

Testing, Testing, Testing

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[0 : 01] Well, let us turn to the Scriptures. We're going to be in 1 John today, which you will find in page 1023. 1 John.

Over these next three weeks, God willing, we hope to be in John's letters. This week, 1 John. Next week, 2 John. And the following week, 3 John.

But under consideration today is John's first letter. And we're going to read from chapter 5, beginning at verse 1 through to verse 5.

So let us hear then the Word of God. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.

And everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey His commands.

[1 : 03] For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.

And this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

Amen. And may God add His blessing to this, the reading of His Word. Before we come to the preaching, let us just take a moment to pray together. Amen. Father, we thank you that your eyes are on the land from the beginning of the year until the end of the year.

We give you great thanks for your goodness and faithfulness to us over this past year. And as we go into this year of grace, 2014, with all its twists and turns, with all its disappointments, disasters and delights, we do so knowing that you are sovereign.

We do so knowing that you are good and that you are faithful. And that no matter what comes our way this year, we know that you will use all of it for our good and for your glory.

[2 : 22] And as we turn now to your Word, we thank you that faithful men have taught your Word faithfully from this pulpit this past year. And we pray that beginning with today, this year would bring the same privilege to bear in our lives.

So be with us now and speak to us, we pray. For we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, friends, we live in a world of must-haves.

Every Christmas there is the must-have toy for children. And this year the must-have toy was Lego Coast Guard. Some of the old things haven't seen their sell-by date yet.

Lego was the most popular toy this year. And every year there are new mobile phones or new computers that are the must-haves. And this also extends to clothing and to footwear.

And things were no different when I was a boy at primary school. I remember one year the must-have pair of training shoes was a pair called Adidas Kick. Everybody who was anybody had a pair of Adidas Kick.

[3 : 39] And I longed to have a pair of Adidas Kick. But I was from a big family. My mum and dad had six boys. So money was a bit tight. But I remember this day, my mum was going out to buy me a new pair of training shoes for me and my younger brother.

And my younger brother came up to me that day in the school playground and he said, My mum's going to buy us a pair of Adidas Kick. Well, you can imagine my delight. I started telling all my friends, I'm getting a pair of Adidas Kick.

I ran home that day. I couldn't wait to put on my new training shoes. Mum, where are my new trainers? I shouted as I burst through the door. They're in your room, son, she said.

And I went into my room. There on the floor were a pair of trainers that were black in colour, just like Adidas Kick. They had white stripes down the side, just like Adidas Kick.

But these training shoes had four stripes. And friends, you laugh because you know as well as I do that real, authentic Adidas training shoes have three stripes.

[4 : 49] And so did I. No one, regardless of who they were, could convince me that the new training shoes that were lying on my room floor were Adidas Kick.

Because I knew that real, authentic Adidas training shoes have three stripes. Now friends, I share this story as a helpful way into this afternoon's sermon.

John's purpose in writing this letter, you will see in chapter 5 verse 13. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

So John was writing to believers, so that they would know that they have eternal life. John was writing to give them assurance. Much of this letter is based around three marks or three tests that John gives, in order that the readers would have assurance.

So just like my Adidas training shoes, John in this letter is saying there are three marks, three tests, that denote real, authentic Christians.

[5 : 56] And these are the test of belief, the test of love, and the test of obedience. But if you're anything like me, when you read through 1 John, and as you compare yourself against the three tests, you would feel discouraged.

You would feel anything but assurance, as you and your Christian life just don't measure up. But friends, there's more to the letter than this. Why would John feel the need to write to these particular believers to give them assurance?

Well, if we look to chapter 2 verse 26, we get an insight into what was going on in their situation. John writes, I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you.

So John writes to give them assurance, as there were others who were trying to lead them astray. And in chapter 2 verse 19, who this group are is revealed.

They went out from us, but they were not of us. If they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

[7 : 14] So we see the situation. This group had been part of the church. But now they have left. And friends, this wasn't a case of some folks going off to do a church plant.

No, this was a case of them moving away from the teaching of the church altogether. The church that had been founded on the teaching of the apostles. The us there in verse 19.

The us of verse 19 as the apostles. They have left us. They have left the apostles. They have left the apostles and their teaching. They had left and were now making some amazing claims.

