

1 John 2:3-17

A Genuine Walk with God

“We need to walk the walk, and not just talk the talk”

Good morning, church – and happy Mother’s Day to all the mothers here, both the physical and spiritual mothers.

It’s great to see everyone here today as we begin the second part of our 1 John series.

Today we have a large passage with a lot to cover, so let’s just have a moment’s prayer and then we will get into it.

[Opening Prayer]

I want to start out today by asking you a question:

If you told me that you loved your spouse, or your boyfriend or girlfriend, what kind of behaviour would I expect to see from you?

If you told me you loved your spouse, but then I saw you having a whole bunch of relationships on the side, would I have any reasons to take your claim seriously?

Kids, if you told me you loved mum and dad, but you kept disobeying and disrespecting them...should I believe you?

You see, our claims need to be backed up with actions for them to be true...otherwise it’s just talk.

And our claims to be walking in real fellowship with God are no different!

Last week we saw what is needed for us to **have** real fellowship with a holy God: we need the real Jesus and the real Gospel.

And I said to you that in this next section of the letter John would develop the theme of holy living, and that’s where we find ourselves today.

Are we living lives that line up with our claims?

I’ve titled this sermon “A Genuine Walk with God” and our big idea for today is this:

We need to walk the walk, not just talk the talk.

Because a genuine walk with God is:

A Walk in Obedience (2:3-11)

A Walk in Assurance (2:12-14)

A Walk without Detours (2:15-17)

A Walk in Obedience (2:3-11):

In this section, John wants us to understand the importance of walking in **obedience** for someone who is in real fellowship with the God of light...but he also wants us to **know** that we are in fact in real fellowship with him.

These ideas are probably best captured in vv3-6:

³We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. ⁴The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

These are pretty clear words – fellowship with God involves Godly living! And John wants us to understand that Godly living doesn’t come from merely knowing **about** Jesus, but actually knowing **him** as our sacrificial king.

And here we see one of those tests that I told you John was going to give us. How can we **know** that we know him? The test is our obedience. V3 and 4 both say, “**if** we keep his commands”.

So, failure to keep his commands is a sign that we don’t really know him, and keeping his commands is a sign of our real fellowship with God.

Those who claim to walk with God should “walk as Jesus did”, v6 says. To follow in **his** footsteps, to walk the path **he** walked...that is what it means to “remain in God.”

And this should not surprise us – it would not have surprised John’s original audience. There is nothing new about the call to obedience – we see it everywhere in the Bible, from the very first pages!

See v7:

⁷Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard.

So, this is an old commandment, one that has been around “from the beginning”. That’s an obvious allusion to Genesis 1: “In the beginning...”.

What did God say to Adam and Eve “in the beginning”? “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it...but don’t eat from that tree over there.”

Obedience to God has been part of genuine fellowship with the Lord since humanity’s creation.

But, what does he mean in v8?

⁸Yet I am writing you a **new command**; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

So is it new or not? Yes...and no.

It's not new because obedience has always been a characteristic of God's people. But there is something new about it, and here I think he is referring to something Jesus said that John recorded in his Gospel.

Jesus says to the disciples:

“³⁴I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13)

Jesus says that not only should his disciples love God, they should also love each other.

Loving our fellow Christians is something that Christ expects of all his disciples. And John unpacks that for us in vv9-11:

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

Our obedience to God – old commandment – involves loving our fellow Christians – new commandment.

And see how important this love of other Christians is? John says that if we don't love our brothers and sisters in Christ then we are still living and walking in darkness.

It doesn't matter if you say you are in the light as verse 9 says – if you're not walking the walk, you are just talking the talk.

V10:

¹⁰Anyone who loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. ¹¹But anyone who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.

Can you see how John links this back to an obedient life? By loving other Christians “there is nothing in him to make him stumble”.

Failure to love...is failure to walk in the light.

So what does loving others actually look like? John will unpack this a bit more in chapter 3, so let me just make some big picture comments about it here.

Figuring out what actions are loving is a very important question these days.

