



# God's Love Perfected

## 1 John 2:1-6

**Walking in the Light**  
A study through the book of First John

After last week's sermon, I was talking with a few people about how encouraged I was with how John argued against the false teachers. These false teachers who think they can live in sin, and that this sinfulness doesn't affect their fellowship with God, are completely wrong. But notice that John doesn't say, "Listen, Christians don't sin!" Instead, John says that Christians do sin, but they relate to sin differently. They admit it. They agree with God about it. They don't hide it. They're transparent about their sins. They even are open in fellowship with other Christians about it. No justification.

Sometimes people might think that sinning is hypocrisy for the Christian, but I would say that hiding and not being transparent is hypocrisy. The reason why is because John said that those who have trusted Jesus are now in a relationship with God, who is Light. His light shines on us, and we cannot hide!

Now, that can sound scary to some people. The all-gazing Light of God is shining on us! For anyone who doesn't know the love of Jesus and the grace found in the gospel, this is scary news, right? God sees everything you do and you will be judged for it. But for those of us who have been seen our sinfulness and we know we deserve God's punishment, but instead, we have seen how Jesus has taken the punishment on the cross. And we have turned to God for forgiveness on the basis of Jesus – not us. For us, we now aren't afraid of the Light. After the sermon last week, someone said that the only way to live as John calls people to live is if you really know the gospel. Naturally, we run and sew fig leaves like Adam and Eve. We seek to hide in our shame. But if we know the security we have in Jesus, we are open because we know even God's discipline is all coming from love!

I hope you know this love and grace. Somehow, through admitting our weaknesses and being transparent with God, we don't go backwards in obedience, but we move forward. Again, this is the complete opposite mentality than the world's mentality. The world says, "I'll try harder" or, "It's not that bad," all the while sin is still there and it festers. The Christian confesses they're weak and can't do anything in their own strength. Miraculously, God graces them with growth. Wow. Praise his name.

Even as I emphasize these things, we're going to continue with these ideas moving into chapter 2 today, and the main idea of the sermon is that **Jesus' rejection of sin compels Christians to genuine obedience**. How does this relate to the title of the sermon? Well, I could say this: Jesus' rejection of sin compels Christians to genuine obedience. And, in this, God's love is perfected through his children! Ventura, do you want to grow in knowing the love of God? Do you want to show to others God's love? Then ponder and praise the Lord for what Jesus has done and then seek to follow Jesus in genuine obedience to God.

But what does that mean? I'm glad you asked. What I'm going to do today is focus on this main idea and we'll break it into two main points: "Jesus' rejection of sin" and "Christians are compelled to genuine obedience." But, before we jump into the main idea, I want to ensure we don't just read these words as sterile words on a page or as a mere doctrinal treatise from one of the apostles. John is writing in love

for the readers. Let's read the first sentence of chapter 2: **My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.**<sup>1</sup>

John uses the phrase "little children" on multiple occasions, and he's actually following the example of Jesus. Jesus physically calls "little children" to us, but of course, Jesus refers to his own followers as "little children." We are weak in our own strength. We are needy for the Savior. But the the phrase doesn't simply refer to weakness. It also refers to love. This past week, I visited my niece and nephew and was introduced to another grand-nephew for the first time. Now, there's something mysteriously magical that takes place whenever I see a woman see a baby for the first time. Their voice changes. Excitement exudes through them. They can't contain themselves at how much they love this little one. Now, I get some of that personally, but for me, I think I feel it more with 2 year olds. They can move. You can be silly with them, tickle them and laugh. But I get a smile on my face when little children come to me before and after church. They're precious! Yes, they're weak, but they're also precious. Here John is speaking with the love of Jesus towards the readers. But John does something here that he doesn't do anywhere else when he uses this phrase. He uses the word "my." "My little children. . . ." John loves these people immensely. He wants them to know this on the outset. And, as I hear these words of John written, I simply can't help but resonate with John as I think about you Ventura. I genuinely believe that you will never know until Heaven how much the elders and I love you all. You may think, "Well, all the elders don't know me that well, Pastor." Maybe there are individual elders who don't know you as well as others, but believe me, you are thought of and prayed for. We are burdened when you're burdened, and we ache when sin, division, sickness, pain, sorrow attack. And we rejoice when we hear of God's illumination, joy, and grace are revealed in your lives. Again, I genuinely believe you will never know how much the elders love you. How many tears have been shed on your behalf. How much groaning and also how much yearning for godliness and growth. We love you. So, I echo John's words to you: "My little children."

