

Walking the Walk

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[0 : 0 0] So, we're going to look through this Sunday evening, next Sunday evening we're going to look through second John, and then for the next couple of Sundays after that, third John.

So written by the Apostle John, who is by this time an old man, and he, first John reminds us, if you remember anything about it, you'll remember that John really grasped the central truths. If you've got time, reread it. If there's one book in the Bible I would encourage you to memorize. It's not that long, it's a few chapters. It would be first John. It's such a great summary of the Christian gospel. The more we understand it and live out the truth of first John, the more we can be assured that we'll stay close to the very heart of the gospel in the heart of Jesus. And so it's a great book that speaks about God's light and God's love and the power of His love. And even that central truth which was so significant and so fresh and new to the people to whom He was writing, was in danger of being swamped by false teaching. Even at that early stage, there was people who were coming into the churches there and deceiving them with a false teaching and false doctrine. There was division, there was power struggles. Mmm, that sounds familiar. So not just from the early church, but right through history, we found these temptations within us, not just as churches, but also as individuals to drift from the truth, to be attracted to some new fancy message or simply to be attracted to our own sinful, selfish lives and living. So first John is a great book, and first, second and third John are great books to take together. I just want to give free lessons at the beginning here by way of introduction. The first is the great example of an old Christian who's a really great old Christian, John. He calls himself the elder in the first introductory verses, words of the letter. Now that may refer to his designation as an overseer of maybe a group of churches around Ephesus to which probably first John was written. Or it just may be simply a designation to his old age and being an old man in the faith. But he'd certainly matured, and over that maturity had kept his perspective really good. So he'd kept his perspective around Christ and around people. He loved Christ and he loved people. And that really comes across in these letters. They are gentle but really courageous. He has a deep love that is willing to expose things that's wrong about his children and the faith. But he does so with great gentleness and with great attractiveness in many ways. He's passionate. He's a bit like what you could imagine your favorite granddad to be like. That's the kind of character that John seems to be. And he talks so beautifully to the people that he was responsible for, the people that he was writing to so beautifully. It would be great if... It's a great thing to learn to speak like that to whoever it might be we're speaking to. Even when we're speaking, things that aren't easy to speak to them about in faith. And I think the danger sometimes for us as we grow older in the faith, as we've been Christians for longer, that we can become complacent or we can stop growing or we can become prayerless or middle of the road kind of Christians so we're happy enough with what we've reached a certain level in it. That's okay. We'll just... We'll carry on there. And we don't allow ourselves to grow into the love of Christ as he intends us and wants us to be in the way that John has done. Maybe becoming a bit cynical of the needs of others and or disinterested in them.

So I would always say, beware middle-agers of the faith. That middle-aged time, I know some of you are much younger than that, but you may be middle-aged in your faith. I'm not so much speaking about age in terms of your years as maybe age in terms of how long you've been a Christian. Always take someone like John as a great example. An old man but he was growing younger every day inside because he remained that... maintained that freshness of being close to Christ. First lesson. The second lesson is to remember our own forgetfulness of the basics, the fundamentals, the message of the gospel because the churches that John was writing to were relatively new churches. They were church plants. They had grown through conversion. People becoming Christians. It wasn't like it was... It wasn't like moving the bits on a chessboard. It wasn't that they were Christians already, just happened to move to that new church. They've become Christians. They've come to Christ, new converts. And yet already they were forgetting the basics. Already they were tempted to follow another path and go a different way. They were distracted. They were reverting sometimes to their old ways. And the older I get, the more I see sins grip. See, even for new Christians, there's this temptation to drift from Jesus Christ. Old habits, old sins are hard to... It took

God the Son. It took God the Son to go to the cross as we were reminded so beautifully this morning. God had to die the Son. It took that... That was the cost. That was what was needed to break the strength and the power of sin in our lives. And it's easy for us to forget that sometimes and to forget how quickly we can drift from the fundamental truths. You know, I think as preachers, any budding preachers here, just remember, we think we make a huge difference in people's lives. We probably don't make very much difference at all. It's amazing how little may be preaching, how little a difference preaching can make in people's lives. But then I think of the disciples. We look at it in Mark's Gospel and we think of all the disciples and how little they understood. We've been seeing that over the last number of months. How little they grasped. It took the syrophoenician woman to understand, wasn't it? Today we saw. And I take comfort from that because they were under Christ preaching and they didn't even understand. And there's that reality, isn't there, that we're quick to forget. It's not an easy thing to stay close to the important truths of the gospel unless we're relying on Jesus Christ. So when we come to God's...

