

# This is Just a Test

## 1 John 2:3-14

When was the last time you took a test? A driver's test, a proficiency test, a test in a college class, or something you had to do to keep a certification or even your job. Well, tonight we are going to be looking at a couple of tests. And I warn you up front, you can't study for these, but you had better be prepared for them.

Sorry, no one is allowed to leave the building!!

As John writes this letter to the Church of his day, you and I, some two thousand years later need to realize, he's not taking chapter or even verse breaks as he writes. His thought process is continuing on from the beginning as he shares what he feels to be important information with the Church. It was important for the Church of *his* day and... it's important for the *Church of today*.

We've seen already, as he began the letter, he confirmed for them the fact that he himself is what could be considered **an "Expert Witness"** –

*<sup>1</sup> That which... we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled..., <sup>2</sup> the life was manifested, and we have seen, and (we) bear witness, and (we) declare to you... <sup>3</sup> that which we have seen and heard we declare to you...,*

He was there.

*He didn't get the t-shirt, but he personally, and fully experienced the life that was manifested in Jesus Christ, the very Son of God. And now his fellowship with the Son of God and God the Father continues and he desires this Body of Believers known as the Church to experience this same fellowship or *Koinonia*.*

The problem is and was, John knew that **sin caused a separation**, a void in the *Koinonia* or Fellowship that God desires to have with us. So John instructs all Believers to *"confess our sins, (knowing that God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

Earlier John had spoken about how we maintain our *Koinonia* by walking in the *LIGHT* and not walking in the *DARKNESS*. By way of context and reference, John is saying **that walking in obedience is walking in the *LIGHT*. While walking in sin is walking in *DARKNESS*.**

He now takes that thought and begins to explain to us what walking in the *LIGHT* looks like... what does it mean to walk in obedience... how can we know that we know Him?

If you will remember, we spoke about the fact that all through his letter John lays out **Three Tests:** The Moral Test, the Doctrinal Test and the Social Test. These tests help us to do a self-examine our own spiritual lives. And I say “*our own spiritual lives*” because John seems to zero in on the need for the individual Believer himself or herself, to consider ***their own personal lives***.

This isn't judging my brother or my sister, this is **putting myself** under the microscope of God's determined will... ***to see where I stand!***

John lays it out very plain, he states his case very clearly –

1John 2

*<sup>3</sup>Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. <sup>4</sup>He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*

Before we get too far, I want you to zero in on the **personal plural pronoun “we”**. In the correct usage of that word it speaks of “*you and me*”. John wants us to bring this statement or **Moral Test** home to our own personal lives, but in the words he uses John is including himself in the statement – ***we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments***.

What's brought out here is the clear truth that ***past experience alone doesn't confirm or affirm our salvation***. Let me share that with you again, because it is of utmost eternal importance: ***past experience alone does not confirm or affirm our salvation***.

Our confirmation and affirmation of our personal salvation comes through the faithful walk of obedience. It is not our salvation, but ***it is*** the confirmation that we have salvation.

**James said the same thing** when he wrote:

*“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”*  
(James 2:14-17 ESV)

Eugene Peterson in his book *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* states this,

*“Each act of obedience by the Christian is a modest proof, unequivocal for all its imperfection, of the reality of what he attests.”*<sup>1</sup>

To state it another way, Peterson is saying is that if we **verbally attest to the fact that we are Christians**, then “each act of obedience... is a modest proof... of that reality” in our lives, even in the midst of our imperfections.

So, here’s the test: How do we know that we know Him?

**By a life of obedience to His Word and leading in our lives.**

The Apostle John goes on –

*<sup>5</sup> But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. **By this we know that we are in Him.** <sup>6</sup> He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.*

“...the love of God is perfected in him...” as a Believer the Love of God is already ours. That work of Grace through Faith is what allowed us to abide in Christ. John is reminding the Church is that since we *ARE abiding in Him, we ought to walk just as He walked.*

Beloved, **it matters greatly how we live our lives...** this isn’t in order to obtain eternal life or even to maintain our salvation. The importance of the life we live is the attestation and confirmation that we truly are Believers. When the Holy Spirit of God is directing our lives and we walk in obedience to His wooing, we then, and only then have the assurance. *This is the affirmation that the Spirit of God abides within us.*

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, 1980, IVP Books

If this obedience isn't present in our lives, then we need to consider rather or not we are  **basing our eternal lives on a religious experience, rather than on the redemptive work of God's Spirit**. John writes to give the reader the assurance of salvation he wants the Church to **know**. As a matter of fact the word "to know" (*ginosko*) is used 23 different times in this short Epistle.

