

Faith In Action.

Text: 1 John 2:3-11

1) What this includes

Suggested Hymns:

2) What this excludes

105, 205, 345, 344, 355

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 John 2:3-11, ³ *Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵ But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. ⁶ He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.*

⁷ *Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. ⁸ Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. ⁹ He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. ¹⁰ He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹ But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Martin Luther once called the Book of James a straw epistle and questioned its authenticity as a recognised book of the Bible. His one and only reason for doing so was the unusual manner in which James speaks of faith.

While the other writers of the Bible, in both the Old and the New Testament, speak of faith as the one and only cause of man's salvation, in some instances adding specifically "*without the deeds of the Law,*"¹ so that no one is misled or

mistaken in this vital matter, James in his writing ‘*seems to*’ teach the very opposite.

Listen to James 2:14, ¹⁴ ***What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? Again James 2:17, ¹⁷ Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*** And then James proceeds to show in five substantial chapters just what kind of works are essential to saving faith if it is to be recognised and accredited as saving faith.

On a first and hurried reading of James it would ‘*appear to*’ contradict the other holy writers, but in reality he does not.

The entire Book of James was written, not in response to the question what must a person do to be saved, but rather in reply to the question how the person who has saving faith, gives evidence of its existence in his personal life, and especially with respect to his fellow men. It is faith in action.

Now, the theme of the evidence of a living faith is a frequent and recurrent one in the Bible. It formed the heart and soul of many of the teachings of our Lord, for example the Parable of the Barren Fig-Tree in Luke 13. It is presented in major or minor detail by practically all of the writers in the New Testament.

It is also the message of John in our text today. Let us then gain a better understanding of the evidences of a living, active faith in the life of the Christian. Our theme is “Faith in Action.” May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Faith In Action

What This Includes

The Love of Christ Compels

John speaks as a father in the words of our text. He addresses those to whom he writes as “*my little children.*”² He is exercising the power and persuasion of a father over them. He has the interest of a father in them. Through love and endearment he wants not only to keep his children from the pitfalls of sin, but inspire them to higher levels of Christian service and consecration. He wants to accomplish this through love, rather than the Law.

And it is not only his personal, paternal love which should move them in this vital matter but primarily the love of God in Christ Jesus. We read prior to our text in 1 John 2:1-2, ***And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father,***

Jesus Christ the righteous. ² And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. John is anxious to bring the proper motivation to bear upon the lives of those whom he desires to inspire greater service and sacrifice.

The love of Christ, His sacrifice on Calvary, His constant intercession for man before the throne of grace above, these must compel, drive and urge them. They will love Jesus because He first loved them. Their entire life will reflect the love of Christ who gave Himself for them. And now, in this spirit, John urges the telling truths of our text.

He says that those who truly believe in Christ as their Lord and Saviour will show this very tangibly and unmistakably in their daily living. Listen to these words, ³ *Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.*

Christians, John contends, have certain saving knowledge. It is a God-given knowledge. It is a knowledge which becomes very evident and practical in the life of the Christian. It affects his talk and life. It causes him to “*walk in the light.*” It is not a light which can be hid under a bushel. It is not a philosophy which remains purely in the mind. It is not a principle for mere theorising.

On the contrary, it is a power and force which affects the very heart and soul of the life of the Christian. And as John now goes deeper into the practical side of Christian knowledge or faith, he points to four characteristics which must be considered in this connection.

The first is this, that through keeping the commandments of God, through permitting God’s wish and will to be dominant and determinant in his life, through living his life in accord with the commandments of God, the Christian comes to the more positive conviction, that he truly knows God.

It is through the art of practical fellowship with God that the Christian comes to a greater heart knowledge of God. Listen to John, ³ *Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.*

John is not speaking here of conversion and the knowledge which comes to a person in and through the experience of conversion. No amount of moral effort will qualify a person for the act of conversion, nor will a lifelong keeping of

God's commandments, if this was possible in itself, lead into a saving knowledge of God. Salvation is purely a gift of grace. By grace you are saved. No one can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

It is true that Christians are obligated to let their *light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*³ But that is not the demonstration of Christian faith referred to here. No, when John writes as he does, he points to the deepening of convictions which comes through personal experience in a life activated by Christian faith.

