



1 John 2:3-11 - ³We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. ⁴The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. ⁷Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. ⁸Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. ⁹Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. ¹⁰Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. ¹¹But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.

Living in the Light of Christ



How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are. (1 John 3:1)

Chemistry was not a favorite subject of mine in high school. Balancing (or trying to balance) chemical equations, memorizing portions of the periodic table, constructing a replica of some molecule or another – those were things that I didn't enjoy the most. I appreciated chemistry on a practical level – getting to see the intricacies of the process, gaining a new and deeper appreciation of God's created order – that part was pretty cool. Chemistry was OK, but at the end of the day, it wasn't something my mind was drawn to. There was one redeeming quality of simplicity about chemistry, however. That came when we got a bunch of little strips of paper paired with a color coded guide -litmus paper used to test the pH level of a given substance. It was easy. All you did was take a little drop of whatever chemical you were working with and drop it on the paper. Then the paper would turn a certain color, you'd use your handy-dandy color coded guide, and determine whether the chemical you're working with is either an acid or a base. Sometimes those colors were as plain to see as the nose on your face. Other times, the result was a little harder to read. You'd look at your litmus paper and then at your color coded guide – checking it again and again, but it was kind of between a couple of colors or it just looked like a hazy shade of greenish, reddish, purple-ish, brown. Then you weren't sure what you were looking at. The results weren't so clear – you might even say inconclusive.

As you know, we're not here to talk about high school chemistry class. But have you ever thought of performing a litmus test on yourself? I don't suggest you go splash some strange chemical on your skin and see what color it turns. But I would invite you to take a spiritual litmus test with me through the words of the apostle John in our sermon text for today. John writes, **We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.** So I guess the question for our spiritual litmus test is pretty simple. How do you know you belong to God? You obey his commands. You walk as Jesus did. But do you?

When John wrote this letter, most likely to the church in Ephesus, he was addressing a dangerous false teaching that had come on the scene. These false teachers said that Jesus Christ wasn't good enough – that in order to be saved, you needed to receive some additional knowledge, some higher form of enlightenment, something more than Christ. According to these false teachers, the soul was the only important thing about a person, therefore the body didn't matter – and what mattered even less was what you chose to do with your body. Sin, immorality, indulgence of every kind – none of those really mattered to these false teachers. Can you imagine what it would have been like to live in a world with people like that? People who say things like, *"You can't impose your moral standards onto me." "It's my body – I'll do whatever I want with it." "It's not like it really matters what you do – as long as no one gets hurt."* Can you imagine what it was like for those 1st century Christians to live in a world with people like that? By now, I hope you see my point. You, dear 21st century Christian, live in a world with remarkably similar values and priorities. Now do you see how vital the practical this "spiritual litmus test" is? How can you know that you belong to God? You obey his commands. You walk as Jesus did. But do you?

John says, **The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him...Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness...and walks around in the darkness; he does not know here he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.** Stop me when this starts to sound familiar. These words are especially pointed at us, the people in the church. It's so easy to hide behind a veneer of piety – as long as I keep up outward appearances, everyone will know that I'm a super-Christian. It's even easier to hide behind a church affiliation, but would you pass the spiritual "litmus test" John



proposes here? John is talking about genuine obedience at the level of Jesus, the very Son of God. And when it comes down to the results of this test – there’s only two possible results and there’s nothing inconclusive about them. You’re either walking in the light or you’re reveling in the darkness of sin. And the frightening thing about that? When someone is in the dark, John says, **he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.**

The devil’s damnable darkness blinds us. It blinds us into blending in with the world. Jesus calls us to be **in the world, not of the world.** The child of God cannot ever, without denying himself and his God, be at home in the world which is in the power of the evil one. But the darkness causes blindness. Has your spiritual vision been effected by the darkness of this world? Have you been blinded into blending in? The devil wants us to blind us into thinking that we can hold a grudge, that we can carry hate, that we can be duplicitous, that we can have those lustful thoughts, and somehow still be a child of the light. Is that possible? John tells us in very black and white terms. The difference is as clear as the sunshine at high noon and the pitch black of inky darkness at midnight. Do you, dear Christian, want to know if you belong to God? Look at your life. Those who belong to God obey his commands. They live in the light of Christ.

