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HOW TO KNOW THAT YOU KNOW HIM

1 John 2:3-6

By

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1 John Lesson 6

How to Know that You Know Him 1 John 2:3-6

Years ago, when I was candidating at my first church, we were staying in a house in a remote area of the Southern California mountains while the owners were away. We were having dinner at another home when we received a call informing us that an escaped convict had ditched his stolen car in the driveway of the house where we were staying and had set out on foot through the property. We decided to spend the night at the home where we had dinner.

The next morning, I called the sheriff to explain our situation and to ask if it was safe to take my pregnant wife back to the house. He assured me that it was perfectly safe. I said, "Fine, but I would like a sheriff to escort us into the house and to check some hiding places on the property, just to make sure." When we arrived at the property, there were three or four cars of officers wearing their bulletproof vests, loading their shotguns!

We later learned that the convict had made his way to another road, hitchhiked, and killed the driver who picked him up. The sheriff was sure that it was safe *for us* to go back to that house unarmed, but he wasn't *really sure!* When the safety of his men was on the line, he wanted to be *really sure!*

There are some things in life that you want to be *really sure* about, because so much rides on the outcome. Your salvation is such an issue. You don't want to take risks about your eternal destiny. Since the Bible warns that many are deceived about this crucial matter, you especially need to *know* that you know Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord.

Last week our text focused on God's abundant grace in forgiving all of our sins. If we sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. But there is always the danger that people will mistakenly "turn the grace of our God into licentiousness, and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 4). The true grace of God teaches us "to deny ungodliness and worldly

desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:12). So after setting forth God's grace, John goes on to show that those who have truly experienced it will show it by living in obedience to His Word. John gives this as the first test of how you can know that you know Jesus Christ:

You can know that you truly know Christ
if you walk in obedience to His Word.

Our text teaches us, first, that...

1. God wants us to know Him.

Christianity is not just knowing about God or knowing certain doctrines or following certain moral precepts. It is essentially to know God. Jesus said (John 17:3), "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." Christianity at its heart is, knowing God personally through Jesus Christ, who revealed God to us. If you do not know Him, you are not a Christian, no matter how correct your doctrine or how faithful your church attendance. You may have been raised in the church and you may always have adhered to Christian morality. But if you do not know God personally, you are not saved.

There is a vast difference between knowing *about* a person and knowing that person. I may know many things about President Bush, by reading the news or watching TV. But I do not know him personally. I've never met him or spent any time with him. In the same way, you may know a lot about God, but if you have not entered into a personal relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ, you do not know God personally.

The apostle Paul was a rabbinical student steeped in Judaism. He knew the Hebrew Scriptures. He fastidiously kept the Jewish rituals and feasts. As to the righteousness of the Law, he said that he was blameless. But he wrote (Phil. 3:8), "... I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ." Paul knew a lot about God, but he didn't know God personally until he came to faith in Jesus Christ.

Do you know God personally through Christ? That is foundational. You begin there.

2. God wants us to know that we know Him.

John writes (2:3), "By this we know that we have come to know Him..." There is a difference between knowing and knowing that you know. It's easy to claim that you know Him, but it's also easy to be mistaken. John mentions (2:4) someone claiming, "I have come to know Him," but John bluntly says that this person "is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Since we're talking about eternal destiny, we don't want to be deceived on this crucial matter!

Because this subject is so important, it's not surprising that the enemy of our souls has created some major confusion about it in our day. There are many evangelicals (including the Greek professor under whom I first studied 1 John) who teach that if a person professes faith in Christ, he is saved eternally and should be assured of his salvation, even if his subsequent life demonstrates no fruit to back up his claim. They argue that if faith must be validated by any evidence, then it is not faith alone that saves.

The popular Four Spiritual Laws booklet also promotes the idea of giving immediate assurance of salvation to a person who prays to receive Christ. It uses 1 John 5:13, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." The logic goes, "You just prayed to receive Jesus, indicating that you believe in Him. Therefore, you should know that you have eternal life and that nothing can ever take it away from you." But the booklet ignores that "these things" refers to all that John has written, which includes three tests of genuine faith: obedience, love, and sound doctrine.

That view of instant assurance based on a person's profession of faith is foreign to what most of the godly men in church history have taught. I would argue that it is foreign to First John, Hebrews, James, and many other Scriptures. In the parable of the sower, those represented by the rocky soil that received the word with joy certainly would have claimed to believe. The same would be true of the thorny soil. But only the fourth type, the good soil, brought forth fruit with perseverance (Luke 8:5-15). That parable shows that if a person *truly* believes, he will endure trials and root out the weeds of the world. But it takes some time to determine this. How can we know if a recent profession of faith is genuine, saving faith? Look at the fruit that comes from it. But fruit takes time to grow.

