

1 John 2:3-11 (NKJV)

³ Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

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

⁵ But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.

⁶ He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

⁷ Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning.

⁸ Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.

⁹ He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now.

¹⁰ He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

¹¹ But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Every one of us faces tests.

I had to take a test for my insurance license. It is the hardest test I ever took. I had to travel all the way to Baltimore for it. And I was fairly certain, about a third of the way through it that I was going to flunk. I started getting all worked up, which **hurt** my chances of passing **even more**. Then I gave myself the same counsel I give everyone else. First, what is the worst that can happen? In this case it wasn't very severe. I will just need to take the test again. So I thought through how I could retake the test, and then finished the test a little more calmly. To this day I do not know how I passed it, but I did. Well that test was **nothing** compared to the life tests we face. And often the worst that can happen is **much worse** than a simple change of schedule. But the end goal of all those tests is **to pass**. It is an obstacle that, by handling properly, we gain a reward. That is what tests are. They show us **what we are** and are used to **make us stronger or wiser**.

I am keenly aware of the places in which I am tested in my life. I don't like them. I hope you are aware of yours too. If not, you are probably not paying enough attention to your life.

And in each test, we usually **pass or fail**. Sometimes there are degrees, and maybe we do slightly better or much better than we did in the past. But often we pass or fail.

We find in scripture that these tests have a God **chosen**, God **ordained**, and **God planned** purpose. We can respond badly when we face those tests, like they have no good purpose, but when we do we are displaying to all onlookers that **we do not believe what we proclaim** about God. And those we hope to disciple are usually far more impacted by our example than by our doctrine. They may **recite** our doctrine, but they are most likely to **live out** our example. If **we** don't react to life's circumstances like God has it under control, it should be no surprise at all that **they** don't either.

James 1:2-4 (NKJV)

² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Do you see the implication here? The implication is that we are not as **patient** as God wants us to be. We are not as **strong** as we could be. So we need to **lift some spiritual weights**. We need to **do some reps**.

If we could see our life's situations for one day through the vision of pure faith, it would be like when Elisha sees the Syrian army surrounding him. 2 Kings 6 tells the story. Elisha and his servant could both see the Syrian army. But that **is all** Elisha's servant could see. But Elisha could see the **spiritual** reality. And the **spiritual** reality was a very comforting one in face of the **physical** reality that looked disastrous.

The physical reality made it seem that **all was falling apart**, all was **to be destroyed**, this situation was **beyond God's control**.

The **spiritual** reality was that the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire. **God** had the **upper hand**. **God** was **in control**.

Our human tendency is to fixate on **what we can see**. We imagine all the bad that will come from the current situation. We work ourselves up into a tizzy. And God puts us in those situations so we can practice learning that **He knows what He is doing**. He is calling us into a life of patience where we learn to **trust God** to **fulfill His promises** instead of us **fearing our circumstances**. God is training us to trust Him quicker and quicker.

Now if we want to learn slow, we can have all the misery we want. He will not force us to give it up. But we may have to go into the weight room way more times than we would have to if we would just start exercising our faith. The quicker we learn patience in trials, **maybe** the less those trials are necessary. So faith is how we pass the test. Trust in God, believing in **that which God promises** that we **cannot see** is how we overcome that which **looms in front of us** that we **can** see.

And it is so interesting that James says **count it all joy** when you face trials. And then he says happy is the man who endures it.

James 1:12-15 (NKJV)

¹² Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

This about sums it up. Our happiness, our joy, is based upon what we get at the end of the journey. It is not based on **the now**. Sometimes the trials we face last for a **lifetime**. But none of them last an **eternity**. In fact, the trials we face provide eternal reward. Notice there is no happiness promised for us when we do not endure temptation. We know from our own experiences that failing to resist temptation only steals our joy and creates misery. And we lose the assurance that John is so determine to give us.

And then to finish out this passage in James

¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Notice that our failure is never based on the severity of our circumstances. Our failure is not based on personality traits or how we are designed. Our failure is based on **our desires**. When we are tempted to respond in a wrong manner, and we know that we are not reacting in trust and obedience to God, the only thing we can really blame it on is that **we want what we want**. It is **our desires** that are the problem. And if we follow the path of our desires all of our lives, we will experience the spiritual punishment that scripture promises to all the unfaithful.

The point is, **wanting what we want** is how we fail the test. Clinging to what we want when God appears to be taking it from us, or withholding it from us, is how we fail the test.

But when we obey, there is great joy promised. There is assurance promised. So we see 1 John is not the only book addressing this.

I took this side road because we are talking about **passing the test**.