But John adds, "I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin." In case anyone is confused, John isn't justifying sin. He's not saying that Christians sin and so we should therefore just settle in with sin and tolerate it. No! Forgiveness comes to us not so that we can continue in sin that grace may abound. Forgiveness comes to us so that our eyes would open up to the heinousness of sin and the great love and goodness of God! And this is where John leads us. So again, Jesus' rejection of sin compels Christians to genuine obedience. Let's now break this apart to see how John explains this.

### **1. Jesus' rejection of sin. . . (vv. 1-2).**

Look again at verses 1-2: 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.<sup>2</sup> He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.<sup>2</sup>

But if anyone does sin! Again, John doesn't say Christians don't sin, but a Christian's relationship to it is different. The reason our relationship to sin is different is because we have a reconciled relationship with God. In chapter 1 John emphasized this reconciled relationship by giving us the idea of us walking with God the Father, who is Light. Because we walk with the light, we walk in the light, and we are progressively changed. As we come into chapter 2, John emphasizes our reconciled relationship with God the Son, Jesus. Because of our relationship with Jesus, our relationship to sin is different. So, again,

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 2:1.

<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 2:1–2.

**because God is Light, we walk in the Light. Because the Righteous Jesus is our propitious Advocate, we have an adversarial relationship with sin.** But what does “propitious Advocate” mean? And what does Jesus’ righteousness have anything to do with all this? That’s what we’re going to dive into. If Jesus was not righteous. If he wasn’t our propitiation. If he wasn’t our Advocate, everyone here would still be controlled by our sins. You might say, “No. We’re not that bad.” But let me define sin again. It’s falling short of God’s glory. Sin is loving or serving anything at the level of God or above. What things excite and drive you? Does God have that level of drive or force in your life? You might say, “Well, if that’s sin, then I do fail!” Exactly. And the reason why it’s sin is because we weren’t made for these things. And, if we live for anything that’s created, we are worshipping the creature above the Creator. We’re abusing gifts God has given while ignoring God. To live for these things will actually lead to death because these things cannot save us. We’re not made for these things.

Without Jesus, we can’t be set free. So, John focuses our attention on to Jesus. If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father. This word for advocate can also be translated as “comforter.” Who else in the Bible is referred to as the Comforter? The Holy Spirit! But the Spirit is referred to by Jesus as “another Comforter.” So, please remember Jesus is a comforter as well. But what does this mean to be an advocate/comforter? Well, in John 14, we read of the Spirit being the Comforter to come. The ESV translates this as “Helper.” I like Advocate. What the Spirit does it he is sent to this world to empower Jesus’ followers to plead Christ to the world! We have been given a commission to proclaim the gospel. But in that context of John 14, we are also told that we are to obey. Our words and our actions need to match in order to evangelize to the world that Jesus really does save! This is what the Spirit does.

Now, what does it mean that Jesus is the Advocate? Well, Jesus pleads our cause to the Father. We plead Jesus to the world in this world. Jesus pleads believers to the Father in Heaven. What is he advocating? What is he pleading? Before we ask that, we have to ask whether or not God would listen to Jesus’ advocacy. Is Jesus worthy for the Father to listen to? Of course, we all nod our heads and say “yes!” But John wants to ensure that we understand Jesus’ worth. So, he refers to Jesus as “Christ the righteous.” These words are cramped with meaning. Jesus is the Christ. He’s the One whom the Scriptures foretold and said would come and put an end to sin! He is the Ruler who has come to defeat sin and death and someday will deliver his Kingdom over to the Father. And, Christ, is Righteous. God the Father is Righteous, and Jesus, the God-Man, is righteous. That means whatever Jesus speaks aligns perfectly with the Father. He only does what is right and just. And, as we learned last week, God is always faithful and just.

So, Christians, let me ask you, “Will God the Father listen to God the Son?” Absolutely! If Jesus pleads something, it will happen. Jesus even said of himself that he could call 10,000 legions of angels to rescue him from the cross if he had wanted – and the Father would have listened. But the Father and the Son’s will always remains aligned. Even in the Garden, was Jesus saying, “Father, I don’t agree with you. Do something different?” No. He was asking, in his humanity, if he was missing something to reveal it. But if this is the way, he was always going to be aligned with the Father.

