

## Know and Obey To Be Happy In Jesus

### 1 John 2:3-11

#### Introduction:

- Is it possible to know God and to live like the devil? Is it possible to truly know God and have no life change? Adrian Rogers says, “Study the Bible to know about God. Obey the Bible to really know God.” (*Adrianisms*, vol.2, p.33).
- The apostle John would agree. He would put it like this: it is one thing to say you know God, but it is another to really know Him. To help us “know that we have come to know him” (2:3), John provides a 3-fold test that he returns to again and again to this letter. We can put them in the form of 3 questions: 1) Do I believe the right things about Jesus? (the theological test); 2) Do I obey the commandments of God? (the moral test); 3) Do I love others? (the ethical test). John addressed the belief test in 1:5-2:2. Now he will address the moral test in 2:3-6 and the ethical test in 2:7-11. His goal: that you and I would live in the assurance of our salvation and thereby be happy in Jesus all the days of our lives.

#### **I. Obey Christ’s commands and enjoy the assurance of salvation 2:3-6**

- Chuck Colson (1931-2012) of Watergate and Prison Fellowship fame wrote a masterpiece entitled *Loving God*. In it he said the essence of the Christian life is obedience:

““But how do we love the Lord?” we ask. Jesus answered this in a discussion with His disciples: “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15). Or, as the apostle John wrote later, “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments” (1John 5:3)” (p.40).

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer would add, “Only he who believes is obedient; only he who is obedient believes” (Ibid., 19). Yes! To love Him is to obey Him and to know Him is to obey Him. So intimately wed are the ideas of knowing God and loving God that John will use both words more than 40 times each in this 5 chapter letter. To know God is to love God and to love God is to obey God. This obedience, John teaches us, reveals the genuineness of our faith (v.3), the authenticity of our confession (v.4), the maturing of our love (v. 5), and our growth in Christ likeness (v. 6). For John, and it should be the same for us, there is a massive difference between saying and doing, between saying and knowing (1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6, 9).

1) You will know that you know Him 2:3-4

- My friend Matt Carter says, “When I am participating in an interview with someone we’re thinking about adding to our

[church] staff...I let others ask the detailed questions. I ask the candidate only one question. I ask him or her, “When was the last time the thought of the gospel made you weep?” (What would your answer be?). If the person we’re interviewing can’t answer the question, I simply won’t hire him or her. Why? Because I’ve realized there is a direct connection between a person’s love for Jesus and that person’s obedience to Him” (*The Real Win*, 135).

- John saw the importance of the gospel’s connection to obedience. He knew it was an important avenue of assurance of salvation. You want to know day by day that you know Him, that you are saved, it is simple: Look to His perfect advocacy and atoning word on your behalf (2:1-2) and keep His commandments. The word “keep” is in the present tense and conveys the idea of guarding. We should guard as a precious treasure God’s commandments. And as we do, the treasure of the assurance of salvation is strengthened with it. Obedience is an important avenue of assurance. Because I know Him in all of His beauty, glory, and majesty I delight in obeying Him. To obey Christ is not a burden. It is a blessing. It is my natural response to what He has done for me.

- However, if we claim to know Him but do not guard as precious His commandments (v. 4) we are liars (what we say) and the truth is not in us (who we are). We are spiritual deceivers. Fakes. We claim to have something we really don't: a true and genuine relationship with God.
- The New Birth (see John 3) that results from fleeing to Jesus as our advocate and our atonement will place a new knowledge in our minds and a new desire and passion in our hearts to obey Him. That desire to obey and our decision to obey gives us a certainty that we know Him.

2) You will know His love perfectly 2:5

- Keeping the commandments of God is not a condition of knowing God, but it is a clear sign and indication that we do know God. It is a life of true worship that delights in the commandments of God for no other reason than it delights in the God who gives those commandments.
- John says “whoever keeps (as a habit and pattern of life) his word (another way of saying his commandments), in him truly the love of God is perfected.” This verse is set in contrast to verse 4 and it advances the argument John is making. And, it ties together the

vital relationship of knowing God, loving God and obeying God.

