

No New Commandment

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[0 : 0 0] All right, let me pray before I get started. Father God, we just ask that tonight you would open our ears and our hearts to your word.

Lord, may your spirit work in each of us tonight to encourage and convict us where we need it and may each of us grow tonight closer to you, our God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen. Well, I want you to take a minute and just to think to yourselves about a time where you may have lacked assurance, that is, where you have thought, I'm not sure, even though I think I'm a Christian, I'm not sure if I'm going to go to heaven if I die tomorrow.

So maybe you don't want to share that with the person next to you, but if you're brave enough, you can maybe share with the person next to you a time when you've been unsure of your salvation.

And then I'll get to tell you a time when I was unsure of mine. So it's a trade-off. If you share, I'll share. No, I'll share anyway. So just take a moment, try and think, and maybe if you're brave enough, share with the people around you.

[1 : 2 0] Maybe it's never happened. That'd be good. No, I'll show you. That's right.

All righty.

Let me tell you my story now. You can finish comparing your stories afterwards. Not long after I became a Christian, it was sort of in the process of becoming a Christian.

The first time I ever heard the Gospel and understood it, that Jesus had died for me, and I thought, yes, that's true for me, I want to claim that for myself.

I didn't believe that I was saved. For months and months, I had to battle with this lack of assurance, a lack of any sort of real trust, that even though I wanted to accept the Gospel, that God would accept me.

[3 : 0 0] And so it was a real struggle for me, and eventually I did sort of come to the world, it's not about how I'm feeling about this, but actually God says in His Word that if we trust in Him, if we live for Him, then we are guaranteed, we are assured that He will save us.

And the book of 1 John, I think, is actually a book about assurance. See, last week Matt gave us a bit of a picture of what was going on in the book of 1 John, and if you weren't here or if you've forgotten, basically John has written this book, 1 John, this letter, to churches that are facing some false teaching, some people sort of going around and they're saying, we've got a new and a special way, or a new and a better way, we've got extra knowledge, or if you're sinning, then you're not really a Christian.

They're saying all these types of things. But John writes this letter to combat that, and he says in chapter 5, verse 13, that I'm writing these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life, so that you will know it.

John is writing this book, I think, primarily to assure those people in the church that they didn't need some other thing to be sure of their salvation.

No, all they needed was to remember what they heard at first, that Jesus was enough, that you just need to trust in Jesus and then live your life in light of that trust in order to know that you are saved, in order to be sure that you are saved.

[5 : 03] Our assurance comes from our confession of who Jesus is, through what he's done in living his life, dying and rising again.

And it comes from our knowledge and our trust in that. But it also comes from living our lives in light of that. You cannot have one and not the other.

See, it's not enough to simply profess a knowledge of God, yeah, God died for me, but to continue living without a clean break from the world, without a deep love for other Christians.

Now, that's the same as if we were to say, you know, I follow Jesus' example but I don't believe that he's the Son of God. Belief and behaviour go together and that's what John is telling us in this passage tonight.

So, as we look through tonight, I want us to see that our assurance that we can be sure of our salvation based on two things. And they are, if we're walking in God's light, that's verses 1 through 14, and then if we're practising God's truth, which is verses 15 through 27.

[6 : 23] So, I'm going to unpack those two big ideas. Are we walking in God's light? Are we practising God's truth? So, what does walking in God's light look like?

I think there are three things and the first one was touched on last week, so I'm not going to really talk about it at all except for right now. Confessing our sins is the first thing that involves to walk in God's light.

We need to be people who are confessing our sins. You see that in verse 9 of chapter 1. And the two other things that it involves, which we're going to look at in depth tonight because they're from chapter 2, is to walk in God's light involves knowing who Jesus is and becoming like Him, becoming more like Him.

And then sort of underneath that is particularly growing in a love for other people, particularly other Christians. So, that first thing, knowing Jesus and becoming more like Him.

I think sometimes we think that it's enough to just know stuff about God. You know, we think, as long as I've got my theology right and I turn up at church, then I'm okay, that I'll be okay.

[7 : 47] And perhaps others, others of us think, well, it doesn't really matter what you think, as long as you live in the good life, I'll be okay. You know, I'm sort of following Jesus' lifestyle.

I'm living the lifestyle of Jesus. But John is telling us again, like I said before, no, we need both, belief and behaviour. And chapter 1, we're told to confess our sins.