When we come at preaching or under God's word, you know, it's important not to keep looking for novel truth. Yes, we're looking for insights and we're looking for a new understanding.

[7 : 29] But it must come from the Spirit and it must come from our readiness to be responsive to the Spirit. When you hear old truths from God's... from the pulpit, don't become weary with that because it's very important to recognize that the old truths are the ones that John keeps going back to in these letters. The message you heard from the beginning, the same truths. It's not anything novel or new, he's speaking to these churches that are tempted to wander from him. And there's a great need for us to recognize the need for the Spirit to take that old truth and say, what is God saying to me with that old truth from His word into my life today? There's a couple of illustrations about preaching that maybe it will help us, it certainly helps me. You know, I wonder if I asked any of you what you ate for three weeks ago last Monday. I know these are all... they're all illustrations.

I've only got old illustrations. You remember what you had for your meal three weeks ago last Monday? Probably none of you would remember exactly what you had. But it would have nourished you at the time and it was important for you to eat that meal at the time. And I think sometimes that's true of preaching. We don't remember necessarily unless you've got particularly good memory what the preachers preach. But you look for nourishment each time you come.

You look for being spiritually fed and for it to do you good for that moment and for the weekend which you've entered. And that's significant. Or remember another preacher who one of his members came up to him after the service and said, why do you keep preaching on the same text, love your neighbour as yourself or love one another as I've loved you? And he returned back and said, well, once you start doing it, I'll move on to another text.

And I think there's a reality of that too sometimes for us that we're looking to be moved and touched and changed under God's word. And John is in these letters, he's taking them back to the fundamental message that they heard from the beginning. And it's interesting too, I think the third lesson is from these three letters that we can take is there's a pattern to them. It seems very much like the first letter was in a sense a round robin letter that was written to a group of churches, house churches probably likely around the Ephesus area. John may well have been the overseer, spiritual overseer. Second John, which we're going to look at briefly or a bit of it, was written to a specific church.

Some commentators think it was actually to an individual lady, the elect lady and her children, to a woman and her family. But most would seem to suggest, and it fits in with the whole of the letter, that that was his way of speaking about the church, the bride of Christ would be similar to that, that it was a church and the children are the members of that church. And first John, he speaks about the members of the churches as his children.

[10 : 34] Ten times is a common way of speaking that he used. So the first letter is to the group of churches, the second letter is to an individual church, and the third letter is to an individual Christian, Gaius, who he's writing to. And he's bringing the same message to all of them.

And I think there's an encouragement there for us that the Word of God that comes to us, it applies at every level. It applies to groups of churches, which we would call presbyteries or affiliation of churches. It applies to the local church, the individual church like St. Columba's. It applies to us as a corporate people. So it's not just a message for people out there, it's a message for St. Columba's when we hear it. And it also applies to us as individuals. So we take all of these things from God's Word and we recognize the core message for the same is all. So just for a few minutes, we're going to look at two of the main themes of the first six verses. We're going to look at verses one to six. And the two main themes are inextricably linked and they're very simple. And it's old truths again that John is speaking as he reminds them and continues to remind them of the same truth from the first letter. And that is truth and love, the importance of truth and love. He speaks about truth five or six times in these first few verses. And he's reminding them of the kind of truth that's important to elder, the elect lady and her children, the chosen lady and her children. He immediately sets it in the context of the sovereign election of God, that these people are those who have been chosen by God and are elect under God. God knows them, God loves them, He will keep them. And there's a great mystery in that whole amazing reality of the elect called of God, the mystery of the dynamics of our deadness and the need for God to breathe life into us. And yet not only that we are chosen but that we choose Jesus Christ. And yet the reality for us of that truth that there is an elect people who are being called by God, encouraging for our evangelism, encouraging for our confidence. He's bedding it in God's sovereign work, the truth of God's sovereign work. And it's truth, he says, as he's repeated throughout the first letter, it's truth that is revealed. It's a message that can be known. It's a message that's been shown and given to us. And he's telling this church that is in danger of welcoming in those who are preaching a false gospel and being deceived by that. He's saying, you've got to go back to that truth. It's not something we can make up. It's not something that we can choose to manipulate or change. It is the truth of Christ, Christ and His finished work and the truth of the

