

*At a very large university many years ago, close to a thousand students gathered in a massive lecture hall for their calculus final.*

*Calculus is hard, but the professor leading this class made it even harder. He was one of those arrogant and boastful “know it all” kind of teachers who badgered his students, he found ways to increase their stress, and he seemed to take great joy in their failure. As you might guess, he was not a well-liked teacher, but unfortunately, for many of these students, his class was required.*

*When the students had completed their exams, they were instructed to stack their exams and their work sheets on a huge podium at the front of the lecture hall, and as you might image, with nearly a thousand students taking the final, this made for a mess of paperwork.*

*During this particular calculus final, one student really needed a good grade to pass the class, but he typically did poorly on tests when he was rushed – and he was being rushed by this professor. So, to ensure he got a good grade, he hardly flinched when the professor yelled out, “Time is up, pencils down, place your exams and your work sheets in stacks on the podium at the front.”*

*Well, that’s what everyone did, except for this student who continued with the exam. Five minutes turned into ten, ten into twenty, twenty into forty...almost an hour after the exam was “officially over”, the student finally put down his pencil, gathered up his papers, and headed to the front of the hall to submit his work. The whole time, the professor sat at the front of the room – watching and waiting.*

*“What do you think you’re doing?” the professor asked the student as he started to put his exam onto the stack.*

*“I’m turning in my exam,” replied the student. “Well, I’m afraid I have some bad news for you, young man. Your exam is an hour late. You’ve failed, and consequently, I’ll see you next term when you have to repeat my course again.”*

*The student smiled and asked the professor “Do you know who I am?”*

*“What?” replied the professor. So, the student asked again, “Do you know who I am? Do you know my name?”*

*“No, of course not”, snarled the professor, to which the student replied, “I didn’t think so”, as he lifted up one of the stacks of exams and shoved his somewhere in the middle. He then turned around and walked out of the lecture hall.*

I'm sure the professor wished he knew who that student was. It pays to know who you are dealing with, **doesn't it?**

Last week we learned that Jesus is our Advocate because He Himself became an offering – a sacrifice for sin to satisfy the justice and the wrath of God. Jesus went to the cross – a cross where both God's love and God's justice converged at one single point, and it was there that Jesus took the full wrath of God so that for those who believe, they might have eternal life.

Now when we think of eternal life, we often think of a heavenly home and rich rewards, and those are most certainly elements of eternal life, but listen to what Jesus said about eternal life. In the "Lord's Prayer" or what some call the "Priestly Prayer", Jesus prays to His Father on behalf of His disciples and He says this in **John 17:3**,

***"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."***

Yes, eternal life includes a heavenly home, and yes, there awaits rich rewards for those who follow the Lord, but at its heart – eternal life is not just about a place or rewards – rather eternal life is about a Person – it's about knowing God personally through Jesus Christ.

It's about knowing God, and this morning we are going to talk about knowing God – not just knowing facts or knowing doctrines about Him, but personally knowing Him – so if you have your Bible, turn to **1 John 2**, and we will pick up where we left off last week. Beginning with **verse 3**, John says,

**<sup>3</sup>By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. <sup>4</sup>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; <sup>5</sup>but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: <sup>6</sup>the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.**

Now before we dig into this passage, I need to remind you of the background behind this letter.

If you recall, the Apostle John was trying to correct some false teaching by the Gnostics that had crept into the early church. The Gnostics claimed to have some special kind of knowledge from God that ordinary Christians did not have, and if people wanted to be right with God – then they needed this special knowledge from these Gnostics. Well, this special knowledge was nothing but a bunch of

crazy ideas about Jesus and even crazier ideas about the nature of man, and understandably their ideas caused a lot of confusion and doubt in the church, so much so, that it left some very troubled about their standing with the Lord – apparently leading some to ask, “*How can someone really know they really know God?*”

That’s a great question. “*How can someone really know they really know God?*”

It’s clear in the Bible that God wants us to know Him – we totally understand that, but it’s also apparent that God wants us “*to know – that we know Him*” so we can have assurance in our relationship with Him.

