1 John 2:3-17 Assurance of love

# Introduction

How do you know if something is genuine or not?

It might appear to be genuine, but how can we know it is?

Many people look at the classifieds to see if someone is selling what you want.

But a photo put up could be deceiving.

It might look perfect and exactly what you want in the photo, but you will not know whether it is the real deal until you get up close and examine it.

Likewise, many people claim to be Christians.

They claim to believe in God and follow Jesus.

But how can we know that they are genuine in their claim?

It is impossible for us to know because we can never know the heart of a person.

Someone could claim to be a believer, but there is no way we can see the truth of their heart.

But according to today’s passage there is a way we can know who is a genuine Christian.

We can know a genuine Christian by their love for God.

For their love for God is expressed not in words but in action.

And that love for God arises not from what they feel about God but what they know about God.

And it is that love for God that distinguishes a genuine Christian from the rest of the world.

# Genuine Christians love God not by words but by action

So how do we know if someone is a genuine Christian?

It is not a matter of claiming to know God as John says in **verse 4**:

*“Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person.”*

You cannot claim to know God without keeping his command.

It is like saying you work for Woolworths and yet never set foot in their stores, warehouses or offices.

How can you claim to work for Woolworths if you have never did any job for them?

In the same way, you cannot claim to know God without obeying his command.

For knowing God here, is not knowing things about God, like knowing what the queen looks like or where she lives.

Knowing God is about having an intimate relationship with God.

So if you truly know the queen, what would you do if she asks you to do something?

If you knew her personally, not only is it right for you to do what she asks, but if you really think about it, it is right for her to ask you in the first place.

For why would the queen ask you to do anything if she didn’t have a personal relationship with you?

So our obedience to God’s commands is not simply based on our obligation as creatures.

But more than that it is an expression of our relationship with him.

So if we claim to know God personally and yet ignore what he says, then we are liars.

Our action has already shown that we do not love him if we continue to disobey him.

Which is why, as John says in verse 5, the genuine test of our love for God is in obedience to his word.

So we know if someone is a genuine Christian in how they obey God’s word.

Just as Jesus lived in obedience to God, as Christians we must live in obedience.

**But the question is, what are we to obey?**

Are there new instructions that Christians must live by?

In **verse 7** John says:

*“Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard.”*

The command Christians are to obey is not new because it is the same command that God had given.

In fact, even though we see many laws and commands given in the Old Testament.

All of them can be summarized by: love God and love your neighbour.

And so this is the old command that Christians are to keep.

They are to love God and love their neighbour.

Yet this is a new command that is given to Christians.

For Jesus himself says in **John 13:34**

*“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”*

Jesus calls on his followers specifically to love one another just as Jesus had loved them.

It is by this obedience to love that other people will know they are genuine Christians.

For Jesus says in **John 13:35**

*“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

Genuine Christians will love other Christians just as Christ loved them.

Which is why John goes on to say in **verse 9**

*“Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness.”*

You cannot claim to be a Christian and hate someone in the church.

You cannot claim to believe in Jesus and not love others in the church.

For our love for God is truly expressed in our obedience to his word.

And that obedience results in loving each other.

# Genuine Christians love because of who they know

But how easy is it to love our fellow believers?

How easy is it to love others especially when they are difficult?

For we are not at all perfect.

In fact as we have seen last week, we still sin in this life and we cannot deny that.

So even though we are forgiven, we are still sinners who need to confess our shortcomings.

Which means that the local church is not a congregation of perfectly holy people.

But rather the local church is a gathering of confessing sinners.

So how easy is it to love others in the church?

It is not easy.

If it is hard at times to love even those in our own family, how hard can it be to love those in God’s family?

But the command to love still stands.

It is not an optional command, but one that must be fulfilled to show the genuineness of our faith in God.

As John said, we can’t claim to be light if we hate our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Only those who love their brothers and sisters in Christ live in the light of God.

**So if we must love difficult people, how can we do it?**

In order to love, we must remind ourselves on what we know.

This is what John is talking about in verses 12 to 14.

For what we know, especially about God will direct our obedience.

That is why we read time and time again in the Old Testament the call for Israel to remember.

They were to remember what God has done for them.

And they were to remember what he commanded them.

So let’s have a read of **verses 12 to 14** again.

Now to help us understand this passage easier.

Let’s look at how it is constructed first.

You will notice in verses 12 to 13 that John says he is writing to three groups of people.

In verse 12 he is writing to the children.

In verse 13 he is writing to the fathers and the young men.

And then in verse 14, he says he is writing to the same three groups: the children, fathers and the young men.

What this tells us is that in verses 12 to 14 John is not writing to six different groups, but he is repeating or expanding on what he is saying to the three groups.

This will help us group what is being said to the children, the fathers and the young men.

