

To Know That You Know: The First Test

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[0 : 00] Well then, take your Bibles this morning.

And you know, I think most of you, that I've been preaching through the Apostle John's first of three letters. Actually, I've planned to preach through all three letters, but we're in the first letter, 1 John. Last Sunday, I finished up chapter 1 and went on into chapter 2, the first couple of verses. And this morning, I want to digress just a little bit and start our study with verse 1 of chapter 2, so you can take your Bibles and open to 1 John chapter 2, and listen as I read verses 1 through 6.

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, actually we could render that, and when we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world. That is, He's the only Savior.

[1 : 24] There is no other. 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. He who says He abides in Him ought Himself also to walk just as He walked.

Okay? We'll stop right there. I know I'm against it on the time, but I do want to review just a little bit. Starting with verse 5 of chapter 1, which we looked at last week.

Starting there, John began to deal with a huge problem within the churches he was writing to. And that huge problem, if you will remember, was from within.

It was false teachers. False teachers in the church teaching, of course, as they always do, false doctrine. And the false doctrine they were teaching really could be summed up with two things.

[2 : 47] First of all, the denial of the incarnation. The truth that Jesus came in human flesh. The incarnation. They denied that. John deals with that in this letter.

But second, a denial of the existence of sin. Or at least the significance of it. Importance of it.

They denied it. And both of these false doctrines were rooted in a certain Gnostic belief that the flesh, indeed all physical matter, is evil.

And the spirit is good. That's the basic foundation of their belief in what they were teaching. And so you can see how those would correspond with these two denials.

Because Christ could not have been flesh because flesh is evil. So how could Christ be flesh, human? And then the second denial regarding the life of the believer is that since all flesh is evil, then the spirit is all that matters.

[4 : 00] The spirit is all that matters. And since there is no real connection of any kind between the flesh and the spirit, then sin has no significance whatsoever to the believer's spiritual life.

It's kind of a neat little system. Something that a lot of people would love to believe. And love to believe is true. And that is you can just sin all you want to because it doesn't matter.

This is what they were teaching. And John addresses that. And we looked at the second of those two denials last week as we were looking at chapter 1. They were teaching you can have fellowship with God and still live an immoral life.

That's what they were teaching. And they were teaching that once you become a Christian, you no longer have a sin nature. And even worse, they were teaching that once you become a Christian, you no longer commit sin.

Neat, huh? Wonderful. We might even think, would it be great if that were true? Well, John, of course, states emphatically that all of this is false.

[5 : 12] It's false. Those who teach these things are liars. And those who have embraced these things or any part of this or any version of this are deceived.

Deceived. A lot of people are deceived. Because as true believers, we're still sinners. Sorry, but we are. That is in the sense that we still sin. You do.

I do. Every day. We still sin and we still need to deal with that sin in a biblical way. And John provides that biblical way.

It's through confession. Which, of course, presupposes repentance. Though he doesn't use the word repentance. We turn from it and confess it as the thing it really is.

As we agree with God about it. And then we trust in his faithful forgiveness and cleansing. That's how we're to deal with it. All right, so how should we be thinking about all of this?

[6 : 14] And I would say that we have to be careful. We have to be careful here because we might be prone to just give up on the fight against sin in our lives. We might just want to give up on that.

You know, after all, sinfulness is my reality. That's who I am. That's what I will continue to be until I die or until Jesus comes. And you say, well, that's silly.

But there are a lot of people who operate according to that kind of philosophy. I've even heard it expressed that way by those who profess to be believers. I just can't help myself. I'm just a sinner. Just a sinner saved by grace. Now, I want you to know for sure there is a sense in which that is true. That statement.

You know, that kind of little ditty. I'm a sinner saved by grace. We are sinners saved by grace.

Absolutely. But there is also a sense in which we can use that as an excuse for sinful behavior.

[7 : 16] To excuse ourselves. An excuse not to deal with it as it should be dealt with. And to deal with it erratically as the Bible prescribes that we deal with it.

Now, listen. John is not giving us the right view of sin in order to provide for us an excuse for it. We could excuse it. Quite the opposite.

In fact, didn't I just read chapter 2, verse 1? My little children. John writes, says, these things I've written to you. These truths about sin. I've written these things to you so that you may not sin.

Not sin. So you can choose not to. Which essentially means, if we were to put it in the positive, and I think that's what John is doing in our passage.