And here, in chapter 2, we see the reason why. The reason why we can confess our sins. The reason why confessing our sins works. So, in verse 1, John tells us that Jesus is the righteous one who is advocating for us.

Now, to advocate for something or someone means to sort of speak in its defence. So, I think the most common place where I hear the word advocate is like a refugee advocate.

So, a refugee advocate is like someone who goes around and says, you know, government, it's not good enough. These poor refugees, they've come so far and you put them in jail on Christmas Island, you know, let them go.

[9 : 01] And they sort of advocate on behalf of the refugees who don't know English, they don't know anything that's going on, they're stuck in this prison, they can't do anything about it. So, people with power, who can vote, they advocate on behalf of the refugee.

So, Jesus is our advocate before God, which means when we confess our sins, Jesus is there saying, he's with me, she's with me, he's one of mine, she is one of mine.

I died for that person. I died for him. I died for her. But it's a bit more effective. It's a bit better than a refugee advocate because, I don't know about you, but it seems that refugee advocates don't really get anywhere.

Not because their cause is not noble, but it's just because maybe there's not many votes in it or something. But a refugee advocate tends to do a lot of advocating with very few results.

There are thousands of people, maybe not thousands, but a hell of a lot of people in detention centres, which maybe, I'm not giving any statement on policy, so don't hear me saying, I think that's a bad policy, I'm a refugee advocate.

[10 : 18] I'm just using it as an example. But a refugee advocate sort of advocates in vain almost. But Jesus is not advocating on our behalf in vain because verse 2 tells us that we can know for sure that Jesus advocating will work for us because he is himself an atoning sacrifice for our sin.

Jesus himself, by dying on the cross, has enabled access to God for those who trust in him.

And it says there that the whole world can have that access to God but only if they trust in him. Jesus is our advocate, he's our effective advocate because he himself died and took our place.

So as a Christian, to be sure of our salvation, we've got to trust that fact that Jesus is standing at the right hand of God advocating on our behalf if we put our trust in him.

But being a Christian is about more than that. If it stops there, it's not enough. In fact, there's no assurance to simply believe that only. Because look at verse 4.

[11 : 45] It says, whoever says, I have come to know him but does not obey his commandments is a liar and in such a person the truth does not exist.

A Christian cannot be a person who merely says the right things. Their life has to be one that is being transformed, is becoming more and more like Jesus, obeying his word, doing and saying the things Jesus did.

Now, I don't know about you but some people seem to think, it looks like to me, some people think that doing what Jesus said and did means simply to live a good and moral life.

Right? It means you don't, maybe you don't have sex before marriage or you don't have abortions or you don't murder people or you only lie every now and again or, you know, you only get drunk once every three months or, you know, whatever.

They sort of reduce it to achievable morals. And before I finish what I say, I want to say these are good things. These are, morals are good, right?

[12 : 54] Morals are good things, they're godly things. But the Christian life can't really be reduced to morals. It's not what he's talking about. Being like Jesus is not about being moral, doing moral things though that is part of it but it's not the be all and end all which is I think where some Christians end up.

It's not enough to be the Christian who believes what Jesus has done, doesn't smoke or drink or tell too many lies but in their hearts is unforgiving, is unloving, because to walk in God's light is not only about knowing who Jesus is and doing the right things but it's also about having the right attitude.

attitude. It's about having an attitude of love because what Jesus did for us is he showed us love in taking our place, taking our punishment that we deserved, putting our interests before his and so that's what we need to do.

We need to show that kind of love, self-denying love and that is what John's talking about in verses 7 through 11 that walking in the light, that being a Christian is about having a genuine love for others, especially for other Christians.

But before we, I want to unpack that a little bit more in a moment but before we do, I've just got to try and deal with verses 7 and 8 because verses 7 and 8 are confusing, right?

[14 : 32] Maybe you're not confused but when I read them, I was confused because he says, I'm not writing to you a new commandment but an old one but I'm writing you a new one. That seems confusing to me but maybe it's because I'm not a Rhodes Scholar.

But I've spent the week trying to, this is one of the big things I've been trying to nut out. What is he talking about? And this is my, this is the best answer that I can come up with.

What I think John is saying here is that the old commandments, that is, you know, the law, the prophets, all those things, all the Old Testament, really you can sum those up like Jesus does in Matthew's Gospel in chapter 22.

