

TRUTH COMMUNITY

- TEACHING GOD'S PEOPLE GOD'S WORDS -

Obedience and Love

1 John 2:3-11

GraceLife: 1/10/2010

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For today and the next few times that I am here after a very long hiatus, we are coming back to the study of the book of 1 John. I invite you to turn to 1 John this morning as we return to study one of the last epistles written in the apostolic era.

The apostle John wrote this letter to help Christians, to help his flock as they were being assaulted by false teachers. These false teachers denied the true nature of Christ, they taught a false salvation and they led sinful lives that were denial of the holiness of God. And yet they had found through their clever words a measure of influence among the flocks that John was looking to protect when he wrote this letter.

Now, understand that when we talk about a group of false teachers 2000 years ago, that doesn't make this a matter of historical study, the things that were troubling those Christians then are the same kinds of things that trouble us now. John's solutions to their problems then are the same God-inspired solutions to our challenges today. And so what we see John saying to those believers back then are the things that we need to hear today.

Those false teachers were undermining the truth just as false teachers do today. They were causing those believers to question the reality of their salvation as error undermined the foundation of what they believed. And the apostle John, in a very loving, tender letter to the believers writes to give them the resources that they needed to live victoriously in the midst of a deceptive, tempting, hostile world. False prophets abound then and now, the world is full of temptations that would distract us from a walk of holiness then and now. And unbelievers hate Christ now just like they did back then and directed their hostility against Christ and true believers.

We live in a difficult environment. We try to live out a Christian life in a difficult, hostile environment and yet, the apostle John writes with a God-inspired certainty that spiritual victory is possible and indeed is expected for Christians as they live in this world. Listen to what he says in chapter 5:5:

This is the victory which has overcome the world, our faith.

Victory in the midst of the hostile world, that is what 1 John is writing to promote and to see accomplished in the lives of believers.

Now, to have spiritual victory in your life means you have to overcome the hurdles of false teachers, you have to overcome the hurdles of the lusts of your own flesh, the pride of your own heart and the hostility of non-Christians. The glory of the scriptures, not only in 1 John but in all of the Bible is that what was written thousands of years ago is the same truth you need today to walk in joy and truth and that is what we are going to dive in to here this morning.

But for that result of joy and truth to attain in your life, you profoundly need to go back again and again and again to the proved nature of salvation and its ramifications for your life. In the swirling storms of temptation and deception, you need to know that you are in the truth, that you are truly a believer in Christ, that God truly has saved you out of this world and has delivered you from the domain of darkness over which Satan is the head in to the kingdom of His beloved Son in which Christ is the head. You need to know that those invisible spiritual realities are true in your own life. You need to understand what it means to be saved and you need to understand that you truly belong to Christ—that's why John wrote this letter. Look at chapter 5:13. This knowledge, this assurance of salvation is at the core of why John wrote. He says in verse 13:

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

If you know that as a foundational certainty in your life, then you are going to be able to live the Christian life from a position of strength and a Christian life from a position that leads to and gives you the capacity to enjoy victory in the midst of what would otherwise overwhelm you. Because salvation is supernatural, it overcomes the natural opposition that we face in the world.

Now, John gives his readers several truths, several tests to give them discernment, not only about the nature of their own salvation, but in order to be able to discern true teachers from false teachers. Look at chapter 4:1, he says:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out in to the world.

You have to have a fundamental understanding of the doctrines of Christianity in order to be able to discern true from false teachers. If you are weak in those areas, you are going to be susceptible to blows from the enemy. John writes this letter to give strength and give discernment that distinguishes true from false teachers and also gives you the capacity to evaluate the condition of your own spiritual life.

What I want to do today is to give you five questions to ask yourself about the condition of your own soul, about what you believe and the direction that your life is going. Let me use these five questions to review what we said in the past rather quickly and then also pivot in to new material for this morning. And as we do this, we are going to see the themes of this letter unfolded to us in very clear way I trust.

First question that you need to ask yourself as you look at your own life, as you measure the quality of your spiritual life and if you are questioning and wondering if whether you are even in the faith, these are the places to go.

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1. Do You Fear God?