In 2 Peter 1:10, the apostle exhorts us to “be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; ...” Why would anyone need to be diligent to make certain about this, if assurance is something that accompanies initial faith? Peter indicates that making certain about our calling and election is somewhat tied to our deeds subsequent to initial faith. He adds (2 Pet. 1:10-11), “for as long as you practice these things [the qualities that he has just listed], you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.”

So God wants us not only to know Him through faith in Jesus Christ, but also to know that we know Him. But as many Scriptures indicate, this assurance is linked to how we live subsequent to our profession of faith. John shows...

3. The way that we know that we truly have come to know God is by walking in obedience to His Word.

John uses three somewhat overlapping ideas here, but there seems to be a progression in them.

- A. Keeping God’s commandments is evidence that we have come to know Him (2:3-4).

He writes (2:3), “By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.” John (2:4) then states the other side, exposing the false claims of the heretics, “The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” John doesn’t use diplomatic, nuanced language that leaves you thinking, “I wonder what he meant?” What part of *liar* don’t you understand?

We need to be careful, though, not to reverse the order of Scripture. We are not saved by keeping God’s commandments. We are saved by faith alone, but genuine saving faith *necessarily* results in a life of obedience to Jesus Christ. As John Calvin puts it (*Calvin’s Commentaries* [Baker], on 1 John 2:3, p. 174), “The knowledge of God is efficacious.” He means that knowing God *necessarily* changes your heart and life.

Behind our text in John’s mind were Jesus’ words in the Upper Room. Jesus said (John 14:15), “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” He added (14:21), “He who has My com-

mandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." If we missed it, He repeats (14:23-24), "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me." Just a few sentences later, Jesus emphasized (John 15:10), "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."

We could spend several messages on these important words of Jesus, but note a few things. First, the fact that John, as an old man, is still reciting these words of Jesus that he had heard about sixty years before should teach us something! He couldn't shake from his life the words of Jesus. Jesus' teaching is not something to read and forget as you go your way. His teaching should burn into our very existence, so that it shapes how we think and how we live for the rest of our lives.

As Jesus stated, His words were not merely His words, but the words of the Father who sent Him. If you are not thoroughly familiar with Jesus' teaching, it will not affect your life. You will not obey His words if you do not know them. Since Jesus' words are God's words, we must study and know them so that they impact everything we do.

Second, note that Jesus doesn't give out helpful hints for happy living. He isn't a therapist in the sky, suggesting that you may want to try His techniques to see if they work for you. He issues commandments! This means that you are not free to pick and choose the commands of Jesus that grab you or fit your agenda. He is the Lord, who speaks the words of God. His commandments are authoritative.

Third, to keep His commandments implies diligence and effort. The word "keep" was used of a sentry walking his post. It implies that the enemy is attempting to invade and dominate your life with temptations that will destroy you. To resist him, you must be vigilant so as to obey the commandments that Jesus has given. A faithful sentry is not laid back. He is alert and diligent.

A fourth observation is that knowing God and keeping His commandments are inextricably linked. John states that keeping His commandments is one way that we know that we know Him. Jesus said that if anyone keeps His commandments, He and the Father will love him and Jesus will disclose Himself to that person. We often hear about God's unconditional love, and there is a sense in which it is so. But Jesus points to a conditional aspect of His love, namely, that it hinges on having and keeping His commandments. To the extent that you obey Jesus (and to that extent *only*) will you experience His love and to that extent only will you truly know Him.

B. Keeping God's Word shows that the love of God has been perfected in us (2:5a).

The first part of verse 5 repeats what John has just said, but it also seems to go a bit farther. John moves from *knowing* God to the *love* of God, and from keeping His *commandments* to keeping His *word*, which seems to be broader. The Bible contains many specific commandments about how we should live, but it also includes many general principles that relate to how you think, to your motives, and to your goals. So we should obey all of God's Word.

The phrase, "the love of God," is ambiguous. It may mean "God's love for us," or, "our love for God." Or, it may refer to God-like or divine love. Scholars are divided between the first two options, and it's hard to decide. But perhaps it does not really matter, in that if God's love for us is perfected in us, we will also love God. And, no one can really love God without first experiencing His love. So the two concepts are intertwined. "Perfected in us" means, "brought to maturity." It means that the love of God has "fulfilled its mission," or "has reached its goal" when it is consummated in our obedience (Robert Law, *The Tests of Life* [Baker], p. 213).

John Calvin understands the phrase to refer primarily to our love for God. He points out that Moses said the same thing (Deut. 10:12-13), "Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the Lord's commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?"

