarks on this subject by stating it in the positive—he doesn't say, *"those who practice sin don't know Him"*, he says in verse 3—

1 John 2:3-4 (NKJV)

³ Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments [and don't practice sin]. ⁴ He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

There is a difference between 'knowing *about* Jesus'—and then 'knowing Jesus'.

We can know a lot about some famous figure—like President Donald Trump without knowing him personally. The same is true with Jesus Christ—many people have gone to church their whole life and know a lot about Jesus from an historical and even theological standpoint—but don't know Him personally. (Often the difference between religion and relationship—Explain)

When John said, **"by this we know that we know Him"**—he wasn't talking about a causal knowledge (like the average *church-goer* who knows *about* Jesus) but a deep intimate knowledge like we read in Genesis 4:17—*"Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore him a son"*.

This is a very deep, intimate, personal knowledge that speaks of two people becoming one with each other (as a husband and wife in the physical act of sex, or when we become one with Jesus through salvation).

John tells us the 'litmus test' that determines if a person is genuinely one with Jesus (saved) is whether or not they *continue* in His commandments ('**keep**' in verses 3 and 4 is in the present tense in the Greek and denotes a continuous action).

Notice that John doesn't say, *"Now by this we think"* or *"we're pretty sure"*—he says, **"Now by this we know that we know Him [we know we're saved] if we keep His commandments."**

The idea here is **assurance**—knowing without a doubt that we have a real relationship with Jesus Christ and are genuinely saved.

As one author put it—

"Assurance comes from obeying God's commandments in Scripture. Those who fail to do so will and should wonder if they are converted and the Holy Spirit is truly leading them. But obedient believers can be assured that they have come to know Him (Christ)."

Whether we're talking about knowing if *our* relationship with Jesus is genuine or we're trying to determine if some *other* professing Christian's relationship with Jesus is genuine—the truest test is whether or not the individual is living in continual obedience to the Word of God and His commandments.

John is telling us, that is the surest test of the legitimacy of a person's relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 John 2:5 (NKJV)

⁵ But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.

"Keeping His Word" (v.5) and "keeping His commandments" (v.3)—is the same as "walking in the light" (1:7).

Warren Wiersbe—

“To walk in the light means to be honest with God, with ourselves, and with others. It means that when the light reveals our sin to us, we immediately confess it to God and claim His forgiveness. And if our sin injures another person, we ask his forgiveness too.

But walking in the light means something else: it means obeying God’s Word (1 John 2:3–4). “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” (Ps. 119:105). To walk in the light means to spend time daily in God’s Word, discovering His will; and then obeying what He has told us.

Obedience to God’s Word is proof of our love for Him. There are three motives for obedience. We can obey because we have to, because we need to, or because we want to.

A slave obeys because he has to. If he doesn’t obey he will be punished. An employee obeys because he needs to. He may not enjoy his work, but he does enjoy getting his paycheck! He needs to obey because he has a family to feed and clothe. But a Christian is to obey his Heavenly Father because he wants to—for the relationship between him and God is one of love. “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).”

And again, in verse 5 John is pushing the idea of **assurance**. You see, John knew that Satan can’t rob a Christian of their salvation—so he does the next best thing—he tries to rob them of the *assurance* of their salvation thru carnality, compromise, selfishness, pride etc.

1 John 2:6 (NKJV)

⁶ He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

The concept of ‘**abiding**’ is a major theme in John’s writings—it occurs forty-one times in his gospel and twenty-six times in his epistles (24 times in 1 John alone).

The Greek word he uses for “abiding” is *menō*, meaning “to dwell”, “to remain” or “to continue.”

This concept is important to John because he knew it was important to Jesus—but ultimately to us!

John 15:4-5 (NKJV)

⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵ I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Abiding in Jesus is synonymous with having a close, intimate ongoing relationship with Him in the practice of our daily walk.

