

True Faith

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[0:00] So let's return to the passage that Do read for us earlier in 1 John chapter 2.! Tonight we'll be focusing on the first three verses.

! It's been a while, the first six verses, sorry. It's been a while since I last spoke here on the first chapter of this letter.

So a brief recap of the purpose of the letter and the broader context for tonight's passage might well be helpful. The Apostle John, likely later in his life, penned this letter to believers in and around the city of Ephesus.

The congregation was unsettled. It was troubled by false teaching. There was division and uncertainty. Some had abandoned the fellowship, while others were promoting distorted views of Jesus.

They were denying either his humanity or his divinity. This resulted in confusion, not only about Christ's identity, but also about the true nature of being a Christian.

[1:16] Writing as a spiritual father to his children, John speaks with affection, clarity and authority, calling the church back to the certain revealed truth that had been there from the beginning.

The letter is practical and pastoral. It's structured not like a step-by-step argument, like, say, many of Paul's letters, but rather it contains a series of tests, of marks, of signs, that define authentic Christianity, right belief, genuine love, and holy living.

In the first chapter, we looked at the marks of true fellowship among the believers in the church. So we saw what true fellowship looks like in the local church.

And this evening, we're going to focus in on the individual to look at what are the marks of true faith. In this passage, John addresses the practical reality of the Christian life.

A life lived after conversion, but one still marked by imperfection. He is speaking directly to the spiritual state of his readers, anticipating the very struggles that every sincere believer faces.

[2:52] This short passage addresses two fundamental questions that inevitably arise in the life of a believer. And no doubt, you've probably asked these yourself.

Firstly, what happens when I stumble? John instructs us to walk in the light. But I know my own heart.

I still sin in thought, in word, and in deed. Does that mean that I am cut off from fellowship with God? We live in an age that often tells us to define ourselves by our performance.

If you succeed, then you belong. If you fail, you're out. And it's easy to carry that mindset into our Christian walk.

We think, if I've had a good week, then God must be pleased with me. If I fail again, he must be ready to cast me off.

[4:01] John writes to correct that way of thinking and to anchor us in something far steadier than our own performance, Jesus Christ himself.

And the second question that this passage addresses is, how can I know that I truly belong to him? There are people who claim to know God, but their lives show little evidence of it.

So how do I know that my profession is real? How do I know that my faith is genuine? How do you know that your profession is real?

How do you know that your faith is genuine? That is a question that many sincere Christians struggle with. The hypocrite will rarely, if ever, ask it.

The hypocrite is content with appearances, but the tender-hearted believer often does because he longs to be sure of Christ.

[5 : 15] John writes to steady such hearts so that we do not live in endless doubt. These are not abstract theological concepts, but they're profoundly personal and practised by recent failure.

Some believers may be weighed down by recent failure. Hearing the accuser whisper, you can't be a Christian. Others might be troubled by persistent doubts.

Am I truly his? Am I deceiving myself? Still others feel weary in the Christian life, wondering whether they can go on at all.

In chapter 2, John speaks directly to those fears with the compassion of a spiritual father. He offers reassurance without compromising the call to holiness.

He establishes a firm foundation showing that the Christian life is not defined by sinless perfection, but by continuing reliance upon Jesus Christ.

[6 : 31] So in these six short verses, John gives us three anchors for our faith, three truths to steady us when we stumble, when we doubt, and when we feel weary.

These three anchors and our points for this evening are we have an advocate. Christ defends us when we fall into sin.

We have assurance. A life of obedience shows that we truly know him and we can abide in him. We are called to walk as Jesus walked.

This is John's message to a church unsettled by false claims, but it is also God's word for us this evening. Wherever you are in your walk with Christ, here is solid ground.

Christ our advocate, our assurance, and our abiding. So firstly, Christ our advocate. Let's read again the first two verses of this chapter.

[7 : 42] My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin, but if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. John's words carry both tenderness and authority.

He begins his encouragement with my little children, a fatherly voice full of love and care. He writes not to discourage, but to steady believers.

And what is his aim? Well, he says that you may not sin. The Christian life is not careless about sin.

Grace does not give us license to behave in any way we want. John tells us that God is light and those who walk with him must walk in holiness.