It's about loving God and it's about loving others. and if you read Galatians, in Galatians chapter 5 verse 14, Paul says that the law is summed up by loving your neighbour as yourself.

So I think what John's trying to say here is that the old commandments, the law and all that, they, they, they were about ultimately loving others. But now that Jesus has come, we see it in a sort of a new, a new light, almost with a new force kind of thing.

[15 : 53] So it's not new, but it is new, if that makes sense. So the old commandment was about love and loving others, but with Jesus, we just see it in a, in a new way, with new force, because Jesus so actively demonstrates what it is to love others through his death on the cross.

So the commandment is to love, to love others. And what does it look like to love other people? I thought I'd go through a few examples of what I think it does and it doesn't look like, and in the process tell you some stories about where I've not been very loving.

So something that is not loving, I think, is to store up a grudge or to, to store up hate or unforgiveness in your heart against another Christian.

That's a, that seems like an unloving thing to do to me, especially when, in light of what Jesus has done for us. Because as Christians, I think we're called to be like Jesus, that's what John's saying here, and we're called to forgive, to sort out differences.

Now, when I was living in Tasmania, we, we had a church building, a bit like this one, but our pews were like glued into the wall, right?

[17 : 22] You couldn't move them. And we got this new vicar, and he was really cool, he used to be a youth minister and stuff, and we were all really excited, and it was really, you know, everyone was excited, and he comes, and he, one of the first things he did was he got rid of all these pews, and he put in all these chairs, and then he laid out all this new carpet, we used to have about eight different colours of carpet in the church, which was lovely, so he rolled out all this beautiful red carpet and beautiful, nice, single-seated chairs, we could move them around, and I thought it was great, I was so excited, what great opportunities for ministry we're going to have with a much more usable space.

Anyway, with this new carpet came a new rule, which was no supper in church, and our evening service, which I was a key part of, sort of lived on supper after church, and so I was furious about this, and like, I'm not even exaggerating, like, full-on furious, like, we had a meeting with these people, the sort of the wardens, the wardens at this church are great, by the way, and so were the wardens at my last church, but we had this meeting with them and I accused them of not being Christians, and of not understanding the gospel, and of not knowing anything about Jesus, or anything, how could you make such a stupid decision, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, on and on I went, and that was like the first of about three massive dummy spits that I had about this,

I'd see them and I'd just feel so angry, like, oh, it was terrible, and it went on for a couple of months, I reckon, I was just so angry about this decision that had been made, but thankfully, God rescued me from myself, and he showed me that that's not the way a Christian's meant to live, a Christian is meant to be forgiving, loving, it's a bit rich, Chris, to think just because they're making a decision based on reasons that are okay, that they're not Christians, that's a bit harsh, Chris, that's a bit unloving, Christians, we're going to, and it happens from time to time, we disagree, and perhaps strongly, but we're called to love, to forgive, forgive.

An example of something that is loving, this is just a really simple example that I could think of, is where we take care to not cause our brothers or sisters to stumble, that is, to sin, and the best example that I have of this is where girls think about what they wear, and decide to dress more modestly for guys, that is one of the best examples that I see of people denying their own rights to wear whatever they want for the sake of their Christian brother, and the same goes with guys, not wearing things to show off our massive biceps or whatever, we, that's one of the best examples I think, of denying yourself for the sake of the other.

See, loving others is a big deal, and if we don't love each other, then John says in verse 11 this, whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

[21 : 26] As I was reading this, and I was thinking back about my carpet fury, I really thought, you know what, if I hadn't worked through that, if I hadn't forgiven those people, and apologised to them for my immaturity and stupidity, then this verse could have described me, I very easily could have become one of those people who gets overtaken by bitterness, anger, hatred.

I'm sure that many of you have met people who are Christians who seem to match this verse, who've stored up some bitterness or unforgiveness often 20, 30, 40 years ago, who maybe have acted selfishly or instead of lovingly towards others.

And these people, they seem to lose perspective like I did in the carpet, I lost perspective on what's important. And they can start not being able to take criticism, not being able to take a loving word of rebuke as anything but a total criticism.

person. And they stumble around in the darkness. Please don't be like that.

Go home tonight or after the sermon, in the songs, in the prayers, think to yourself, what are the ways where I've acted unlovingly towards others?