It is absolutely essential to start your thinking with the character and nature of God. If you start at any other place, you are going to go astray, but when you start with the character of God and your response to Him, you are on the right track. Do you fear God? Why would I say it like that? Look at 1 John 1:5-6. After his introductory statement that asserted his apostolic qualifications to write this letter, John starts this letter with this fundamental assertion about the character of God. This is the cornerstone that aligns everything else in his letter, he says:

This is the message that we have heard from Him and announce to you....

This is the core of what we teach, he says, this is the fundamental starting point, this is the message that we are announcing to you:

...that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.

He is saying that God is positively true, He is positively holy, He is absolutely opposed to deception and sin. He is full of glory and there is no spec of unrighteousness anywhere within the realm of His being. And He does not allow sinners in to His presence. Look at verse 6, he says:

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

Proverbs 1:7 says:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

A proper self-assessment of whether you belong to God or not is to ask yourself whether you fear Him, whether you understand His holiness and recognize that His holiness is a threat to your spiritual well-being. Because you, being a sinner, are not fit for His presence in your own righteousness—that is the starting point of the true knowledge of God. True Christianity starts with a true understanding of the nature of God—not about what you do, not about what you have or haven't done, it starts with this cornerstone reality of the holiness of God and recognizing that you are not fit for His presence in and of yourself—that's the starting point. Because when you understand that He is holy, that He is a God of wrath, a God who has indignation every day as Psalm 7 says, it should bring you to fear Him.

Why should you fear Him? Fear is a necessary consequence of the second question. (Again this is all review and that's why I'm doing it so quickly.) But do you fear God? Do you recognize Him for the high and lofty one that He is? If you do, you will understand that He is one to be feared. Now secondly, do you fear God? Another words, do you recognize His holiness? Are you in awe of His greatness? Secondly:

2. Do You Confess that You are a Sinner?

A proper respect for the holiness of God will expose your sin to your understanding and to your consciousness. As you see the high and lofty holiness and purity of God and you look to yourself, you see your sin and how you have fallen short by comparison—that's the way it works. You see the holiness of God and you say "Woe is me for I am ruined, for I am a man of unclean lips" as prophet Isaiah said in Isaiah 6. Unless you recognize your sin, unless you confess that you are a sinner, you are not a Christian at all, you are still lost and headed for eternal judgment. Look at verses 8-10 with me on this point and notice how clear John is on this point. He says:

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

Here is the significance of that for you today beloved. True Christians know and understand that freely confessed without qualification, that they have broken God's law as He has revealed it in the scriptures, they realize that the ten commandments found in Exodus 20 and other parts of the scripture condemn them because even if they have not violated the outward requirements of that law, they have violated it in their hearts. Jesus talks about how a lustful look is the same as the physical act of adultery, how an angry spirit is equivalent to murder in the eyes of God. That's because God as verse 16 or 17 says, God looks on the heart, He doesn't look on things as man does. He doesn't look at the outer appearance as man does, He looks on your heart. Under the standards of the law of God, your heart stands condemned no matter how outwardly moral you have been.

A true Christian starts with that understanding and that self-assessment. A true Christian looks at the holiness of God, looks at the perfection of the law of God and says "Oh, I fall short, I have broken His law in my inward attitudes if not in my external conduct." And most of us know something about breaking it in external conduct as well. And the starting point of the true knowledge of God is a settled understanding and confession and recognition that you and I have broken His law and in our own merits deserve eternal damnation in hell.

But a point of clarification and emphasis here. We are saying more than you making a statement that "I don't deserve to go to heaven," that's one level of understanding. But the truth of the matter is and the truth of the depth of a true confession of sin says, "Not only do I not deserve to go to heaven, I deserve eternal damnation in hell because of my guilt before God." It's easy, it's a cheap throw-away to say, "Yeah, you know, maybe I don't deserve to go to heaven." It's a lot harder to get people to say positively, "I deserve damnation." But that is what it means to confess sin at the depth that John is talking about here.

