

used to indicate, “to be completely successful in accomplishing some goal or attaining some state.” The (hyperbolic) claim, then, is that such a person’s ability to love God has reached a state of maturity.¹

To put this simply, the language John uses in this phrase would indicate that God’s love of each and every one of His redeemed children secures a growing maturity in the believer to love God in truth, that is, to be enabled to live in accordance with His revealed will—to be obedient children of God.

By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. – John now uses language which seems parallel to Paul’s well-known phrase, “in Messiah,” for he speaks of the believer being “in Him,” that is, in Yeshua. To be “in Him” means to “know Him” in truth, and thus the relational aspect of “knowing” is highlighted. To be “in Him” is to be identified with Him, to have fellowship with Him, and thus to be like Him. This means that the believer in Yeshua has received the gift of God’s forgiveness through the redemption purchased by Yeshua’s death and made secure by His resurrection, ascension, and intercession. It means that the Father receives the child of God into His presence just as He receives His own dear Son, for the believer is “in Him.”

But how can one know that he or she is in Him? John writes “By this we know,” but to what does the word “this” refer? Some would have it refer to the previous context while others take this to be an introduction to v. 6. But it seems best to understand this verse as being based upon the previous context as well as moving us forward to the concluding statement of v. 6. Thus, we know that:

1. We know that *we are in Him* when we have come to know Him as He has revealed Himself in truth. Thus, to be “in Him” is just another way of saying “we have come to know Him” in truth (2:3). We live in the reality of the salvation He has procured for us through His death, resurrection, ascension and intercession.
2. We know that *we abide in Him* when we have ongoing fellowship with Him, through prayer, through the inward leading of the Ruach (Spirit), through the word of God being our guide, and through fellowship within the body of Messiah. “In Him we live, and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Our

¹ Martin M. Culy, *I, II, III John: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Baylor Univ Press, 2004), pp. 28–29.

“knowing Him” is relational, not merely intellectual.

3. We know that *we walk as Yeshua walked* when we seek to pattern our lives after the example of Yeshua, which means that a submissive life of obedience to God’s revelation of righteous living is that which characterizes our daily walk of faith.

the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. – The final phrase of our verse uses the common term “walk” to describe the pattern or characteristic of one’s life. Though not found in the Bible, the later rabbinic term *halachah* (הלכה) is derived from the Hebrew verb *hālach* (הלך), “to walk.” The verb itself, however, is used in the Tanach to describe one’s behavior. Note these examples:

Sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling has seized the godless. “Who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can live with continual burning?” He who walks righteously and speaks with sincerity, he who rejects unjust gain and shakes his hands so that they hold no bribe; he who stops his ears from hearing about bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil; (Is 33:14–15)

ADONAI, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart. (Ps 15:1–2)

A worthless person, a wicked man, is the one who walks with a perverse mouth, who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, who points with his fingers; (Prov 6:12–13)

What does it mean “to walk in the same manner as Yeshua walked”? It is clear that in our context this phrase means to imitate the life of Yeshua in the manner in which He obeyed His Father’s commands. In the parable of the vine and the branches, in which Yeshua pictures Himself as the true vine, He uses similar language as John does here in our context, namely, that those who are His, will “abide in Him.”

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. (Jn 15:4)

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. (Jn 15:7)

And note how Yeshua concludes the parable of the vine and the branches:

Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. (Jn 15:9–10)

Note the clear parallel in this teaching of Yeshua. To “abide in My love” is likewise to “keep My commandments.” Thus, to walk as Yeshua walked is to live in obedience to God’s commandments and to do so by following Yeshua’s example. And what is it that was primary in Yeshua’s life of obedience? It was the relationship of love He had with the Father. In like manner, what is the primary motivation we must have to “walk as He walked,” that is, to live a life of obedience in imitation of Him? It is to “abide in His love,” that is, to grow in our understanding, appreciation, and application of the fact that Yeshua loved us by giving His life for us, by paying the supreme price necessary to rescue us from the Father’s holy wrath, and enabling us through the work of the Spirit to become more and more set apart unto God. Thus, as those who are “in Him,” i.e., “in Messiah,” we are able to fulfill the very purpose for which we were created, that is, to sanctify His Name by giving Him the glory, praise, and honor He deserves. We do this by living in obedience to Him, expressed by our love for Him and for one another.

There is one caution that should be voiced as we seek to understand the meaning of the phrase to “walk in the same manner as He walked.” John is not teaching us here that we should seek to return to a 1st Century culture or to mimic ancient near eastern society. That, of course, would be impossible. Nor, for instance, is John suggesting that one should remain single since Yeshua never married. John’s point is that those who claim to abide in Him must be known as those who obey God’s commands, motivated from love—love for God and love for one another. And the manner in which Yeshua demonstrated this kind of obedience is the pattern we too must strive to follow.

7–8 Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining.

John now addresses his readers by referring to them as “Beloved”

(*Ἀγαπητοί, agapētoi*), and he will address them five more times in this same way.¹ By doing so he reveals his affection for them as well as identifying himself with them as their brother in the family of God.

He also wants them to know that in this epistle, he is not urging them to something novel or newly formed, as though he, the last remaining Apostle, was now giving a new teaching. On the contrary, he makes it clear that he was not writing a “new commandment” (*ἐντολὴν καινὴν*) to them but that he was simply urging them to remain faithful to the message of the Gospel which they first received and by which, having exercised faith in Yeshua (which is the core element of the Gospel), they were born again unto a new life.