Listen to John’s statements here then. If we sin, Jesus is our Advocate. He’s the one who’s going to plead for us, and God the Father will do whatever Jesus says because they are One in will! Now we can ask, “What will Jesus plead?” I love what the Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther once said: **So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this: ‘I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is there I shall be also!’**

This is what John wants to emphasize. Look at verse 2 again: He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.<sup>3</sup> I wish the word “propitiation” wasn’t so obsolete for people. Propitiation emphasizes a removal of God’s wrath towards us because of sin. Some people will ardently disagree with me because they’ll say, “God isn’t a God of wrath.” But, I must said with trembling that because God is love, he hates and abhors sin. Because God is just, he punishes sin. And, because God is perfect, he is the only one who can weild wrath perfectly. Meaning, his wrath isn’t like humans. We are capricious and sinful. But God is perfect. The Bible, and Jesus himself, is very clear that God is just and God will judge all sinners. John 3:16 is a glorious verse we quote: <sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”<sup>4</sup> Then, you go to verse 18 and read, “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”<sup>5</sup> Whoever doesn’t believe is condemned already. So, Jesus didn’t come to condemn, but to set free! Everyone is born sinners – born condemned. But Jesus came as the propitiation for sins. He came to appease and satisfy God’s just and righteous wrath. Jesus became sin and endured an eternity’s worth of hell for myriads upon myriads of sinners in himself! He drank it completely to show the immense glory, holiness, and love of God. Have you turned to him? Have you embraced this God of grace?

If you have, Jesus is your propitiation. He’s appeased the wrath of God. And John further emphasizes Jesus’ propitiation by saying that Jesus is the propitiation for the sins of the world. That doesn’t mean that everyone is forgiven in this world, but that Jesus’ sacrificial death is powerful enough to save every single human being. Since that’s the case, we have comfort! Each person who trusts Jesus is fully forgiven! So, let’s go to John’s argument again. If anyone sins, Jesus Christ, the righteous One is our Advocate. He pleads our case and what is it? It’s a message of no wrath for us! This reminds me of one of my favorite hymns: Before the throne of God above I have a strong and perfect plea A great High Priest, whose name is Love Who ever lives and pleads for me My name is graven on His hands My name is written on His heart I know that while in heaven He stands No tongue can bid me thence depart No tongue can bid me thence depart.

Our relationship to Jesus and his work in destroying our sin, should then affect how we live, don’t you think? That seems to be John’s logic here. Jesus’ rejection of sin compels Christians to genuine obedience. So, let’s move to the second part of the main idea.

## **2. . . .compels Christians to genuine obedience (vv. 3-6).**

I’m going to switch the order around a little bit for the sake of clarity in this sermon. Let’s read the end of verse 5 through 6 together first: By this we may know that we are in him: <sup>6</sup> whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.<sup>6</sup>

Another way of translating “by this we know” is “Here is a test by which we can make sure that we are in him.” Now, I want to be careful with this word “test,” because sometimes people will read 1 John simply like checkmarks. Do I do this perfectly. Do I do that perfectly? No! That’s not what John says. Remember, we do sin. But the point is that we don’t settle in with sin. We don’t tolerate sin. We fight against sin. But just because we sin, we shouldn’t then say that God can’t grow us in obedience. That’d

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<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 2:2.

<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 3:16.

<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 3:18.

<sup>6</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 2:5–6.

be wrong. God designs that we would not sin and that we would grow in obedience. So, John gives this test. Here's a way you can know you are "in him." To be "in him" refers to being united with Jesus. Jesus is your life. Jesus is your joy and peace. You are in fellowship with Jesus. If you are in fellowship with Jesus, then "whoever abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." Some want to make this word "abide" mean more than it does. They'll say, "If you're in deep fellowship and communion with Jesus, then you're going to fight sin. But John connects this word "abide" with the idea of simply being "in him." Every Christian is in him. Every Christian abides in him because we have been brought to a new relationship with him of great fellowship that will abide forever.

So, to say you have fellowship with Jesus means you're going to want to walk in the same way he walked. What does this mean? John is bringing up "walking" again. How did Jesus walk? Some will say, "Jesus walked obediently." That's true. Jesus obeyed all that the Father commanded him. And certainly, that's an emphasis of John here. However, I think John is emphasizing *how* Jesus walked. Meaning, what was the basic element to Jesus' living on this earth? I think the apostle Paul has words that help us in Colossians 2:6: as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.<sup>7</sup> What does that mean? Well, how did you receive Jesus? Answer: through faith. Meaning, you depended on Jesus as your Savior and Master. You didn't save yourself. You didn't clean yourself up in your own strength. You looked to Jesus to rescue you. Paul says that as you received him, so walk in him. So, he's saying that you are to walk in dependence. I think this is what John is saying here. Walk as Jesus walked. He always walked in dependence on the Holy Spirit, dependent on the Father and whatever the Father ordained for him. After all, apart from faith, everything is sin.

