

FBCO Authentic Christianity #6

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: 1 John 2:12-14
Preached On: Sunday, September 11, 2016

Crossroads Ministries
301 S. 8th Street
Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

This morning I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of 1 John 2. As you're turning to 1 John 2, you may be a guest or visitor with us this morning and I want to welcome you as we're continuing a message series through the book of 1 John addressing a very simple but important subject matter: authentic Christianity. What does real life authentic Christianity, not only what does it believe, what does it look like, how does it sound, what is it supposed to be about, and today we continue on that journey of hopefully recapturing what was initiated 2,000 years ago with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. What is authentic Christianity to look like in our lives.

But today in 1 John 2, we're going to find ourselves in three very simple verses, verses 12 through 14, and this is a very strategic place in chapter 2 of the book of 1 John for if you just allowed this chapter of the Bible to naturally divide itself, it divides itself into seven very simple sections. The first one we dealt with a couple of weeks ago in verses 1 and 2 where it says that Jesus Christ is our Advocate. He is the propitiation for our sins, the one who took the punishment thereof, not just for ours but for the entire world. Then it begins in verse 3 talking about the importance that our actions match our words and we dealt with the subject matter of hypocrisy. Then it addresses brotherly love. We deal with this last week, that we're to live a selfless life and not a selfish life. Next week we're going to come back in verse 15 through 17 where it says: love not the world, neither the things of the world because the love of the world has nothing to do with our relationship with the Father. Then beginning in verse 18, it uses a word that's not used in any other passage in the Bible, the word is the antichrist or antichrists plural. We're going to talk about those who departed from because they were never a part of. Then chapter 2 concludes with the second coming and how we're to live in expectation for the return of Jesus Christ.

You may be wondering why did I cover those entire seven sections in just a few moments? Because today we find ourselves in the middle section, right in the middle of this great passage of Scripture, and it's going to deal with a subject matter that we desperately need to pay attention to because nobody, nobody can walk away today and say, "That had nothing to do with me." Why? Because everything that happens in these three verses defines and describes who we are in our relationship to the Lord.

There is a question that I want to ask you today. It's a very simple question: where are you? You say, "Why is that the question that you're asking?" Because that's the question

that the Lord asked humanity in Genesis 3:9. Let me take you back to that event. Humanity ate of the forbidden fruit. We believed the deception of the devil versus the truth of God. And in that moment when they ate thereof and the Bible says they realized that they were exposed, they realized that they were naked, they did their best, they covered themselves with fig leaves but in verse 9 of Genesis 3, the Lord asked this question to Adam particularly but to him and Eve, he said, "Where are you?"

Now, I am firmly convinced that the Lord knew exactly the latitude and longitude of where Adam and Eve were that day. I'm convinced of that. The reason he asked the question is he knew where they were, he wanted them to admit where they are, and once they admitted where they were in relationship to him, then back in verse 21, he was able to provide a covering and clothes for them. Why is that so critical for us to understand? Because just in a few moments we're going to see the Bible describes us as believers as either little children, young men or fathers, and we need to ask the question: where are we? But more importantly, not only where we are honestly in our relationship to the Lord but where does God desire for us to be because wherever you are today, he desires for you to be walking closer with him tomorrow and what we're going to see is not only where we are but where we need to be.

Now, before we read these three verses, let me give some qualifications here. We're about to use terminology the Bible uses it, of human development in comparison to our spiritual development. Little children, young men, fathers, the progression of human growth. Do not fall into the trap of thinking that your physical development is necessarily a mirror of your spiritual development. In other words, you can be 17 and be mature in your faith, you can be 70 and not be so much so. So just because you are of a physical age or stature does not necessitate where your spiritual depth lies.

The other thing I want to make very clear is in just a moment we're going to deal with what I've called three stages: the young children, the young men, or little children, young men and then the fathers or adults. Do not look at this in terms of high school football, okay? We're not talking freshman, JV and varsity here, alright? It's real easy to say, "Well, that means I'm on the varsity. I'm so much better than the freshman squad over here." Understand what the difference is, as we'll see in just a moment, is one who I'm going to label as a stage III, a father in the faith. They are not absent from the first two stages but they continue and take them with them. You would never have a young man starting on the varsity football team who also plays for the JV and the freshman at the same time because in that world you progress and you move and leave something behind. In the spiritual world, when we progress in our faith with the Lord, we don't abandon the first principles, we take them with us as the Lord grows us.