It means those who have a genuine, saving relationship and intimate fellowship with God are those who are daily engaged in a pursuit of righteousness and godliness in life.

[8 : 17] That really sums up the truth of this particular passage. And it's not just that a believer should be engaged in this pursuit.

But John is saying that a true believer will be. Will be engaged in this pursuit of righteousness and godliness. Yes. And if not, you're not a true believer.

That's not my conclusion about it. This is exactly what John says. The daily pursuit of righteousness is the rule rather than the exception of your life.

And this is John's point in our passage today. The test, the proof of a genuine, saving relationship with Jesus is your pursuit of righteousness and godliness.

Your moral pursuit to live in obedience to God's word. I know that sounds very dogmatic. It sounds very narrow. But that's exactly what John's teaching.

[9 : 24] It's what the Bible teaches. Now, I don't think you'd misunderstand me at this point. But just in case you might misunderstand, the daily pursuit of righteousness does not save you.

Okay? We do need to at least mention it. It doesn't save you. You're getting it all backwards. No, it doesn't. Righteousness and acts of righteousness and living, you know, pursuit of godly living does not save you.

No. Double no. Double no. The basis of salvation and fellowship with God is not and never can be personal righteousness.

It can't be. You don't get it that way. And I would add, you don't keep it that way either. Through acts of righteousness.

And John has already given us the basis upon which we can have and continue to have a saving relationship with God. He's already given that to us in verses 1 and 2.

[10 : 26] The basis of our salvation fellowship is the advocacy of Jesus Christ. That's the basis of it. He said we have an advocate with the Father. When you sin, we have an advocate with the Father.

It's Jesus Christ, the righteous. Because he himself and only himself. Not your or my works of righteousness.

But he himself is the propitiation. That is the full satisfaction for all our sins. The satisfaction for a holy God.

So absolutely no. The pursuit of righteousness which John defines here as obedience to God's word. Is not the way to salvation and fellowship with God.

It is the proof of it. It is the proof of it. The proof of its reality. In your life. It is the moral test, if you will.

[11 : 26] Of the genuineness of your salvation. And actually, this is the first of three tests. That John clearly gives us, provides for us in this letter.

Some have identified these three tests as the moral test. Which is what we'll focus on today. The relational test. And third, the doctrinal test.

Though really all three of these are full doctrine. And so, the objective of these tests is very personal. These are to be taken personally.

Okay? That is, these tests have not been given to us so that we can go around applying them to all the other people in our church. And that's the temptation, isn't it?

To take this test and say, well, I wonder, let me apply that test to old so-and-so who sits back there, over here, over there. And I'm not really sure about that person's salvation.

[12 : 27] So, I'll just apply the test to that person. Now, be very careful about that. Notice, John did not say by this, I know that you know him.

He didn't say it that way, did he? Or, by this, we know that they know him. Now, he's making this very personal.

So, we need to apply this test personally. So, let's look at this first test this morning. And John chooses, really, to define this first test in kind of parallel thoughts, three of them.

Though, he's really, he's really very much like saying the same thing three ways or three times. And so, there's, you know, he states this truth in three slightly different ways.

Kind of like taking a diamond, you know, a diamond when you kind of turn it in the light and you see different facets of that diamond.

[13 : 30] That's kind of what he's doing with this truth. John takes this truth and he turns it one way, then another, and then another until we see all of its facets. And I want to use three simple words.

This is my outline, three simple words to identify the facets of this one truth, this test. This test that if you pass the test will produce in you assurance.

And that's the whole point of it. And here are the three words. Living, loving, and learning. That's pretty simple. Living, loving, and learning.

So, let's take the first one. Living. And to state it more broadly this way. Specifically this way. True salvation, genuine salvation manifests, always manifests itself in the way we are living.

In the way we are living and in a very specific way in which we are living. It is manifested in our obedience to God's word. That's what he says there in verse 3.

[14 : 38] Look at it. Now, by this we know that we know him if we keep his commandments. That's very simple, isn't it? Very straightforward. And, of course, you can see that John uses the word know twice in this verse.

Know that you know him. Almost sounds redundant. Know that you know him. I've heard, I quote Adrian Rogers all the time. I've heard him say, know that you know that you know you're saved.

That's basically just what John is saying here. Know that we know him. So, two times the word know appears. And John used the same Greek word in both places. So, it's not one of those examples where he uses one Greek word and we translate know.

