

Prove It

1 John 2:1-11

Introduction

Context: John is writing to these churches so that they will **know God**. Because of **false teaching**, they don't know God, and it shows up in **division** among them. The solution to our separation from God and others is to admit our sin so he can heal us (e.g., **walk in the light**).

Identity: Who are you? God did not design us for sin; he designed us as image bearers to live in an unbroken relationship with him in his perfect creation.

- God didn't create you a sinner. Sin is a corruption or perversion of his good design. Sin poisoned God's perfect creation, introducing sickness, injustice, and death. Worst of all, sin separated us from God and one another.
- *But* sin is a reality in which we all find ourselves in this broken world. If we deny the problem, we'll never experience the solution (e.g., out-of-tune guitar; good by design, broken by direction).
 - The truth of the gospel allows us to *admit* we are broken and align ourselves with God.¹

If you know Jesus, your life should look like Jesus.² That means we live like Jesus in obedience to what he commands and love like Jesus in the community of faith.

- (1) Run to Jesus When You Sin (vv. 1-2)
- (2) Walk Like Jesus If You Know Him (vv. 3-6)
- (3) Love Like Jesus in the Light (vv. 7-11)

¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. ³ And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. ⁴ Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, ⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. ⁷ Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. ⁸ At the same time, it is a

¹ You ever taken one of those personality tests online? You answer a few questions, "Do you like parties or books?" "Would you rather be a dolphin or a dragon?" "Would you rather fight one horse-sized duck or a hundred duck-sized horses?" "If you could be one type of bread, why would it be sourdough?" And suddenly it tells you who you really are: an introvert, an extrovert, a Gryffindor, a Golden Retriever, or a spicy chicken sandwich. These tests have consistently proven to be false because they don't tell you who you are but who you wish you were. They are aspirational not actual; wishful thinking, not honest reflection. Isn't this true with our faith so often? We say we believe, but if you look at your actual life, does it match what you say? Does that sound harsh? It's actually grace. Because the last thing God wants is for you to pretend to know him if you don't. I am not interested in you looking the part of a Christian; I'm interested in you being a Christian. I don't want you to simply know about the gospel; I want it to transform every part of your life. I want it to work in your soul.

² I.e., "Walk in the same way in which he walked" (1 Jn 2:6).

new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. ⁹ Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. ¹¹ But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.³

1. Run to Jesus When You Sin (vv. 1-2)

¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Affection: ¹ My little children, John loves this church as children in the faith. Everything he says is *for their good*, not their harm (e.g., pastors should see their flock as children in the faith; youth pastor problem). There is a loving, caring, intimate tone to his letter. **He desires their best** (e.g., bedtime kids for their good).

Purpose: I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. Everything he says about **God** and **sin** is to motivate them not to sin.

- “Sin is saying no to God and doing what I want instead of what I want.” Sin harms. “Sin takes you further than you want to go, keeps you longer than you want to stay, and costs you more than you want to pay.”
- The consequences of sin destroy us (e.g., the doctor looks at bloodwork, tells you to eat differently, won’t arrest you, and lock you up. But if you don’t change, your health will deteriorate, your body will break down, and your heart will attack you).
 - When God says to not be **unequally yoked** with unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14) and you ignore his warning, you bring all sorts of difficulty and danger into your life. And when things go badly (and they will), don’t blame God; blame your sin.
 - When Jesus says seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matt 6:33), and you seek your own kingdom first, putting your work, hobbies, and personal comfort ahead of God, and it leads to spiritual and relational problems, don’t blame God.
 - He could smite you, and sometimes he might, but he can also give you over to your sin, and your world can fall into despair and disintegration.

³ ¹ Τεκνία μου, ταῦτα γράφω ὑμῖν ἵνα μὴ ἀμάρτητε. καὶ ἐάν τις ἀμάρτη, παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον· ² καὶ αὐτὸς ἱλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, οὐ περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου. ³ Καὶ ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκουμεν ὅτι ἐγνώκαμεν αὐτόν, ἐὰν τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ τηρῶμεν. ⁴ ὁ λέγων ὅτι “Ἐγνώκα αὐτόν καὶ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ μὴ τηρῶν, ψεύστης ἐστὶν καὶ ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀλήθεια οὐκ ἔστιν· ⁵ ὃς δ’ ἂν τηρῇ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον, ἀληθῶς ἐν τούτῳ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ τετελείωται, ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκουμεν ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἔσμεν. ⁶ ὁ λέγων ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν ὀφείλει καθὼς ἐκεῖνος περιεπάτησεν καὶ αὐτὸς [οὕτως] περιπατεῖν. ⁷ Ἀγαπητοί, οὐκ ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν ἀλλ’ ἐντολὴν παλαιὰν ἣν εἶχετε ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς· ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ παλαιὰ ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος ὃν ἠκούσατε. ⁸ πάλιν ἐντολὴν καινὴν γράφω ὑμῖν, ὃ ἐστὶν ἀληθὲς ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν, ὅτι ἡ σκοτία παράγεται καὶ τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινὸν ἤδη φαίνει. ⁹ ὁ λέγων ἐν τῷ φωτὶ εἶναι καὶ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ μισῶν ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστὶν ἕως ἄρτι. ¹⁰ ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ φωτὶ μένει καὶ σκάνδαλον ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν· ¹¹ ὁ δὲ μισῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ ἐστὶν καὶ ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ περιπατεῖ καὶ οὐκ οἶδεν ποῦ ὑπάγει, ὅτι ἡ σκοτία ἐτύφλωσεν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ.