That’s what these troubled church members were seeking – they wanted assurance, and so John shares these four verses that essentially say the same thing from either a positive or a negative perspective, and in a nutshell, what he shares is this – the evidence that we have come to know God is a life of obedience – not a perfect obedience, not a flawless obedience, but a determined obedience where the desire of one’s heart is intent on responding to God’s word in the right way.

There were those in the church way back when – and quite frankly, there are those in the church today, who profess to believe, who claim to be right with God, who say they know God and yet their lives say otherwise – their lives give no visible evidence that they really know God.

That’s what John is telling us here. People may say, “*I have come to know Jesus*” – they may say all the right things about God, but no matter what they may say, ultimately their lives will reveal the truth of their relationship with God. To really know that we really know Him – John says there should be evidence in our lives, and one piece of evidence is a growing desire and determination to obey what the Lord says, to follow His example, and to walk as He walked.

I was thinking about that old Wendy’s commercial where a woman said after looking at a competitor’s hamburger, “*Where’s the beef?*” In so many words, that’s what John is saying, “*Where’s the beef?*” “*Where’s the evidence that you know God?*” “*Where’s the obedience?*” because it’s our obedience – or the lack of it that reveals if we really know God. No matter what you may say, your life reveals the truth of your relationship – your actions speak louder than your words.

Anyone who claims, “*I know Jesus*” but their life is characterized by habitual disobedience and sinfulness – John says they are **a liar**. Obedience is a piece of visible evidence that we really know the Lord. That’s what John is saying here – and it’s the same thing said by Jesus on several occasions.

Since we are observing the Lord's Supper this morning, let's see what Jesus had to say during that meal with His disciples – and I want to point out that this comes on the heels of Jesus talking to them about the future role of the Holy Spirit in their lives. In **John 14**, beginning with **verse 21**, Jesus said,

*<sup>21</sup> He who has My commandments 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.* <sup>22</sup> *Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?"* <sup>23</sup> *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 abode with him.* <sup>24</sup> *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.*

I brought up the role of the Holy Spirit for a purpose. As you may have experienced, the Holy Spirit prompts us, convicts us, He guides us, inspires us, and He empowers us – but if you think about it, all of that work is internal – it's invisible, and what both Jesus and John are saying is that the visible way to be assured that we know the Lord is by walking in obedience in our daily lives.

**Did you notice that Jesus tied our love together with our obedience?**

If we love God, we will have a growing desire to obey Him, or said in another way – obedience is the outward expression of our love for God. That's what love for God looks like – it looks like obedience. If we claim to know God, if we say we love Him, then we will have a growing desire and determination to obey Him – it's as simple as that.

Now when speaking of obedience – we may obey for different reasons. Maybe we obey because *we have to* like Jonah who was kicking and screaming all the way to Nineveh. He had to obey because I don't think he wanted to spend any more time in the belly of a fish or in the belly of anything else for that matter, so he had to obey. Then there are those times we obey because *we need to*. For example, when the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, they needed to obey God and gather manna in a certain way. They needed to obey God if they wanted to eat. Then lastly – and this is where we want to be as we come to know and grow in our relationship with God – we obey from the heart because *we want to* – which is obedience that motivated out of love.

*Let me illustrate this way. Suppose, I am the king of Amboy and all of you are my subjects. As your king, it is your duty to obey me – you have to – you need to. If*

*you obey me, I will provide for your needs. If you don't obey me, I will punish you and make you wish you had obeyed me.*

*In my kingdom, all of you have roles and jobs as you serve me. You do your job – I will be happy and you will be rewarded – you fail in your job – I won't be happy and neither will you.*

*One of the jobs in my kingdom is that of a baker, and the baker is Trish – I'm a single king with no queen – and Trish makes the best apple pie in my kingdom. No one in the kingdom makes an apple pie like her. She has no recipe – she's one of those kinds of bakers, and those who have tried to duplicate her apple pie just can't seem to get it right. So, Trish makes the best apple pie in my kingdom – I know it, and she knows it, and every Friday night, without fail, I want apple pie – and she has to make it, and if I don't get apple pie – I won't be happy. So, Trish has to obey me – she needs to obey me or else.*

*Let's say over the course of time, I begin to take notice of Trish. Yes, she makes the best apple pie in my kingdom – a pie I get every Friday night, but she's also beautiful, both inside and out, and eventually a loving relationship forms and I take her as my wife. She's no longer my servant – she's, now my queen.*

So, here's the question. Now, that Trish is my queen, and she knows I love her and I love her apple pie, **do I get her apple pie on Friday night?** Yes, I think I do – but not because she has to and not because she needs to, but because she wants to. Our relationship completely changes her motivation, and when applying this idea to God, we are motivated to obey Him because He loves us and we love Him.