So with all that being said, 1 John 2, beginning in verse 12. It says,

12 I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. 13 I write unto you, fathers, because you have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because you

have known the Father. 14 I have written unto you, fathers, because you have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.

Now you understand the reasons for this very long introduction today because in these three verses he describes these three stages of faith: as a little child, a young man, and a father, which has everything to do with what we've been studying and a lot to do with what we're about to begin to study.

So what I want to do today is ask a very simple question: where are you? In a few moments as we begin to go through these three stages, you're going to have the opportunity to say, "Pastor, you're right. That's who I am. That describes who I am." The great news is no matter where you land today, just like Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, the Lord wants to take you further tomorrow. And as we discuss this, I want to look at past, future and present. In other words, whatever stage you're in, what does your past look like? What does your future look like? And what does your today or present look like?

So let's begin with little children. He says, "I have written unto you, little children, your sins are forgiven for his name's sake." If you're here today and you say, "You know, I'm a baby Christian. I'm a brand new believer in Jesus Christ. I'm just learning how to make this walk of faith with Jesus." According to 1 John 2, you are a little child. This is exactly what Jesus was trying to describe to Nicodemus in John 3. This is your past. Remember Nicodemus, this ruler or this theologian comes to Jesus, can't comprehend the teachings that he is communicating, and Jesus says, "You must be born again." To which Nicodemus says, "How can I, a grown man, return to my mother's womb?" And Jesus communicated something we need to grasp today: it doesn't matter what age you are physically when you get saved, the day you get saved you're a newborn baby spiritually. It doesn't matter if you're 7 or 70, at that point, if two people get saved at the same day, the same time, one is 70 and one is 7, they are the same age spiritually at that moment. Your sins have been forgiven. In other words, that relationship is initiated, it starts when one understands they are a sinner, that Jesus is the only one who can save them, and they've done what Romans 10:13 says, they've called on the name of the Lord and he will and shall save them.

Now, why does it say so emphatically your sins have been forgiven? Because I believe the one thing the devil wants to do to new believers is get them to question what really happened. "Have you really really been forgiven or do you just think you've been forgiven?" Let me give you some advice that somebody gave me years ago: if the devil reminds you of your past, you need to remind him of his future. Now think about that for just a moment because what happens is when we are new in our faith, we struggle because at that point physically we've lived less time forgiven than condemned; we've lived less time saved than lost. But he wants you to know your past, your sins have been forgiven.

So what about the future? Someone who is new in the faith, new to the faith, just started this walk with Jesus, just got saved, what is your future? Well, notice it says you have known the Father. Well, in the physical parallel, every physical parent has the greatest of dreams for their children and there is a statement that my wife makes all the time, in fact, ladies, she's going to make it tomorrow at the presentation she's doing, she'll make this simple statement: believe it or not, God loves your children more than even you do. He does, and when it says that they've known the Father, what it is communicating there is God desires great things for your life even more than we do as physical parents for our own children.

Now, think about this, Jeremiah 29:11, we all know the verse, "For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans not to harm but to prosper." How about Ephesians 3:20, it says, "unto him," this is speaking of God, "who is able to do exceedingly abundantly more than we could ever think or ask according to the Spirit that is within us." Hear me clearly: what that is communicating as a new believer in Jesus Christ, no matter what the devil says about your past, God has something great for your future if you will allow him to be exactly what it says here when it says, "your past is forgiven, you know the Father." And your future as a new believer is dependent on how you handle the present. Here's what I mean: as a new baby, your feeding, your clothing, your bathing and all sanitation, is lead or left to somebody else facilitating it in your life if you're new in the faith, if you're a newborn believer in Jesus Christ, no matter how long that has been chronologically.