Bible. And it's truth that lives in believers. He says, the elder, the elect lady whom I love and truth not only I but also all who know the truth because the truth abides in us and will be with us forever. So we recognize that this fundamental truth is not simply an intellectual knowledge but is a relational truth that lives in us in the person of Jesus Christ. It's a real... the word. Jesus is called the word because He's truth revealed, but yet it's a truth that lives in us relationally in Christ. So we have this knowledge of God in Christ, not simply theological and intellectual knowledge. And it's a truth therefore that is our unbroken companion into eternity. A truth that will be with us forever. It's the permanence, the absolute solid rock of our existence that though we've grown older, though we lose our lives, we simply pass on into the nearer presence of Jesus Christ because the word is in us. The Spirit of God through the Holy Spirit is with us and overcomes our greatest enemy, death, our greatest fear, our greatest unknown of being forgotten, of being lost, of being alone. God says that we are... He is with us eternally. That is the great truth that John is reminding us of here. And he explains... he describes that truth and that word of Christ as grace, mercy and peace be with us from God the Father.

Great benediction at the beginning of His letter. The grace of God is His help to you in your helplessness. Again, it was highlighted very powerfully this morning. That's what God wants from us. He wants that sense of our own inability and our own need and our own weakness and we come to Him for His grace. And mercy, His pity, His compassion on the guilty and on the undeserving. I don't have many illustrations but this is an old one that I've heard but congregation changes so much. Maybe some of you haven't heard it. A soldier who deserted from Napoleon's army but was caught and was to face Napoleon who was going to sentence him to death for his desertion. And the soldier's mother was there and rushed up to Napoleon and fell on his knees and begged for mercy for her son. And Napoleon said, he doesn't deserve mercy. And she returned. If he deserved it, it wouldn't be mercy.

And that's the reality of our position before God is that it's not something we deserve, it's the compassion on the guilty that as we fall before Him we can know His acceptance and His peace. That great recognition, the Old Testament shalom, the New Testament truth of where we get the word, ironic from someone who's ironic is someone who promotes peace.

[17 : 22] And that's the kind of believers we become. We promote peace within the family of God, within the church of God, within the community of God, within your workplace, within wherever you study. It's a wholeness that allows us to have our discorded hearts and lives brought into that sense of oneness and peace because of what God has done for us.

And the truth and the reality for us is joy, which we sung about at the beginning of the service. I rejoice greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth just as we were commanded by the Father. And there's a great reality there of the response of truth in the life of the believer. John had this great shepherd's heart. And I do think we're all called to have shepherd's hearts. I know there's some that are maybe specifically gifted in one way or another, leadership gifts, pastoral gifts, but we're all called to have pastoral concerns and love and a desire for one another. And it's a great mark of our spiritual maturity if we are able to have fine joy when we see others walking in the truth, when we see those around us following Christ and coming to Christ. The greatest joy that we have is to hear someone that we know and love coming to Christ and finding out and recognizing the wonder of