- Do you know what the worst punishment is? It's not abuse, it's **neglect**.
- Only Jesus can heal you. Only the creator can bring order from the chaos. His Lordship leads to an abundant life. But if you stubbornly stick to your sin and stubbornly try to rule your own life, **you will destroy yourself (he won't have to)**. God isn't against us. He is against our sin. He loves you so much that he doesn't want you to destroy yourself.
 - Jesus loves you enough to tell you the dangers of your sin.⁴

Advocate: But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

- If [you] sin (of course you will sin). John never calls for perfection. Cf. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (1 Jn 1:8,10). He calls for honesty and progress: Cf. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:9).
- Such progress is only possible because of Christ and not ourselves. How do we deal with sin? Do we beat ourselves up? Do we try harder? No! We depend even more strongly on Jesus.
- Jesus is our **advocate**. He **pleads our case**.⁵ He stands before the judge and argues on our behalf (e.g., Guardian Ad Litem). What is the substance of our defense? Is it our good behavior? No. It is the finished work of Jesus.
 - The only source of power strong enough to overcome sin is Jesus.

Sacrifice: ² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. Propitiation⁶ isn't a common dinner party term. It describes the satisfaction of a claim against someone (literally, the wrath of God against your sin has been absorbed).

- Some argue that this implies the teaching that God is a vindictive, angry, and capricious God demanding his pound of flesh for our sin.
- This has always been the picture of salvation from the sacrifices in the garden and mercy seat of the tabernacle (e.g., Yom Kippur).⁷
- It is the propitiation, payment, of our sins **by Christ** that doesn't diminish the grace of God but exalts it.
- For God to be just, sin must be paid for (e.g., car accident; we don't want sin ignored); for God to be gracious, he pays for our sin.
- On the cross, every ounce of penalty that you deserved for your sin was poured into Jesus (not just physical but emotional and spiritual pain).

⁴ You can imagine that someone might say: if we all sin, and Jesus forgives sin, then why can't I just sin because he has to forgive me (a la Rom 6)? This is a basic misunderstanding of a relationship with Christ. Salvation doesn't just let you off the hook, it unites you to Christ and transforms you to be like him!

⁵ Latin advocatus, Greek παράκλητος

⁶ ἱλασμός

⁷ Often translated in Hebrew as "mercy seat" or "atonement cover" comes from the Heb verb *kaphar* meaning "cover" (e.g., Gen 6:14). The idea of "covering" lies behind the meaning of "atone." "To atone is to cover, in a double sense: God screens sins and confers glory-covering. Atoned, we re-enter the Edenic sanctuary to assume our Adamic role as priests" (Leithart).

Worship and Holiness: This kind of love is the only true motivation not to sin (*contra* guilt, shame, image, etc.). Clean car vs. dirty car; Christ's righteousness vs. our sin.

- "Jesus is both the advocate and the atoning sacrifice. What he pleads on behalf of sinners is what he himself has done on their behalf" (Marshall).⁸
- "There is no way to fellowship with God except as our sins are forgiven by virtue of the sacrifice of Jesus."
- When we sin, let's not run from God but to Jesus, our advocate. He covers our sin and draws us into a deeper relationship with him.

Faith doesn't stop at forgiveness; it results in transformation. "Grace isn't permission to sin, it's power not to" (Smethurst).

2. Walk Like Jesus If You Know Him (vv. 3-6)

³ And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. ⁴ Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, ⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

Assurance of Salvation: ³ And by this *we know* that we have come to know him,

- There are ways you can know if you belong to Christ. You can't know perfectly (only God can), but you can know truly and confidently.
- The *basis* of our salvation is the finished work of God; the *evidence* or proof is seen in various ways.
 - (A) Objective: The Promise of God⁹
 - (B) Subjective: Witness of the Holy Spirit¹⁰
 - (C) Practical: Evidence of Grace¹¹ (*largely what's in view in 1 Jn*).
- All of these tests work together.
 - If all we have is an internal feeling, we'd never be confident (e.g., feelings change, etc.). Behavior is never enough (e.g., am I ever really good enough? Despair or arrogance).
 - But my feelings and behavior, when rooted in the truth of God can give me assurance.