And then he uses a different word that we also translate know so we can sometimes be confused in our English language. That's the same word. Gnosko in the Greek text.

Gnosko, which really basically is defined as knowing experientially. Knowing something by experience. But there is a difference in the forms of the words.

[15 : 54] Different form. And that is very important in the Greek language because they don't use words so much or additional words to tell you whether the word is past or present or future tense or something like that.

But it's all kind of in the word, in the way it's spelled. And so, we have to identify, if we're going to understand the Greek text, identify the form of the word. And so, the first know is present tense.

It's a present tense verb. And you've heard me say this so many times that you ought to have this memorized that a present tense verb in the Greek usually conveys the idea of continuous action. And so, here then, it is conveying the idea of a present ongoing knowledge that is on the basis of experience.

To know and keep on knowing. And so, it's an ongoing confidence. Or, let's use the word assurance.

[16:54] Assurance. Assurance. Assurance is John's objective in all of this. And so, assurance concerning what? Well, that leads us to the second word, know.

And the second know is in a little different form. And it is what is called the perfect tense. The perfect tense verb. Now, I know that most of us in this room have not done any study about Greek grammar.

But the perfect tense, that Greek perfect tense, basically conveys the idea of a past event or action that has taken place.

But it has a continuing result in the present. Past event that its result is continuing into the present. All right, so the idea here is that the past event was our spiritual birth. When we became a Christian. When we first believed in Jesus in a saving way.

[18:01] Believing unto salvation. And that event that has happened in the past. But it took place in time. This saving faith has a continuing result in the present.

A state of salvation. A state of salvation. A state of eternal life. An ongoing salvation. If you have a New American Standard or an ESV, those two versions give a better translation, I think.

And by this we know that we have come to know Him. That's the perfect tense. Have come to know. That's one word in the Greek.

And have come. That points back to the past action. Past event. And the to know. Have come to know. Points us to the continuing result in the present.

So what is his point in all of this? He's saying that it's one thing to have come to know Jesus in a saving faith.

[19:05] It is sometimes another thing to know it. For sure to be sure about it. And sometimes we don't always know that. As we should know.

To know that you're saved. And so it is again the issue of assurance. Once you have it, you cannot lose your salvation. I don't have time to go through all the scriptures that support that very clear doctrine in scripture.

But once you have salvation, you can never lose it. But you can. You can lose your assurance. Your assurance of salvation.

And John says assurance comes to you. Comes to you. Assurance comes as you know that you have come to know Jesus.

Do you understand? Assurance comes as you know that. As you know that you're really saved. And it fills your heart and your mind with assurance.

[20:13] Assurance. And what is the proof that you have come to know Jesus in a saving way? Well, it's so simple you don't really need me to tell you. John says the proof is keeping his commandments.

Living according to his word. That's what he says. By this we know. We know something. We know. We keep on knowing it. That we have come to know him.

By this we know that we have come to know him. In a saving way. If we keep his commandments. That's the test. True salvation will always manifest itself in the way we are living.

Do you keep God's word? Do you keep his commandments? Is the Bible your final rule on all matters concerning life and practice?

Is it the word of God? And again, lest I be misunderstood. Obedience is not the way to salvation.

[21:20] It is the proof of it. One of the proofs of it. And I would go a step further. And this is important too. Though it might be a little confusing at first.

But obedience to the word of God is not the way to assurance either. That's not the way to assurance. You don't create assurance by a renewed commitment to obey God's word.

You don't create assurance that way. Actually, you experience assurance because you are obeying God. This is John's point.

It said examine your life. How could you characterize your life? Is your life and the way you live it obedient? Is it characterized by obedience to God's word?

That the Bible is your final rule for life and for practice? Then you should be assured then that you really have come to know Jesus. So if you're lacking assurance, you don't say, Well, I'm just going to start obeying God's word so that I can have assurance.

[22 : 30] You understand? Obedience is the test of genuine faith, a genuine relationship with God. And when you apply that test to your life, what it reveals will either give you assurance or it will give you something else.

A sudden knowledge that you really need to be saved. What John says next explains this, I think, even further.

Look at verse 4. He who says, I know him, again, in the sense of knowing Jesus savingly, same as saying, he who says, I'm saved, and does not keep his commandments, is a liar.

We don't really like that, do we? It goes even a step further, the truth is not in him. That's very important to note.