This is a powerful triad to say the least.

- The phrase “love of God” is ambiguous and open to various understandings. It could mean 1) God’s love for us, 2) our love for God, 3) God’s kind of love or 4) simply the love of God in a general sense. I believe the context here indicates that, it is our love for God that is in view (Akin, 93). As we consistently obey God carefully guarding His Word, our love for God grows and is brought to maturity and completion. It reaches a “marked out in advance goal” and is brought to perfection. (cf. also 4:12, 17, 18). Keeping or obeying His Word, my love for Jesus grows, matures and is brought to its intended goal. And here is the beauty of the whole thing: the more I know Him the more I love Him and the more I love Him the more I know Him. (Ill. Think what happens in a godly marriage).
- There is a tradition that on one occasion the apostle John, near the end of his life, was brought to the church on a pallet. All he said to the believing community was, “love one another.” When he was asked why that was all he had to say he responded by saying, “because it is enough.” The perfecting of our love life is an

additional avenue “that we are in him,” that we belong to Jesus and that Jesus belongs to us.

3) You will know you are abiding in Christ 2:6

- When God saved us He did not save us simply to take us to heaven. He saved us that we might be conformed to His perfect image, that we might become like Jesus (Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:2). He saved us that we might “walk in the same way in which he walked.”
- Verse 6 is the 2<sup>nd</sup> “whosoever says” statement in this section (v. 4, 9). Here John speaks of our “abiding” in Him. Jesus said a lot about this in John 15. John will use this word 23 times in this epistle. Like obeying Jesus and loving Jesus, it is the natural outgrowth of knowing Him. The idea is one of remaining or continuing in Jesus.
- John says we have both a statement to prove and a Savior as a pattern. And, the word “ought” conveys a moral obligation for our walk to match our talk. To truly abide in Christ means I will live (walk) like Christ. This theme is not unique to I John but is repeated several times in the New Testament.

- John 15:4-5 – “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”
- 1 Corinthians 11:1- “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”
- Ephesians 5:1- “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.”
- I Peter 2:21-“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might know follow in his steps.”
- Like Father like Son. Like Savior like saint. Christ’s life becomes my life, my example, my goal, my pattern. And note: it is abiding in Him that enables me to live like Him. I don’t do it in my strength. I do it in His! I don’t have to be like Him to be assured, I want to be like Him and am assured.
- John Stott says, “We cannot claim to abide in Him unless we are like Him.” (p.92) But, as we abide in Him we will be like Him because we will know Him.

## II. Love one another and walk in the light of salvation 2:7-11

- John is good at simplifying the Christian life. Basically he says know Jesus, obey God and love others. It is the theme of our love life that, briefly introduced in v. 5, John will now give more intense attention (And wait until we arrive at ch 4:7). In v. 5 it was our love for God that concerned him. Now in vs. 7-11 it is our love for others he, with a sense of urgency, must address.
- He begins with an affirmation of his love for those to whom he is writing. He calls them “dear friends” or “beloved.” It is the word *agapetoi* and John will use it 6 times in this letter (2:7; 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11). It is a term of endearment, of heart-felt love and concern. It also serves John well as he begins a new thought, though in this instance, it allows him to continue and expand upon the idea of God’s commandments. Here he will narrow his focus to one specific commandment: the commandment to love. Interestingly, though the idea of love is clearly the theme of this section, the word itself only appears in verse 10.
- Question: Does John believe a right love for God (2:5) is absolutely essential to a right love of our brothers (v. 10)? I believe the answer is a resounding yes. Indeed the two are inseparable.