No one who thinks that the good outweighs the bad in their lives is a Christian. No one who thinks that they lived a good enough life to go to heaven is going to heaven—it's just exactly the opposite. It is only those people who realize and freely confess from the depths of their heart

that they are sinners who could possibly be saved. As long as you are clinging to your own sense of self-righteousness, either in good things that you think you have done or as was in case of my own life, bad things that I thought I hadn't done, as long as you are clinging to that and saying there is something good and righteous about me in myself, you cannot go to heaven. Jesus made that very clear when He said:

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. (Luke 5:32)

That's the significance of what Jesus said in the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:3 when He said:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who have declared spiritual bankruptcy and say, "I am bankrupt spiritually, there is nothing good in me. I agree with the apostle Paul when he says":

There is none who have done good, no, there is not one, there is none who seek after God.

"That blanket condemnation of all men applies to me."

There are none who understand, none who seek God, all have turned aside, together they have become useless. There is none who does good, there is not even one.

When you come to a true confession of sin, you are simply lining yourself up with the clear testimony of scripture about the universal depravity of man. And you say, the scripture teaches that in general and applies to me in particular.

I was having a conversation with someone recently (this is just kind of a side point) that whenever you take the elements of communion, that is what you are saying, you are saying "I have no righteousness of my own, I partake of this communion as a symbol of the recognition that I am a sinner in need of redemption." There are no short cuts around this, the only path to true Christianity is the one that crucifies forever your spiritual pride that says I have no merit before God of my own at all. And when we state the things that clearly, that helps divide and separate the sheep from the goats. The true Christian says, "Yes, of course, that is true. I stand before Him and say, that's absolutely true of me." The one who is treasuring some sense internally that he has got a righteousness of his own bucks against that and says, "Let's not go that far, let's not get crazy about that, let's not get carried away." No, it's black and white, you are a sinner in need of redemption whether you realize it or not—that's what it means to confess that you are a sinner.

Getting back to our text that is before us here in 1 John, let's look at verse 8 again, he says:

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

It is utterly convicting, true Christian says, guilty as charged and throws himself on the mercy of the court as it were.

This leads us in to our third point here this morning. I've been going through this quickly intentionally, deliberately because we have covered this text in the past. Do you fear God? As a result, do you confess that you are a sinner?

3. Do You Trust Christ Alone for Salvation?

Listen, this is absolutely essential in light of the text that we are going to go to in chapter 2:3-4 and some other verses afterwards. It is absolutely essential that you realize that when you examine yourself to see whether you are a Christian or not, you not only examine the obedience of your life which we are going to see in a little bit, but understand that you have to start with the promises of the gospel. You start with the promises of the gospel and ask yourself, "Do I believe that? Have I received Christ and am I resting in Christ alone to merit my access before God?"—as John 1:12 says:

As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God.

You cannot bypass this point because it is not just about examining what comes out of your life, it is what you are resting and reposing your hope in. And the apostle John emphasizes this repeatedly before we get to chapter 2:3. The true Christian trusts in the righteousness and shed blood of Jesus Christ as the exclusive grounds of his acceptance with God. He understands that only Christ can save him from his sin, there is nothing he can contribute to change his filthy status before God. And he recognizes Christ and he trusts Christ exclusively for redemption. And John has talked about this repeatedly in the first two verses of chapter 2. Look at chapter 1:7, the end of verse 7:

The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

The blood cleanses us, we don't cleanse ourselves by our own efforts—we can't. We don't have that capacity, it is not our prerogative to forgive our own sins and we cannot work our way out of our own sins because our righteousness is like filthy rags as Isaiah 59:2 says. We must have the blood of Jesus His Son to cleanse us from all sin.

A mature Christian says, "I'm trusting in that, I'm trusting the blood of Christ not my own merit to have God forgive me for sin." Look at verse 9:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Notice, in this verse you are looking outside of yourself for the forgiveness of your sins. You are confessing your sins and looking to God through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ to be the one who cleanses you and forgives you from sin. You are looking outside of yourself, you are not protesting your own innocence. You are not blaming someone else, you are not trying to excuse

your sins. You accept the guilt of it and you appeal to Christ alone for forgiveness. That's what we mean when we are saying you trust in Christ alone for salvation. Now, notice this, in the middle of chapter 2:1 he says:

If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous and He, Himself is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

Again, you are looking to the righteousness of Christ, you are looking to His work on the cross, that is what turns away the wrath of God from your sins. You are trusting in someone outside of you, someone who is perfectly righteous, someone who paid the penalty for sin with His death on the cross, you are looking to Christ alone.