Among some of the claims were that they were now totally free from sin. And it's understandable that all of this had confused and badly shaken all those who had been left behind.

And understandable too that they would have had many questions. Are we really Christians? Do we have the real and full gospel? These folks that have left, are they right?

[8 : 22] Is it possible to be totally free from sin now? Have we missed out on something? Nothing. So the apostle John writes to bring assurance to the church.

And he does this not by teaching them anything new. No, he does so by reminding them of the gospel. The gospel that they already have.

So the three tests that John gives are to reassure the church. And also to reveal that those who went out from them were never really of the church.

In fact, look at the language John uses for them in chapter 2 verse 18. Children, it is the last hour. And as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, so now many Antichrists have come.

Therefore, we know that it is the last hour. It is the last hour. It is the last hour. It is the last hour. It is the last hour. John calls a spade a spade. He says they are Antichrists.

[9 : 29] They are against Christ. They are Antichrist. They are opposed to Christ and his gospel and his church. John says in these last days there will be many Antichrists within the church.

So John writes in order that the true church, the true people of Christ would be reassured. And that those Antichrists, even though they may say things that sound really Christian, and they say that they are Christians, so that these Antichrists would be revealed.

Well, what we will aim to do this afternoon is to grasp something of the overall message of the book. In the preaching here at the Tron, we are used to going through books of the Bible verse by verse and chapter by chapter.

But this afternoon, we will aim to cover the whole book by way of an overview. So this afternoon, we will have a one John overview. One John and one sermon. Or as we would say here in Glasgow, one John and a whanny.

As I've already said, this letter is based around these three tests of real, authentic Christianity. But the tests are not neatly divided up into chapters.

[10 : 43] They are woven throughout the letter. So we will begin in the verses that we read from chapter 5, as that's where the three tests are found together. So let us look firstly at the belief test.

The belief test, chapter 5, verse 1. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. Everyone who is born of God.

Everyone who is a real Christian believes that Jesus is the Christ. John started his letter by emphatically presenting the historical reality of Jesus.

Chapter 1, verse 1 to 3. And again, just like chapter 2, verse 19.

John is reassuring the church.

[12 : 11] We, the apostles, we seen him. We heard him. We touched the real Jesus. We were there in time, space, history. And we can begin to work out the reasons why John was taking time to spell that out.

As it seems that one of the things that these antichrists were teaching is that the incarnation didn't really happen. Chapter 4, verse 2. By this you know the Spirit of God.

Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. So it appears that these antichrists didn't believe that God had really appeared and lived among us as a man, a real man, fully man.

So John is reminding them of the historical reality of Jesus. Jesus is the Christ and he appeared in the flesh. John and the other apostles saw him.

They heard him and they touched him. Jesus Christ existed. But friends, it's not enough to believe that Jesus Christ existed. There is not a historian worth their salt would deny that Jesus Christ existed.

[13 : 30] The belief test is not just to believe the historical reality of Jesus Christ, but to believe all. All that the apostles have handed down and passed on about Jesus.

concerning his birth, his life, his substitutionary death on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, his resurrection from the dead, his ascension, and his soon coming again in judgment.

We have no authority. We have no right to mess about with the apostolic gospel that has been handed down, that has been passed on. For apostolic preaching and teaching is the foundation on which the church of Jesus Christ is built.

That is how the true church of Jesus Christ is to be built. Built upon the preaching and the teaching of Jesus' apostles. That's exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ commanded before his ascension into heaven at the end of Matthew's gospel.

And this is what Jesus said. And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

[15 : 00] Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. How did the Lord Jesus Christ envisage his church being built?

Through the apostles' teaching and preaching. All that Jesus had commanded them. Christian belief is about believing the message of Jesus that he commanded his apostles to preach.

But friends, this is not just the way the church of Jesus Christ was to be established. But this is how the true church of Jesus Christ is to continue.

Listen to how the apostle Paul instructs his son in the faith and fellow worker Timothy. And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

This is true apostolic succession. Not adding to the teaching of the apostles, nor subtracting from it, but passing on the preaching and the teaching of the apostles.

[16 : 08] In reading through 1 John, you will see that these antichrists were making some spectacular claims. They claimed that they were free from sin now, chapter 1, verse 8.