Paul calls it the *"earnest of the Spirit within."*⁴ It is the inner sanction which the heart gives to the claims of God as experienced in the course of keeping His commandments. It is to this deeper and fuller knowledge of God that he refers. Christian faith, then, to John is an intensely practical thing. He could subscribe one hundred per cent to the statement of James that a faith without works was dead. Faith in action was not only an evidence of life, but a definite pathway to a better knowledge of the character and claims of God.

Secondly, John says more about faith in action. He notes, that the very truthfulness of the Christian is evidenced by his practical Christian living. John writes *"He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.* This means that consistency between profession and practice, practical Christian living, is more than a matter of policy. It touches the heart and core of the Christian's being.

Not only does the world judge the truthfulness and honesty of the Christian by the morals of his living, but God Almighty does the same thing. Very correctly and bluntly John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit records the accusation of the person who professes to truly know God, to possess a saving knowledge of Him, but then in his daily life deliberately fails to live up to the wish and will of God. Such a person is untruthful and dishonest, and there are no ifs or but's about it.

Thirdly, John tells us why the Christian faith must be translated into Christian living. It is this, *⁵But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.*

God has a definite design for our lives, and that is a design of love. Failure to keep His commandments is thwarting this design of love and making it of no

effect. But keeping the commandments gives the love of God full and free play in our lives until this love fully possesses us. Doing the will of God becomes our second nature.

Thus the design of God for our lives is carried out from day to day until at the close of our days it is perfected in us. Christian living then involves growth in Christian love, service, and understanding and leaves unquestioned evidence that the individual dwells in God and God in him.

John gives us a fourth reason why Christian faith must be practical and reveal itself in the keeping of the commandments. He writes, ***6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.***

Peter also reminded the Christians of his day that they were called to follow in the steps of Christ as we read in 1 Peter 2:21, ***21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.***

John does the same in the verse before us. If someone claims to be in Christ, to abide in Christ, to have the mind of Christ, to be one with Christ, then he will walk in life as Christ walked. He will reveal the mind of Christ in his practical reaction to life, just as Christ Himself did. People will be able to detect the same mind and heart beat operative in both.

These, then, are the four simple reasons given by John in the words of our text why saving knowledge of God, if it be saving knowledge indeed, must be reflected in consistent, practical living. It is why the person who professes faith in God must permit that faith to reveal its genuineness in keeping His commandments. It is a faith in action which John is impressing upon His readers.

Clearly the very reasons given in our text by the Apostle for practical Christian living are as valid, and need to be urgently stressed in our day as they were in his day. The dangers against which John warns us here are as prevalent and pressing in our day as they were in his day.

There are too many professing Christians whose faith presumably is localised in the head and never penetrates the heart or pulsates through to the hand. To them the accusation of the Prophet of old applies, ***these people draw near with***

*their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me.*⁵ Or the caution of our Lord,²¹ *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”*⁶ Let us not be one of these!

Growth in Christian faith and knowledge is to a considerable degree a matter of living the Christian life. As we keep the commandments, we truly learn to know God. Have you grown in your knowledge of God through keeping His commandments? Has consistent Christian living deepened your insights and convictions? Or must you confess that intellectually and spiritually you are no more advanced in your Christianity than you were many years ago?

And what about the truthfulness of your profession as reflected in your Christian living? What about the operation and perfection of God’s love in your life? What about a constant, daily following in the footsteps of your Lord? Can you honestly lay claim to this?

If you cannot, John questions the truthfulness and honesty of your Christian claims. There is a possibility that you have no saving knowledge of God at all and that your attachment to Christ is but a sham and a delusion.

A faith that is a faith indeed will soon reveal its light and life. James knew what he was saying when he questioned the character of a faith that did not bear fruit.

Martin Luther correctly sums up the statements of our text in these words: *“The whole duty and work of a Christian is made up of these two parts, faith and obedience. Guided by faith, living after the example of Christ, growing in likeness to Christ, this is Christian faith in action.”*

2. Faith In Action What It Excludes

Faith in action is known positively by what it includes, and also negatively by what it excludes.