As you examine yourself beloved and ask yourself, "Am I truly in the faith or not?" you start there when you recognize that you are a sinner and you ask yourself, "Where am I reposing my hope for salvation? Do I understand that Christ died on the cross in my place as my substitute in order to take the wrath of God that's should have fallen on me? Do I understand that His righteousness is what God gives to those who believe in Christ and that righteousness of Christ counts as this standing before God that you need to have access to God?" Where is your trust? Are you trusting in Christ?

The true Christian understands that he or she has irretrievably broken God's law and yet, the divine and yet, Jesus Christ has fully met the requirements of God's law on your behalf, on behalf of everyone who believes in Him that His righteousness, Jesus Christ the righteous (chapter 2:1) His righteousness is credited to your account and His death satisfies the wrath of God against you. Do you trust Christ like that? That's the mark of the true believer. If God is to accept you, it will only be because the merits of Christ have been credited to your account—that justifies sinners.

And as you are examining yourself as 2 Corinthians 13:5 says "Test yourselves to see whether you are in the faith" must integrate the promises of the gospel in your assessment. Are you trusting Christ alone for your salvation? If you can answer yes to that question, there are crowns for great assurance in your heart even though you are conscious of the ways that you still fall short.

Now, as we turn the corner for new material, I want you to see something very important. Understand that this total gift of salvation that God gives to those who believe in Christ does more than simply change your legal status before God, it is more than a book keeping entry, it is a true forgiveness of guilt that takes you from guilty to righteous. But understand this most significant point that is the cornerstone for the last two questions we are going to look at. At the moment of your conversion, God also gives you a new nature. He gives you His Holy Spirit to abide in you and as a result, you are no longer dead to the things of God, you are no longer dead to the word of God as if it were some irrelevant extraneous book from 2000 years ago. Suddenly the word of God becomes alive to you, suddenly you are no longer dead to the realities of sin and righteousness, but you are awakened and alive to them and you want to pursue them. You find

yourself spiritually alive in Christ. You have been born again in to God's family. John talks about this repeatedly in this letter. I just want to show you few of the verses here because it undergirds these final two questions that we are going to look at this morning. 1 John 2:20 for example is contrasting his true readers with those false teachers who left the fellowship, he says:

(Verse 19) They went out from us, but they were not really of us, for if they have been of us, they would remain with us, but they went out so that it would be shown that they all were not of us.

(by contrast, verse 20) But you have an anointing from the Holy One and you all know.

You have the Holy Spirit, he says. Chapter 3:1-2, he says:

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called children of God and we are. Beloved, now we are children of God and it has not appeared as yet what we will be.

He is saying, you have been born in to the family of God, you have new life, new spiritual life that distinguishes you, that has changed you from what you used to be in to something new. God has done a work in your heart that has changed you. Chapter 3:9:

No one who is born of God practices sin because His seed abides in him and he cannot sin because he is born of God.

You have been born in to God's family. Look at chapter 3:24:

The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him and he in Him. (God abides in the true believer) We know by this that He abides in us by the Spirit whom He has given to us.

Chapter 4:18:

By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us because He has given us of His Spirit.

Now, stay with me here. These verses and others like them in 1 John, to say nothing of the rest of the New Testament, reflect the theological reality of regeneration. Regeneration is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in which God imparts new divine life to you at your conversion. While it is an inner, invisible change, it will inevitably manifest itself in visibly righteous attitude and good works in your subsequent life. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says:

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. The old things passed away, behold, new things have come.

This spiritual change, this new life that God plants in you at conversion guaranties that your life will change because God has made you in to someone new. And as someone new, you reflect

the life of the one who gave it to you. God gave you new life, in some manner your life starts to change—that's the idea.