But before we can look at what is said to each of the groups, we must first determine who these groups are.

In chapter 2 verse 1, the apostle John begins the chapter with the words: “My dear children”.

Here we know he is not writing to his own literal children, but rather he is writing to Christians in general.

As an elder and an apostle, he considered other believers as his dear children.

Just as the apostle Paul considered Timothy to be his spiritual son, the apostle John considered his Christian community to be his spiritual children.

So when John writes in verse 12 and again in verse 14: “dear children”, he isn’t speaking about literal children.

But rather he is talking to believers in general.

And he reminds them of what they already know.

They already know that their sins are forgiven on account of the name of Jesus.

For as the apostle Paul writes in **Acts 4:12**

*“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”*

Forgiveness is found in no one else apart from Jesus.

And this is what all Christians have known and believed.

Secondly all believers not only know the name of Jesus as their Saviour, but they also know God the Father.

We all know we are adopted as God’s children in Jesus.

We believe that our relationship with God has been restored on account of the name of Jesus.

So we can obey God’s command to love because we already have fellowship with God and with Jesus.

It is because God loved us first in Christ that we can love one another.

Now if the children mentioned here in verse 12 and 14 refers to all believers, then who are the fathers and the young men?

They too refer to believers.

But given that John is making a distinction between the two groups, we can assume that Paul may have two different groups in mind.

So who are the fathers and the young men?

To understand what John means, we must consider the Christian life.

We don’t become mature overnight.

No, the Christian life is a continual life of development.

We start as babies in Christ and continue to mature over time.

So when John writes to the fathers, he is writing to those who are mature.

John tells them twice to remember the one who is from the beginning.

And who is the one from the beginning.

We have already seen in 1 John 1:1 that the one from the beginning may refer to God, but in the context it refers to Jesus.

And that is who we are to remember when we face our own mortality.

We don’t need a new revelation or new strategy to love others.

But rather all we need is Jesus and that is enough.

As we meditate on Jesus over our lifetime, our knowledge of him and what he did for us deepens.

And as we grow older and more mature, we will come to a realization that Jesus is all we need.

This is certainly the testimony of the great early church father Polycarp.

When the Romans arrested him and force him to recant of his faith, this is what he said:

*“86 years have I have served him, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?”*

Finally the young men here are those who are not babies, but rather those who are becoming mature and independent in their faith.

John states quite emphatically that they are strong.

He isn’t writing to tell them to become stronger, but they are already strong.

For they have the word of God that gives them strength and victory.

As the apostle Paul said when he wrote about the armor of God, God’s word is the sword of the Spirit.

It is the weapon of choice to fight the spiritual fight.

That is why John says that they have overcome the evil one.

Only by God’s word can we defeat Satan and his lies.

Only by knowing and living out the truth of God’s word can we stand strong and have victory.

So in order to love others, especially the difficult ones.

We must remember whom we know and what we know.

We must remember Jesus.

Not Jesus as the world portrays him, but the Jesus of the Bible.

The one who died and rose again.

# Genuine Christians love God and not the things of this world

So in our life, we must love God and love each other because that is the expression of our faith.

If we know Jesus and if we love him and his word, then naturally we will want to obey his command and love each other.

And as Jesus had said, it is by our love for each other that the world will see we are his disciples.

Which means the distinguishing mark of a genuine Christian is love.

And that love must be wholeheartedly for God.

For if we say we love God and yet chase after the things of this world, then can we really claim to love God?

If we put God on hold while we pursue the desires of this world, then can we truly say we love God?

As John emphatically says here in verses 15-16, you cannot love God and the world.

You either love God or love the world.

They are mutually exclusive.

What this world desires and lusts after are temporary.

They do not guarantee anything except condemnation.

So who will you love?

Will you love God or will you love the world?

# Conclusion

If you know Jesus and what he has done for you on the cross.

If you know that your sins are forgiven because he died on the cross.

If you know the power of God’s word to change your life.

And if you know God as your Heavenly Father.

Then be assured you are not of this world.

If you know the love of God.

And if you are compelled to love others because of his love.

Then be assured that you belong to God.

If Jesus is your Lord and you obey his command to love one another.

Then be assured that God has promised you will live forever with him.

But if you continue to live in sin.

If you continue to chase after the desires of this world.

If you continue to hate and not care for other believers.

Then you have to question where you stand before God.

Are you for God or against God?

The Bible is clear, unless you obey his command you do not belong to him.

And his command is clear, love him and love your brothers and sisters in Christ.

So if we know Jesus

And if we know God.

Let’s express our love for God in loving each other.

For we belong to God and not of this world.

We belong in the light and darkness has no part in us.

So let’s live as Jesus lived.

Let’s love like Jesus loved us.