John anticipates the reaction of some of his readers and so he proceeds immediately to answer them, in order to lead them into an even fuller and better understanding of a faith in action.

He says, “I am not giving you a new commandment, but merely reminding you of an old one. It may sound new to some of you, but it was definitely present in the Word which you heard from the beginning. Now since Christ has come and the light of faith has filled your hearts, this faith must be active in you just as it was active in Christ.”

Thus John seeks to forestall an objection which may be raised. But he does still more. He warns against one specific evil which a faith that is genuine must exclude — an evil whose presence definitely stamps that faith a fraud. He refers to hatred for the Christian brother.

Hatred of the Brother

How cutting and caustic is the language of the Evangelist as he discusses this subject in the final three verses of our text!

He tells us that “Anyone who claims to be a Christian but still hates his brother has never been a Christian and is not one now. This is one of the signs of being a Christian that he truly love his brother and in this love give no offence to himself or others. On the other hand, if hatred for his brother still dominates his soul, such a person gives unquestioned evidence that he still dwells in the land of spiritual darkness, not being able to see the way out.”

Now, what amazes us, as we read these words, is the vehemence of language against an evil which we would hardly expect to find in the early Church. A hatred? Yes, a certain kind of hatred will be in the heart of the Christian just as the Scriptures inform us that it is in the heart of God. But never a hatred for the Christian brother.

Irrespective who he may be or what he may do, the Christian dare never hate the offending and erring brother. Yet, we ask, was this hatred so prominent in the early Church as to provoke these rather cutting and biting words of the Evangelist?

As a matter of fact it was, just as it is today and always will be, until the end of the world. Christians are still of the flesh and it is so easy for them, not having entirely conquered their innate selfishness or submitted wholly to the guidance of their faith, to be victimised by hatred of the brother.

When they succumb to this weakness, they stumble themselves and cause others to stumble also. What fools they become! What fierce animosities they provoke! How they deter the stranger at the gate!

The pagan historian Ammianus wrote in his day: *“The enmity of the Christians toward one another surpassed the fury of savage beasts against man.”* While this certainly is an overstatement in the extreme, it does point to an evil which has always burdened and eroded the Christian society and still does so today.

Where this hatred exists, John says, there saving faith does not exist, there the individual has fallen from grace and is still groping in spiritual darkness.

But where genuine faith is in action, there hatred for the brother is outlawed and suppressed, instead patience, forbearance, and forgiveness are at work, and love comes into action. And because love is always winsome and gracious, it never becomes a stumbling block to others and never creates an obstacle to the Gospel.

On the contrary, an active faith and an active love in the life of the Christian will attract others to Christ just as an unchristian hatred will drive them away. John warns against hatred as he preaches and pleads for more faith and love.

We also have need of hearing and heeding this warning today. Untold harm has been done to the Church of Christ by members who are not guided by love, but by hatred in their treatment of one another! Failing to provide for the growth and expansion of faith, not too concerned about a consistent use of the means of grace, they soon permit envy, jealousy, and pride to ensnare the soul. With that comes that devastating, blinding hatred, which has wrought such fearful havoc in the Christian Church.

As we are urged anew to demonstrate the genuineness of our faith in deeds of love and charity, how equally urgent is the warning to guard against the danger of hating the brother. Brotherly love is an evidence of an active Christian faith. Brotherly love promotes the stability and security of Christian life. Brotherly love is a mighty magnet to draw others to Christ.

May God, then, grant to us all that needed measure of grace to heed the solemn directions given to us in the words of our text. May we be blessed with a faith that leaves no doubt with regard to its character in its practical expressions

in our lives. A faith that leads into an ever growing and expanding knowledge of God. A faith that follows in the footsteps of Christ. A faith that loves the brother.

It will then be a faith that from day to day carries forward the design of God for our lives, doing His will, promoting His cause, carrying forward His banners, until one day, having completed our work here below, we shall see love perfected before the throne of God above. May the Lord grant us this for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Romans 3:28

² 1 John 2:1

³ Matthew 5:16

⁴ 2 Corinthians 1:22

⁵ Isaiah 29:13

⁶ Matthew 7:21