

2 John 1:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

Analysis

And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. John defines love not as emotion or sentiment but as obedience: "this is love, that we walk after his commandments" (Greek autē estin hē agapē hina peripatōmen kata tas entolas autou, αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἀγάπη ἡνα περιπατῶμεν κατὰ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ). The verb "walk" (peripatōmen) again denotes continuous lifestyle, not isolated acts. The preposition "after" (Greek kata, κατά) indicates conformity—shaping our conduct according to divine commands.

Love for God manifests through obedience to His commandments (John 14:15, 21, 23-24, 1 John 5:3). Similarly, love for others finds expression not primarily in feelings but in actions that conform to God's revealed will. This corrects both ancient and modern distortions that separate love from truth or obedience. John insists authentic love operates within boundaries established by God's commands—it is not autonomous, subjective, or self-defined.

"This is the commandment" (singular) refers to the encompassing command to love, which John then clarifies: "as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it." The pronoun "it" (Greek en autē, ἐν αὐτῇ, literally "in it") likely refers to love—believers should walk in love. However, love itself means walking according to God's commandments. This creates a beautiful circularity: love is defined as obedience, and obedience is motivated by love. The commandments

give love its content and shape; love provides the motive and heart for keeping commandments. Neither exists authentically without the other.

Historical Context

Antinomian tendencies appeared early in church history—some claimed that grace freed believers from moral obligation or that spiritual maturity transcended ethical commands. Conversely, legalistic groups reduced Christianity to external rule-keeping divorced from heart transformation. Both errors persisted into the first-century church's experience.

Gnostic teachers particularly promoted ethical relativism. They claimed that since matter was evil and only spirit mattered, physical actions had no moral significance. This led some to libertinism (license to sin since the body was irrelevant) and others to asceticism (severe bodily denial to escape material existence). Both rejected the biblical integration of spiritual truth with ethical obedience.

John's insistence that love necessarily involves obedience to divine commands preserved Christianity's moral substance. Against antinomians, he affirms that grace establishes rather than abolishes God's moral requirements. Against legalists, he grounds obedience in love—commands are not burdensome when fulfilled from hearts transformed by grace (1 John 5:3). Against Gnostics, he asserts that spiritual reality manifests in ethical practice—one cannot claim to love God or others while disregarding divine commandments. This teaching became foundational for Christian ethics: authentic faith produces obedience motivated by love.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does modern culture's definition of love differ from John's definition, and what are the practical consequences?
2. In what situations might we face tension between loving someone and holding to God's commands, and how should we respond?
3. How does understanding that God's commands are an expression of His love change our attitude toward obedience?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	αὕτη	ἐστὶν	ἡ	ἀγάπη	ἴνα	περιπατῆτε	κατὰ	τὰς
And	This	is	G3588	love	That	we walk	after	G3588
G2532	G3778	G2076		G26	G2443	G4043	G2596	
ἐντολή,	αὐτῇ	αὕτη	ἐστὶν	ἡ	ἐντολή,	καθὼς		
commandments	his	This	is	G3588	commandments	as		
G1785	G846	G3778	G2076		G1785	G2531		
ἡκούσατε	ἀπ'	ἀρχῆς	ἴνα	ἐν	αὐτῇ	περιπατῆτε		
ye have heard	from	the beginning	That	in	his	we walk		
G191	G575	G746	G2443	G1722	G846	G4043		

Additional Cross-References

1 John 5:3 (Love): For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

1 John 2:24 (Parallel theme): Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.

1 John 2:5 (Love): But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

John 15:10 (Love): If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

John 15:14 (Parallel theme): Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

John 14:15 (Love): If ye love me, keep my commandments.

John 14:21 (Love): He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

1 John 5:15 (Parallel theme): And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

2 John 1:5 (Love): And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.