[8 : 49] John will not lower the standard. Sin, as we hear this morning, is deadly serious. He knows the truth.

and if anyone does sin, note the wording, it's not if the unbeliever does sin, but if anyone.

The Christian is included here. And as John has already stated in the first chapter of this letter, if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.

even those who are walking in the light will sometimes stumble. So what then? Are we left hopeless when we fall?

No. Here is the comfort. We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. The word advocate is a courtroom word.

[9 : 55] Picture the scene. God the Father, the judge of all the earth, sits in holiness. The charges are read and they are true.

Our sin is real. Our consciences condemn us. Left to ourselves the verdict is certain. Guilty.

Think for a moment what this means in the ordinary Christian life. When you pray after sinning, you are not approaching a Father who rolls his eyes at you or sighs in frustration.

You are approaching the Father with Christ himself beside you, speaking on your behalf. Your prayers, faltering and weak as they may be, are taken up by the advocate who never fails.

This is why the writer of Hebrews says we can draw near with confidence to the throne of grace. Boldness does not come from our track record but from our advocate.

[11 : 07] John says we have an advocate. Again, not we hope for an advocate or we once had an advocate but we have an advocate right now in this very moment.

Jesus Christ stands before the Father on behalf of his people. And who does this passage say the advocate is?

He is Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the righteous one. He has no sin of his own. His obedience was flawless.

His righteousness is perfect. Our defense is not built on our record but on his. But his advocacy rests not only on who he is but also on what he has done.

He is the propitiation for our sins. That word propitiation takes us back to the Old Testament to the mercy seat in the tabernacle.

[12 : 24] On the day of atonement the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled upon the mercy seat to turn away the wrath of God. That blood covered the sins of the people.

But all that was pointing forward. Christ is not only the priest who intercedes but he is also the sacrifice whose blood makes atonement for us.

as Paul says Jesus is the one whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

On the cross he bore the wrath that was due to us. Justice was satisfied the punishment fell on him.

So when he stands as our advocate before the father he does not beg for leniency as if the judge must overlook sin.

[13 : 25] He can plead on the basis of justice justice that has already been satisfied at Calvary. He can point to his own finished work and say father their debt is paid.

And John adds here not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. The sacrifice of Christ is sufficient for all.

It is not limited to one people to one nation to one time. As Isaiah prophesied I will make you as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

The gospel is as wide as the world. All who believe from every tribe and tongue find in him a perfect advocate.

So what does that mean for us? Firstly do not despair when you sin. When you stumble Satan will whisper that there is no way back for you but scripture teaches us here that you have an advocate.

[14:49] Your hope is not in what you can say in your own defence but in what Christ has already done for you. Secondly do not take sin lightly.
if Christ had to suffer wrath as our propitiation how can we treat sin as if it is a small matter?
John writes so that we may not sin. Grace calls us to holiness. And thirdly rest in Christ's righteousness. Your plea before the father is not I tried my best. It is Christ lived and died for me. He is your righteousness.
He is your advocate. So here again these words of comfort. We have an advocate with the father. Christ Jesus the righteous.

[15:50] That is the solid ground of the Christian life. let's move on now to look at verses 3 to 5. And by this we know that we have come to know him.
If we keep his commandments whoever says I know him but does not keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps his word in him truly the love of God is perfected.
By this we know that we are in him. If our first comfort is that Christ is our advocate here John gives us our second our assurance not a vague hope not a wishful thought but the solid ground that we may know how sorry so that we may know that we know him.
that phrase is worth pausing on even though I stumbled upon it by this we know that we have come to know him. John is not content for Christians to remain in doubt and uncertainty.
the Lord does not want his people to live their whole life saying I hope I am his but I cannot be sure. This is a letter written to trouble believers and John's aim is not to unsettle but it is to steady him.

[17:29] Yes John is realistic about sin. Yes we are called to obedience but he writes with this pastoral purpose that God's people might live with confidence in Christ not with endless doubts.
How then do we know well John's answer is plain if we keep his commandments. Now we must be clear he's not teaching salvation by works.
Obedience does not earn us a place in God's family but obedience is evidence that we already belong to him. To know God truly is to be changed by him.
When the spirit of God writes his law in our hearts as Jeremiah prophesied then obedience is no longer just an external duty but it becomes an inward desire.
I will put my law within them and I will write them write it on their hearts. This is what John is describing and that is why he draws the contrast so starkly in verse four.