Types of Knowledge: know (head) that we are in (another way of knowing; relationship) him. It's a poetic and rhetorically powerful way to say this.

⁸ Be careful not to place Christ against the Father in an adversarial courtroom drama. This is simply the limit of the metaphor. God has already been described as faithful and just to forgive sins (1:9) and will be described as the giver of the Son as the atoning sacrifice (4:9ff).

⁹ Jn 3:16, Jn 5:24, Rom 8:1, 1 Jn 5:13

¹⁰ Rom 8:15-16, Gal 4:6

¹¹ 1 Jn 2:3, 3:14, 5:2

- The Hebrew word for “know” means complete oneness (i.e., one flesh, “knew his wife and they conceived”). There are multiple Hebrew words for intimacy but the most common one is “to know” (יָדָע) because it implies oneness.¹²
- ²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’ (Matt 7:21-23).
 - Lip service to Jesus and boisterous actions are not always indicative of a genuine relationship (e.g., false prophets and false disciples).

Obedience: if we keep his commandments.

- Obedience for personal gain is not keeping his commandments. It’s joyfully following the word and way of Christ with sincerity for his glory.
- “Obeying God’s commands is not the condition, but the characteristic of the knowledge of God” (Bultmann). Obedience is not the prerequisite for a relationship but the fruit of genuine participation with Christ.
- ⁴ Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,
- A loving relationship with God cannot coexist with a hatred of his words and commands.

Progress: ⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him:

- Perfected (not perfect living), but growing in maturity and completeness.
 - So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and *increasing* in the knowledge of God (Col 1:10).¹³
- *Contra* Christian Perfectionism (e.g., Wesleyan holiness, etc.). *Progress*, not perfection.
 - We can’t say we are without sin (1:8, 10). Growing in maturity reveals more sin (e.g., increased circumference of light touches more surface area of sin; better performance in the theater gets more picky notes from the director).
 - Sincere, pure, and genuine pursuit of Christ, not litigious, perfectionistic, legalistic moralism.

Progress: ⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

- A disciple learns from and becomes like his teacher. The way I do things mirrors how I was taught (e.g., teaching, preaching, parenting; children imitate). Does your life mirror Christ? Can people see in you, the justice, compassion, mercy, and truth of Jesus (in some genuine though imperfect way)?

¹² Sexual activity

¹³ 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes (Eph 4:13-14).

Obedience is Love: Obedience is a word we don't like. Love and obedience are connected. Jesus says, If you love me, you will keep (obey) my commandments (Jn 14:15). **Obedience is love.** If I tell my son to take out the trash, it does little good to hear him say how much he *loves* it and has even *memorized* my instructions if he won't take it out! Do you sing all day about how much you love God, but you won't do what he says?!

- As the song asks, "What is Love (Baby Don't Hurt Me)? Is it that tingling feeling you get? Love *certainly* involves our affections, our hearts, but we've limited it to that almost exclusively.
- Paul told the Ephesian churches to "walk in love." I tell couples when they go to get married that "falling in love is an accident, walking in love is a choice."¹⁴
- Jesus says to "walk in the same way in which he walked" (Walk this Way).
- Too many of us want heaven, but don't walk toward it. We want Jesus to save, but don't want to follow the path he has called us to. I want to be a doctor, but I don't want to study for my biology test.
- Loving Jesus is an active, abiding, ongoing relationship of following and obeying our loving Master: "And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep (obey) his commandments."
 - Your obedience is evidence of your love. If I look at your life, and you consistently, joyfully, and without conviction disobey the commands of God, then I don't believe you if you say you love him.
 - A woman said it was *not* customary among married people in her culture to always say "I love you." To which it was asked, "How do you know someone loves you?" She laughed and said, "You know by how they treat you."
- **One of the greatest evidences for Christianity is her joyful and obedient saints,** and one of the biggest stumbling blocks are the hypocrites who say they love Jesus but don't obey his word.¹⁵

Kindness Leads to Repentance: Obedience is not motivated by guilt or shame or trying to get approval, but love. Obedience is not the basis of salvation but the evidence of a relationship.

- The Bible does not teach salvation by obedience, nor does it teach assurance by obedience, but John is saying that salvation is **evidenced by obedience**.
- The gospel doesn't guilt or shame you into reluctant change but frees you to love God fully and totally.

What does it actually look like to walk like Jesus? The clearest evidence of a life transformed by Christ is not merely what we avoid, but how we love. If obedience is the fruit of knowing Jesus, love is its sweetest expression.