Calvin says (p. 176) that “the law, which is spiritual, does not command only external works, but enjoins this especially, to love God with the whole heart.” Thus our obedience shows that we truly love God and have been laid hold of by His love.

C. Walking as Jesus walked shows that we abide in Him (2:5b-6).

Although some take the last phrase of verse 5 to point back, I understand it to point forward to verse 6: “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 equates being “in Him” with “abiding in Him.” “Abiding” is John’s term for fellowship or a close, intimate relationship. As with the phrases, “keeping His commandments” and “the love of God,” so also the term “abiding” goes back to the Upper Room Discourse, to Jesus’ words about the vine and the branches. There Jesus said (John 15:4), “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.”

Dr. James Rosscup devotes an entire book to the theme of abiding in Christ as found in John 15. He sums up the concept of abiding in three ways (*Abiding in Christ* [Zondervan], p. 116, italics his): “Abiding involves a person’s *relating* himself to Christ the Vine, to His Person and His purpose; *rejecting* attitudes, words, actions, or interests which Christ’s Word reveals He cannot share; and *receiving* the quality-essence of Christ’s imparted life for authentic fulfillment.”

In our text, John says that if we are abiding in Christ, we will walk as He walked. This means that He is our supreme example for living. Jesus showed us how we should live in total dependence on the Father and in complete submission to His will, no matter how difficult. Jesus claimed (John 5:19), “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.” He also said (John 8:29), “... for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.”

While no one can make similar claims, everyone who claims to abide in Christ should have the same focus and direction, not to act

in independence from God, but in total dependence on Him. We should not live to please ourselves apart from God, but to do the things that are pleasing to Him.

Also, John's words show us that the Christian life is a *walk*. That is a helpful metaphor that the apostle Paul uses often (Eph. 2:10; 4:1, 17; 5:1, 8, 15; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:12). Walking is not as spectacular or swift as running, leaping, or flying, but it is a steady, sure movement in one direction. It implies progress toward a destination or goal. A walk is made up of many specific steps, but it points to the overall tenor or general quality of a life, not to any one step.

To walk as Jesus walked means that our lives should be characterized by daily dependence on God, submission to Him, and obedience to His will. Our overall aim in life will be to seek first His kingdom and righteousness. We will seek to please Him by our thoughts, words, and deeds. While we will never perfectly walk as Jesus walked, it should be our constant aim and effort to do so.

Conclusion

Thus John is saying that you can know that you truly know Christ if you walk in obedience to His Word. But someone may say, "As far as I know, I do believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I seek to obey Him. But, I often fall short. Since I can never walk perfectly in this life, how can I have complete assurance that I truly know Him?"

Calvin, who was not only a theologian, but also a pastor, answers this in a couple of ways. He points out that there is not anyone in human history, except for Jesus Christ, who has perfectly kept God's commandments. If perfect obedience were the requirement, then no one could ever confidently say, "I know Him." So Calvin says that keeping His commandments refers to "such as strive, according to the capacity of human infirmity, to form their life in conformity to the will of God. For whenever Scripture speaks of the righteousness of the faithful, it does not exclude the remission of sins, but on the contrary, begins with it" (p. 175).

Regarding the fact that no one loves God perfectly, Calvin replies, "that it is sufficient, provided every one aspired to this perfection according to the measure of grace given unto him. In the

meantime, the definition is, that the perfect love of God is the complete keeping of his law. To make progress in this as in knowledge, is what we ought to do" (p. 176).

So the issue is, purpose, direction, and focus. If the purpose and direction of your life is to please God by obedience to His commands, you can know that you know Him. It does not mean that you never fail, but that when you do, you get up and keep walking in obedience, seeking to please God with all your life.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones sums up these verses (*Walking With God* [Crossway Books], p. 53): "If you have the life, it is bound to show itself, and if it does not, then you have not the life.... You cannot be receiving the life of Christ without becoming like Him. You cannot walk with God without keeping His commandments. You cannot know God without immediately, automatically loving Him. Love always manifests itself by doing what the object of its love desires."

So ask yourself, first, "Do I know Christ?" Have you trusted in Him as the propitiation for your sins? If so, ask, "Do I know that I know Him?" How? "Do I obey His Word and seek to walk as Jesus walked?" If that is the direction and focus of your life, then you can know that you know Him.

Application Questions

1. Why is assurance of salvation important? What practical benefits are there if you have it? What disadvantages if you don't?
2. Assurance of salvation is not something to share immediately with a new convert. Agree/Disagree? Give biblical support.
3. Some say that if assurance depends on anything in us (other than faith), we fall into works-salvation. Agree/Disagree?
4. Some say that if you emphasize obedience to God's commandments you fall into legalism? Agree/Disagree?

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