

How to Know that You Know Him

1 John 2:3-5 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.

Not too long ago, I was distressed to find out that my son has a medical disorder. In the last few months, unfortunately, I found out that my daughter has it as well. Worst of all, it looks like they inherited it from me. The disorder is Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), which is defined as an ongoing pattern of disobedient, hostile and defiant behaviour toward authority figures. My son has it. My daughter has it. I think I have oodles of it.

Of course, I'm being a bit facetious here. The fact that our culture has a special medical term for what used to be called naughtiness or being a brat just shows more of its desire to call good evil and evil good. No right and wrong, just sick or healthy. According to the world, my son and daughter are very sick. And by that token, I still have the disease. Because existing in me is a desire to disobey God, defy His authority and live life my own way. But the Bible doesn't call that a disorder; it calls it sin. The Bible does not say we have a disorder; it says that defying God is quite natural to born sinners. To disobey your Creator is the worst kind of disorder. However since the day when I trusted Christ as Lord and Saviour, another principle or nature has been in me. A nature which wants to please God, wants to honour and love and please Him, and hates the remaining desires to disobey and defy God.

In fact, if you don't have some kind of experience of that tussle, some kind of experience of two principles that oppose each other, the Bible would exhort you to examine yourself whether you are in the faith, because, to pick up the term, 'a Christian' with the life of Christ dwelling within does not live with unbroken ODD towards God.

That's the subject of John's next few verses. John is giving us signs of life. He is showing us what the life of Christ looks like in a believer. He has shown us what believers do with sin. Now, he turns his attention to what believers do with God's authority in their lives. He is going to show us the kind of life that characterises a Christian. Do Christians live with chronic, unbroken defiance and disobedience? Is there such a thing as a permanently backslidden Christian? What are the signs of life when it comes to obedience to God's Word?

What John is going to do here is give us a simple test to find out if we know Him. Following that, he is going to give us two examples, two real-life test-cases for us to compare our lives against. This is a very user-friendly manual – here is how to know if you know Him

I. The Test: How to Know that You Know Him

1 John 2:3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

John says you can know something for sure. What is it that you can know? You can know that you know Him. That's another way of saying, have eternal life – be a Christian. Remember Christ's words in John 17:3?

John 17:3 "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

In this passage, John describes eternal life as having come to know God. If you have already

entered into a relationship with God where you have come to know Him as your true and living God and Father, then you have eternal life.

In fact, the verb for 'know Him' in the original is in the perfect tense, which means the idea is 'by this we know that we have come to know Him'. In other words, if you have been born again if you have been justified, converted, regenerated; if you have come to know Him in the past; if you have previously entered into a relationship with God and therefore are a true Christian, then here is a present-tense, current test. We can know now, in an ongoing, present-tense fashion, if something has really happened in the past.

Isn't it interesting how modern Christianity has reversed that order? The Bible says, look in the present, to know if something really did happen in the past. Verify the past event by using the present. We say, look into the past to see if you have something in the present. We say, try to remember if you have an experience from your past which you think was a sincere one, and then you can know you are OK in the present. John says apply this test to your life right now, to find out if you really did accept Christ in the past. We say, I remember trusting Christ on such-and-such a date, and therefore I know that I am saved right now. Do you see how we are doing the opposite of Scripture? Scripture says don't use the memory of a decision to trust Christ as the basis of your assurance. Look at your life right now, and if it meets the tests

So what is the test which John gives us? How do we find out if we have truly come to know Him in the past and still do know Him in the present? **By this**, John says, we know that we know Him, **if we keep His commandments**. If we are keeping His commandments; if as a way of life, as a habit, as a general rule, we are keeping the commandments of God, then we can know that we have come to know Him. What does that mean, "Keep His commandments"? God's commandments are everything He has made known as His will in His Word. That's why verse 5 says 'Whoever keeps His Word'. To keep God's commandments is to obey the will of God revealed in the Word of God, whether it is direct rules, commandments, precepts; whether it is examples to avoid or follow; whether it is attitudes to embrace; whether it is principles to follow. The idea is one of taking in the will of God through the Word of God, and keeping it. The word for 'keep' means to guard, to watch over, to protect. The attitude is one of diligence, carefulness, concern.

Have you ever been asked to operate something that belonged to someone else, like drive their car, or use their laptop, or something of that order? What kind of attitude characterises you when you do it? You are typically very careful, paying attention to detail, not wanting to break anything or destroy anything. This is the attitude of the one with eternal life towards the will of God. He or she keeps it.

