

1 John Chapter 2B

IN the film, “Catch Me if You Can” that was released in 2002, Leonardo Dicaprio played the role of a legendary imposter whose name was Frank Abagnale Jr.

Between the ages of 15 - 21 this young man assumed no less than eight different identities, posing as a Pan American Airline pilot, a Georgia doctor and a Louisiana parish prosecutor.

- IN a very short period of time he became one of the FBI’s most infamous imposters, defrauding companies of millions of dollars before finally being apprehended.

Well, in the first chapter of John’s Epistle, he brilliantly holds the light of the revelation of Jesus Christ (**that which he had seen with his own eyes and touched with his own hands**) He holds that revelation up against the corrupt philosophy of the imposters who had infiltrated the church at the end of the first century.

- These imposters claimed to enjoy the light and beauty of intimate fellowship with God, and yet they lived continually in the darkness of gross immorality.
 - John speaks plainly, when he confronts them calling them liars who do not practice the truth.
- These imposters testified that they were living on a higher spiritual plain where they had achieved sinless perfection.
- But in reality they were self-deceived individuals who were void of the truth.

My friends, when imposters are discovered within the walls of the church, when the treachery of false shepherds is exposed the whole flock is effected and the sheep are cast into chaos and confusion.

- Some people become angry and simply walk away from the church.
- Many are deeply saddened by what they see as a complete betrayal of trust.
- Some actually begin to question their own salvation, asking “Is my faith real?”
- And even after the dust finally settles, many are left wondering, “How can we know when faith is really genuine?”
- They look around the Body of Christ and ask, “How can we tell a true Christian from an imposter?”
- Is there a litmus test, a biblical set of guidelines that can help us to differentiate between true believers from those who are imposters?

Do you remember, just a few months ago, in our previous study, Peter addressed this very subject. 2 Peter 2: 1 **But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.**

- HOW did Peter say that we could recognize them? He said that we simply need to observe their lifestyle and consider their appetites:

2 Peter 2: 14 **They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children!**

- Like Peter the aged Apostle John uncovers the vast differences between the true saints of God and the Bogus Believers who were seeking personal gain.

Reading carefully we see that John uses very strong language to describe these imposters. He wants us to know that they were not merely Christians with a difference of opinion in some minor matters.

- He calls them “false prophets” (4:1),
- “Antichrists” (2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7),
- “Liars” (2:22), and “deceivers” (2:26 & 2 John 7).
- He repeatedly says and implies that they are not of God (4:6), they are from the devil (3:8, 10); they are of the world (4:5); and that they do not know God (3:6)

These false teachers were out to deceive believers through corrupt doctrine and immoral practices. John states (2:26), **“These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you”** YOU SEE:

- John is a good and faithful Shepherd, caring for the flock of God. He sounds the alarm with volume and clarity when he sees wolves creeping into the fold.
- He comforts God’s precious sheep, leading them beside quiet waters, helping them to rest in the green pastures of God’s precious promises.
- He assures them of the gracious provision of the Good Shepherd AND they can rest KNOWING that through His death Christ has given them Life.

1 John 5:13 John says: **I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.**

- One of the words, most frequently employed by the Apostle John is the word “to KNOW.” Twenty-Eight times in the ESV the Word “KNOW appears in the pages of 1 John.
- You see, the Imposters claimed to possess a secret knowledge, special personal revelation that went beyond the Word of God. BUT John says:

1John 2:4 **Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,**

The words of this Epistle inspired by the Spirit of God, penned by the Apostle John, serve as a double-edged sword. With one single swipe of the sword, John cuts away the error of the impostors and at the same time, He provides a blessed assurance to those who are truly Born of God.

While we often think of John as the “Apostle of Love” and picture him laying his head on the chest of Christ at the Last Supper, we see HERE that John is certainly not afraid of confrontation. His writing contains clear black and white language.

- In 2:15, John says either you love the world or you love the Father, but not both.
- In 2:22 Either you have the Father AND the Son or you've got neither.
- In 3:6-9, Either you are born of God and do not practice sin or you are not born of God and you are a slave to sin.
- In 3:10-12, Either you are a child of God and love your brother or you're a child of the devil and hate your brother. (it's Black and white)
- So you see, the Apostle of love, actually loves the church enough to speak the truth with boldness.
- John portrays true and false belief in such a way that if anyone is in the middle, he will be forced to take sides, to commit himself to the truth or knowingly walk in error.

I see John's writing as a tapestry in which He weaves three colorful threads back and forth, in varying sequences; these threads are colorful tests of true faith, and John weaves them back and forth in order to produce the image of a true believer.