**John writes to give assurance and no doubt.** He understands that this life of obedience is difficult, but he also wants to be certain that we are certain that we are where we need to be in reference to eternity.

*A few years ago Brian Perkins explained to me about the revelation God gave to him and Maria as they were considering leaving the **religion of Mormonism** – a religion where works are paramount to the securing of your salvation. In essence, and I'm certain I'm not quoting him completely, but he said that all his life he had been trying to climb this ladder, hoping to get high enough that he would gain God's favor in his life. Yet, all his life he would climb up three steps and fall back two; or climb up one and fall back three, never seeming to get high enough never able to obtain that assurance of his relationship with God.*

*Then one day he realized he could never climb high enough to please God. But that wasn't the real problem... the real and actual problem was, **the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall**. All of his life his ladder was leaning against the Wall of Man's Works and Abilities. He came to realize that his ladder need to be **resting on the Wall of God's Grace**. In and on Grace his ladder became securely fastened. And as he climbed the ladder of obedience, it wasn't to gain God's favor, because it was God's good favor that attached his ladder to Grace – no, his climb of obedience simply strengthened the Fellowship he has with God and the continually assures him of the love of God already lavished upon him through Faith in Jesus Christ.*

*He also shared that one of the problems with many Mormons is that although they realize they can **never climb high enough**, they don't realize (or want to admit) that their ladder is on the wrong wall.*

As we move on to verse 7, John moves from a **Moral Test to a Social Test** – READY FOR YOUR NEXT TEST?

This test deals with the inner workings of how we respond to people on the outside.

*<sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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.*

John wanted his readers to know that this isn't some new-fangled doctrine that he, himself had come up with. He wanted them to know that what he is about to say is actually something that they already knew to be true.

When John was writing to them about obedience, there seems to be this one continuing theme found throughout the Epistle of 1 John – *Love for the Brethren*. This is a truth, or a commandment they would have heard from the very beginning of their Christian walk: as both Jew and Gentile entered the church; as both slave and freedmen, as well as servant and aristocrats all came to fellowship together; all men and women from every walk of life coming together to experience true *Koinonia*.

The call to love one another is an old commandment. But, what had already been lived out in Christ and the Disciples, was actually *new to them*.

Sort of like if I told you, “*We just bought a new car.*” And you go outside and see me get into a 1993 Nissan Altima. You would say, “*That’s not a new car, it’s old.*” Well, you would be right, but for me it **is a new car, I’ve never owned it before.**

Here John is laying down for them. You may have heard this at the beginning of your walk, but you need to be certain to bring it into your life and spiritual experience

Once again John gives them the test. This test is a clarification of the former Moral Test. This test combines Moral Standards with Social Actions –

*<sup>9</sup> He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. <sup>10</sup> He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. <sup>11</sup> 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.*

Again here, we can see the case of opposing arguments or statements to show his the direction of his teaching and position – okay, here's the test:

- *Okay, you saw you are in the light, yet you hate your brother or sister*
  - *DING, DING. Sorry, you're still in darkness until now.*
  - *NEXT!!*
  
- *This one here loves her sister. She must be abiding in the light, there should be no cause for stumbling in her,*
  - *DING, DING. Okay, she's in the Light.*
  - *NEXT!!*
  
- *Hmmm, you say you hate your brother. You have no idea where you are going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.*
  - *DING, DING!! You apparently are still in darkness, because you continue to walk in darkness.*

You see the test really isn't that hard to take. The only real difficulty is trying to live up to something you are not. But, John also understands that there are a variety of maturity levels within any Church. The level of one individual's maturity and obedience to the Lord may be miles ahead of another. A young Believer may have greater struggles than an older Believer. There may have been long fought battles in the mature Believers life that the New Believer may have never had to face.

John now writes in almost a poetic format, as he addresses three different levels of Christin maturity. However, some have said he is still writing to all Believers, everywhere, we will look at that in a moment –

<sup>12</sup> *I write to you, **Little Children**, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.*

<sup>13</sup> *I write to you, **Fathers**, because you have known Him who is from the beginning.*

*I write to you, **Young Men**, because you have overcome the wicked one.*

*I write to you, **Little Children**, because you have known the Father.*

<sup>14</sup> *I have written to you, **Fathers**, because you have known Him who is from the beginning.*

*I have written to you, **Young Men**, because you are strong, and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.*

Yes, one of the first things we come to realize when we come to Jesus as **Little Children** is the sweetness of having our sins forgiven. Then the last part of verse 13 is the joy of coming to know the Father – a good, good Father – full of grace and truth, powerful to cover and protect us from all harm, deserving of our respect and honor, yet allowing us to rush into His presence.