Because sometimes people will say something like this, Well, I know the truth, I just don't live it. I just don't practice it. I know perhaps that I should. But it's not that I don't know the truth.

[23 : 51] It's just that I don't practice it. But John doesn't say that. No, John says, that person who says he knows the truth, but doesn't practice it, that person is a liar.

Now, they don't think they're liars. They think they're telling the truth. But then the standard is not what a person thinks.

The standard is God's word. And John says that person is a liar, and guess what? The truth is not in him. Not in him.

Not, what a shame that this person knows the truth, but then doesn't put it into practice. That's not what he said. He says, No, that person has no truth in him. Or her. That person does not know Jesus.

Does not know Jesus. Because knowing Jesus will always lead to living according to his word. Obeying his commandments. Paul connected the two.

[25 : 00] A number of places. Probably the most famous would be Ephesians chapter 2 verses 8 and 9 and 10. In 8 and 9, Paul's, of course, talking about the grace. Grace of salvation.

You say, By grace, through faith, and not of yourself, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any one should boast. But then in verse 10, he starts talking about our works.

He says, You've been created in Christ Jesus unto good works. So, Paul puts the two together. Saving faith always leads to good works.

And Paul said, Walk in that. James puts the two together as well. Not contradicting Paul, but supporting what Paul is teaching.

In James chapter 2, verse 14, he says, What does it profit my brethren if someone says he has faith but does not have works? That's very similar to what the false teachers were saying there in the churches John was writing to.

[26 : 00] He said, What does it profit? What good is it? If someone says he has faith but does not have works, can faith, that is, can that kind of faith, can that kind of faith save him?

And the implied answer is no, it can't. Because it's not real. It's not true. James goes on to say in James chapter 2, verse 18, Show me your faith without your works and I'll show your faith by my works.

Same test that John is talking about here in our passage. Verse 20 of James chapter 2, But do you want to know, foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

Faith without works is dead. So, now, John is not saying that Christians must or even can keep God's commandments perfectly. Let's make sure we understand that.

Not to provide some kind of way out or some kind of, you know, excuse for you. But John's not talking about perfect obedience. I mean, if that were the test, we'd be hopelessly lost, every single one of us.

[27 : 04] But John's not saying that. If so, we could probably argue that John is having a senior moment because just three verses before this, what does he say? He says, if anyone sins, if any one of you, any one of you Christians sins, we have an advocate with the Father.

So, John certainly knows that Christians continue to sin. And we know that too, don't we? John is not suggesting that any Christian can keep God's commandments perfectly, but he is saying that when you sin, do you confess it?

Do you agree with God about it? Do you deal with it radically, as the Bible deals with, says to deal with it?

And is obedience to God's word the rule in your life rather than the exception in your life? If not, then you, I tell you, you never really have ever come to know him.

And any assurance you think you have is false. It's false. It won't stand up on judgment day. Your claim to know him is a lie.

[28 : 24] It's a lie. The truth is not in you. Now, I've spent a lot of time on this first point, but it is really the defining point of this entire passage.

And so, let's turn that truth a little bit and see another aspect of it. And I will use the word loving this time.

Living, loving. And I can state it this way. True salvation. Genuine salvation manifests itself through loving obedience to his commandments.

loving obedience. That is, really, the love of God is really in you because you love his word and love to obey him.

You're not just obeying him out of, you know, fear or duty. You love to obey him because you love him and you love him because his love is in you. That's a proof.

[29 : 29] proof that you have come to know him. And so, look at verse 5. But whoever keeps his word, truly the love of God is perfected in him.

By this we know that we are in him. Now, this is interesting. Everyone who truly loves God, and that's just another way of saying truly saved, everyone who truly loves God loves his word. Loves his word and loves to obey his word and actually everyone who truly loves God, this is what John is saying, everyone who truly loves God, that love, the love of God is only perfected in that person through obedience.

obedience. That's what he's saying. And so, you know, we could ask, do you love God? You say, well, yes.

Then are you obeying him? Do you want to love God more? And every Christian ought to want to love God more.

[30 : 44] One of the struggles of the Christian life is that we don't love him as much as we want to love him. And we want to love him more. Do you want to love God more? Then continue to obey his word.

It all comes right back to obedience to his word. This is the only way that your love for God, and by extension, your love for everyone else, that's the only way that it can be perfected, is through obedience to his word.

See, our love for God is not perfected through pious and spiritual words we say, that we might say in prayer, or we might say through hymn singing, or chorus singing, or worship services.