Does this mean that we need to keep His commandments to get eternal life? Do we need to keep His commandments to sustain our eternal life? No. The Bible is very clear that eternal life is a free gift, one that cannot be earned, bought, or kept by our own works (Eph 2:8-9, I Pet 1:5) However, the Bible is equally clear that good works are a necessary, not optional fruit of eternal life. Obedience, keeping God's commandments are not a condition for eternal life; they are a characteristic of it. Keeping God's commandments does not earn you eternal life, but if you have eternal life, you will keep God's commandments. The classic passage here is James chapter 2.

James 2:14 ¶ What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ^{and} one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? James 2:17-26 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¶ But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show

you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe -- and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Notice: real faith, the faith that saves is never alone. Following it, like a baby calf following its mother are works of obedience. Fruit does not produce life; life produces fruit. An apple tree does not need to produce apples to be alive, but if it is alive, it will produce apples. You do not keep God's commandments to get eternal life. But if you have eternal life, you will keep God's commandments.

Revelation 22:14 ¶ Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.

One reason for this is when God brings eternal life to a human being, He changes their whole attitude towards Him and His will. He implants a principle of desire to please God.

Ezekiel 11:19-20 Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, "that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

John now gives us two opposing examples of what this does and doesn't look like in real life. He starts with the negative example.

II. The One Who Fails The Test: The Mere Professor

1 John 2:4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

Here's the **Mere Professor**. The Mere Professor has nothing more than his profession, his statements that he knows God. He talks, but in his life, he does not keep God's commandments. He does not have that attitude towards the will of God. John says this man's claim to know God is a false claim. This man's statement is a lie. The truth is not in him. If the truth were in him, it would work itself out into a life of keeping God's commandments. But because he doesn't do that, it really doesn't matter what he says, because his life denies his words.

The Bible is very clear that verbal claims don't mean much in the kingdom of God.

Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

Titus 1:16 They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

John is not interested in what you say; he is interested in what you do.

1 John 4:20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his

brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

Who has not met a Mere Professor? They number in the millions. They are everywhere. They live like the devil, and when they find out you are a Christian, they are quick to tell you that they, too, are born again. Yes, they love Jesus and go to church quite frequently, and they are happy to tell you that they know Him. But their lives are lived in rebellion to Him.

Or else we meet the person who is supposed to be a Christian but is just terminally 'backslidden'. His one-time profession of faith is enough to assure friends and family that he is indeed a Christian, just not living for the Lord for the last fifteen years. They are sure he has eternal life, but that he just doesn't live up to it. And that can be the case in any of our lives for certain periods. But when you meet someone who claims to have accepted Christ, but there has been no change in his life since then, and now lives just as he would have had he not made that profession of faith, what reason do you have for believing he has eternal life?

That raises a question: how many of God's commands do you have to break before this becomes true of you? Well, obviously the Bible accepts that Christians are going to sin. We just finished studying chapter 1:5-2:2, which is all about what Christians do with their sin. They confess it and seek to forsake it.

So this doesn't mean that the breaking of God's commands means you are not saved. It means that those who break God's commands as their way of life, as the pattern of behaviour, as their unrestrained, unrepentant, unchanging way of life – these ones are not saved.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

The person who makes a practice of sin until that can be called a habitual fornicator, idolater, homosexual, thief, drunkard, reviler is not showing evidence of eternal life. They are not showing evidence of a new, fleshy heart which wants to obey, and wants to please God.

Notice the unambiguous sentence the Bible passes on such behaviour: "He is a liar". We're very timid today. If someone makes that profession, we feel very frightened to say they are not Christians. And certainly, it isn't our place to become salvation detectives, sniffing out professors from possessors. No, Christ will do that at the end of the age when He sorts the wheat out from the tares. But what I John does give us the right to do is to openly challenge a professor, when his life is one of consistent disobedience. That's what church discipline is: Christians challenging a pattern of disobedience in the life of a professing Christian.

John then turns to give us the positive test:

III. The One Who Passes the Test: The True Possessor

1 John 2:5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him.

Here we meet the opposite of the Mere Professor. This is the **True Possessor**. This person does not merely make claims to be saved. This person keeps God's commandments as a habit, and as such, they give evidence that they are truly saved, justified, converted, possessors of eternal life.

Notice, John says, 'truly', this is the case. This person has the real deal.

And then John says something interesting. Instead of saying, the one who keeps God's commands truly knows God, or the one who keeps God's commands truly has eternal life, John says that in a different way. He says the one who keeps God's commandments, the love of God has been perfected in Him. What does that mean and why does John say it that way?