His grace, His mercy and His peace. And that is the joy that should mark our Christian lives. That's the joy that should mark our understanding of His commands for us, His commandments which are so glorious and beautiful. And so our Christian lives shouldn't be marked by a legalistic, critical, judgmental, doer or permanent sense of struggle. Of course there's struggle, of course there's difficulties. But as we remain in Christ and as we found ourselves on the basic realities of the gospel and that personal relationship with Him, we recognize He is good and His Word is good and we want others to enjoy that goodness and that walk with Him and we care about them and we encourage them and we say things like, I'm delighted and I rejoice greatly when I see you walking in the truth. I wonder when the last time we thought, we said that to anyone in our Christian life. Probably, there were probably someone who would think you were weird if you said that, but it's a great thing to do. And to be encouraged when you see someone growing in the faith, evidently growing in the faith and sharing that with them. So truth is something that John keeps going back to the truth of the gospel, which he is challenging them and reminding them not to drift from, not to be deceived by, not to listen to the false teachers who are tempted to come in and divide the fellowship, even this young fledgling church. And then of course, his great theme, the apostle of love, is love itself, truth and love. And time is though I'm writing a new commandment, but the one we had from the beginning that we love one another. And this is love that we walk according to His commandments. And this is a commandment, just as you've heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. And He uses this kind of repetitive language all the time. He's saying the same things, going around them, looking at them, different perspective, but saying the same thing, truth and love. And what He's saying to them, look, I'm saying, just as I've said from before, there's never been another way. This has always been, this is always, from the beginning, this has always been the way, is the way of Christ's loving sacrifice and His grace that's poured out into our hearts. It's the beauty of divine love. We speak a lot about love from the pulpit, don't we? And it's so hard, therefore, to make it something, to recognize the uniqueness of the divine love that God promises to us. It's discovered and enjoyed only in Jesus Christ. And it's where we find true meaning and true hope.

And so He encourages them as a response to false teaching and as an outworking of understanding the truth that we love one another. Now in John 13, that's expressed slightly differently as a new commandment. John here says, I'm not writing you out, a new commandment is an old one. But in the gospel of John, he says, it's a new commandment. I'm asking you to love one another as I have loved you. So the motive is Jesus Christ and the kind of love and also the gift of love that He alone can give. It's John's restatement again and again that the core of His life is coming to know this love that is as different from our own disordered loves as light is from darkness. Can I say that again? It's Christ's love is as different from our own understanding of love as light is from darkness. So we do need to put aside our complacency when we talk about or think about love from a Christian point of view. And we need to fall on our knees and ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see what the love of Christ will look like in my life, what it looks like in my marriage, what it looks like in my home, what it looks like in my workplace, what it looks like with my colleagues, what it looks like in every moment of my life. And it's what John is saying again, it's what Corey was saying this morning that we need the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to unstop our deaf ears and to recognize that this is the love He gifts us that we need to ask for a love for the unlovely, a love for those who are undeserving in our own eyes, a love for those who maybe hate you, a love for the needy, a love that covers a multitude of failings in others. It's a love that doesn't idolize human love or even brotherly love or sisterly love or friendship love. There's nothing wrong with friendship love, but friendship love becomes an issue when we favor friends over those who need our love or when we idolize our friends or when we exclu-exclusivize our friends at the expense of those who are in need, who are isolated, who are not naturally of our friendship group but who are children of God or maybe who are not children of God. It recognizes not to make friendship of people in a worldly way which puts them on a pedestal and then when they let you down, that you dump them because they have failed the standards that you hoped they had, that you hoped you had for them. And there's that recognition of it changes the perspective and the direction and the way we think about every love relationship because we understand our own hearts and the sinfulness and the way we let people down and the way we prioritize wrongly and the way that we choose to ignore some people's failings and then choose to highlight other people's failing because it suits us. It suits our selfishness. And so it's moving selfishness out of the middle of our love relationships and putting Christ in there which is a radical change. It's a radical transformation. It took God, Son, to be nailed to a cross to

[25 : 56] enable us to love like that. And we need to throw ourselves onto Christ. And every day you say, I can't do that. I can't love like that. I don't naturally love this way. I need the Spirit's help. I need my eyes to be opened. I need to be selfless and I need to be committed to the strength and power of the Holy Spirit. And He says here, the aid that enables us to live like this, to love one another and this is love that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you've heard it from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. So there's this interesting parallel and it's kind of paradoxical because there's love and there's command. But the two come together in Christ. As we walk in obedience to Christ, in His strength and in His power, because we recognize the debt we owe, we find ourselves, it's a bit like, I was going to say it was cori, it wasn't the cori this morning, it was the Bible verse that I was, the video that I watched from the Bible verse about the fruit of the Spirit. It's not so much we work for the fruit of the Spirit to have all that fruit, but we work to be connected at the root to the water of life and the fruit comes almost naturally. And the same is true with the love as we're grounded in the commands of God. We find that love is the fruit of that. It's an act of our wills. It's not really an emotion simply, it includes an emotion, but in our extremely expressive individualistic age where feelings are everywhere and feelings are everything. And it's more than that. It's an act of our will where we walk according to God's commands in our lives and follow Him and love as an act of our will, not simply an emotion. The word for walking there is peripatio, which is the word that we get, the pathetic from. So if you're a peripatetic gym teacher, it's one, you go around the different schools, you walk around the different schools, you're not based in one place. And anyone who does work that peripatetic, that's what it means. And that's, it's really what John is saying here is wherever you are, the walk that you're on, wherever you happen to be, that's what he's talking about, walking in His commands. Wherever we go, we're walking in this way of obedience and love. Wherever we find ourselves in our lives, it's certainly not just in the church. It's in all of our lives and in all of the reality of our lives, wherever we are, we're seeking to do God's will. His commands about worship, His kingdom, thankfulness, dependence on the Spirit, forgiveness, sexual purity, faithfulness, it's all inclusive.

