



### Thought for the Week 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021

#### READING 1 John 2:3-11

<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>5</sup> but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. 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>7</sup> Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. <sup>8</sup> At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because<sup>[a]</sup> the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. <sup>9</sup> Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. <sup>10</sup> Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him<sup>[b]</sup> there is no cause for stumbling. <sup>11</sup> But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Despite the "Do Not Touch" signs, a museum was having no success in keeping visitors from touching, and damaging, priceless exhibits of furniture and art. But the problem was solved when a clever museum employee replaced the signs with ones that read: "Caution: Wash Hands After Touching!"

Signs are everywhere. On the road they tell us which way to go, when to stop or warn us of hazards ahead. Signs tell us what a shop is selling (when they are able to be open). Of course, if signs are to be any use they need to be clear and easy to interpret.

What are the signs of being a Christian? The Apostle John wouldn't have known anything about road signs or shop signs but he did know about the signs of someone being a Christian and, in the passage we read from the second chapter of his first letter to the churches he mentored, he was concerned that the signs of some of the believers being Christians were not very clear at all. In fact, some of them were actually showing the wrong signs.

Like many a good sermon, John has three main points. He begins each of them with the words "Whoever says."

In verse 4 he says: *Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him."*

In verse 6 he says: *"... whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."*

And in verse 9 he says: *"Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness."*

In other words the signs of being a true Christian are:

- a. We keep His commandments.
- b. We walk as Jesus walked.

c. We love our brothers and sisters.

Let's look at each of these briefly and, as we do, let's ask ourselves if the signs of being a Christian are clear in our lives.

The first sign that we are a Christian is that we obey His word. And the test for this is "Do We Keep His Commandments (3-4)? John begins this section by saying "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." The Greek word *know* used here has the sense of having to do with, have dealings with, knowing personally. It is not just head knowledge, it implies a sense of intimacy. We can say that we know who Boris Johnston is, but most likely we do not know him personally. . Even in the OT, when the Bible says that a man "knew his wife," it meant that he had an intimate relationship with her.

John is stressing here that if we are to have an intimate relationship with God through his Son, Jesus, then we must obey His commandments.

Knowing God is evidenced by our heartfelt desire to obey him, yet some people say that they know God, but they deny it by the way that they live their lives. Jesus himself said (in John 14:15) "If you love Me, keep My commandments. John is characteristically blunt when he says, "*Whoever says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in them.*"

True believers must wholeheartedly accept and submit to God's will as he has revealed it in his Word. But whoever doesn't obey God's commandments, he or she is a liar. The situation in the churches to which John was writing was that some people claimed to have special knowledge and a higher truth which brought them close to God and so such mundane matters as earthly obedience and sticking to a moral code, didn't really matter at all. Truth in John's mind isn't just knowledge but the principle of spiritual integrity that should accompany all worship that is empowered by God's Spirit. John is here not simply saying that someone who fails to obey has missed the point; instead, such people are seriously disconnected from God.

Anyone can, of course, make a claim to know Christ, but John says you can check his or her authenticity by seeing whether or not they obey God's word. As Jesus said, "you will know them by their fruit!" If we truly know Christ, and He is truly living in us, then the evidence of that will be seen in what we say and do. This is very challenging for us all:

- a. We can't say one thing and do another.
- b. We can't say that we believe in Jesus and disobey His word.
- c. We can't say we follow Jesus and follow the ways of the world.

You can stand on a street corner from now until the cows come home and proclaim that you are a Christian, but if you do not love the Lord your God with all of your heart soul and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself it's nothing but hot air. God doesn't care how much money you have or how big your house is, as much as He cares whether or not you are living by His word.

John's second point is in verse 6 when he says, "*...whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*"

The second test of being a true Christian is - Do We Walk As Jesus Walked?

In verse 5 John says, "*whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.*" Here John uses a word that in English is translated "keeps," and it implies "duration and perseverance: to observe diligently, to guard carefully, to suddenly realize a truth — and to protect it." In other words,

"to keep God's word" goes far beyond mere conformity to law. It expresses a zealous desire to adhere to God's will.