And these claims, these beliefs, set them outside of the one true gospel delivered to the saints. Friends, that's the results.

That's where adding to or taking away from the one true gospel takes you. It takes you outside the gospel. And there are many extreme views of this down through the years, where people have combined some Christian doctrine with their own ideas.

The results being a Christian cult. And in many occasions, these cults have not ended in salvation. Or being free from sin. But in mass suicide.

Absolutely tragic. But friends, it's not just the extreme groups who fall tragically outside of the apostolic gospel. No. Don't think that for a minute.

[17 : 14] What about the very lovely and charming person that you maybe meet at a friend's dinner party? Who knows that you're a Christian. And they ask you, what church do you attend?

And you tell them the gospel, evangelical church that you attend. And they say, oh, I used to go to a church like that. I'm so grateful for the teaching that I received at the evangelical church that I used to go to maybe when I was a student.

I'm so grateful for my evangelical roots. I used to believe all the things that they teach at churches like that. But I've moved on from that kind of teaching to a much more mature faith.

And as you begin to talk and listen to them, you find out that their much more mature faith turns out to be something totally unrecognizable from the teaching of the apostles.

You see, friends, that's why doctrine matters. Now, I know lots of folks go, oh, here we go again. Doctrine. Because doctrine is seen as a barrier to fellowship.

[18 : 22] As doctrine and theology are just seen as things that Christians disagree on. But doctrine isn't a barrier to fellowship. Doctrine is a safeguard against false teaching.

You would only have to read through the New Testament to see how the church, from the very beginning, has had to fight against false teaching. And how were these false teachers fought?

They were fought with truth. You see, friends, truth really matters. John loves them. And he is devoted to caring for their spiritual well-being. And he is very clear about the importance of truth.

I remember a while ago, I was chatting to a friend of mine. He now lives in Wales. But he's a Glasgow boy. And before he was a Christian, he was a drug addict. But this boy has been on fire for Jesus for the first day that he became a Christian.

And I was chatting to him and he'd said to me, Terry, I was asked by the pastor of my church to become a member of the church. But he said to me he couldn't join. As part of the vows of membership were for him to confess that he believed that a person who was saved, genuinely saved, could lose their salvation.

[19 : 40] And this is what he said to me. He says, Terry, I cannae be bothered with all this doctrine stuff. I just want to tell people the simple gospel message of Jesus.

Now friends, that sounds good, doesn't it? I just want to tell people the simple gospel message of Jesus. But as soon as you begin to tell people the simple gospel message of Jesus, then you're drawing on theology.

You're drawing on doctrine. Maybe this week, when you're at home, you might get a chat on the door and you'll answer it. And standing there will be two Jehovah's Witnesses.

They've got Bible in their hands and they're talking about Jesus. But who is the Jesus that they're talking about? Are they talking about the real Jesus? Is the message they are peddling at your door the message of Jesus as preached by his apostles?

Well, no, it's not. Remember the sign of the last days? Many antichrists have come. So John says, hold on to the real Jesus.

[20 : 49] The real Jesus that was preached by his apostles. Chapter 2, verse 24. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you, remain with you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.

The belief test. But let us move now secondly to the love test. Again, chapter 5, verse 1. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.

And everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. The second test that you will see throughout this letter is the test of Christian love.

And in particular, love for one another in the church, the brothers. If you have come to know the love of God the Father, if he has adopted you into his family, then this will show itself in love for his other adopted children.

John is saying, if you have been grasped by the real gospel, then you will love one another. The mark of Christian love runs all the way through one, John.

[22 : 00] Like the word Blackpool through a stick of rock. chapter 4, verse 19. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar.

For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him. Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

And again in chapter 3, verse 16. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.

So you see, friends, the love test flows right on from and right out of the belief test. You need to know, firstly, who Jesus Christ is and what he did on the cross.

[23 : 16] And what he did on the cross was out of his love for you, even when you were his enemy. And friends, the evidence of how much we have grasped the amazing sacrificial love of Jesus will be seen in how much we love our Christian brothers and sisters.

And in particular, the ones we don't like that much or find it harder to get along with. Can you see how practical that is? Can you see how Christ-like that is?