[23 : 05] Try and deal with them. Ring up people, apologise, seek their forgiveness, give them your forgiveness because being in the darkness is no way to live.

It's not the best way to live, it's painful. So as a Christian we can be sure of our salvation if we're walking in the light.

God's truth. And we can know we're walking in the light if we're confessing our sins, if we're trusting in who Jesus is, what he's done for us and what he's doing for us now, advocating at the right hand of God, and if we're seeking to become more like him, especially in the area of love.

But it doesn't stop there because we also have to be people who are practising God's truth. And this involves two things, and they are rejecting the world, which comes out of verses 15 to 17, and abiding in Jesus.

If you don't know what the word abiding means, it sort of is like living permanently in Jesus. So like he's your permanent home. So let's look at the first part of practising God's truth, which is rejecting the world.

[24 : 28] So in verse 15 John says, he's referring there to the world, he's referring to people who have chosen to reject God, who've chosen, whether knowingly or unknowingly, to live in a way which is opposed to God, which is alienated from God.

And in verse 16 John tells us that there are three particular things about the world which we have to reject. And they are the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes and the pride in riches.

And I think the interesting thing about these three things is that it doesn't seem to be so much the things that are the problem, but the emotions or the desires that go with them.

So I want to sort of make a first point, which is it's not the things of the world in and of themselves necessarily that are bad, but it's our attitude towards them.

I think that's why Christians, that's why we can still live in the world. That's why when you become a Christian you don't go jump off a cliff or something, because we can still live in the world, because God's world is still a good world.

[25 : 48] He's still made things to be enjoyed by us. Even though sin has tarnished them, it tarnishes it in the way we use the things he's created and try and replace God with them.

So we must reject the way the world perverts things like money or sex or possessions and the way the world makes us desire them as we should desire God.

God. The world, it promises a lot from the misuse of things, but the world delivers nothing from the misuse of things.

In fact, the world, as I look around, seems full of empty promises. The world may offer stuff that looks fun or looks good, looks better than Jesus, us.

But we see here we need to reject it, we need to flee it and we need to stop and think, what are my desires here?

[26 : 53] Are they for God or are they for the things of the world? If you talk to anyone who's ever been addicted to something, be it a drug or pornography or anything like that, they can tell you, I'm sure, that what once felt good, now it's killing them, but they can't stop.

The world promises much, but it only serves to in the end trap us, whether we realise that in this life or the next. It only serves to trap us and take us away from our true self.

And our true self, our freedom, is found in Jesus. John tells us that the world and the things in it are passing away in verse 17. This world is temporary.

Fulfilling worldly desires will never satisfy. It will not last, but the things of God, God's people, those who are living in him, go on forever, John tells us.

So we have to reject the world and its empty promises, but we also have to do one other thing, one other thing that I want to look at tonight, and I think this thing helps us with all of the things that I've talked about.

[28 : 22] If you're worried about your salvation, if you're struggling with habitual sin, if you find that you're becoming an unloving person, then perhaps you need to ask yourself the question, am I abiding in Jesus?

That is, am I making Jesus my permanent home? Am I living in Jesus? That's what John's talking about in those last few verses, 18 to 25.

See, people are going to come and tell us, just like they did back in John's day, that Jesus is not enough, or that he's just a nice guy, or that we need Jesus plus something else to be saved.

But the best way to avoid all of those lies, and all the lies the world will tell us, is to continue to abide in Jesus, to continue to confess that Jesus is the Son of God.

John says, if we confess the truth about Jesus, the truth that he alone is the only way to God, he says it there in these last few verses, God has promised you eternal life.

[29 : 45] So what does it look like to live in Jesus, to abide in Jesus? I think in my life there is a direct correlation. If you can't remember your year 10 mass, that's like, got something to do with relationships.

So basically, in my life there is a direct relationship, I should just say relationship at the start, shouldn't I? There's a direct relationship between periods of growth and godliness and periods of struggles and habitual sin in my life.

I see a relationship between those two things and whether I'm making an effort to abide in Jesus. See, when I'm letting God's truth and the truth about Jesus dwell in my heart and in my mind, then I find, strangely, perhaps not, that I'm better at acting lovingly.

I'm better at loving people, that I'm better at retaining things that I read, that I'm learning more about the stunning truth of God, that it's captivating me.