Obedience is linked not merely with knowing God but with loving him.

Then John says, " whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."

"Abide" is one of John's favourite words and it means to be "set and fixed and remaining there."

This echoes Jesus' words in John' Gospel 15:4-6 *"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."*

If we are going to say that we are abiding in Him, then we should walk as he walked. So, anyone who wonders how to obey God can look at Jesus, and anyone's claim to live in Christ must be backed up by following his example of complete obedience to God and loving service to people.

The importance of really living the Christian life is illustrated in the life of the famous author Mark Twain. Church leaders were largely to blame for his becoming hostile to the Bible and the Christian faith.

As he grew up, he knew elders and deacons who owned slaves and abused them. He heard men using foul language and saw them practise dishonesty during the week after speaking piously in church on Sunday. He listened to ministers use the Bible to justify slavery. Although he saw genuine love for the Lord Jesus in some people, including his mother and his wife, he was so disturbed by the bad teaching and poor example of church leaders, that he became bitter toward the things of God.

Again, this is challenging for us. When someone finds out that you are a Christian, they will watch you like a hawk, waiting to see if you make a mistake. Like the little boy who was standing for ages watching while a minister fixed some planks in his fence. "Are you interested in making a fence," asked the minister. "No," replied the little boy, "I'm waiting to see what a Minister says when he hits his thumb with a hammer!"

However, we can look at this another way. What people may be looking for is to see Jesus in you. Maybe they are waiting for you to make a mistake because they have been disappointed so many times before by people who said one thing and did another. Maybe this time they are waiting for you to prove to them that there really are people who walk the walk of Jesus as well as talk the talk. As someone has said, "You may be the only Bible that person ever reads!"

If we are truly followers of Jesus then we will show it by doing what He did - by loving even the unlovely, by serving rather than being served, by looking at the needs of others rather than our own. When people see us, they should see Jesus!

John amplifies this in the third thing he says in verse 9: "Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness."

The third test of being a true Christian is: Do We Love Our Brothers & Sisters? He prefaces this by saying in verses 7 & 8: *"Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. <sup>8</sup>At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining."*

John knew that he was not writing a new commandment because it is an old one that they always had. It's in Leviticus. 19:18 *"... you shall love your neighbour as yourself."* But then John says, "At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you."

If it's an old commandment, how can it be new? What John is saying is that the ancient command has taken on a new form since the coming of Christ.

Christ himself exemplified love by demonstrating his self-giving love for us on the cross. In his death for us he fulfilled the law of love in a way never seen before.

In the Christian church, love is not only expressed by showing respect; it is also expressed through self-sacrifice and servanthood which reaches beyond friends to enemies and persecutors. Love should be the unifying force and the identifying mark of the Christian community. In his usual blunt manner John takes it a step further when he says *"Whoever says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now."*

This verse teaches that a person who claims to be in the light should then, by extension, also be filled with love. But if the person who makes this claim hates a Christian brother or sister, then the claim to be in the light is false. That person is still in darkness. Such people, even though they give the appearance of being a Christian, John says are lost, having been blinded by the darkness. These are very challenging words to us.

One writer has put it like this. Jesus said, *"By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* But they will not know we are His disciples by:

- The bumper sticker on our car.
- The gold cross hanging around our neck,
- The "Jesus loves you" t-shirt we wear.

There is only one way that people will know that we belong to Jesus, and that's by the way we love one another. And of course by love we don't mean a sentimental kind of love, but the kind of self-sacrificing, self-giving love that Jesus showed to us.

So, what are the unmistakable signs that we are a follower of Jesus?

- a. If we obey His commands.
- b. If we walk as He walked.
- c. If we love our brothers and sisters.

In 1 Corinthians 13:13 Paul says: *"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."*

John hits home with a real challenge to all of us - when people look at us will they see the way to Jesus, or will they get lost because they can't read the signs?