

Lesson 6: “Obeying and Abiding”

1 John 2:3-6

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There is nothing in life more important than being confident of our being securely on the path to heaven.

Without this confidence we are ever wondering and wandering, questioning and searching for spiritual security. John, in this little book of First John, has as his primary goal: “*so that you may know that you have eternal life.*” (chapter 5, verse 13). As such, he has given us in this book a series of practical tests of our faith – both doctrinal and relational. His hope, is that we will pass these tests with “flying colors,” finding a secure confidence in our faith. And if not, we will be honest enough to revisit the sincerity of our faith and truly make Jesus the Savior and Lord of our life.

Today, we come to the first and second of these tests – the tests of obedience and of abiding. We will find they are similar, but not the same. And God requires both of His children.

1 John 2:3-6 *By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 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; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.*

In this important and very practical passage, we find a number of things that God wants us to know.

FIRST – GOD WANTS ME TO KNOW HIM

Before we can know that we know Him, we must know Him. This knowledge of God is the essence of eternal life, and discovered through knowledge of His Son, Jesus the Christ. Jesus Himself taught this.

John 17:3 *This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*

I trust we all realize that there is a vast difference between knowing about someone and knowing someone. To some degree, we all know about our president. And the more we read, and hear and study the more we can know about him. But I would guess that not one of us here has met him, talked with him, spent time with him and gotten to know his heart on matters that would never be revealed in the press. To do so would be to know him, not just know about him.

In the same way, God wants us to know His heart, having spent time with Him and listening to his words and watching His actions. No, we can’t see Him – for “no one has seen God at any time.” And yet Jesus, the God-man, said, “*he who has seen Me has seen the Father.*” (John 14:9) Jesus was the perfect and exact representation of God’s words, thoughts, actions and heart – because Jesus was God in the flesh.

The apostle Paul revealed that there was nothing more important to him than knowing God, through Jesus.

Philippians 3:8 *I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord ...*

We can know God in a one-time sense when we invite Him to be our Lord and Heavenly Father, through the work of Jesus His Son on the cross of Calvary. At this moment of invitation, the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, comes to dwell within our life, and we begin to have a first-hand sense of God’s heart. But this knowledge of God continues and grows through our life as we allow that Spirit to have control of us, and as we take time to learn God’s ways and will as revealed in His Holy Scripture. This combination of internal knowledge through the Spirit, and external knowledge through His Word allows us to grow more and more in our knowledge of God.

This is the “knowing” we desire for each of us at Oaks Bible Church – and is the first of our “Know, Grow and Go” purpose “motto.” What an amazing and heartwarming revelation – that the Almighty God of the universe wants to know ME and wants me to know HIM in a personal relationship. Now that is worthy of my life’s pursuit!

SECOND – GOD WANTS ME TO KNOW THAT I KNOW HIM

1 John 2:3 *By this we know that we have come to know Him ...*

Not only does God want me to know Him – He wants me to KNOW that I know Him. He wants me to be sure, certain, and be CONFIDENT of my faith. Jesus taught this in regards to recognizing true Christ-followers: *“You shall know them by their fruits.”* (Matthew 7:16) And by “fruits” he meant outward signs of their inward life. And by inference, this takes observation over time.

I recognize that we can and should rejoice over someone’s profession of faith at the moment of his or her decision. And I am solid on my understanding that salvation is by faith alone, and not by anything we must do to earn that salvation. (Ephesians 2:8-9) But to use an old expression, the “proof in the pudding” is the visible and outward results that sincere inward faith will surely bring.

Recall Jesus parable of the seed that fell on four different soils. The seed in the parable was the Word of God, and the four soils represented four different receptivities of the human heart. The parable says that only the fallow and prepared soil received the seed and produced a crop. The other soils and hearts gave initial signs of life, but after time showed no results of life. The point is, it took time to prove the reality of the new life.

Listen to the apostle Peter as he urges us to “make certain” of our calling by practice:

2 Peter 1:10-11 *Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.*

And hear the apostle James, the earthly brother of Jesus, make his bold statement:

James 2:17 *Faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.*

He was not saying it takes works to save, but that it takes works to prove and authenticate the reality of the new life. Without “fruit” there is no life.

Can one be truly confident of the salvation of one who made a confession of faith early in life, but now shows no evidence of spiritual life, either by continually ignoring or even denying that faith ever existed? Sadly, I think not. We can hope that one to be a prodigal, but either way, we must treat him as one who needs Jesus as Savior and Lord. God wants me to KNOW that I KNOW.

