

Lesson 2
1 John 1: 5 – 2:11
Walking and Talking in Love

Memory verse: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9 NIV)

The life that is real also has an enemy, and this enemy is sin. Nine times in 1 John 1:5 to 2:4, John mentioned sin, so the subject is obviously not unimportant. John illustrated his theme by using the contrast between light and darkness: God is light; sin is darkness. But there is another contrast here too - the contrast between saying and doing. Four times John wrote, “If we say” or “if we claim” (1 John 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4). It is clear that our Christian life is to amount to more than mere “talk”; we must also “walk,” or live, what we believe. If we are in fellowship with God (if we are “walking in the light”), our lives will back up what our lips are saying. But if we are living in sin (“walking in darkness”), then our lives will contradict what our lips are saying, making us hypocrites.

The New Testament calls the Christian life a “walk.” This walk begins with a step of faith when we trust Christ as our Saviour. But salvation is not the end - it’s only the beginning - of spiritual life. “Walking” involves progress, and Christians are supposed to advance in the spiritual life. Just as a child must learn to walk and must overcome many difficulties in doing so, a Christian must learn to “walk in the light.” And the fundamental difficulty involved here is this matter of sin.

Of course, sin is not simply outward disobedience; sin is also inner rebellion or desire. Sin is refusal to submit to the law of God. Lawlessness, or independence of the law, is the very essence of sin. If a believer decides to live an independent life, how can he possibly walk in fellowship with God? “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). The fact that Christians sin bothers some people - especially new Christians. They forget that their receiving the new nature does not eliminate the old nature they were born with. The old nature (which has its origin in our physical birth) fights against the new nature, which we receive when we are born again (Gal. 5:16–26). No amount of self-discipline, no set of man-made rules and regulations, can control this old nature. Only the Holy Spirit of God can enable us to “put to death” the old nature (Rom. 8:12–13) and produce the Spirit’s fruit (Gal. 5:22–23) in us through the new nature.

In 1 John 2:7–11, we learn how Christian love is affected by light and darkness. A Christian who is walking in the light (which simply means he is obeying God) is going to love his brother Christian. John not only wrote about love but also practiced it. One of his favourite names for his readers was “Beloved.” He felt love for them. John is known as the “apostle of love” because in his gospel and his epistles he gives such prominence to this subject.

The amazing thing is that Christian love is both old and new (1 John 2:7–8). This seems to be a contradiction. Love itself, of course, is not new, nor is the commandment - that men love God and each other - a new thing. Jesus Himself combined two Old Testament commandments, Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, and said (Mark 12:28–34) that these two commandments summarize all the law and the prophets. Loving God and loving one’s neighbour were old, familiar responsibilities before Jesus ever came to earth.

In what sense, then, is “love one another” a “new” commandment (1 John 2:8)? Again, a look at the Greek helps to answer the question. The Greeks had two different words for “new.” One means “new in time,” and the other means “new in quality.” For example, you would use the first word to describe the latest car, a recent model. But if you purchased a car that was so revolutionary that it was radically different, you would use the second word - new in quality. (Our English words recent and fresh just about make this distinction: “recent” means new in time, “fresh” means new in character.)

The commandment to love one another is not new in time, but it is new in character. Because of Jesus Christ, the old commandment to “love one another” has taken on new meaning. How then shall Christians learn to walk and talk in love?

Things to learn: 1) Definition of Sin 2) Dealing with Sin 3) Practice Love - a new commandment.

Discussion Questions:

1) What is sin? (10 mins)

2) Sin is a hindrance to relationship with God. How are we to deal with sin as taught in verses 1 John 1:5 to 2:4 if we are to enjoy real life with God? (20 mins)

3) What are the important ways reflected in 1 John 2:7–11 that the old commandment to “love one another” because of Jesus Christ, has taken on new meaning? (20 mins)