But when I'm not abiding in Jesus, when I'm sort of just going with the flow or forgetting about him, then I notice that I'm less likely to ask God to help me.

[31 : 08] I'm less likely to try and fight sins that I might be struggling with. I'm just less like the person that God has created me to be.

A great example for me, and maybe there are things that you can use in your own life to test how you're going, but I like to have a bit of a laugh with people or whatever, and sometimes for me that involves occasionally sarcastically teasing, which I try to not do too much because some people can't take it.

And perhaps it's ungodly, I don't know. Anyway, it's what I do, I'm working on it. But anyway, most of the time it's just meant to be a bit of a joke, people do it back to me and all's good in the world.

But sometimes I'll say something and as soon as I've said it, something happens inside of me, God's spirit convicts me and I go, you know what, that wasn't a funny, sarcastic little comment, that was the truth.

I really don't like that person or I really think that person is fat or, you know, obviously you wouldn't make a joke about someone's weight, would you? But, you know, I really do.

[32 : 35] I really am acting unlovingly towards that person. And every time I've caught myself, this happens over and over again, every time I catch myself, thinking I'm joking, as soon as I say, knowing I'm being serious, I always am pushed back to Jesus because I realise that's one of those symptoms for me that I use to diagnose, am I abiding in Jesus, am I taking time to let his word transform me?

There's one one more thing that I want to touch on in these verses. It's right at the end there. John says in verses 16 to 27, that we don't need anyone to teach us.

So, perhaps you'd wish that I'd started there and sat down. so what's going on there? Well, I don't think he means that we shouldn't have any more sermons because he's written this letter to people and in a sense it's to teach them that the false prophets, the antichrists that have come into the church, the people telling them non-truths about Jesus are wrong and that they just need to hold on to Jesus for their salvation.

So, his letter is in effect teaching them. What I think he means is that you don't need someone to come and teach you special things that you couldn't figure out with what you heard at first.

That is, you don't need someone to come and teach you the gospel plus something else, which is what these false teachers were trying to do.

[34 : 39] John says that the anointing we have as Christians, which is the Holy Spirit, which each of us gets that first time we confess, Jesus is Lord of my life, I want to live for him.

The Holy Spirit testifies within each one of us to who God is. That if we want to understand God, at the end of the day, you simply need to have God's Word and God's Spirit working in your heart.

Sometimes, you know, we think that we need lots and lots of commentaries and smart preachers and all those things are helpful. Don't hear me saying they're not.

But at the end of the day, we have God's Spirit and God's Word. We have enough to know who Jesus is, what he's done for us, and how to live, how to love.

So, as we've looked at all these things, as we've saw that we need to be sure of our salvation, we can be sure if we're walking in God's light, if we're practising God's truth.

[35 : 53] As we've looked at all this, I want us to remember what John says in chapter 1, in verse 8, he says, If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. See, being sure of our salvation, walking in God's light, practising God's truth, is not about perfection.

Because if we say we're perfect, the truth is not in us. See, to be assured of our salvation doesn't mean that we don't sometimes believe what the world tells us, that we don't sometimes have doubts, that we don't sometimes act in ways that are unloving, not in God.

To walk with God, to practise his truth, to know that we are saved, simply means that we abide in Jesus, we trust in him, we seek day by day to make our home in him, to admit that we do fall short.

Because the funny thing about abiding in Jesus, I think, is that you become more aware of how short you really do fall, that you do still sin and that you do still need God's help in becoming more like Jesus.

[37 : 33] And we can confess our shortcomings and our sins to God and have 100% confidence that Jesus' death has paid for our sin and that Jesus Christ stands at the right hand of God, advocating on our behalf, speaking in our defence.

God wants us not only to be people who know stuff about God, but who live like Jesus, who love like Jesus. And if we can resolve to try each day to do these things, like I've just said, we know, we have assurance that Jesus is there advocating for us.

Father, I've bought Chris with my blood, he is mine. Father, insert your name here. I've bought them with my blood, they are mine. So I want us to be confident in our salvation, confident in what God has done for us, if we've responded in faith to that, if we're seeking to live our lives each day more and more like him.

Let us be people who are striving to walk in God's light and to practice God's truth. Let us not strive to be sinless, but rather strive to know with full assurance what God has done for us in Jesus.

Amen.