THIRD – GOD WANTS ME TO KNOW THAT MY CONFIDENCE IN KNOWING HIM PARTLY COMES FROM MY BEING OBEDIENT TO HIM

Can I truly know God and not be obedient to Him? John says no. And so God says no. Remember, to “know” God is to be saved and on the road to heaven. So here God is teaching through John that our obedience to Him is an indication that we are indeed saved. It is not the only confirmation, as we will see from other tests, but it is a sure result of sincere faith. Without consistent obedience, we can be sure that we do not know Him in a saving way.

To “keep His commandments” is not necessarily referring to the “10 Commandments” which were given to the Israelites. It is referring to all of the commands of God in the Scripture, of which there are 100’s. “How can I keep them all,” you say? Well, to begin, you must read and learn. I count some 22 commands in 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5 alone. Here are some:

Esteem those who have charge over you in the Lord. Live in peace with one another. Admonish the unruly. Encourage the fainthearted. Heap the weak. Be patient with everyone. Don’t repay evil with evil. Seek after good for all people. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks. Don’t quench the Holy Spirit. And that is just a dozen in that chapter alone! Hear what Jesus said:

John 14:15 *If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*

And we don’t get to pick and choose which ones are useful. God is not a social therapist who gives “helpful suggestions” and advice. He gives commands as the God of the universe and Lord of our life.

To “keep” His commands implies diligence and consistent attention. And, to “keep” his commands implies knowing what they are – which implies reading and studying His Word to us. This is not, after all, a book of

“divine suggestions” but divine commands. And “keep” cannot mean to keep perfectly – no one can be expected to do that. But God does expect that we will ever seek to know his commands and follow them.

I’m so very glad that here John writes, *“whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected.”* God doesn’t just want me to judiciously follow a set of rules. He wants me to follow out of love, which as I obey will grow in me. As a child I obeyed because I was told to. As an adolescent I often obeyed because I had to. But as I matured I obeyed and honored my parents because I loved them and wanted to please them. So it is as we grow in maturity in our obedience – the love of God is perfected in us and we obey out of love and honor. Again, *“if you love Me, you will keep my commandments.”*

And just a thought here on “unconditional love.” Yes, God loves me unconditionally, in the sense that he loves Me despite my disobedience and inconsistent devotion. “God so loved the world ...” But – and here is the thought – His love is “perfected” or completed in me as I obey Him. In that sense, His perfect or complete love is conditional on my obedience. His love toward me may always be unconditional, but I certainly will feel and reap the benefits of His love more when I am in obedience!

FOURTH (and final for today) – GOD WANTS ME TO ABIDE WITH HIM MORE THAN JUST OBEY HIM

John 15:4 *Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.*

These are God’s words through His Son Jesus to his disciples both then and now.

1 John 2:6 says, *“By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”* So the beginning phrase, *“By this we know that we are in Him”* I see as a second test of our salvation. As I said at the commencement, this is similar to obedience, but different. Abiding does not eliminate or replace obedience, but rather is a deeper and richer expression of experiencing and honoring our God.

To “abide” is to “hang with” – literally to “tabernacle” with – meaning to have deep and rich fellowship with. It is the same word used by John in John 1:14 when he says that the Word became flesh and “dwelt” among us. So Jesus chose to “abide” with us, and now He asks us to “abide” in Him. It means to think long and hard about Him, studying his ways and walking as it were in His footsteps. It means to talk with Him continually in prayer and listen to Him in the still small voice of the indwelling Spirit.

And as we do this, do you not see that obedience to Him becomes so easy and natural – or should I say supernatural. We no longer obey Him out of duty, but out of having known Him so well and understanding more of the “why” of His commands. His ways and desires become our ways and desires, and we obey because we know it is the right and true way to live. Abiding then is a deeper test of our knowing God.

And note that John says that abiding in Him *we “ought to walk in the same manner as He walked.”* This reminds me of Paul’s great challenge to the Ephesian church and to us:

Ephesians 4:1 *Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.*

Paul especially, often referred to the Christian life as a “walk” – implying a series of steps or decisions going in a forward and purposeful direction. And this purposeful walk is a part of “abiding” in God. To find myself doing so is a confirmation of my salvation - that I am on that narrow road to heaven.

So take the two tests of OBEDIENCE and ABIDING. Do you find yourself wanting to know and keep His commands? Do you find yourself wanting to spend more and more time with Him? These are two of the important confirmations of your salvation that will give you CONFIDENCE that you indeed are securely on the path to heaven!