But then again, maybe we’ve been putting the cart before the horse. Those who belong to God live in the light of Christ, but before that ever happens, the light of Christ lives in us. What happens when I look at my life and I don’t see all the evidence I think I should? What happens when I look at myself, expecting to see the light of love, but only stare down a seemingly bottomless pit of sin and darkness? What then? John seemed to anticipate that kind of dilemma – people looking for this proof in their lives that they’re God’s children, and not always finding it. So he wrote, **“This is how...we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.”** Are you looking for proof that you’re God’s child? Don’t look to what your heart and emotions say about you. Look to what God says about you. In the final estimation, who you are has nothing to do with your personal accomplishments. It’s all about what Christ has accomplished for you.

In order to see the love you’re supposed to live, you need to remind yourself of the love that’s been shown to you by God. In the verses just before our text, John wrote this: **“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”** The beautiful truth of the gospel is that God doesn’t demand anything he doesn’t give you first. I’m going to say that again, because it’s important: The beautiful truth of the gospel is that God doesn’t demand anything he doesn’t give you first. If God wants perfect righteousness, it’s going to have to come from somewhere or someone outside of me. If God wants a life of perfect love, it’s going to have to come from somewhere or someone outside of me. And it has...Look at Christ, the perfect embodiment of God’s love – a love that loves you not because of who you are, but because of who he is. God’s love caused him to send Jesus into the world to live the perfect love he demanded. God’s love sent Jesus to the cross, to suffer hell like a wretched sinner, so that we wretched sinners wouldn’t have to suffer hell for our sins. That all consuming, self-sacrificing, lost-seeking, sin-shattering, death-defeating love is the love that God has shown to *you* and given *you* fully in Jesus Christ. That’s the love that fills you. Having been so filled with God’s love in Christ, the believing child of God can do nothing other than to let that love spill out to everyone around you – living in the light of Christ.

John makes that point clear, **Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning.** There’s nothing new or novel about obeying God’s commands. When you heard about your full, free, forever forgiveness in Christ, you wanted to respond by keeping God’s commands. **This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you,**



because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. The truth of this old and new command is seen in Christ and it's seen in you, dear child of God. The command to love is an old one, but what's also new about this command? Every one of God's commands has been perfectly fulfilled in Christ, his Son. And he did it in your place, because he knew you couldn't. That's the good news of the gospel, and inevitably, the gospel changes people. Those changes aren't secret, theoretical, or just for the future. The converting work of the Holy Spirit leads to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit – and the fruits of faith are real and visible! You have been set apart to live in love for the God who loved you and gave himself up for you.

John's encouragement to 1st century and 21st century Christians - live in the light! Living in the light involves more than "being good and obeying commandments." Living in the light means having fellowship with God – and the only way to do that is through Jesus, who tells us, "**no one comes to the Father except through me.**" Living in the light means identifying with Christ, who he is and what he's done for you. We identify with Christ through faith. Living in the light means relying not on who I am and what I've done, but relying on Christ; who he is and what he's done for me. So will you pass your spiritual litmus test? What if the results are kind of hazy or inconclusive? Well, think back to when some liquid was splashed on your head, not as a spiritual test but as a spiritual gift. In the waters of your baptism you were washed clean from every sin by the water packed with the power and promise of God. In the waters of your baptism, you were given strength to live and walk in the light of Christ every day of your life. When God conducts a spiritual litmus test on you, he doesn't see a hazy shade of whatever. He doesn't see your sin and darkness. He sees Christ – who gave you his holiness to wear your whole life through.

Because of that power and promise of God, you get to be different now. You get to walk in the light of Christ. Identifying with Christ, who he is and what he's done for you, changes you. Through the forgiveness that Christ freely gives you, you get to forgive someone who hurt you – even if they don't seem sorry. Because of the love God showed you in sacrificing everything to save you, you get to love others selflessly. You get to show a genuine concern for your neighbor's spiritual well being. You get to encourage your brothers and sisters here at Hope sincerely, from the heart. Because God has set you free from guilt in Christ, he empowers you to let go of the grudge your old self wants to hold. You get to be new because God has made you new. **The darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.** That's where you find God's children – in the true light, the light of Christ, reflecting that light to everyone around them. God bless you as you live in the light of Christ because Christ lives in you!

Amen

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen (Jude 24-25).