Thus, the “old commandment” (*ἐντολὴν παλαιάν*) is that which they had “from the beginning” (*ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς*), that is, from the beginning of their walk of faith in Yeshua as the promised Messiah and Savior of sinners. And John refers to the “old commandment” by which he sums up the previous context, namely, that to love God is demonstrated in a person’s life by keeping His commandments.

But in what way is this contained in the Gospel? If this commandment was known to the readers “from the beginning,” i.e., from their initial confession of faith, then this must be an essential component of the Gospel message itself. Interestingly, we find that both Paul and Peter speak of “obeying the Gospel.”

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Yeshua will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Yeshua. (2Thess 1:6–8)

For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1Pet 4:17)

In a similar way, John couples obedience as an essential component of saving faith:

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (Jn 3:36)

¹ 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11.

In this verse, note how “believes in the Son” finds its opposite in the phrase “does not obey the Son.” We would have expected John to write: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not believe in the Son will not see life....” But this is not what he writes. Rather, in this verse, the opposite of “believes in the Son” is stated to be “does not obey the Son.” The obvious meaning is that to “believe in the Son” results in obedience to the Son. All too often in our modern world, the “gospel” message has been redefined in terms that leave out both turning from a life of sin (i.e., repentance) and a commitment to live in obedience to God.

Paul defined the “word of faith” (i.e., the Gospel) which he was preaching this way:

But what does it say? “THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART” — that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Yeshua as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. (Rom 10:8–10)

Note carefully the components of the Gospel as Paul defines it:

1. “**Confess** with your mouth Yeshua as Lord” (*κύριος, kurios*)
– This means that one openly confesses Yeshua to be Immanuel, the Son of God in the flesh, and that He is therefore to be received as one’s Master as well as Savior. Thus, He is to be obeyed as an expression of love for the salvation He has granted.
2. “**Believe** in your heart that God raised Him from the dead”
– This means to accept Yeshua by faith, confessing that His death is payment for my sin and that His resurrection affirms that His death conquers sin and its penalty (death) for those for whom He died.
3. “You will be **saved**” – saved from the just penalty for sin, which is eternal separation from God.
4. “With the heart a person **believes**” – heart = mind, thus faith is not a “leap in the dark, into the unknown,” but an acceptance of the truth as revealed by God.
5. “Resulting in righteousness” – God declares the sinner righteous (justified) on the basis of his or her faith in Yeshua.
6. “With the mouth he **confesses**” – openly identifying with Yeshua as one’s Lord and Savior.

7. “Resulting in salvation” – to be identified with Messiah (“in Messiah”) is to be **saved** from the just penalty of sin.

Thus, we see that the Apostolic message includes obedience to God as an essential component of the Gospel. If, as we witness to others by giving them the Gospel message, we neglect to include the need for repentance toward God (i.e., a turning away from sin) and a confessed desire to obey Him, then we have failed to give the Gospel message in its fulness.

Indeed, when Paul summarizes his proclamation of the Gospel in Asia, he describes it this way:

...solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Yeshua Messiah. (Acts 20:21)

Thus, the “old commandment” of which John writes is the commandment of the Gospel: the command to repent of sin, to believe in Yeshua, which issues in a heart that both desires and is enabled to live in obedience to God’s commands.

8 On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining.

Here it seems that John is talking in contradictory terms. In v. 7 he said he is not giving a new commandment but an old one. Here, however, he admits to “writing a new commandment” to his readers, and thus to us as well. How are we to understand John’s statements here?

The “old commandment” is the commandment of the Gospel: repentance toward God and faith in Yeshua the Messiah. The commandment of the Gospel which requires repentance and faith issues in a life ready and willing to obey God’s commandments:

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. (1Jn 2:3)

We first must remember that the whole of God’s revelation in the Tanach can be summed up as (1) loving God (the *Shema*, Deut 6:4–9; 11:13–20) and (2) loving one’s neighbor (Lev 19:18). This was the clear teaching of Yeshua:

One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Torah?” And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH

ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’
 This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is
 like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ On these two
 commandments depend the whole Torah and the Prophets.”
 (Matt 22:35–40)

With this in mind we should understand that the “old” can give birth to the “new,” and in doing so, the “old” does not cease to exist or become useless. Or to say it another way, “old” can mean “prior” and “new” can mean “current.” Thus, the old commandment which is summed in the very message of the Gospel, commanded to love God and to love one’s neighbor. But the question that would inevitably arise in the minds of the Jewish community was how to define who was one’s “neighbor.” From the Apostolic Scriptures we know that the inclusion of Gentile believers into the synagogues of “The Way” presented a problem to the Jewish community. It was not a problem in terms of what the Scriptures stated on the matter, for the Torah had already clearly taught that both the native born and the foreigner who desired to worship the God of Israel, were to be received as equal members of the covenant.

As for the assembly (*kehilah*), there shall be one statute for you and for the foreigner who sojourns with you, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the foreigner be before ADONAI. (Num 15:15)

9–11 The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who 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.

We can see a very obvious structure in these three verses, for John once again shows his fondness for contrast. He gives us three pairs of opposites: light and darkness, love and hatred, walking and stumbling. Light, love and walking characterize the true believer while darkness, hatred and stumbling are marks of the person whose confession of faith lacks reality.

In the previous context John has given us a primary characteristic of the true believer in Yeshua, namely, that genuine saving faith is seen in obedience to God’s commandments which He has revealed to us in His word.