[18:47] Whoever says I know him but does not keep his commandments as the liar and the truth is not in him. It is possible to make a false claim a false profession.
It is possible to say I know God and yet live as though his word carries no weight in my life. That kind of profession is hollow.
Isaiah condemned Israel for this very same thing. This people draw near with their mouth and honour me with their lips while their hearts are far from me.
John's words are sharp because he wants no one to rest on empty words. But having said that we must not miss the encouragement of verse five.
But whoever keeps his word in him truly the love of God is perfected. In other words when a person treasures God's word when they seek to shape their life by it however imperfectly that is evidence that God's love is truly at work in them.

[20 : 06] His love is perfected not meaning that they are perfect but that God's love has reached its goal. It has produced obedience from the heart.

Now let me speak to our own tradition here. It's no secret that many who attend worship faithfully week after week, month after month, year after year, but stop short of professing faith.

Sometimes this will be because they fear being hypocrites. sometimes it will be because people do not feel good enough. Sometimes it's because they're waiting for some overwhelming experience that will give them the certainty they are craving for.

And so they wait year after year, always attending, always listening, but never resting in Christ. John's words are meant to help precisely in that situation.

assurance does not come by waiting endlessly for a sudden moment of light. Assurance grows as we look honestly at our lives and see the evidence of God's work.

[21 : 32] Do you love his word? Do you grieve over your sin? Do you seek to walk in his ways? Those are desires that are not natural to the human heart.

they are signs of the spirit's work in you. And this is where the fellowship of the church is such a gift. Because sometimes we are the worst judges of our own condition.

We either excuse too much or we condemn ourselves too harshly. others can see what we do not. Elders who have walked with you, friends who know your life, fellow believers who observe your manner, they can often testify that they see God's grace in you.

They should not be ignored. If trusted Christians tell you that they see the fruit of God's work in your life, do not dismiss it as empty flattery.

It may well be the Lord's own means of giving you the assurance that you look for. John's point is that assurance is not found in perfection, but in direction.

[22 : 54] None of us keep his commandments without stumbling. But when the heart is turned towards obedience, when the word of God matters, when sin becomes a grief rather than a delight, then we can say with John, by this we know that we have come to know him.

This is a bit like walking up a hill on a foggy day. Sometimes the fog is so thick that you can't see the summit and you may even doubt that you're on the right path.

But if you were to stop and look back, you can see the trail that you have already covered. That backwards glance assures you that you are indeed on the right path.

In the same way, assurance grows when we look back and we see how God has changed us. The old sins we once loved now grieve us.

The word of God which was once dry now draws us. And love for his people now takes root where once there was indifference.

[24 : 07] These are signs of the spirit's work and they give us confidence that we are his. so let let me press this gently.

If you are one of those who sits under the word week by week, perhaps for decades, but you have held back from professing Christ because you feel unworthy or unsure, John is calling you not to despair, but to examine yourself honestly and positively.

Look at your life, consider what others have seen and above all ask this, do I desire to keep God's word?

Do I desire to follow Jesus? If so, then that is the fruit of God's love at work in you. the devil would have you live forever in uncertainty.

Christ would have you live in the assurance of his grace. Don't confuse humility with unbelief. True humility receives what Christ has done and true assurance is found not in saying I am good enough, but in saying Christ is my advocate and I can see his word shaping my life.

[25 : 39] So John gives us assurance. By this we know that we have come to know him if we keep his commandments. Our advocate gives us confidence before the Father and our obedience gives us assurance in Christ.

And now John takes it further. If we say we abide in him, then our whole walk must reflect him. We must walk as he walked.

And that is our third anchor. We must abide in him. if we look back at verses five and six, second half of verse five.

By this we may know that we are in him. Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. Here John is not simply speaking about outward obedience, but about union, about being in him.

To be a Christian is not merely to admire Christ or to follow his teachings at a distance. It's to be joined by him, to share his life.

[27 : 00] Jesus himself used that language in John 15, abide in me and I in you. John takes that picture and says, if you claim to abide in Christ, then your life will show it.

And what will it show? Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. This is both the simplest and most searching test.

The Christian life is a walk. A daily step-by-step pattern. And that pattern is Christ. Not sinless perfection for us, for John has already told us that no man may say he is without sin, but the direction of life is Christ-shaped.