But you say, "Do you know what? I'm just a baby Christian." Do you know what you are? You're absolutely completely dependent on somebody else spiritually feeding you. Allow me to illustrate. This is a hypothetical, this is a pretend, do not read into it and do not over-literalize this analogy. Imagine that you take a 2 day old, 2 week old, 2 month old, we can take a 2 year old child, place them in the perfect environment, a pantry that's full of food, a refrigerator that's got all the nourishment in the world, beds, baths, soap, sanitation, I mean, everything they want including a brand new baby puppy, I mean, it's everything in the house, they've got it, what would happen to that young child in just a matter of weeks if left to themselves? They would perish. They would die. Why? Because a newborn baby has to have somebody else feed them. A newborn baby has to have somebody else clothe them. A newborn baby has to have somebody else facilitate all of the sanitation in their life.

Let me communicate what this means. If you would say, "Well, that's where I am. I'm a little child. I'm new in my faith." I know I'm preaching to the proverbial choir but listen to me clearly: you need church more than anybody. You need Bible study more than anybody. You need Sunday school more than anybody. You need mentorship more than anybody. Why? Because spiritually speaking you're not completely capable of feeding yourself. You need someone to say, "This is what it means." You need someone to say, "This is the outcome here." You need someone to feed and to walk alongside and the last time I checked, all babies do one thing real well: make messes and big stinky ones, at that. If you're a new believer in Jesus Christ, I've got news for you, you're going to mess up a lot. You're going to make bad decisions. You're going to turn the wrong direction.

You're going to listen to the deception of the devil. And do you know what you need? You need someone to come help clean up the mess and that's what physical parents do for their children. They feed, they nourish and they clean up the messes in their life. You see, oftentimes people stay at that "stage I" Christianity because they're never allowing somebody to feed them and clothe them and pick up the messes and come alongside them. We'll talk about that more in just a moment.

But let's talk about stage II here, it talks about these young men. It says in verse 13, "they have overcome the wicked one." In verse 14 it says, "they are strong and they've overcome the wicked one." So as we use this analogy of human development to spiritual development, think in terms of adolescents, teenagers, young adults in this stage of life. Spiritually speaking if this is where you are, you say, "Pastor, I'm a stage II Christian. I'm not brand new, but really I'm kind of a young adult here. I'm kind of a teenager in my faith." What does that mean about your past? Well, it says you've overcome the wicked one. It doesn't mean you're perfect, it doesn't mean you make every right decision, but this stage is best described when you look back over the last couple of months, last couple of years, whatever it may be, and you say, "Do you know what? More often than not, I desired and chose the things of God for my life." You see, in those early stages, we don't have a clue what we're doing and we mess up everything. It's at this stage of development where we begin to understand that 1 Corinthians 10:13 is right: there is no temptation come to man that God will not give us an out. There is always the opportunity for holiness. There's always the opportunity for righteousness. And it says here they have overcome the evil one. In simple human development terms: they are no longer completely dependent on somebody else feeding and cleaning, they're able to do some things on their own.

So what's the future? If at the end of the day today you say, "This is where I am. I'm one of those young men. I'm one of those adolescents in my faith. I'm not a baby believer. I'm not mature. I'm growing." So what is your future? Well, I like to parallel it to the growth chart. Those of you that have raised children and grandchildren and you've been to a pediatrician at any point in the last couple of years, there is this experience that you have to go through on typically an annual basis whether it's shots for school or some kind of annual physical where they will measure the height and the weight of your children and then they will place a dot on a growth chart and it will tell you where they line up compared to everybody else their age and their gender in this wonderful country of ours. Now, you understand that this is a very important event, at least in my life, every year because I pray, "O Lord, I pray, please put them above the 50% measuring line," because we're not tall people at all, and we want the best for our children, do we not? So I pray, "Please, Lord, let it be above 50% and please don't let the weight be over 100," because we're not thin either, so to speak, and so my family, you know, I come from a long line of Indians. I can say that. If you are one you can say it, by the way, and my family growing up out in west Oklahoma and north Texas, we're about as tall as we are wide so I'm actually the tallest and skinniest and that's something to be proud of.