Regeneration is a topic that deserves a study all on its own and perhaps at some point in the future study of 1 John I'll do that. I've done some work on that that would be easy to incorporate. But for now I simply want to call it to your mind because that theme that John expresses later in his letter undergirds the necessity of these final two questions, of the change these final two questions point us to as it leads us in to the passage that new material for today.

4. Do You Keep God's Commands?

True salvation has an ethical impact on you. True salvation changes your life. And we say that dogmatically and without exception because true salvation means that you have been regenerated. God has given you a new life and as a result your life starts to reflect that and that's what John is pointing to in chapter 2:3-4. Look at verse 3 with me, he says:

By this we know that we have come to know Him if we keep His commandments.

The one who says, "I've come to know Him, I've come to have fellowship with Him, I've come to share life with Him" and does not keep His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him.

Now, based on what we have said so far (follow me closely here) based on what we have said so far, it is obvious and indisputable that John is not telling us to obey God's commandments in order to receive salvation—we have already disposed of that. He has already said in the first chapter that we are sinners in need of forgiveness by the blood of Christ. And so he is not telling you to obey God in order to get salvation. He is not telling you to obey God in order to keep your salvation. Look at what he says in verse 3:

This is the way that we know that we have come to know Him.

This is the way to know that we have been born in to the family of God, this is how you can know that you have already become a Christian. True salvation brings a Christian to love God's law, to love it, to embrace it, to recognize it as good and desirable and to pursue it because of the reality of regeneration. God gave you a new heart if you are a Christian that loves His word, that loves His law and wants to obey it.

Talking in the realm of heart's desire, without that heart desire, without that love for the word of God, without that desire to reflect the character of the one you say saved you, the person's claim to salvation is exposed as false.

Now, let's consider these words in a little more detail here. When John says "If we keep His commandments" at the end of verse 3, he is emphasizing someone's characteristic practice, the pater of the life if you will. A true Christian is oriented toward obedience to God, his heart bent is toward obedience. And this is talking about more than your external conduct, it is describing your heart affections that want to obey and in some manner, a life that reflects actual obedience

to God. John is not talking about achieving spiritual perfection. You don't have to attain sinlessness before you receive assurance from this, otherwise none of us would get that. John has already said in chapter 1 that if you claim to be without sin, you are a liar. So dismiss that false understanding of what he is saying here in chapter 2:3-4. He is not suddenly contradicting what he had just said in chapter 1 with these verses.

But what he is insisting upon and what you must understand that is inherent in a saving response to Jesus Christ is a heart commitment to obey Him, a heart commitment that submits to Him as Lord and is committed to following Him no matter what kind of imperfections you might manifest along the way. Your heart is inclined toward God's word even though perfection is absent. And that we need to let sink deeply in to our hearts even if it means that we have to look at family members who made a profession of faith when they were 10 but never lived a moment of their life as if that were some kind of reality in their life. You have to let go of that and instead of claiming the fact that "they made a profession back then, I'm sure he is saved even though he is working on his 18th marriage now." I mean, come on... A profession of faith that does not produce a changed life is a false profession—it's not real, it's false, it's not true, that person is still in their sins. Someone that claims to be a Christian is going to have a life that somehow reflects obedience to God as he has expressed it in his word.

A true Christian is oriented toward humility and toward obedience to Christ. Jesus Himself left no room for misunderstanding on this point. Matthew 7:21, He said:

Not everyone who says to me "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven...

So let's get that straight in our minds, we have to think more deeply than what we say. We have to look more deeply than what someone says with their lips. What does their life say about their testimony to Christ.

Not everyone who says to me "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he, who does the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter.

An unbroken pattern of sin, an unbroken pattern of disregard and indifference and outward disobedience to Christ is the evidence of someone who has never been born again. The nature of regeneration guaranties that life will change. And if you were saved in an early age where there was not that much of the big black and white difference to be described, the nature of regeneration in your life will be reflected in a pattern of growing love and obedience to God even if you can't contrast it with wickedness from your prior seven years of life before you came to Christ or whatever.