Most people think loving others means just affirming what they enjoy doing. If I love them, how can I criticize their actions and tell them they are living in a way that dishonours God?

Someone asked me once what I would do if I found out that a friend of mine was about to have an affair. Would I get involved and stop him? Or would I just stay out of it and let him live his life?

How would **you** answer that?

My answer was that I would confront him – it's the only loving thing to do!

How can I claim to love him if I sit back and watch him do something that would destroy everything that is truly important in his life?

Could I sit back and watch one of you, my brothers and sisters, do something that I know would destroy **your** marriage and your family? Could I say nothing because it would be “unloving” to call out that action as wrong?

In the most famous passage on love in the Bible, the one that's always read at weddings, Paul says:

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. (1 Cor 13:6)

True, Biblical love is not a love that accepts or agrees with unrighteousness. It is a love that “rejoices with the truth” ...even when that truth is hard to hear.

So don't let people tell you that it's unloving to speak the truth into people's lives.

There are certainly unloving **ways** of speaking the truth, but the truth **itself** is never unloving – and if we sit back watching our brothers and sisters walk paths of unrighteousness that we know will lead them to ruin...how can we claim to love them?

That would actually be an act of hatred.

So, at minimum, loving our brothers and sisters in Christ means pointing them back to the path of obedience when they take a detour. It means helping them to walk as Christ walked.

It means helping them remain in the light and avoid stumbling in the darkness.

And as much as we must help those around us walk in the light, we too must walk in obedience. We cannot be hypocrites and just point out each other's wrongs without keeping a close eye on where our own feet are taking us!

Walking with a holy God means we walk in obedience. And although perfect obedience is beyond our reach in this life it is still the goal and the standard for which we must strive.

A genuine walk with God is a walk in obedience.

Now, if you are anything like me (and you probably are!) you are thinking to yourself: but I fail to walk in obedience every day! If obedience is a test of the genuineness of my faith, I fail that test daily!

You might even be wondering if you are really in fellowship with God!

And I think John anticipated that response to his words, because right after he slaps us in the face with the test of obedience, he applies some soothing balm to the wound and reminds of us certain things that are true of us as Christians.

He shows us that the genuine walk with God is also a walk in assurance.

A Walk in Assurance (2:12-14):

In this section John addresses three groups of people: dear children, fathers and young men.

And it's not exactly clear if he is using these groups as metaphors for the stages of Christian growth and maturity from new Christian to mature one, or if he has more literal, biological categories with physical ages in mind.

We probably spent over half an hour at the pre-preach discussing just this one thing!

It might be best to take "fathers" and "young men" in a more literal, physical way – this would also be consistent with how these words are used in other parts of Scripture.

For example, in 1 Timothy 5, Paul instructs Timothy, a young man, to treat the older men around him as "fathers" and the older women as "mothers".

This is clearly a reference to biological age differences, not maturity, as Timothy is the appointee of Paul and is probably more spiritually mature than these older people.

So, I'm going to interpret John in the same way, but if you think the spiritual maturity way is best, that's valid too.

And remember what I said John's doing here – he's just given us the hard, binary test of obedience, and now he's following that up with words of encouragement to those who are feeling down about their test score.

And don't let the masculine language get in your way – we shouldn't think his message is just for men.

I am writing to you, dear children:

John first addresses "dear children".

While it is possible this refers to physical youngsters, I think it best to understand "dear children" as Christians in general because, as much as Timothy should think of older men as "fathers", the members of these churches are John's spiritual children – he is their Elder, he probably planted some of these churches.

And he started chapter 2 by saying to the **entire** church, "my dear children...".

So that means these statements are to all Christians regardless of age, while the other parts are about older and younger people.

What does he say to all Christians? How does he assure them of the genuineness of their walk with God?

He first says in v12 that their “sins have been forgiven on account of his name.”

This is **the** defining characteristic of being a Christian.

If our sins have **not** been forgiven because of Christ and his work then we **aren't** Christians!

The second thing he says in v14a is that they “know the Father”. This, too, is something that characterises all Christians.