But nonetheless, we pray for that event. Why? Because we want greater for our kids. Here's the thing about the growth chart: it doesn't matter if the child is 14, 10 or

somewhere in between, it doesn't matter, where they land on that chart at that moment does not determine where they will be in ten years. It doesn't determine it. It just tells you where they are today. What could change, what could affect the future? Imagine, just imagine that this is just a pipe dream in Jeff Meyers' life, okay? Just a pipe dream. Imagine that we go in and my child is 100% height, 75% weight. I mean, I don't know if it could get any better. That would be my pipe dream for my child. And imagine I looked at my child and said, "Congratulations, son, you're as tall as they get for your age. It's going to be nothing but Oreos, cookies and chocolate milk for you the rest of your life." What would happen? It would stunt the growth. It would cause harm to him physically and the parallel here is spiritual.

Young men that have overcome, young men that are strong, when we hit that stage of our spiritual development where we're beginning to come in our own, we're beginning to grow in our faith, how easy it is to get caught up in this syndrome where we say, "Well, I used to do this and I used to do that. I no longer need to because I'm where I need to be." But the future of someone at this stage of their Christian development is that this is the time – listen – this is the time where nutrition is the most important. This is the time where regular habits of sleeping and health and sanitation are critical because if this is not addressed now, then there won't be a future. Human development and spiritual development parallel in so many different ways.

So what about the present? You say, "Do you know what? I'm a stage II Christian. That's who I am. I'm kind of growing. I know I'm not where I need to be but I'm not where I was and I'm making some progress." Let me tell you what your present is: you are strong but you're distracted. Let me tell you what I mean. I am now beginning to understand the reality of having young men and a teenager in my home. I have had to succumb to reality. They are now officially faster than me. They are, but I'm smarter than they are. You see, they can run circles around me, I just know where to stand when the circle comes full circle.

We were discussing this week in staff meeting, Tracy was talking about that they had a group of college students over this week at their house celebrating Labor Day and he said he continued his streak of always winning the volleyball tournament even though he's much older than those young college students. Now, why is that? Because he knows where to stand, how to stand, and how to play and they just run around all over the place. That's exactly what happens at this stage in our Christian life. We're so excited about the things of God, we're so excited about the word of God and we're just literally pouring and pouring on and "Squirrel!" and we're distracted. What happened? You know, I'm getting excited about the things of God and all of a sudden, I mean, our attention is completely...this is the highs and lows.

I've been a teenage boy. I never want to be one again. Oh, God bless everybody. Oh, man. I remember the hormone flux. Man, I'm on the mountain today, I'm in the valley tomorrow. I couldn't imagine teenage girls in the home. God bless all of you that have teenage girls. But I mean, there are days where things are great! And then not so great. Think about that spiritually. You see, this is kind of your stage. Man, things are going

great and all of a sudden one thing happens and boom, it just knocks you off the spiritual cliff. He says you're strong. You've overcome the evil one but we need to realize there is also that struggle of spiritual adolescence.

Then there is the final stage. Interesting, he says, "I write unto you, fathers," and all it says is, "you have known the Lord from the beginning." The least is said to this group than the other two and in the book of 1 John more is said about little children than any other group and the reason is this: when you talk to somebody who is mature in their faith, they've been walking with Jesus, let me tell you what their past is, it doesn't matter how long they've been walking with the Lord, here's the past, are you ready: been there, done that, got the t-shirt. I've seen the highs. I've seen the lows. I've been through the valleys. I've been on the mountaintop. I've been through heartache. I've been through success. I've been through it all and I've learned not to get too excited and not to get too scared. That's exactly the picture we have of those that are mature in their physical lives. The same picture is given for those that are mature in their spiritual lives.

So what is the future for what I call a stage III Christian, someone who is mature in their faith? It's the only word used here of the three that by definition necessitates reproduction. You have little children, you have young men but the term "father" means one who has children under him; one who has reproduced. In other words, if you're here today and you say, "Do you know what? I'm a stage III believer. I mean, I've trusted the Lord years ago. I'm growing. I'm past kind of all the up and down stage spiritually. I've kind of leveled out. I'm just going with the Lord." Then your future means you need to pour into and reproduce with stage I and stage II. That's the definition. You see, the biggest problem that can happen if you're a stage III Christian, if you're here today and you say, "That's who I am," and I hope you are, the worst thing that could happen is you just spend the rest of your life getting fat and happy on the things of God. You see, you can eat but you've got to exercise.