1) God’s love has been with us since conversion 2:7

- I believe the gospel of John was written before the letters of John and that the letters of John assume a knowledge of the gospel of John. Here it is John 13:34-35 that John assumes his audience knows. There Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”
- This being the case, John can say the commandment to love one another is not new, it is old. It is something you have had from the beginning, the beginning of your Christian experience as a follower of Jesus. Further, you know this commandment’s ancient rootage in Leviticus 19:18, what Jesus called the 2<sup>nd</sup> great commandment. There Moses wrote, “Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself, I am Yahweh.”
- John Piper says, “This [verse] is a very remarkable rebuke to typical gospel preaching and witnessing today. For John, the commandment of love belongs to what people should hear from the beginning! It is not an optional stage two in Christian growth...The gospel contains not only the commandment to

trust Jesus, but also the commandment, in the power of that trust [knowledge?!], to be changed into a loving person.” (The One Who Loves Lives in Light, 2-24-85).

2) God’s love is seen most truly in Jesus and His followers 2:8

- Some cynics might argue that the apostle John leaves himself open to the charge of senility in v.8. After all in v. 7 he says, “I am writing to you no new commandment, but an old commandment.” Now in v. 8 he says, “It is a new commandment that I am writing to you.” Well, which is it? The answer is, “it is both.” I think the opening phrase as translated by the *ESV* is helpful when it says, “At the same time...” This old, old commandment that goes all the way back to Moses took on a new character with the coming of Jesus. The newness is 3-fold:

- 1) It is new and true in Him, in Jesus.
- 2) It is true and new in us, those who “walk in the same way in which he walked” (v.6).
- 3) It is true and new in us because the “darkness is passing away and the true light (see John 1:5, 9) is already shining.”

- In Christ the commandment to love one another is strengthened, deepened, expanded, and given a depth of meaning and understanding never seen before his coming in the incarnation. And now that same kind of supernatural love is being seen and experienced in those who love Him and abide in Him. But there is more! Perfect love as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has dealt a deathblow to darkness. Darkness is on the run and it cannot outrun the light. In fact the darkness is already departing and the true light already shines! The Light of the World (John 8:12) has come. The King of Light and Love is already reigning, and the fullness and consummation of that reign is just around the corner. How we love one another gives evidence of all of this.
- Love is not new. It is as old as God (I John 4:8) and rooted in the Law. Yet it is new to us in conversion and new in its depth in Jesus. It is new in experience, emphasis, expression and endurance. It is old as the sun and new as the dawn.

### 3) God's love exposes the darkness of hatred 2:9-11

- John utilizes his 3<sup>rd</sup> "Whoever says" statement and does so to draw the strongest possible contrast between those who are in

the light and those who are in the darkness, between those who love and those who hate, between those who are the children of God and those who are the children of the devil (3:10).

- Verse 9: You say you are in the light experiencing the life of God and yet you continually hate your brother, only one conclusion can be drawn: you are still in darkness, the realm of spiritual death and moral corruption, evil and wickedness. You still belong to the devil.
- Verse 10: You who are consistently loving your brother: you continually abide in light and give evidence that you have the life of God in you. Further, there is no cause for stumbling (*Gr. scandalon*), offense, for the one who abides in the realm of light. He truly is walking as Jesus walked (v.6). The world of light and love always go together.
- Verse 11: You continually hate your brother, 4 things are true for you: 1) you are in the darkness (spiritual death); 2) you walk (live) in darkness; 3) you do not know where you are going; 4) you are blind. In the darkness of spiritual death there is the absence of love and the absence of God in your life. And tragically, you don't even see it, having lived so long in the

darkness. You are like a blind man in a dark room who has no idea where he is or where he is going. How tragic is that?

Conclusion: There is an old hymn entitled “Trust and Obey.” The first verse and refrain reads, “When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, what a glory He shed on our way! Let us do His good will; He abides with us still, and with all who will trust and obey. Trust and obey, for there’s no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”

I believe the apostle John would have liked this song. I believe he would have agreed with its message. You see to trust Him you must first know Him: know Him as the One who has been from the beginning, know Him as the One who is the word of life and the eternal life, know Him as the Son of the Father in whom there is no darkness at all, know Him as the cleanser and forgiver of sins, know Him as your advocate and atonement. To know Him is to trust Him and to trust Him is to obey Him. And when you do, there will be a happiness in Jesus that will indeed be a glory that He will shed on your way.