And John will come back to this in more detail at the end of this chapter.

But this idea is not unique to John. Paul also picks it up in Romans 8:15, “We are God’s children...receiving the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, ‘*Abba*, Father!’”

And Jesus was also very clear about this when one of the disciples, Philip, asked him to show them the Father.

9 ...“Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me **has seen the Father**. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10 Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.” (John 14:9-10)

This is why John can say to all Christians that their sins are forgiven on account of Jesus **and** that they also know the Father.

Access to God the Father is something that every Christian has right from the very first moment they become a Christian, and this means every one of you who has had their sins forgiven because of Christ can also come to the Father.

Do you ever really just stop and think about that?

This great God who created the whole universe, a universe that contains billions of galaxies, each containing billions of stars...who set it all in motion and maintains it all in existence...we can come to **know** this God!

He **wants** us to know him, and he wants to be part of our lives – and through Christ all Christians have that access.

This is the foundational truth for all Christians.

But what about the “fathers” and the “young men”? I think what he says to them is tailored to their stage of life.

I am writing to you, fathers:

John says the exact same thing twice about the fathers: they “have known him who is from the beginning” which is a reference to Jesus.

How is this something that should give them assurance?

Think of it this way: when you’ve stepped off the path of God and stumbled in the darkness...when you’ve failed the test of obedience, John is reminding you that you’ve “come to know” God...and **that** is what should restore your assurance.

I know God! I don’t just know **about** him, I actually **know** him.

And as much as this is a great statement that should restore to you your assurance of being in real fellowship with God, I think it also works as a bit of a warning.

Often with age comes a tendency to look down on those younger than us. A sort of, “what would you know? I’ve been around longer than you!”

Paul even had to remind Timothy not to let others “despise you because of your youth” – this was clearly an issue in the church, and Paul is writing about churches in the same region as John.

I even find myself struggling with that sometimes working with teenagers – it’s very easy for me as someone who is much older than them to fall into that trap.

And so perhaps what John is doing here is reminding the older men and women of the church to reflect on the fact that, yes – they have been around longer and know more than the youngsters.

They probably even know God better than the youngsters – but the one **they** know has been around “**from the beginning**”!

If you want to take pride in how much you know because of your age, just remember that compared to God you are but a babe!

And so, fathers and mothers of GBC Corinda – when you fail the test of obedience, remind yourself of what John says here about you.

Remind yourself that you **know** the one who is from the beginning...but also remind yourself that **you** are not “from the beginning”! And don’t despise anyone because of their youth.

Now – to the “young men”...and women!

I am writing to you, young men:

Look at how he describes them in vv13-14:

- Because you are strong
- The word of God lives in you
- You have overcome the evil one (twice!)

Most of what he has to say to these younger Christians is very physical, active language – they are ‘strong’ they are ‘overcoming’. And this is a wonderful way to comfort the youth and assure them of the reality of their salvation.

Are you feeling down about your sin, young man of God? Young woman of God?

Do you look back at your failures of obedience and despair? Do you sometimes feel powerless in the face of temptation?

Take heart!

John wants to remind you that you are **strong**, and you have overcome the evil one – he even says that twice to make sure you get it!

He is reminding you of the fact that, because your sins have been forgiven and you know the Father you have and continue to live in victory over Satan. You have “overcome”, you have conquered, you are victorious over him.

I know it doesn’t feel like that all the time, but it **is** true!

This is the state of the Christian’s life – we live in victory over Satan because, although we still stumble into sin, that sin has no ultimate power over us. When we die, we will rise again in victory over death itself and spend eternity with Christ in heaven.

We are those who have overcome the evil one through our union with Christ on the cross.

And, practically speaking, one of the best ways of living out that victory is by training ourselves according to God’s word – that’s the third thing John says about the young men, that “the word of God lives in you”.

Is this something that could be said of you? Does the word of God ‘live in you’?

Is it there in your mind when you need it to be? Is it shaping you daily?