Let me give you the Jeff Meyers guide to exercise and eating. I exercise all the time but let me tell you why: I'm not vain, I'm not into "my appearance," I really like to eat. I mean, I love to eat and I exercise so I can eat more. That's really why I exercise but I understand that if you don't exercise, then you'll get "fat," you'll get lethargic, you'll have health conditions. So therefore spiritually if you do not exercise your faith, if you do not reproduce, if you do not pour into others, guess what happens? So your future is not so much dependent on what you consume of the things of God but what you exercise of the things of God.

So what's the present? It's real simple: you're to model it for others. You're to show them you're going to get through the valleys. You're going to communicate to them the mountains are great but they don't last forever. You're to model. You're to be a part of their lives.

Now, here's probably the most important question today. You see, every one of you knows exactly where you are. Some of you are saying, "Do you know what? I'm a stage I Christian," and that's okay. Some of you are saying, "I'm a stage II. I've got some

struggles but I'm growing." And some of you say, "You know, I'm stage III. I've been there, done that and I've got the spiritual t-shirt and I'm making progress." So how do you go from one to the next? Let me allow two very simple bridges. If you're stage I today, you say, "Do you know what? I may have been a believer for several years but I'm still an infant in my faith. How do you become stage II?" Let me share with you what I believe are the most liberating days in a parent's life. Now, it just kind of happens. You don't expect it. It's hard to plan for. You can't put it on a spreadsheet but there comes that day where you've changed your last diaper and you look at each other and go, 22,000 diapers later. I did count, by the way. 22,000 diapers later, I guesstimated. 22,000 diapers later, we're done. When your children no longer need you for that process, you talk about liberating. But, you know, there was a day that happened in our life, we didn't plan for it but when it happened, I mean, we became full-blown Pentecostal Baptists, I spoke in tongues and she interpreted. Let me tell you what it is: when we realized they can feed and bathe themselves. I heard an old man, "Woo!" And that's exactly what happens, is if you're a stage I believer in Jesus, you allow others to feed you so often and so regularly you get up one day and you can do it yourself. You get up one day and you can read for yourself, you can go through it for yourself. You are capable because it's been done for you so long that you now say, "I can do this myself."

What about from stage II to stage III, from that adolescence to a mature adulthood? Allow me to share a story that happened in our family's life some years ago. My dad has recently retired. He's a pharmacist by trade and he did what most people do when they prepare for retirement, they go to a financial planner because, "Here's what I've got. Is it going to last? How do I need to do all this?" And so those of you that have been through that process, there's just mounds of paperwork you've got to fill out. They filled out all the paperwork, the numbers, they did all the graphs, whatever they asked them to do and then they went in for their consultation. Now, those of you who do not know and if you don't know, I'll consider it a compliment, I am an only child. I have no brothers. I have no sisters. I'm it. I came out and my mom said, "I can't handle any more. That's enough so let's just move on." When my parents went into that consultation, the guy looked through everything and he said, "I have one real important question." They said, "What?" And he said, "Well, what are you giving to your child and grandkids every month?" I wish I had been there because I didn't know that was an option. I mean, seriously, I'm like, "Really?" And he shared with them that the majority of his clients, though their kids may be in their 30s or their 40s, they're still on the proverbial payroll. They're still receiving funds and they're still... Here's what I'm going to share with you: the only way you can go from being "adolescent" to mature physical adult and my wife and I have been through this, there is that time we were early and in our marriage, we're grown up, where the problem arises and instead of calling mom or dad you say, "We've got to work this out." Instead of saying, "Do you know what? I'll get help from them," we're just going to trust the Lord. In other words, you go from stage II to stage III when you take ownership of who you are in the Lord and say, "Alright, God, if I don't have you, I don't need anyone else." You see, it doesn't matter where we are per se today, it's where do we need to be?