- The three tests that John raises, the three threads that run throughout this Epistle are the test of truth, the test of morals and the test of love. OR we might call them the test of Doctrine, the test of Ethics and the test of Relationship.
- These tests are uniquely designed to provide hope and assurance to those whose faith has come into question by false teachers

This morning we will focus our attention on the Moral test that is contained in Vs. 3-6. Here we discover that obedience to Christ is a crucial element of the Moral test.

- VS 3 – The Test Stated
- Vs 4-5, - The Test Applied
- Vs 6, - The Test Exemplified.

The Test of Morals or Ethics – The Test is Stated

1 John 2:3 **And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.**

- “By this” by keeping the Commands of Christ, we KNOW or, we can be assured that we have come to know God. (that is, we have come to know him savingly)
- John tells us that our external obedience to the commands of Christ serve as evidence of the internal transformation that takes place when a person is Born of God.
- ALLISTER BEGG – Summarized this portion of 1 John with these words, **“Believing on him, and belonging to him, is vitally linked to behaving like him.”**

O.T. foundation for John's teaching: The Prophet Ezekiel describes the work of God in the New Birth as a heart transplant, a transformation of the inner man that produces obedience in the life of the redeemed. Let's read it:

Ezekiel 36: 26 **And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.**
27 **And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.**

- Miracle of miracles, we who were among the walking dead, lost in our sins have been made alive by the sovereign grace of God in Jesus Christ. We were given a new heart that has been divinely reprogrammed to walk in obedience.
- The indwelling Holy Spirit changes our lives, enabling us to obey God's rules.

The prophet Jeremiah also foretold this great work of God that brings about a newfound obedience. Jeremiah 31: 31 **"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,**

32 **not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD.**

33 **For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.**

- New Covenant believers are those who have God's Law written on their hearts and we understand, whatever is written on our heart determines how we live.
- Solomon said, Proverbs 23:7 **"as a man thinks in his heart so He is."** (NKJV)
 - When God give us a new heart we think differently and act differently.
- We see this change in Paul's writing when he calls the unbelieving, **"Sons of Disobedience"** AND then Peter calls believers, **"Obedient Children."**
- IN Biblical Language when someone is spoken of as a "Son of" something it describes the very essence of his nature. TO be a son of disobedience means that one's nature is continually characterized by disobedience,
- BUT those who believe have become new creatures in Christ, they possess a new heart, they are partakers of the divine nature, hence Peter calls them obedient children.

Listen, I think it's important that we understand the obedience that accompanies salvation is not a legalistic obedience that is imposed on us externally. Rather, it's an obedience that flows from the new heart and the New Spirit that God has given to us through the New Birth. So John can rightly say.

1 John 2:3 **by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.**

- The word that John uses here for "commandments" is not the word NOMOS which is generally translated "Law." But John is not speaking of obedience to the Law of Moses, he is referring to our obedience to the commands (ENTOLE) of Christ.

- This word (ENTOLE) speaks of the precepts and directives that were given to us by the Lord Jesus when he walked among us.
- These commands are never contrary to the Law of Moses; rather they are the fulfillment of that law.
- Listen to the words of Christ recorded for us in the Gospel of John

John 14:15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

John 14:21 "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

- Obedience in the life of a believer springs from desire rather than duty, from love rather than law. And this obedient love serves as evidence of our living union with Christ.
- Obviously John is remembering the words of the Lord when he writes:

1 John 5: 3 "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

- This Love for God that comes from the new heart actually lightens the weight or burden of His commands. You may be familiar with this idea.

When we first fell in love with our spouses, the depth of that love was so powerful that it drove us to do just about anything that we were asked to do. None of his or her commands were burdensome. (in the beginning)

- I am happy to cook dinner for you; Let me wax your car for you; Let me vacuum that floor for you dear; Of course I will pick you up at the airport at 3 AM
- Because we were so deeply in love no command was too burdensome for us. Sadly because we still wrestle with remaining sin in our lives, our love is imperfect and so is our obedience
- So what happens in our relationship with God when our obedience is imperfect?

Listen to this Quote by JOHN MAC:

“Under the New Covenant God accepts believer’s loving and sincere, albeit imperfect obedience and forgives their disobedience. By his grace they display a consistent, heartfelt devotion to the mind of Christ as revealed in the Word. That willing obedience to Scripture in daily living is a reliable indicator both to self and others that one has indeed come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.”

As much as we might desire to walk in perfect obedience, we know that our assurance does not finally or fully rest on our performance but rather on the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ that has been credited to us, by the grace of God through faith in His life, death and resurrection.