How much time do you spend in God’s word? Do you read it daily? And I don’t mean read a devotional each day – those are useful, but they aren’t God’s word.

How much time do you spend actually **reading** the Bible? It’s the best defence we have against the devil when he comes to tempt us!

Jesus was tempted by the devil for 40 days in the wilderness. Each time the devil tried to tempt him to do the wrong thing Jesus responded the same way – he quoted Scripture!

And if **Jesus** used the Scriptures to deal with Satan’s temptations, you better believe that **you** and **I** need to do the same!

But...more than a way of resisting temptation, we need God’s word to help us walk in obedience.

Listen to this from Psalm 119:

9 How can a young man keep his way pure?

By guarding it according to **your word**.

10 With my whole heart I seek you;

let me not wander from **your commandments!**

11 I have stored up **your word** in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.

We all struggle with keeping God’s commands – treasuring his word in our heart will safeguard us!

Prioritise time with God’s word. Find a way that works for you.

A few years ago, I set my alarm for 15 minutes early each day – I promise you won’t miss 15 minutes of sleep. I spend that time reading the Bible, storing up God’s word in my heart so that it might guard my ways.

This was characteristic of the young Christians to whom John was writing – is it characteristic of you?

Whether we are young or only young-at-heart, John wants to encourage us to **know** that we have a genuine walk with God.

When you fail the test of obedience this week – and you will – remind yourself of what John says here.

Be assured of the genuineness of your walk with God, and press on in confidence!

But as you do, pay attention still to how you walk, because you don’t want to take any detours.

A Walk Without Detours (2:15-17):

One of the greatest challenges Christians have always faced is navigating their way through a fallen world. Every part of our lives and our world is tainted by sin’s influence, and it is so easy to wander off God’s path and take a detour towards the things of the world.

One reason it’s so easy is because a lot of what the world offers us is actually quite attractive to our sinful natures.

Our world is filled with messages about sex and money and power: we are often told that these things are the very purpose of our lives.

These are hard to deal with because we actually like them – they resonate with our sinful selves! And because we like them, they are difficult to resist...but resist them we must!

John wants us to be aware of the world and the things it offers because walking with a holy God means **not** taking detours off God's path and walking with the world.

If we stay walking with God, we will find ourselves walking **away** from these things.

The Love of the World

The first thing John warns us about is having a love of the world. Let's read v15:

¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love of the Father is not in him.

Now, when he says "the world" he means the system of the world, what the world prizes, values and says is important in life, and we will see in v16 what that is.

But what does it mean to "love" the world? It means to place value in it and cause us to prize it.

It is a motivating force, this love, and it directs our actions.

This is the kind of love that John says we must **not** have for the world or the things of the world because if we do, "the love of the Father is not in us."

If our love is for the world then we will follow **its** ways and value what **it** values.

But...if our love is for God then we will follow **his** ways and value what **he** values.

John is urging us to make a choice – walk with God or walk with the world. We can't do both!

The Things in the World

So what specifically are these worldly things that we are not to love?

V16:

¹⁶ For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.

There are three specific areas of worldly behaviour that John says are definitely not from God, but they can really be boiled down to two main categories: our desires and our pride.

Think about "the cravings of sinful man" and "the lust of his eyes". That's our desires.

Like everything else in our lives, our desires are not pointed in the right direction – they're like a faulty compass. The things we crave are not the things of God.

Perhaps the clearest example of this is our sexual desires. These cravings of our flesh and eyes are one of our strongest biological impulses, and provide a great example of how all our desires are disordered.

Think of how much sex drives our culture.

How many movies or TV shows are there that **don't** have any sexual content? Not many.

How many chart-topping songs are about sex? I don't mean love, although our world often confuses the two – I mean sex.

I recently listened to a top hits playlist from the 80s – the music of my youth! And I was amazed at how many of the songs I remember listening to as a kid are actually about sex!

And what about advertising? You can't walk through a shopping centre without being bombarded with sexual images selling everything you can imagine – even things that have nothing to do with sex!