John is talking about a life that produces a pattern of obedience to Christ. Look at what he says in verse 5:

But whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him, the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. (referring to Christ)

The characteristics of humility that Christ manifested on earth (we talked about that last week from Philippians 2) The characteristics of obedience to the Father, unconditional, unqualified obedience to the father that marked Jesus will mark His true followers as well. That lifestyle marks a man or a woman who has received new life from God. Think about it this way, your life, your earthly life starts to resemble the life of the one who gave it to you. If you have been born of God, you are going to reflect some manner of the spiritual characteristics of God in your life and those will flourish and grow more as you are under the true teaching of God's word and understand what that is like. Just as a biological child reflects the traits of his biological parents, a spiritual child reflects the characteristics of his heavenly Father who gave that life to him.

Now, important question here. Does this mean that if you have an ongoing struggle with sin, that you are not a Christian? If you have a particularly besetting sin that you wrestle against? No, that's not what we are saying, that was the point of 1 John 1. We go back to that again and again because we are so easily distracted and so easily forget—verse 7:

The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

(verse 9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive our sins.

Chapter 2:1:

If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins.

As you are evaluating your life, as you are examining this question of “Do you keep the commandments of God?” The idea is not to go straight to the one sin that you struggle with and focus on that and say, “Well, if that's true, then I can't be a Christian.” That's not the point here, you put it in the whole context of everything else that we have been talking about. Do you fear God? Do you confess that you are a sinner? Are you trusting in Christ alone for your salvation? Are there other areas of your life for that kind of love for God and obedience to Him is reflected? Put your besetting sin in that broader context and answer the question. The idea is not that one kind of sin would cause you to question the reality of your salvation. That's the point of Romans 7 with Paul's experience:

The good that I wish, I don't do, but I want the good, but I do the evil.

We wrestle against sinful thoughts, sinful desires, sinful habits. What John is saying here (follow me) in verses 3-6 is that the true Christian is pursuing Christlikeness even when he falls short. The heart foundation of a true Christian is “Oh, how I want to obey.”

I was talking to somebody a couple of weeks ago when I preached someplace else. And he was pouring his heart out about a particular sin that he was wrestling with. I asked him, I said look, here's the way to measure it. Would you get rid of that sin if you could? He said, “Yes, oh I would love to be rid of this. I would love to be rid of desire for this. I would love to be perfectly obedient in this area.” I said that's the heart of the true believer. It is not denying the reality of

the struggle with sin, but left to your own devices, left to your own choices as Paul says I want the good, it's just my wretchedness that indicates that I still fall short.

The one who cherishes sin and doesn't confess it and doesn't receive rebuke about it and persists in it and indifferent to any pangs of consciousness, that's the one that John is undermining the assurance of here, that's the one who doesn't keep the commandments, that's the one who is a liar. The one who confesses sin and is trusting Christ, who knows something of victory and yet something in the struggle, that's the one who John says:

If you keep His commandments, you know that you have come to know Him.

The reflection of your deepest heart desires and an overall pattern of life that he is pointing to.

5. Do You Love Christians?

Do you enjoy the fellowship of other believers? Do you love and serve them? John is going to transition out of his discussion of obedience in verses 3-6 and now talk about Christian love in the next few verses. Salvation has an ethical impact on you—verses 3-6 an ethical implication for your obedience to God and His commands. Now John is saying it has a social impact upon you as well. Look at verses 7-9, he says:

Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you have heard. On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you which is true in Him and in you because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

John, what's this commandment stuff you're talking about? He says, verses 9-10:

The one who says that he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother by contrast abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

Notice how verses 9 and 10 talk about abiding in the light, being in the light and how that ties directly to what we said was the cornerstone verse of his whole argument in chapter 1:5:

God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.

God loves His children. God loves His spiritual children that Christ died to redeem. The true Christian is going to reflect the love and desires of his Father by loving those whom He has likewise saved—that's the idea.

It is an old commandment in the sense that the Old Testament pointed to the same principle. Leviticus 19:18 says:

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

The commandment is new in the sense that John is talking about because the incarnation of Christ which was a recent historical reality some 50 or 60 years earlier from the time he was writing, but still new enough and fresh enough that the apostolic community was still on earth. Christ had given a new manifestation of love with His life, with His death and in the lives of the believers that John was writing to, their new situations called for a fresh application of the commandment. So there was this abiding eternal principle of loving your neighbor and he says Christ has manifested this more newly than anyone could imagine. We see love incarnate on the cross as it were (1 John 4:10) and now in your life, the commandment is new because you have new situations to respond to.