- All those who have received this gift of righteousness will display the fruit of that righteousness in a growing obedience to His commands.

- SO we have heard the test clearly stated, now we move on to see how that test is applied.

The Test Applied

4 **Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,** 5 **but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him:**

- IN these verses John brings the test from verse 3 into the contemporary experience of his readers. He want's them to evaluate what they are hearing and seeing by the Word of the Lord.

In Vs 3 John laid out the standard of measurement for all true believers and that is obedience to the commands of the Lord. By holding up the standard of obedience they will be able to evaluate their lives AND experience the assurance of their own salvation.

- The imposters made the bold but erroneous declaration that they Know God! They say that they have an ascended knowledge of the divine being; they claim to have had some spiritual experience, a personal encounter with God.
- But they never, ever (present active verb tense) never keep his commandments.
- Applying what we learned in Vs 3, we understand that regardless of what they say, the evidence of their lives proves that they do not possess a new heart or a new spirit. So they remain children of disobedience. Hence, they are liars.

Friends, this moral problem within the church was not unique to the first century; here in the 21st century there are multitudes of people who claim to know God, and yet they walk in continual disobedience.

In a recent Ligonier Survey, a panel of those claiming to be Evangelical Christians were asked a series of questions on beliefs and ethics.

Beliefs:

They were asked to respond to the following statement: *"A person obtains peace with God by first taking the initiative to seek God and then God responds with grace."*

- 83% of self-identified evangelicals agree or somewhat agree with this.
- BUT the Scripture says: Romans 3:11 **no one understands; no one seeks for God.**

Ethics

The same group was asked to respond to the following statement: *"Sex outside of traditional marriage is a sin."*

- Only 52% of self-identified evangelicals who attend church once or twice per month strongly agree with this statement.

The Holiness of God

When asked to respond to the following, “Even the slightest sin deserves eternal damnation,” the results are startling. 61% of all participants strongly disagree with this statement.

Do we really have to wonder why so many Christians lack the Assurance of Salvation that God has provided through His unchanging Word?

- Many who say that they believe really don't obey the commands of Christ because the philosophy of the World has infiltrated the church and those who claim to believe DON'T walk as He walked.

Back in the Epistle Ch. 2 Vs 5 John speaks of a blessed assurance that is possessed by those who DO walk in obedience: **but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him:**

- Those who KEEP (*present active*) whoever keeps on keeping His Word. The one whose life is characterized by obedience can be assured that they are in fact, united to Christ in loving union.
- AND In HIM (*in the one who walks in obedience*) the love of God is perfected. We could translate this the love FOR God grows to maturity.

In our own families: We see maturity blossoming in our children when they begin to walk in loving obedience. The goal of our discipline is that our children might know the Lord and be transformed into His image. That they might KNOW that they have eternal life.

- We know the test, we have learned to apply the test and now John points us to the Example of Christ.

The Test Exemplified

1 John 2: 6 **whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.**

- Here John holds the Life of Christ up as the perfect example of obedience.
- And Friends, there is no greater example, no more perfect image of obedience than that which we see in the life of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

He was obedient to the Father in his incarnation:

John 6: 38 **For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.**

- He left his eternal abode where he dwelt in the presence of the Father. The creator of all things came and dwelt among us.

For 33 years he lived a perfect life of obedience in the presence of the father. Fulfilling the Law of God in sinless perfection. John records his words:

John 8: 29 **And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."**

- Jesus actively obeyed the perfect will of the Father.

Through His sacrificial death, Jesus yielded himself in obedience to the Father.

Romans 5: 18 **Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. 19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.**

- At the cross the sins of all of God's elect was imputed to Christ and He bore the wrath of God for the sins of those who would believe.
- At the same time, Jesus' thirty-three years of perfect obedience, his active obedience and his passive obedience was credited to those who would believe.

OUR Obedience springs from our union with Christ. As we abide in Him we will most naturally produce the good fruit of loving obedience.

John 15: 4 **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. 5 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.**

- As we abide in Christ resting in his finished work, His life flows through us like the blood that courses through our arteries bringing health, strength and vitality to every cell of our body.

Is your life characterized by the joy of sweet fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ? Are you living with blessed assurance that comes from a heart that truly desires to walk in obedience???

- John's doctrinal test: Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who came from heaven, lived among us, died for our sins and rose from the dead?
- John's ethical test: Does your life reflect that new heart of obedience? Do you possess a desire to walk as He walked in holiness?
- John's relational test: Do you have a true and abiding love for God that extends to all of the members of God's household?