I want to close with one final story because it could be very frustrating for some of you. You can be saying, "Do you know what? I've been a believer for 20 years and I still feel

like I'm stage I." Some years ago I had a young man in my life. He was in his early 40s. He got saved. Knew nothing of the things of God. Knew nothing of the Scriptures. I mean, there he was 42, 43 years of age right in front of me but he was one day old spiritually. He said, "Well, Jeff, what do I do to grow in my faith? I don't want to stay where I am. I want to grow." So I gave him some great theological pastoral advice, I said, "You need to read a book called the Bible for Dummies. It's a really good book, by the way." He finished it. He said, "What do I do now?" I said, "How about the New Testament for Dummies, the Old Testament for Dummies, the Gospel for Dummies?" Pretty soon he was reading so much material, he was taking books off my shelf, he was growing and growing and growing. 18 months later when I had to be out of town, he actually taught a Bible study in my stead. How do you go from day one to stage III in 18 months? Because you get real serious about it.

Folks, do not allow one's physical development to necessitate where you are spiritually. You see, there are some folks who will say, "Hey, I'm 60+ years old. I've got this," and spiritually speaking you're still wearing diapers. And then there are some Timothys in the world where he said, "Don't let people discourage you because you're young." Because you may be 18 years old but you know a lot of the things of God and you've been trusting him for things that a lot of adults haven't been. The question today is: where are you?

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Before we have our time of invitation, maybe today you're that person who would say, "Jeff, I'm not any of the stages that you described because I don't know this Jesus. I have no idea of how to even grow because I don't even have a relationship with him." Boy, do I have great news for you today. If you're that person, it doesn't matter if you're 7, you're 70, old or young or somewhere in between, it doesn't matter if you've been in church 1,000 times or you've never been before, if you're that person today who said, "Do you know what? I realize I've got some problems that only Jesus can take care of," I've got fabulous news: all you need to do, all you need to do is have a serious conversation with God. Now technically we call it prayer. You don't have to say anything out loud, you don't have to say the exact words I would say but maybe your conversation with God would go a little something like this, "God, today I just want you to know that I know that you know me better than myself and I just want you to know, God, that I know that I'm the problem and I believe that Jesus is the answer. God, I want you to know that I know I have a sin problem and I believe that only Jesus can take care of it. So, God, today I'm coming, a person who doesn't have a whole lot of answers but I do know that Jesus is the answer to my sin problem and I'm asking you, I'm asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me. I'm asking you to do in my life what you spoke of to Nicodemus. I need to be born again. I need a fresh start. I need to be what the Bible calls a new creation, not because of my own doing or my behavior but on what Jesus has done for me. So, God, today I come and I just want to be honest, I need forgiveness. I need salvation. And God, I want you to know I believe it can only come through the person of Jesus and I just want to turn my life over to you."

With out heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe that's who you are today. Let me encourage you in just a moment just to step out, step forward. We would love to talk

with you but maybe just maybe that's a decision that has already been made in your life and maybe you're sitting here contemplating the things of God and you say, "Do you know what? If I'm going to go to the next stage in life, I need to let people know I'm a believer. I need to be baptized. I need to let the world know I'm identifying with Jesus Christ." Or maybe you've already been baptized, maybe you already identified with him, maybe today the Lord has said, "Do you know what? To go to the next stage, to be at the next level, you need to plug into a local body. You need to be a part of a Sunday school class. You need to be a part of a church." And maybe this is the day you step out and step forward and say, "This is where we want to make our spiritual home." It doesn't matter what the decision is, the important thing is that you make it if he has led you to.

Lord, as we come to this time of invitation, thank you. Thank you, God, that with Adam and Eve and with myself and everybody in between, you are not satisfied with how we came to this campus, but you're more concerned with how we leave this campus. Lord, how grateful I am that you don't want to put us on the shelf, you don't want to say, "That's just good enough," but that you want us to be in a greater, more thriving relationship with you. So God, I pray whatever that looks like today at our invitation, may our feet just simply follow how you've spoken to our heart. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads us in our time of decision. Whatever decision, you come.