Now, I know some of you and you are thinking, *"I hear you King Bob, but I hope you like 'Grub Hub' because I wouldn't bake the apple pie for you"* and that brings up an important point. Our obedience is not selective as if we can say to the Lord, *"I know You, I know You love me, I know what You want from me, but I will pick and choose how, and when, and if I will obey You."*

**How crazy does that sound?** And to remind you again, I am not talking about perfection here. If you recall, John has already told us we will sin. All of us will have those moments where we blow it and fail to obey our loving God – but someone who claims to know the Lord, but habitually disregards what He says is lying about their relationship with Him.

**So, how can we really know that we really know God?** According to both Jesus and John, one piece of evidence is our determined obedience – obedience from the

heart which grows over time and causes our lives to visibly change, and before we move on, it's crucial that I say this.

Obedience does not *lead* us into a relationship with God – rather obedience is the *result* of our relationship with God. We need to be clear on that. A genuine relationship with God only comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and in that relationship, God begins His work to change us from the inside out – to include changing our attitude about obeying Him.

Okay, let's move on for John has another piece of evidence for us to think about, and beginning with **verse 7**, he says,

**<sup>7</sup> Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. <sup>8</sup> On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. <sup>9</sup> The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. <sup>10</sup> The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. <sup>11</sup> But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.**

I will admit that this passage was a little confusing – at least at the start. There's a new commandment, but it's not really new one – in fact it's old, but I am writing to you it as if it is new.

So, the question is – **what commandment is John talking about here?** Well, he doesn't really tell us, but when given the context of this passage, it seems to be the command to love one another – a commandment given in the Old Testament and later given to us by Jesus Himself – but in a new light.

If we go all the way back to the Law of Moses in **Leviticus 19:18**, God says,

***“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.”***

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Since this is found in the Law of Moses, it's understood to be an old commandment, but in the New Testament, Jesus gave us a new perspective on it and showed us what it really looks like – to the fullest extent, and He said this in **John 13:34**. Now, listen closely to the words.

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”*

So, we are to love one another – that sounds just like the old commandment, **doesn't it** – but not so fast. The old commandment is to love one another as we love ourselves, but Jesus put a new twist on it and He said we are to love one another as He loved us.

Jesus just took that old commandment to a whole new level – a sacrificial level, a selfless level, an unconditional level. In the power of the Holy Spirit, that's how we are to love one another – we are to love one another just like Jesus loved us. Jesus is the standard of what loving one another really looks like.

With this perfect command by Jesus – a command that stands head and shoulders above the rest, John then explains that how we respond to this command to love one another reveals another piece of evidence about knowing that we know God.

In essence, if we know God, if we are living in obedience to Him, we will love God's people, but if a person claims to know God but habitually breaks the Lord's command to love one another – if they are mean and hateful and hostile and bitter towards their fellow brothers and sisters, then something is wrong, and once again, John says that person is lying and is groping in the darkness.

And just for clarification, John is not teaching that we need to feel a certain way toward others, and he's not saying we should have the same fondness with one another – I don't think that's even possible, instead, I think it's best understood that we are to act properly and rightly towards one another, or said a little differently, we are to treat others the way the Lord treats us.

Now, we will talk more about this later as we continue in this letter from John, but I want leave you with something told to us by the Apostle Paul. He said in **2 Corinthians 13:5**.

*Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!*

**How do we do that? How do we examine ourselves?** Well, John just gave us two questions to consider – When looking at your life, as a manner of life, **do you have a growing desire and determination to obey God's word, and secondly, do you love God's people?**

Two questions which I can't answer for you, but if you really want to know that you really know God, your life should give you the evidence you need.

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