3. Love Like Jesus in the Light (vv. 7-11)

¹⁴ Eph 5:2: If you're not prepared to love and raise a child with a disability, you aren't ready to have children at all. Any child can become disabled. At birth. Through illness or accident. Or some other reason. The willingness to love a child *no matter what* isn't above and beyond, it's just what love actually is.

¹⁵ E.g., Burris

⁷ Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. ⁸ At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. ⁹ Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. ¹¹ But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Same God, Same Commands: ⁷ Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard.

- God doesn't change. His word doesn't change. Its purpose and function become clearer in Christ. There is not an OT God and a NT God (wrath vs. love). The OT God has mercy and steadfast love, and Jesus has been known to flip a table in the temple.
- The same God from cover to cover with a plan that is unfolding as he reveals it to us.
- John wants to disabuse us of the idea that what he is calling us to a new invention of God. God's original design was love.
- From the beginning, God designed us for loving relationships with him and one another.
- Loving others isn't extra credit Christianity; it's been on the syllabus from the beginning.

New Perspective: ⁸ At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. "The difference between Old and New is not that in the Old Covenant people had to obey God, and we no longer have to. The difference is that God promises his Spirit to enable us to obey" (Leithart).

- Jesus shows the reality of this new kind of love on the cross. The items in a room don't shift in the dark, but turning the lights on clarifies things. Jesus makes this old commandment new, not by *changing* it, but by *embodying* it.
- The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus reorients our understanding of what God already promised to do. It's like a lens that takes the fuzzy promises of the Old Testament and brings them into vibrant clarity (so *that's* what you meant!).
- Nothing *changes*, but something is revealed.

One Another: ⁹ Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. ¹¹ But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

- We need each other. If you are devoted to God, then you must be devoted to "one another." God designed it so that he uses other people to help us grow and grow his church (e.g., teach, love, bear burdens, encourage, serve, etc.).
 - You are a means of grace in someone else's life! We're in this Christian "race" together (e.g., speed skating and momentum: team short-track speed skaters push each other, using one's momentum to propel the other forward).

- Jesus is others-focused, so we are others-focused (e.g., Jn 13, Phil 2).
- “The Christian life cannot be lived authentically in isolation.” YouTube preachers and Spotify Worship Playlists cannot replace the embodied community of the local church.¹⁶
- “One another’s” in the Bible (±60). be at peace with one another (Mk 9:50)
 - love one another (Jn 15:17)
 - outdo one another in showing honor (Rom 12:10)
 - live in harmony with one another (Rom 12:16)
 - welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you (Rom 15:7)
 - greet one another with a holy kiss (1 Cor 16:20) *I heard some “Amens” and some “oh mys”
 - comfort one another (2 Cor 13:11)
 - serve one another (Gal 5:13)
 - bear one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2)
 - be kind to one another (Eph 4:32)
- “Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. Those who dream of an idealized community demand that it be fulfilled by God, by others, and by themselves. They enter the community of Christians with their demands, set up their own law, and judge one another and even God accordingly” (Bonhoeffer). Do you love the idea of church or the actual people in your church?
- Love is a God-empowered choice to seek the best for another.¹⁷ “True love is finding joy in the happiness of others” (Piper).

Church Hurt: You don’t have to convince me that this is difficult. Nothing has disappointed me more in my Christian journey than Christians. “For people who point out that Jesus was never married, he’s had the most high-maintenance spouse in human history” (Svigel). The church is filled with sinful, hypocritical people (PK; college to escape church). But it is the church that introduced me to Jesus, and it is the church that has walked with me through suffering. “You don’t heal a broken leg by taking it away from the body. It’s healed with the body, in the body, and in a way, by the body. God will renew you, and he’s going to use the means he’s provided in the body of Christ” (Medders).

- You cannot claim to walk in the light while hating the people Jesus loves.

Conclusion

(1) Examine Your Heart: The opportunity this passage offers us is a chance to **examine** our lives. Do I know Jesus? When I sin, do I run to him? Is my only hope for life in the atoning death of my Savior?

- But it doesn’t stop there. It reminds us that if we *know* Jesus, then we *obey* Jesus.

(2) Walk in Love: “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, than to trust and obey.” Obedience is not how you earn love; obedience is how his love takes shape in your

¹⁶ That is why God set up “local” churches (99 of 103 uses of “church” refer to specific, local churches).

¹⁷ Specifically talking about Christians here, elsewhere talks about loving one’s enemies.

life. What command of Christ are you ignoring or failing to obey? Is there a sin to confess? A command to obey? A relationship to repair? A bitterness to release? A step of humility to take?

- What is the clearest picture of looking like Jesus? Love. The evidence of Christ's love is loving those he loves as he does.
- What needs to change in my heart so I can love others like Jesus loves me?¹⁸

¹⁸ You'll never love others until you've experienced the love of Christ. Love is a God-empowered choice to seek the best for another. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us (1 Jn 4).