This closeness and intimacy (if it is there) will be manifested in *obedience* to the Word of God, but also in following the example of Jesus—“*I always do those things that please My Father*” (John 8:29b); “*My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.*” (John 4:34)

1 John 2:6 (NKJV)

⁶ He who says he abides in Him **ought himself also to walk just as He walked.**

John 10:27 (NKJV)

²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

When we abide in Him—we will behave like Him.

1 John 2:7-8 (NKJV)

⁷ Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the

beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning.⁸ Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.

It sounds a little like John is giving us some ‘double-speak’ — “Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment ... a new commandment I write to you”

What commandment is John talking about and how is it both ‘old’ and ‘new’ at the same time? The commandment is ‘old’ in the sense that these Christians had heard it preached to them their entire Christian lives—so in that regard it certainly wasn’t *new* to them.

But it was ‘new’ in the sense that Jesus called it *new* when He gave it to His disciples in the upper room the night before His crucifixion—

John 13:34-35 (NKJV)

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

In the Old Testament God had given 613 commandments in the Law—248 positive and 365 negative.

Matthew 22:35-40 (NKJV)

³⁵ Then one of them, a lawyer, asked *Him a question*, testing Him, and saying, ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Jesus here quoted from Deut. 6:5 and from Leviticus 19:18 holding these up as the first and second greatest commandments—both are commandments to love.

So, the commandment to love others was nothing new, but here in John 13, the night before His crucifixion, Jesus said to His disciples—"A new commandment I give to you that you love one another..." (John 13:34)

The word “new” does not mean “new in time,” since God had commanded His people to love others in the O.T. before Jesus came on the scene—this Greek word means “new in experience, fresh.”

This command for the disciples to love one another was new because it was built on a new *principle* and energized by a new *power*.

The new principle— “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you...” (John 13:34)

In the Old Testament God had commanded His people to love others “as they loved themselves.” What makes this command *new* is that Jesus commanded His disciples to love each other “as He loved them.” How did Jesus love them? How did Jesus love us?—by going to the cross and dying for us!

John 15:12-13 (NKJV)

¹² This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

That's how He wants us to love one another—by going to the cross and dying (not literally but figuratively) for one another—that's what's new about His command to love!

Yes, the Old Testament is filled with commandments and exhortations to love—but Jesus here makes everything new when He says, “Love one another as I have loved you” or in other words to love others more than or above yourselves!

Ephesians 5:25 (NKJV)

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her...

The newness and the fullness of this new commandment is that we are to love in a way that costs us our lives—not just loving emotionally but loving sacrificially—even to the point of death!

You see, biblically there is never true reconciliation apart from someone or something dying.

In the Old Testament, reconciliation was impossible without the sacrifice of an animal.

In the New Testament, we see Old Testament typology become reality with the death of the innocent Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

One pastor put it well—

“There will never be true reconciliation between you and the person with whom you’re angry or from whom you’re estranged until you say, ‘I’m not going to grind my ax any longer. I’m not going to press my point any further. I’m not going to prove I’m right anymore. I’m just going to die.’ The question is, will you? ‘But I’m innocent,’ you say. So was Jesus. ‘But I’m right.’

Wasn’t He?

The commandment He gave us is to die—to our pride, our complaints, our position, our proof. ‘What if I die?’ you ask. ‘Does laying down my life and giving up my rights guarantee reconciliation?’

Was everyone reconciled to Jesus? No. Not everyone is born again. Not everyone says, ‘Thank You, Lord, for laying down Your life for me.’ When you love like Jesus, some will respond and there will be reconciliation.

Others, however, will continue to spit and curse and mock—even as they did to Jesus as He was in the very act of dying for their sins. But if we are to love as Jesus loved, like Him, we’ll pray, ‘Father, forgive them. They just don’t know what they’re doing.’

The problem today is that we have let Hollywood define love for us which most believe is all about *feelings*—but God's love is not feelings oriented it's *action* oriented. (Explain)

Matthew 5:43-46 (NKJV)

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

The Greek word for love here and in our text is “agape”. Paul defines agape love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8:

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a (NKJV)

⁴ Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; ⁵ does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; ⁶ does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never fails...