This is just one example of the things that we crave, the things after which our sinful natures lust.

These are not the things of God – and they must not be part of who we are!

The second category John highlights in this verse is “the boasting in what he has and does”, or as the CSB more simply puts it “the pride in one's own possessions”.

Pride is a serious problem for many, many people. In fact, if you think about it, pride is at the heart of all human sinfulness – because when we sin, we are effectively telling God that we want to do things **our** way, not his.

That's pride. And the world **loves** to feed that pride, especially when it comes to what we own.

How many ad campaigns now feature lines like “you deserve the best”, like this one?

How many car ads actually tell you anything about the features of the car? They just show you what it looks like and how others will respond to you if you have that car.

They appeal to our pride, and to our lust and the cravings of our sinful flesh.

If you pay attention, you'll find this kind of thing everywhere – pandering to our own over-inflated ego.

We are constantly being told that we are what we **have** – our possessions are what makes us. We need to keep updating our car, buying a bigger and better house, upgrading our phones.

No one is content with what they have anymore! Clothing, handbags, shoes, jewellery...we live in a world where our possessions define us.

How much time and money do you spend shopping? And how much of that is for things you **need** versus things you simply **want**?

One way to tell where your heart truly is, where your **love** truly is, would be to look at all your receipts from last year.

After all, Jesus said, “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”!

So...think about these things – where do your desires direct you? How does your pride drive you? Let’s read the end of v16 again:

...[these things are] not from the Father, but [are] from the world.

Let me pause for a moment and ask you to consider this: where is does your biggest challenge lie? Is it your desires or your pride?

Do you struggle to control your eyes? Do you find you are making excuses, trying to justify watching things you know you shouldn’t watch?

Did you choose your car because it suits your family’s needs, or because you want people to admire it as you drive past?

Do you have a wardrobe full of clothes that keeps getting fuller because you just have to have the latest fashions?

All of us are dealing with the same temptations – we are all in need of help and encouragement to avoid these detours and stay on God’s path! And John has some encouragement for us in v17.

The Temporariness of the World

The biggest catch with all these things is their temporariness.

You buy this season’s fashion, but then need to buy next season’s.

Your phone is out of date in 6 months...your car gets old and damaged.

Everything in the world around us is temporary – even the planet we are on won’t last for ever! Look at v17:

¹⁷ The **world** and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

At some point, everything you see around you and everything you own will be gone.

Your clothes might last a few years. Your house, a century. But it will all end eventually, and even if your things last for a thousand years...**you** won’t.

And this is both bad news and amazingly **encouraging** news!

It's bad news because so much of what we chase after in our lives, so much of what the world tells us we **must** have or do will not last, leading us to desire more and more.

That's bad news because it means many of us will pursue **lives** that are ultimately **meaningless**, and the only legacy of our existence will be our credit card bills.

Will that be your legacy? Perhaps not credit card bills – perhaps a flash car that is rusting in a garage somewhere?

Perhaps a crypto currency portfolio?

These things are all temporary.

But it's also good news, because it means that the sinful desires and cravings we have, the pride that blinds us to our need for Christ, won't outlast the grave!

Look again at the end of v17:

... but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

When we get to heaven, those of us who know the Father will be free of these desires, free of the influence of the world.

We will finally be free to serve God wholly and completely!

But we don't need to wait until then to start seeing those benefits.

From the moment you become a Christian the Holy Spirit begins to change you and reshape your heart and your loves so that they line up more with Christ's.

Over time our desires change – we are no longer slaves to our lusts and our pride – we **can** overcome them!

Remember John's words to the young men in v13: they have "overcome the evil one"! With God's help, we can walk away from the world and its lusts and press on towards Christ, knowing that one day our struggle will be over and we will be made perfect.

All our desires will then be in perfect alignment with God's – and what a great day that will be!

So, let's finish with this week's homework assignment. I trust everyone did their homework from last week?

I want you do to two things this week.

First, I want you to think about the area of your life where you are most likely to detour from God's path.

Is it your desires, or your pride?