In the maturity of our Christian walk, as we ourselves become **Fathers and Mothers** to others in the faith, is the strong impression that we, in our limitations of time and space have actually had true *Koinonia* with the King of the Ages. In our limited mortality, we have had the awesome opportunity to walk with the One who is Immortal, Invisible, the Only Wise God.

Then, there are those who are maturing in their faith, no longer **Little Children** but actually **Young Men** active in the trenches of Spiritual Warfare, able to see and understand that they *are more than conquerors through Him who loved us* (Romans 8:37).

Yes, you could look at it as John is writing to three different groups of Believers. But bear with me a moment. What about the possibility that John is writing to all Believers who are actively growing in their faith, as though they are one.

Don't accuse me of adding to the Word of God, here, but with the thought that John could very well be writing to each Believer, yet giving them a message from three different "*angles*". Remember, John himself is an old man at this point. Everyone to him is a Child.

Even here in this chapter we read in verse 1 he writes, "*My little children, these things I write, so that you may not sin...*"

In just a couple of verses down from our current passage in 2:18 he writes, “*Little Children, it is the last hour...*”

Further down in verse 28 we read, “*And now, Little Children, abide in Him...*,”

3:7 “*Little Children, let no one deceive you.*”

3:18 “*My Little Children...*,”

4:4 “*You are of God, Little Children...*”

5:21 “*Little children, keep yourselves from idols.*”

Perhaps what we see in verses 12–14 is John writing with the heart of a Pastor to a congregation he dearly loves – could it be possible that he is writing

*<sup>12</sup> I write to you AS, **Little Children**, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.*

*<sup>13</sup> I write to you AS, **Fathers**, because you have known Him who is from the beginning.*

*I write to you AS, **Young Men**, because you have overcome the wicked one.*

*I write to you AS, **Little Children**, because you have known the Father.*

*<sup>14</sup> I have written to you AS, **Fathers**, because you have known Him who is from the beginning.*

*I have written to you AS, **Young Men**, because you are strong, and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.*

“**AS, Little Children**, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.” Isn't that the truth that all of us need to be continually reminded of as the enemy parades our weaknesses in front of us. As he continually acts as the accuser of the Brethren. We all need to be continually reminded *our sins are forgiven us for His name's sake.*

“**AS, Fathers**, because you have known Him who is from the beginning.” The awesome reality that each of us need to know. In the midst of our temporal existence, our God is

from the beginning of all time, and is outside of all time, and extends beyond all time; forever before the beginning and forever beyond whatever end that we could imagine.

*“I write to you **AS, Young Men**, because you have overcome the wicked one.”*

If you are here tonight, *you have overcome the wicked one*. If you are listening on the radio or the podcast, *you have overcome the wicked one*. As he comes against us in every arena of life, in every facet of our being, when we are still able to walk in obedience to our God, *we have overcome the wicked one*.

And isn't it true, that all of us **AS, Little Children**, *need to bask in the knowledge the Father*; our heavenly Father, whose great love for us began before we were ever formed on our mother's womb. Coming to Him as children, we surrender all our cares to Him; trusting Him to the uttermost. Walking without fear, because we know our Father is with us, watching over us, and keeping us by His great strength.

And as we walk in Him, we are able to walk **AS, Young Men**, *because we come to realize His strength is what makes us strong, and as the Word of God abides in us, we begin to regularly walk in victory, overcoming the tricks and deceits of the wicked one*.

Do you hear the heart of John in this letter?

*“Oh my dear ones, I write to you, to encourage you to continue to walk in the light as He is in the light. In order that you would maintain your fellowship, that Koinonia with God the Father and Jesus Christ His Son.*

*I'm writing to you in order that you might know that you are His and that the truth does abide in you. Don't listen to the lies of the enemy or the promises of religion. Our God calls you to relationship with Him.*

*If you want to know for certain that you have that relationship, do some introspection of your own life, you love for others and your obedience to the things of God.*

*It is only then that we can have full assurance that our sins are forgiven; that we know Him who is from the beginning; that we can walk in victory, recognizing that in Jesus we are victorious over the wicked one. Be strong in the Lord and let His Word abide in you.*