1 John provides us three tests.

The first is **moral**. Are we obeying God's commandments? 1 John 2 1-6

The second is **social**. Do we love others. 1 John 2 7-11 4:7-8

The third test is **theological**. Do we believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that Christ has come in the flesh? 1 John 5:5,10,13 4:2 3:3

These are tests we must pass. Because they are tests of **who is a believer** and **who is not**. Now the odd thing is that we do not gain salvation by passing the test. But if we **do not pass the test** we prove that we are not a child of His, no matter what we claim. It is like these are **spiritual genetic tests**. If we are God's children, there will be an inborn trait that cannot be denied. It will last through everything. If we are not a child of God, the truth cannot be faked for long. We will act like a child of the devil. And the evidence over time becomes clear.

Let's read our text again

1 John 2:3-6 (NKJV)

³ Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

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

⁵ But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.

⁶ He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

³ Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

Verse three reveals a wonderful truth. We can **know that we know** Christ. There is **a way to do that**. We do not have to wander about, uncertain of our salvation. There are some tests we can look at. We can review our lives using some evaluation tools. Then if we pass the test, we can know that we are a believer.

Isn't that wonderful?

We already mentioned the three tests in 1 John earlier.

Do we obey what God says?

Do we love others?

Do we believe proper doctrine about Christ?

Now it is interesting that we are told that the **means of salvation** is to believe in Christ. We place our **faith in Christ alone** for our salvation. We believe

what scripture says about Christ coming to this planet as a baby through a virgin. We believe that He lived His life as scripture describes. We believe that He died on the cross for our sins. And we believe that He rose from the dead and sits at the right hand of the Father.

We were saved by believing and by believing alone. No good works had any part in saving us, at all in any way.

But look at this. **We do not know that we know Him by only asking “Do I still believe good doctrine?”** No. That is how we were saved, if we were. But that is not how we **gain assurance of our salvation.**

So many ministers miss this when they only focus on the prayer of salvation. When a person comes to them and expresses fear that they might not be saved, the minister says “Did you pray the sinners prayer?” “Did you really mean it?” Well, they say, if you were sincere, you are saved. Oddly enough John knows none of that kind of thinking.

John’s response is more like

If you get hit by a car going 60 miles an hour, there will be evidence.

If you have the life changing power of a resurrected Lord, there will be evidence.

He does not pick out all of the evidences that could be focused on. But he focuses on the ones that would be absent if one is following the false doctrine of the Gnostics. He targets the evidence that would counter the Gnostic error. I used to wonder how **believing that Christ came in the flesh** was the litmus test for Christianity. But we need to take it in context. In the situation that that John was in, it was the line in the dirt that separated the false from the true. But it is not as valuable a test in other circumstances. For instance, if he were dealing with legalism there would be a different test, like “Do you believe you are saved by Grace alone, through faith along by Christ alone? Do you see what I mean?”

John is going to point out several ways that we can assure ourselves of our salvation. And they are wonderful things if we pass the tests. If we do not, we need to do some serious introspection and calling out to God. And even in that He tells us what to do. Confess your sins and He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Ok, so we **CAN** have assurance and John **wants us to have assurance** and John **tells us how we can.** We need to pass some tests.

So what can this assurance look like?

Thomas Brooks, an English Puritan wrote this:

Assurance is a reflex act of a gracious soul, whereby he clearly and evidently sees himself in a gracious, blessed, and happy state; it is a sensible feeling, and an ~~experimental~~ [experiential] discerning of a **man's being** in a **state of grace**... assurance is a believer's ark, where he sits, Noah-like, quiet and still in the midst of all distractions and destructions, commotions and confusions.

He continues later

Assurance is a pearl that **most want**, a crown that **few wear**.... Little well-grounded assurance... is to be found among most Christians. Most Christians live between fears and hopes, and hang, as it were, between heaven and hell, sometimes they **hope** that their state is good, at other times they **fear** that their state is bad: **now** they hope that all is well, and that it shall go well with them forever; ~~anon~~ [shortly] they fear that they shall perish by the hand of such a corruption, or by the prevalence of such or such a temptation; and so they are like a ship in a storm, tossed here and there. (*Heaven on Earth*, 15, 11)

John makes clear that he wants us **to have** this assurance and that this assurance **is obtainable**. There is no reason to not live in such a way that this assurance is ours every day of our lives. But it won't just **happen**. There are lots of things in life that can rob us of assurance, and at the top of the list are our decisions to sin and the accompanying guilt.

Peter seems to say this assurance must be pursued. **2 Peter 1:10 (NKJV)**

10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;

There are things we can **do** and choices we can **make** that will keep us in the state of assurance. And assurance is the state in which we can most enjoy the Christian life. Even if we recognize that the Christian life is the **best possible life available**, if we are not certain we are **in it**, we will not have the joy that **we should be experiencing**. Assurance is foundational to joy. It is impossible to look forward to a reward that you don't think you will get.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1648) says

And therefore it is the duty of everyone to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure, that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance; so far is it from inclining men to looseness.