Jesus didn't just love us with words. He didn't just say he loved us. It wasn't just the feeling that he had for us. No. Jesus loved us practically.

He loved us by his actions and laying down his life for us. And friends, loving one another and the fellowships that we belong to is one of the best things that we can do practically to stop each other from drifting.

I'm sure you know the words from the hymn, Let love be found among us, a love from God alone, the hallmark of the children whom God delights to own.

[24 : 26] Love is the hallmark of God's children. That's what the apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 13. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

And if I give away all I have and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is the hallmark of God's children.

It shows that our faith is the real deal. And think of the difference that makes to the non-Christian who looks in from outside and sees a motley crew like us loving one another.

A motley crew drawn from many different backgrounds, different situations, in some cases different countries, who have got absolutely nothing in common, nothing to unite them, except that the Lord Jesus Christ first loved us and now we love one another.

[25 : 44] People may think we're half our heads for believing what we believe, but what they should never be undeniable about us is a love for one another. Let love be found among us, a love from God alone, the hallmark of the children whom God delights to own.

The belief test, the love test, and thirdly and finally, the obedience test. The obedience test. We have seen that love flows from belief and it's the same for obedience.

Obedience flows from love. Chapter 5, verse 2. By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey His commands.

So loving others isn't primarily about having warm, fuzzy feelings. No, it's all about obedience to God. Look at chapter 5, verse 3.

For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments and His commandments are not burdensome for everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world and this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith.

[27 : 00] So you can't say that you have real, authentic Christian faith, that internally your heart has been changed and yet externally there is no change, there is no effect.

You can't just go and do what we want as Christians, do what we like, do what suits us. No, you are no longer your own. You were bought with a price.

Therefore, honour God with your body. Real, authentic Christian belief will show itself in obedience to God's commands. Real, authentic faith can be tested by obedience.

Our obedience to God's commands is not to earn God's favour. Our obedience won't save us. No, instead, our obedience is a response to being saved.

Our obedience to God's commands is a mark that Jesus Christ has made as a new creation. Our obedience is a demonstration that real change has been affected in our lives by the real grace of God at work within our lives.

[28 : 11] But friends, remember the context into which John is writing. He is writing to Christians who have been badly shaken by these antichrists. These antichrists who used to be in their church, but they have left and they've taken a whole load of folks with them.

They have made some spectacular claims about being free from sin. But friends, let's be absolutely honest. Who here among us is not a sinner? Not one of us.

We are all sinners. And without the grace and the goodness of God working in our lives, none of us would see any obedience to God's commands. And so, verse 5 of chapter 5 asks, Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

And so, you see, friends, that brings us full circle back to where we started, the belief test. So, all of these tests are intertwined.

It's not enough just to believe the right things, to be theologically correct, but this belief must show itself to be loving and obedient to God's commands.

[29 : 26] And the only way you're ever going to do that is through the new birth that comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Read through 1 John this week and see where John in his letter puts the weight of our assurance.

It's not on us, but it is on Jesus. Because let's be honest, as we go through these tests, I'm sure we will see some evidences of these things in our lives.

But we will also see failings in them too. Do I always hold to the truth enough? Or do I sometimes want to change it? Do I always love others as I ought to?

No, I don't. Do I always obey God's commands perfectly? No, I don't. But friends, we have someone who has done that, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But friends, that doesn't let us off the hook. These tests are real. We can take great comfort in seeing God's work within us, bringing our lives more into line with his word.

[30 : 29] And we can use these three tests to test the latest spiritual bandwagon that rolls up into town, being absolutely sure as chapter 2, verse 18 says, that many of these things will be led by antichrists.

Friends, none of us will ever go to heaven because we have held to the truth enough, or loved people enough, or even obeyed God's commands enough. It's by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone.

Let's give the last word to the Apostle John. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

Whoever has the Son has life. Amen. Let us pray. Father, we thank you for the Bible.

We pray the truth of your word would be sunk deep in our hearts and minds and lives.
That our love for the Lord Jesus Christ would show itself in love for our brothers, and in obedience to your commands, so that nothing or no one would be able to derail or deceive us ever.

[31 : 45] And in so doing, we would bring great glory to your name. We ask this in Jesus' name.
Amen.