His obedience to the Father, his humility, his self-giving love, these mark the road that we are to walk.

think of how scripture describes his path. In Psalm 40, which is fulfilled in Christ Jesus, we read, I delight to do your will, O my God.

[28 : 18] Your law is within my heart. That was his walk, delight in his Father's will. will. In Isaiah 53, we see him portrayed as the man of sorrows, humble and rejected, yet steadfast in his calling.

Paul sums it up when he writes, and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. to abide in Christ is to have his law written upon our hearts, his humility shaping our spirit, and his love moving our hands and feet.

This is both a challenge and a comfort, a challenge because it will not do to make empty claims of being in Christ while our lives bear no resemblance to his.

if we abide in him, likeness must appear, but also a comfort because the one who calls us to walk as he walked is the very one who abides in us by his spirit.

The promise of Ezekiel comes to life, a new heart I will give you and a new spirit I will put within you and cause you to walk in my statutes.

[29 : 47] We are not left to copy Christ in our own strength, but are enabled by his indwelling presence. So when John says that we ought to walk as he walked, he's not driving us to despair, but he's drawing us into dependence.

Our daily walk, halting though it may be, is lived out of union with Christ. and every step that shows his likeness, every choice of obedience, every act of love, every posture of humility is evidence that we truly abide in him.

Here then is the test and the encouragement. Are you walking as he walked? not perfectly, but truly?

Do you see, however faintly, the footprints of Jesus in your own life? If so, it is because his spirit is at work in you and his abiding presence is real.

The advocate who pleads for you before the father, the Lord who assures you through obedience, is the same Christ who abides in you and shapes your walk.

[31:14] And he will not cease. He will not cease his work until the day when we are made like him and walk with him in glory. abiding is not about dramatic moments, but about steady presence.

Think of a marriage. What proves love is not only the wedding day vows, but the daily acts of kindness, patience, and sacrifice that follow.

In the same way, our union with Christ shows itself in ordinary daily choices. opening the Bible when we are tired, offering forgiveness when we are wronged, serving when it costs us.

These small steps of faith are not wasted. They are footprints of Christ in our life. So as we draw this to a close, let us remember what John has shown us in these verses.

He began with a word of comfort, but if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father. That is our first anchor.

[32:31] We do not stand alone when we fail. The righteous one stands for us, and his blood has already satisfied the judgment of God.

When conscience condemns, when the accuser whispers his lies, when we stumble yet again, our hope is not in ourselves, but in Christ our advocate.

From there John moves to our assurance. By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. The evidence that we belong to God is not in words only, but in obedience.

That is our second anchor. True knowledge of God bears fruit in keeping his word. And though we stumble, there is a new desire to walk in his ways, a new love for his law, a new grief when we fall short.

These are the marks of his spirit's work within us. And then John raises our eyes still higher. Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

[33:47] That is our third anchor. The Christian life is nothing less than a Christ-shaped walk. To abide in him is to have his life in us so that obedience, humility, and love begin to mark our steps.

Not perfection, but direction. Not a flawless record, but a living likeness. God so here in just six verses, John has steadied us with a gospel that is both realistic and reassuring.

Realistic because it takes sin seriously and calls us to holiness, and reassuring because it tells us that Christ is our advocate, that his love is perfected in our obedience, and that his spirit abides in us to make us walk as he walked.

So let me leave you with this encouragement. The Christian life may feel fragile, but the anchors John gives us are immovable.

Our advocate will never lose a case. Our assurance is grounded in the work of God himself, and our abiding is sustained not by our grip on God, but on Christ's grip on us.

[35:10] You may stumble, you may doubt, you may grow weary, but Christ does not stumble, Christ does not doubt, and Christ does not grow weary.

He is enough for you. And so I ask you as we close, do you know this advocate? do you rest on his righteousness rather than your own?

Do you find assurance not in your claims, but in a growing desire to keep his word? Do you abide in him as he abides in you?

And is your walk, however faltering, beginning to resemble his? If not, come to him even tonight. Confess your sin, trust your advocate, and abide in him.

For the one who speaks for you before the Father, who assures you in obedience, will also keep you abiding in him until the day you see him face to face.

[36:18] Amen.