So, we are to walk in like manner as Jesus walked – by faith. Ventura, again, this is an emphasis of relationship. To be utterly dependent on someone means you are in close proximity and relationship with them. And, as John will show us, if we're living in dependence on our Triune God, we will then obey because he's carrying us. He's empowering us. Faith will lead to godly works.

Let's go back to verses 3-4: <sup>3</sup>And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. <sup>4</sup>Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. . .<sup>8</sup> Here's something we can test. Is this person in a pattern of keeping his commandments. Is that the trajectory of his life. The reason I say this is because this is the idea of "keep his commandments." Again, it's not perfection, but it is the trajectory of life. You live your life not only wanting to obey, but actually pursuing obedience.

Oh Ventura, my heart aches when I even get to this point. I've known so many people who talk about "wanting" to obey, but they keep going back to the vomit. The Proverbs say a fool relates to sin like a dog returns to vomit. That's so sad, but it's also a sign of bondage to sin. That's not a sign of bondage to Jesus. Our assurance increases as we keep his commandments.

Then, John moves to verse 4 with the opposite statement: Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. . .<sup>9</sup> Please note that John is speaking to each individual. This is any individual one who says. Therefore, no one can exempt themselves. You cannot exempt yourself from this. And, by the way, why would we want to exempt ourselves when God's great grace and love in Jesus is available to us!

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<sup>7</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Col 2:6.

<sup>8</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 2:3–4.

<sup>9</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 2:4.

Whoever says “I know him” but doesn’t keep his commandments is a liar. If your life isn’t on a trajectory of obedience. If your pattern is to disobey, you’re a liar. Now, right there some people can say, “Well, my pattern is obedience because I read the Bible every day and I pray.” Oh, there’s so much more to obedience, isn’t there? What about actually fighting against sin? What about actually loving mercy, doing justly, walking humbly with our God? What about caring for the weak? What about sacrificial giving towards those in need? As many of you have been studying the book of *James*, you know faith without works is dead! You can’t commune or fellowship with Jesus and live with unrepentant disobedience. John says that’s a lie. So, any person, like these false teachers, who claim they’re fellowshiping with Jesus and tolerating their sin, are liars! And the truth isn’t in them. Neither God’s Word nor Jesus reside in them. That’s true for false teachers in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. That’s true for people today who may go to church or not go to church but claim relationship with no sacrificial, faith-driven obedience.

We can now move to verse 5, which genuinely excites and encourages me and is the reason for today’s sermon title. Read the words with me: <sup>5</sup> but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.<sup>10</sup> The reality is that if you are obedient and growing in obedience, you would be first to confess that this obedience isn’t coming from you! It’s coming because God loves you dearly. Last week, I was talking to someone about specific season in my life that have been filled with trials. Mentally, emotionally, physically – and all affected me spiritually. I said to him that I can genuinely say that I’m here today, still following God, because of God. He’s the only reason. It’s not because my love is so great. It’s because his love is so great! That’s why I love him. Oh, how I love my God!

And, through all those trials and also the many joys, as he’s shown me his love over and over again, my obedience has grown. I can’t remember if I shared this quote to you last week or not, but it’s a good one, and I want to say it again: **When saints sin, they know they’re not sinning against law but against love.** Oh, how he loves us! Do you know his love? If you do, you grow in obedience. You grow in a tenacity and fight against sin because his love has filled you to love righteousness. This is what John means by saying that God’s love is perfected when people are living obediently.

As I said last week, I’ll say it again here. Jesus didn’t come to simply give people forgiveness of sins and then leave us to wallow in sin. He came to bring us into relationship with the Triune God, and through communion with the Lord, he fills us with the height, depth, breadth of God’s love; and we grow in obedience. Now, look at verse 6 again briefly. We are to walk as Jesus walked. Meaning, we are to walk in faith. As we walk in dependence on the Lord, we know God’s love, and his love is perfected through us, leading us to obedience. The apostle Paul concisely puts it this way in Galatians 6. He says that what matters is “faith working through love.” Someone who lives this way, imitates their Father. Someone who lives this way is communing with Jesus.

**Jesus’ rejection of sin compels Christians to genuine obedience. How do you relate to sin? How do you relate to obedience? How do you relate to Jesus?**

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<sup>10</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 2:5.