These are all verbs in the Greek because God's love is not feelings—it's actions!

John is admonishing us to love others the way Jesus loved us (plug the name 'Jesus' into 1Cor.13:4-8—it reads easily and naturally. But then plug your name in and see how it comes across!)

Look, loving people as God commands with His agape love is impossible for us—it is beyond our ability. This is not a love I can generate or imitate—it is not in me to love like this.

- Why would Jesus command me to do something that is impossible for me to do?
- God never tells us to do the impossible without supplying the **power** to do it!

That **power** is ours by virtue of the Holy Spirit living within us when we got saved which, as we abide in Christ, allows the fruit of the Spirit to grow in our lives—and the first one on the list in Galatians 5:22-23 is God's agape love!

Romans 5:5 (NKJV)

⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

It is through our abiding in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit flowing thru us that this kind of love can become a reality in our lives to touch others around us.

1 John 2:8 (NKJV)

⁸ Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, **because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.**

One pastor had this to say—

*"Obviously, the **true light** is Jesus Christ (John 8:12), who has come and inaugurated His kingdom, in which He (and this new dimension of love) is already shining. With the inauguration of Messiah's spiritual kingdom, the true Light began shining and overcoming the darkness of Satan's kingdom. Right now, the light coexists with the darkness, but the Light and the divine love He bears will increasingly dispel the darkness, shine ever brighter during Christ's millennial reign, and eventually rule supremely throughout eternity. Thus, it is only because believers have been "rescued ... from the domain of darkness and transferred ... to the kingdom of His beloved Son," the Light, that this new commandment is a reality in their lives."*

And so, with the First Coming of Jesus the Light of God began to dispel and darkness—

John 1:4-5 (NKJV)

⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

As the light of God (the gospel) is preached and people believe—they are delivered from Satan's darkness and his kingdom shrinks.

William MacDonald—

"The darkness has not all vanished because many have not come to Christ, but Christ, the true light, is already shining, and whenever sinners turn to Him they are saved, and henceforth love their fellow believers."

And that's exactly what John is talking about when he says—

1 John 2:9-10 (NKJV)

⁹ He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. ¹⁰ He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

The distinguishing characteristic of a true Christian isn't wearing a cross or a Christian tee-shirt or carrying a Bible or even going to church—the true mark of a Christian is love and especially for other Christians.

I'd like to end by sharing with you a true story about how the love of God working thru two Christians can overcome any barrier.

"A young man cowered in the corner of a dirty, roach-infested death row cell in a South Carolina prison. His body curled in a fetal position, he seemed oblivious to the filth and stench around him. His name was Rusty, and he was sentenced to die for the murder of a Myrtle Beach woman in a crime spree that left four people dead.

Police arrested twenty-three-year-old Rusty Welborn from Point Pleasant, West Virginia in 1979, following one of the most brutal slayings in South Carolina history. Rusty was tried for murder and received the death penalty for his crime.

Bob McAlister, deputy chief of staff to South Carolina's governor, became acquainted with Rusty on death row. Bob had become a Christian a year or so earlier and felt a strong call from God to minister to the state's inmates—especially those spending their last days on death row. Bob's first look at Rusty revealed a pitiful sight.

Rusty was lying on the floor when he arrived, a pathetic picture of a man who believed he mattered to no one. The only signs of life in the cell were the roaches who scurried over everything, including Rusty himself. He made no effort to move or even to brush the insects away. He stared blankly at Bob as he began to talk but did not respond.

During visit after visit, Bob tried to reach Rusty, telling him of the love Jesus had for him and of his opportunity—even on death row—to start a new life in Christ. He talked and prayed continuously, and finally Rusty began to respond to the stranger who kept invading his cell. Little by little, he opened up, until one day he began to weep as Bob was sharing with him.