I want you to write down the things with which you struggle the most.

For example, is it what you are watching, or what you are buying?

And take that list to someone – your spouse, your friends, your Grace Group.

And I want you to identify the biggest issue on your list, and then identify the steps you can put in place to begin addressing it.

These steps will be different for different people at different stages of life.

For example, I always recommend to my students that they not take their phones into their rooms at night – the temptation is too great.

They should leave them locked in a kitchen drawer until morning – that’s a great way not feeding the “lust of the eyes” for example.

But I live alone – so there is no point in locking my phone up if I’ve got the key!

You need a tailored solution that fits you and your life in order to successfully stay on track with God.

You also need to give someone permission to ask you how you are going in this regard – we all need someone to hold us accountable for our walk with God.

I said at the start that I would get involved if I saw a friend about to do something that would ruin his marriage and family – and we need to do that for each other.

We need to show love for each other, not by winking at each other’s sin, but by standing together with each other and helping each other along, making sure we don’t start detouring off the path.

So, that’s the first thing.

Here’s the second.

John’s talked about the “young men” and “fathers” in the church.

Young men and women – do you treat the older saints here as fathers and mothers? Or do you write them off because they don’t know how to use the latest technology like you do?

Because they talk and dress differently to you?

There is often a divide in many churches between the older members and the younger ones, and that’s a shame.

There are things about Christian living that can only be learned by spending time with God, and we need to recognise and value the older members of our church.

I saw this very clearly a few years ago when I was running the young adult's group at GBC Holland Park.

Ps Dave D'Amour asked a couple in their 60s, Keith and Glenda, to join us. So we had me and a bunch of 18-24 year olds, and Keith and Glenda.

And I think they were the most important part of that group!

Each week we got to benefit from their decades of walking with the Lord and the wisdom that comes from knowing him that long.

It also broke down some of the barriers between the older and younger members of the church.

Still today, if you watch them around the church, the young people will be lining up to get a hug from Glenda, and they will be talking with those young people who were in that group.

This is how church should be!

So, young man and young woman:

Find one of the Godly, mature saints here.

Seek them out, invite them over for dinner, begin developing a relationship with them and find out about their walk with God over the years and learn from their experiences.

Now, to the Fathers and Mothers of GBC Corinda:

What is your attitude towards the younger members here? Is it one of pride? Of "I know more than you!"?

Is it one of annoyance at the way they dress, or the way they talk? The way their phones seem superglued to their hands?

Or do you think about them like they are your "dear children"?

What opportunities are there in your week to speak an encouraging word to strengthen those who are younger? To spend time in prayer on their behalf?

Brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers – we all need each other if we are to succeed in a genuine walk with God.

We need to encourage one another, we need to hold each other accountable, and we need to love each other.

“Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble.”

We need to make sure that we are walking the walk, and not just talking the talk.

Let’s pray.

We spoke at some length today about knowing that we know God...and I’ve picked an old hymn on that same subject to close out our service today: *He Will Hold Me Fast*.

1 John 2:3-17

We need to walk the walk, and not just talk the talk

Discussion Questions

A Walk in Obedience (2:3-11)

1. What is the role of obedience in a Christian's walk?
2. How do these verses say that we can **know** that we know God?
3. What is the "new command" of v8? (Hint: see John 13...)
4. What does loving our fellow Christians actually look like?
5. How would you define true, Biblical love?

A Walk in Assurance (2:12-14)

1. Do you agree that John's categories are literal or metaphorical, reflecting stages of Christian growth?
2. Who are the "dear children"? What characterises their lives?
3. Who are the "fathers"? What characterises their lives?
4. Who are the "young men"? What characterises their lives?
5. How do these characteristics help your assurance of salvation?

A Walk without Detours (2:15-17)

1. In what ways do you see "the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes" influencing our culture?
2. What about "the boasting of what he has and does"?
3. Where is does your biggest challenge lie? Is it your desires or your pride?
4. How is the temporariness of all things bad news? How is it good news? (Hint: v17...)
5. Did you do your homework?