Now back to our text

we know that we know Him

The phrase that we know Him, the first word for know is Ginosoko. There is no uncertainty involved. We can be perfectly confident that if we pass the tests there is no way that we could be wrong.

the second word “know” is in the perfect tense. We might understand it better as “we have come to know Him”. It is based in a **past action** that is **still continuing**. The emphasis is on that which was set in motion and is still continuing. It is not about something that **happened** 30 years ago in our lives. It is about something that **STARTED** 30 years ago in our lives and is continuing.

Keep in mind that John is battling Gnosticism- **know-ism**. And he is saying these people, these gnostics, do not **know** what they imagine they **know**. But **you** can be certain, **by proof**, of the state or your being **right with God**. Their imaginations, while they may produce a sense of **assurance** of salvation, it will not produce **salvation**. **You**, on the other hand can have your **real** salvation and be **absolutely sure of it**.

³ Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

OK so the first test that we must pass in order to have a basis for assurance is that **we keep His commandments**.

Now first off we have to say that we will never do this perfectly in this life. So don't get the idea that if you have ever chosen to commit a known sin you are disqualified from ever having assurance. We always have to say that, because John has already said as much. If we walk in the truth, we will confess the sins we honestly know that we do. So the test is not sinless perfection.

Well what is it then?

The word for **keep** stresses the idea of **observant watchful obedience**. It includes the idea also of guarding something because it is valuable. In it all you get the idea that a believer will **prioritize these things** that are commanded by God and will **guard them in their minds and hearts** and spheres of influence as words to live by and to not be disregarded or disrespected in word or in life.

And the verb tense is such that it is **continual**. This isn't a one time statement of creed. It is a continual surrender to that which is commanded.

Now what is this word “commandments”?

It means an injunction, a charge, a prescribed rule in accordance with which a thing is done.

It is basically **God telling us what to do** and what **not** to do. This is not the same word as the word used for Law. And the emphasis in 1 John is on doing

that which Jesus specifically commanded. But this would also apply to anything in the old testament that still applies to us.

So here is the test. And it is entirely simpler than what we would like. Do you want to know if you are a believer? Look at your life and answer this question. This week did you obey those things that you were clearly instructed in God's word to obey?

If Christ said Don't do this, did you not do it because Christ said so?

If Christ said Do this, did you do it simply because Christ said so?

John could not make this simpler.

If we are refusing to submit to the commands from scripture in any area of our lives, we have no reason to be assured of our salvation.

If we are choosing to obey the commands in scripture in all areas of our lives as we become aware of them, we have reason for assurance that we are believers.

We cannot make it more complex than this. All of the "yes, but's" in the world will not undo this statement. We obey or we do not.

Let's make it a little clearer.

Is there any place in your life where you cannot be counted on to be obedient?

Is there a situation you can be placed in that those who know you best know that you will not do what God says?

This is a huge deal. We cannot allow ourselves to have a set of expectations about the Christian life that are **lower** than what scripture presents. That is an awful danger. We must believe that **what God revealed is true**. And if **He said** that this is a test of our salvation, and we are consistently failing this test, we cannot blow it off. We can't allow ourselves to think, but God really doesn't mean this. He really does not expect us to obey Him when all of our emotions are so powerfully compelled to do something else. Surely He does not really expect me to overcome the avalanche of strong desires that I have. Surely not. Surely I can form another version of Christianity in my mind than that can't I?

Well, this is what Jesus our Lord had to say about it.

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." ([John 14:15](#))

"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." ([14:21](#))

"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." ([14:23-24](#))

"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." ([15:10](#))

So what do we think? Is that clear enough?

We simply cannot, as followers of Christ, coexist with intentional sin. We cannot live with ourselves or any other professing believer who is choosing to sin against Christ. We must do what He said. If it is us, we must confess it to Christ and, if need be, to people who can help us overcome it.

If it is someone else, we must take the steps every time we encounter a sin that a person will not repent of. We must follow the chain of personal confrontation, then bring another until we are sure that the person will not repent, and then bring them to the church.

Knowing disobedience to the clear words of scripture is huge deal. And it is **always** a huge deal. And it **never stops** being a huge deal.

It is a litmus test of true faith. And we can never see it as anything less than that.

And on the flip side of this truth we see a wonderful reality for us. If we are living in obedience to Christ, if we are displaying a track record of growing obedience and submission to the will of Christ, we can have the **wonderful assurance** that we are **perfectly safe** in the hands of Jesus for eternity. And we are sure we will one day have Jesus look us in the eyes and say:

"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"