On that day, Rusty Welborn, a pitiful man with murder and darkness behind him and his own death closing in ahead of him, gave his heart to Jesus Christ. When Bob returned to Rusty's cell a few days later, he found a new man. The cell was clean and so was Rusty. He had renewed energy and a positive outlook on life.

McAlister continued to visit him regularly, studying the Bible and praying with him. The two men became close friends over the next five years. In fact, McAlister said that Rusty grew into the son he never had, and as for Rusty, he had taken to calling McAlister "Pap."

Bob learned that Rusty's childhood in West Virginia had been anything but "almost heaven." His family was destitute, and Rusty was neglected and abused as a youngster. School was an ordeal both for him and for his teachers. Throughout his junior high years, he wore the same two pair of pants and two ragged shirts.

Out of shame, frustration, and a lack of adult guidance, Rusty quit school in his ninth-grade year, a decision that was to be just the beginning of his troubles. His teenage years were full of turmoil as he was kicked out of his home many times and ran away countless others. He spent the better part of his youth living under bridges and in public rest rooms.

Bob taught Rusty the Bible, but Rusty was the teacher when it came to love and forgiveness. This young man who had never known real love was amazed and thrilled about the love of God. He never ceased to be surprised that other people could actually love someone like him through Jesus Christ. Rusty's childlike enthusiasm was a breath of fresh air to Bob, who came to realize how much he had taken for granted, especially with regard to the love of his family and friends.

In time Rusty became extremely bothered by the devastating pain he had caused the family and friends of his victim. Knowing that God had forgiven him, he desperately wanted the forgiveness of those he had wronged. Then a most significant thing happened: the brother of the woman Rusty had murdered became a Christian.

God had dealt with him for two years about his need to forgive his sister's killer. Finally, he wrote Rusty a letter that offered not only forgiveness but love in Christ.

Not long before his scheduled execution, this brother and his wife came to visit Rusty. Bob was present when the two men met and tearfully embraced like long-lost brothers finally reunited. Rusty's senseless crime ten years earlier had constructed an enormous barrier between himself and the brother.

The love of Christ obliterated that barrier and enabled both men to realize that, because of Him, they truly were brothers reunited on that day. It was a lesson Bob would not forget. Not only did Rusty teach Bob McAlister how to love and forgive, he also taught him a powerful lesson about how to die.

As the appointed day approached, Rusty exhibited a calm and assurance like Bob had never seen. On his final day, with only hours remaining before his 1:00 A.M. execution, Rusty asked McAlister to read to him from the Bible. After an hour or so of listening, Rusty sat up on the side of his cot and said, "You know, the only thing I ever wanted was a home, Pap. Now I'm going to get one."

Bob continued his reading, and after a few minutes Rusty grew very still. Thinking he had fallen asleep; Bob placed a blanket over him and closed the Bible. As he turned to leave, he felt a strong compulsion to lean over and kiss Rusty on the forehead. A short time later, Rusty Welborn was executed for murder. A woman assisting Rusty in his last moments shared this postscript to his story: As he was being prepared for his death, Rusty looked at her and said, "What a shame that a man's gotta wait 'til his last night alive to be kissed and tucked in for the very first time."

There are a lot of "Rustys" in this country—people who have been written off by society, people that everyone seems to hate and wants to be rid of. But look how the love of God working through one man (Bob) reached out and changed this murderer into a son of God!

Look at how the love of God working through a victim's brother extended love and forgiveness so that enemies became brothers in Christ!

The world cannot understand this kind of love because it's supernatural—it's the love of God!

As long as we abide in Christ and walk in the Spirit—God's love will flow through us and make a difference in the lives of those around us. But if we move away from the Lord and stop abiding in Christ, the flesh will rise up and self-love will begin to dominate our lives. (2 Timothy 3:1-2a)

Self-love chokes out God's love in a person's heart every time—don't let it, too much is at stake, too many people need God's love, to love them into His Kingdom!

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

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