What he is saying here is that someone may claim to be in the light, but their lack of love for other believers contradicts the claim. That person (verse 9) that one who hates his brother, that one who is antagonistic toward Christians is in the darkness and had never seen the light of the gospel despite their claim to the contrary. Look at verse 10 again:

The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

The word “brother” is referring to another Christian. Listen, someone who claims to be a Christian, if they are truly a Christian, they will naturally love other Christians, they will be drawn to other Christians as a nature of true spiritual life because they are drawn to those who have like affections as themselves. When you are with humble believers who are talking about their love for Christ, their desire to reach out with the gospel of Christ, those sweet believers who are trusting Christ in the midst of adversity and loss and setback, your heart is naturally drawn to them and say, “Oh, I love the affections of their heart. I wish that was manifested more in my life. I want to help and encourage that kind of life.” That is the mark of the true Christian. And someone who truly loves Christians is proving the reality of his own spiritual life. That love is expressed in practical ways in chapter 3:16:

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does love abide in him. Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

These are weighty issues. If you find yourself convicted as you ask these five questions, fear of God, confession of sins, trusting Christ alone, pattern of obedience to God, love for other believers, you find yourself convicted and saying, “That’s not true of me.” Don’t double down on your assertion of being a Christian. Take that conviction as a gift from God that is exposing your mind and opening your eyes to the fact that you are not truly saved. God may just be shown mercy on you in this hour to bring you out of that self-deception and in to true salvation. Come to Christ, He won’t turn you away. He will forgive all of that deception that you have been perpetrating and all of your hypocrisy. You come to Him in humble, repentant faith and say, “Lord, I want to follow you, I believe in you and I trust in you and I give my life to you.”

At the same time, (and we will talk about this more next week) speaking to a large group of wonderful group of believers in Christ, understand that John wrote to encourage true believers. If you have been struggling with assurance in your life, come back to these foundational issues, start with the holiness of God in a profound confession of your sin and renew your trust in the all sufficient work of Christ—go back to the gospel beloved. Go back and remember what true Christianity is about, it is about the forgiveness of sin, offer to sinners in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and renew your trust in Him all over again—trust Him to do what He said He would do. Trust Him to cleanse you from sin and rest in Him and say, “Yes, Christ is enough.”

Perhaps you do need to examine your life. You have been struggling with assurance, well, ask yourself whether you have been tolerating sin and letting sin reign in your heart when you know better—that will undermine assurance. Don’t complain about a lack of joy until you repent and turn away and start bringing forth righteous fruit in your life.

And if you have been forsaking the fellowship of other believers, come back, they would be glad to have you. Come back and start ministering to others with the time and talent and resources that God has given to you. As you respond to God’s word in that way my friends, as you respond to these things with your heart trust and your outward response, you will be showing forth afresh the reality of your salvation. And once again, you will start to walk with joy in the midst of a hostile world. That’s why God gave us this book, why don’t you enjoy the fruit of it this week? Let’s pray.

Our Lord Jesus, we thank you for your life and death and resurrection and ascension on high that secured the spiritual realities of all of these truths for us. We thank you for the gift of salvation which you have sovereignly bestowed upon us as you drew us to yourself and gave us new life. And now, sustained that life through so many different means. WE honor you and thank you for our salvation and we pray that you would help us answer with a ringing yes these questions that arise so easily and so naturally from your word.

And those who don’t know you, convict them in order that you might lead them to a saving knowledge of yourself. Father, open the eyes of the self-deceived that are in this room, the self-deceived that have been passive and indifferent and arrogant toward the demands of your word on their lives. Father, open their eyes, convict them with a holy fear of yourself that they might flee to Christ, truly turn to Him and then bring forth fruit that is in keeping with repentance.

We love you, we thank you that we can truly know with certainty that we belong to you and we walk in that assurance as we leave now. Those of us who know Christ, we trust you, we love you and we will obey your word. In Jesus’ name, Amen.