Love for God is not perfected through those kind of things that we say, emotional things we say.

Our love for God is not perfected through spiritual and emotional feelings.

I just feel that way. I just, I just, I love him. Because I just feel so much love for God. And yet, you're obeying God's word.

[32 : 00] Our love for God is not perfected through some, you know, phenomenal, mystical experience, either. I mean, this is happening to me.

I mean, this great mystical thing, this supernatural thing has happened to me. That proves I love God. It doesn't come that way. See how vitally important God's word is and obedience to his word is.

Our love for God is perfected in our consistent obedience to his word. And as you continue to obey him, obey his word, the more his love is perfected in your heart and life.

love, your love for God as well as love for others. Does that describe your life? Jesus said in John 14, 15, if you love me, you can finish the rest of that, can't you?

Keep my commandments. And John echoed those very same words in 1 John 5, 3. In fact, as you read through John's letters, you'll see Jesus, the words of Jesus echoed many times.

[33 : 11] John was so close to Jesus. And he echoes those same words in 1 John 5, 3, for this is the love of God, that is, the love God manifested in us, this is what it is, we keep his commandments, we keep his commandments.

I think it was Warren Weirby who once said, loving God, really loving him, is obeying him no matter what the cost. Now, I need to wrap this up this morning, and give you the last facet of this truth.

Living, loving, and the last one is learning. And I can state it this way, true salvation manifests itself through learning to live just like Jesus.

Through our learning, ongoing learning, I'm not talking about just hearing and understanding, but learning. That is, when what we are taught, and what we hear, what we read, what we understand, is acted out in the way we're living, we're actually learning to walk as Jesus walked.

That's what he said in verse 6, he who says he abides in him ought himself also to walk just as he walked, or live just as he lived. Now, what about this phrase abide in him, what does that mean?

[34 : 39] Well, in the Bible it means a number of things we don't have time to look at this morning, but I think it's just helpful for us to understand that John uses this term, this idea, this concept of abiding in Jesus, he uses it as just another way of saying salvation, identifying what salvation is.

And actually John uses three truths to denote, or three images to denote salvation, salvation is knowing Jesus, that's verse three, salvation is the love of God in us, that's verse five, and salvation is abiding, abiding in Jesus, that's verse six.

All three are talking about a condition of salvation that a person claims to have, and all three are talking about a condition of salvation that needs to be proved, and in each case the proof is obedience.

obedience to God's word. So you say, you know, I'm abiding in Jesus Christ, are you? If you are, then you're learning each day to live as Jesus lived, to walk as Jesus walked, and how did Jesus walk, by the way?

Well, John 4, 34, Jesus said to them, this is what Jesus said, my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. is that the way you walk?

[36 : 05] Never mind the fact that we always fall short and we struggle with it and we fail many times, but is that the way you live your life and want to live your life? That you walk as Jesus walked?

And is that kind of desire becoming more and more a reality in your life as you grow as a believer? Then that's a good test that you know that you have come to know him.

That you are learning to walk as Jesus walked, live as Jesus lived. Jesus also said in John 6, 38, for I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

And that should be applied to our lives as well. Not doing my will, I want to do the will of him who saved me. See what a test this is.

It's a diagnostic. Put it in kind of computer terms, you know. Run a diagnostic to see if everything is working right. So let this be a diagnostic.

[37 : 13] Because you need to know that you have come to know him. That's what you need.

That's what I need. This is why John wrote this letter. Because we all need to know that we have come to know him.

That is that we're really saved. Do you know that? Well, here's the test of that. True salvation manifests itself through living a life of obedience to God's word.

And true salvation, genuine salvation, manifests itself in your life through loving obedience to God's word. And true salvation, genuine salvation, will always manifest itself through a life that is, ongoing, an ongoing way, learning to live just as Jesus lived.

To walk as Jesus walked. Because it all comes down to this question, what does John's test tell you about your own spiritual condition? Not what am I telling you about your true condition, or what anyone else is telling you.

What is John's test, the word of God, what is it telling you about your true spiritual condition? Have you truly come to know Jesus?

[38 : 35] Have you? Have you really been saved? And if you are, do you know it?

Do you know it in the sense of full assurance of it? Not wavering, no doubting. I know that I know that I'm saved.

And if you're wavering there, put yourself to the test. And let God's word prove one way or the other. Thank you.