The answer lies in how obeying God's commandments and love are related. Look at how Jesus described it in John 14:

John 14:15 If you love Me, keep My commandments.

John 14:21-24 He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." ²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" ²³ Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. ²⁴ "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.

Don't miss this. Jesus says, in verse 15, that the one who loves Him, obeys Him. Then he says the one who loves Him, keeps His commandments, and as a result of this, the Father and the Son will especially manifest themselves to Him in his heart. And what do you think happens to the believer's love for God when God reveals Himself all the more?

Can you see the cycle here? God begins it by loving you and working in you. He works in you to give you desires to love and please Him. As you yield and respond to His work, you obey Him more. But as you obey Him more, God becomes more real to you, more lovely to you, and you love Him more. And out of that love, comes more obedience.

This is probably what John means by the love of God is perfected in such a person. God works in you, you work it out. He loves you, and works in you, and the result of abiding in that love by submission, is a growing love for Him which makes obedience more a matter of 'I want to' rather than 'I have to'.

Warren Wiersbe points out that there are three levels of obedience. There is the have to, need to, and want to. A slave has to obey, or else he will be punished. A worker needs to obey to get his paycheck. But a happy child loves to obey because he or she wants to.

You see this illustrated in Exodus 21, with the Hebrew slave who worked six years, and in the seventh he was to be set free.

Exodus 21:1-6 Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them: "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. "If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. "If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. "But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' "then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.

When he started, he simply had to obey. He would be punished if he didn't. But as he worked for the master, it became more a case of he needed to obey. He needed to obey to get his wages, and to keep things running. But at the end of six years, he had the choice to go out free, but he could stay with his master if he wanted to.

That's something like the stages we pass through in our Christian lives. We might start out with *have to*. But we should become responsible enough to see we also *need to*. And if we keep obeying by the power of the Spirit, we should come to a place where we *want to*.

BTW, it's not wrong to be motivated by *have to*. When we are in a cold state, when our hearts are hard, when we are not mature enough to see the best reasons for something, then 'have to' is part of obedience. You shouldn't reject obeying something because at this point you are only doing it because you have to. That isn't the fault of the command, it's the fault of your heart, and while you're waiting for your heart to grow up, you still have to obey. It isn't wrong to be motivated to obey because you need to. Sometimes you are pushed into something not because of pleasure, but because of necessity. And it is wrong to avoid obedience because you feel necessity more than pleasure. While you are waiting for your heart to love doing it, you still need to do it.

The problem is not that our obedience is sometimes motivated by *have to* or *need to*; the problem is when it simply stays there all the time. The problem is when we never grow to love the one we are obeying. The problem is when we are never empowered by the Spirit so that we experience what Jesus describes as sin, John 14, and obedience becomes motivated by desire rather than duty.

How do you get it to be a matter of desire rather than duty? When this is something coming from within. Christianity is not taking some external commands and forcing them in. It is the life of Christ within which works its way out, when we feed on the Word of God and obey Him. That's what it means to abide, the subject of verse 6, and something we'll look at next week in more detail.

You see, it is not about forcing external behaviour to change. It is about a change of nature. Jesus said in John 10:27:

John 10:27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

Sheep follow. That's because they are sheep. God's sheep follow Him. But those who are not His sheep, as a pattern of life do not follow Him.

John 10:26 But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you.

So once again, I come back to the pot plant. You enter someone's home and you see an empty pot with soil but no plant in it. The person whose home it is says to you, "That's my plant. I planted it in 2002."

But since you see no stem, leaves or flowers, you reply, "But it never germinated. There's nothing there."

And the person says, "But I'm telling you, I planted a seed in 2002. I have a plant." And no matter how many times you refer them to the absence of any growth, they refer you back to 2002 when they planted a seed. In the same way, John comes to the pot plant of your life and looks for fruit. The stem, leaves, fruit and growth which is a sign of life is obedience. And for many, there is no sign of obedience to Christ. So John looks for obedience, and if there isn't any, he says, you're not saved. To that they say, but I accepted Jesus in 2002. You may think you did, John replies, but there is no living, present evidence of a new heart in you, since you don't obey Him. If you really did plant a living seed, then that life will be seen in a plant. If you really did receive eternal life, then it will be seen in a life that wants to obey God.

How do you know that you really know Him? When as a way of life, you seek to obey Him, because you love Him. According to John, if you apply this test, then you can know that you are in Him.

1 John 2:5b By this we know that we are in Him.