And the more obedient we are to His pathway, the more we will see our own hearts, the more we'll be amazed by His grace, the humbler we become, and the more we love and bear that out in others. John is passionate about these truths. It's central truth to him. It's not peripheral. He writes these letters because they're in danger of moving from that fundamental truth of truth and love together. And if we are struggling in our lives, if you're not caring about worship or church or sermons, if you don't read the Bible or pray, if you have a weak, it's because it's a weak foundation, maybe exposed, or you're listening to a re-imagining of the truth that's maybe more acceptable to believe and follow today, whether it's to do with sexuality or with political allegiance or relational idols, they say in the truth, time and distance doesn't change the truth and the love that springs from it. So in conclusion to the lady at St. C's and her children, let's walk with one another in God's love.

Let's do this walk of life together. We live in a challenging and complex world and it's getting more challenging and complex by the day. But the way of the cross is actually very simple even though it's profound. It's always for us far more than just this weekly gathering on a Sunday, significant and important and vital though it is. Let us always maintain this ethos of supporting and loving and walking together in faith. Let us be those who move beyond as if it ever were the case that your sermon tasters are theological tourists and recognize the importance of being together, importance of a radical gritty loving one another walk together. But John sees that that needs to be reminded of again and again, repeated on and acted on. And the interesting thing is sometimes there's an old Scottish phrase that says it's better felt than tell. And that's probably quite true. We can talk about love and we can talk about the significance of Christ's love. But you know that when you experience that both from Him and from one another, it's more powerful than a hundred sermons, better felt than tell. Don't let anyone change what we're striving for. Go up. I might be here for another six or seven months and we've got Corey coming and we know that Corey gets exactly what we are. And that's why we want him here as the preaching elder. Let's never move from what we are. And it's the message that has been from the beginning of the church is truth and love. It's as simple as that. And that's what we need to be. And that's why we're doing what we're doing. And that's why we have a succession policy with someone who knows that and who will lead the elders and the whole congregation towards that more and more and more. The second half of this is about beware of deceivers, be aware of deceivers and division. And all I can say is Corey, it's all yours because he'll be doing that next week. Amen. Let's pray. Father God, we thank You for Your goodness and grace. We thank You for Your love. We ask, we can only ask for forgiveness for how quickly we are blinded and selfish and proud and careless of others. How little we love one another with the love of Christ sometimes. How quickly we revert to quid pro quo love.

I love because they will love me back because we like each other and love each other and we're like one another. Forgive us Lord when we fail to love with the compassionate, pastoral eyes of Jesus. And when we think we can live the Christian life without prayer or without dependence on the Spirit. How quickly Lord we are deceived. How quickly we're blinded.

Forgive us we pray. And ground us in the truth. Help us to walk wherever we are, whatever part of our lives we find ourselves in, that we're walking in the truth, in the light, in the love of Christ. With the challenges that that brings and with also the beauty that that reflects from our hearts of the Christ who redeemed us. So help us in that we pray and help us to help one another. It's such a battle. It's such a struggle. We live in a world that really doesn't appreciate Christ and His message and their faith. So we need to encourage and build each other up, support one another and find here a Christian family, children of our Father in heaven that are bound together in Greece. We ask it in Jesus' precious name. Amen.