

‘Living in the Light’

A teaching series in 1 John by Rev. Robert Griffith

Part 5: How to know you know God

“We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.” (1 John 2:3-6)

We live in the information age. Never before in history has the increase of knowledge been so rapid. For thousands of years we only added to our knowledge. Today, knowledge multiplies. We used to measure the doubling of knowledge in centuries. Now we measure it in just months. We are all traveling on the information super highway - and at breakneck speed it would seem.

However, while this modern age is characterized by a dramatic increase in the storehouse of knowledge, one effect is that we all know a lot more about a lot less. Not long ago, it was possible for a highly educated person to literally know everything about one field of knowledge. Now, people must specialize in smaller and smaller areas within their field.

We are aware of this most in the area of medical science. The family doctor used to know all that was needed about medical science. Now, no one can master everything that has been discovered and published concerning medicine. So now we have lots of specialists. They have divided the areas of work into more manageable disciplines. They have even divided the human body up into areas of specialty. This is all because of the increase of knowledge. It works this way in many other areas of life and work as well. Truly, in our society there can no longer be a know-it-all because ‘all’ is now a very large word indeed.

This all poses a different kind of question. Can we really and truly know anything for certain? You see, knowledge changes because of research and new discoveries. Some of the ‘facts’ of the past are no longer true today. As new knowledge is uncovered, what we used to believe has changed. This is probably why many in our society believe that all truth is now relative. They have become practical agnostics concerning the possibility of knowing anything for sure and they have extended this uncertainty into the spiritual realm as well.

On the face of it, that seems like a logical extension. If one cannot truly know the material world, how can we know the spiritual world? Is it possible to know about eternity – life beyond the grave? Is it possible to know that one has eternal life? Is it possible to truly know God? Is it possible to know that you are saved? These are important questions and none of them can be answered by applying a scientific method. In fact, contrary to popular belief, the scientific method is only one limited approach to knowledge.

It is good to evaluate the things to which it should apply, but there are whole areas of knowledge to which the scientific method can never apply. Eternity, the spiritual world, faith, and God will never be evaluated by the scientific method. There is another authority that we believe gives us real answers to these questions. It is the Bible. And the Bible tells us there is a way to know for certain about the questions of eternity.

Concerning whether we know God and whether we are truly following Him, the Bible tells us that we can know that we know. How do you know that you know Him and what is the standard or test by which you evaluate your Christian life? Our text today gives us some powerful answers to these questions. In fact, several essentials emerge from our text - essentials that help us define whether we have a real walk with Christ. Let's turn our attention now to this passage of Scripture and look at these essentials in our walk with Christ.

What we must know ...

One essential for all people who are seeking God is to know that they are saved. And this is precisely what our text teaches us. There is something we must know. There is something we need to know. We need to know that we know Christ.

I am always amazed at how many professing Christians don't even think they can know. I have had conversations with committed Church members who have gathered for worship every Sunday for their whole lives but who tell me that there was no way a person can really know that he or she is truly saved. It's one thing to say that we should never judge another person's faith in God, but to say that we cannot know personally if we belong to Jesus is so sad.

There are millions of people in this world who identify as Christians whom I believe will die with their fingers crossed, hoping they wake up in heaven. They go through this life not really knowing for sure and just hoping that if they confess their sins, be kind to people, attend Church and pray the Lord's prayer now and then ... maybe ... with a little bit of hard work and service thrown in, maybe they will make it to heaven.

Later in this letter, John wrote these words: says, *"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."* (1 John 5:13)

But even in the face of that Scripture many people continue to say that they can't know for sure and certain that they are going to spend eternity with God. In fact, many of these people would think we are arrogant if we affirmed that we were heaven-bound. Only God can determine that. The truth of the Scripture, and the truth of our text, is that we can know! The passage I quoted in 1 John 5:13 tells us just that. And our text today also says that we can know.

The apostle Peter exhorts us in 2 Peter 1:10 by saying, *"Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure."* The apostle Paul certainly knew without doubt that he was saved. In Galatians 2:20 we read, *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* This same Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:12, *"Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day."* We can know and we certainly need to know.

What we must do ...

Not only is there something we must know - there is also something we must do. This is the second essential that we discern from our text. We read in verse 3 that we know that we have come to know Him if we obey His commands. The real litmus test is that we obey Him.

Obedience is the fruit of a genuine Christian faith. By obedience we can know for sure that we know Him. Many people evaluate their Christian life based on their experience or on the experiences they have with God.

Now, don't misunderstand me here. I believe that experiencing God is good. In fact we need more experiences of the goodness and grace of God. We need to be on the receiving end of special encounters with Him. That is really valuable. In fact, experiencing God on a daily basis should be the goal of every believer. But experiences are never the ultimate test to prove that we have a relationship with God. There are two problems with using experiences as the only test.

The first problem is that experiences can be subjective. How we interpret what we are experiencing may or may not be accurate because we are personally involved in the experience. The second problem is that even non-Christians experience the goodness of God because God is good. God may send His blessings on a person but that is no indicator of a relationship with God. The Bible says that God sends His rain of both the just and the unjust, and rain in this context is a good thing. So, if we evaluate our Christian life based only on our experience, we may come to the wrong conclusion.

Obedience, on the other hand, tells us where our heart really truly is. If, like Paul, it is no longer I who lives but Christ Who lives in me – then obedience is automatic! It comes from the life of Christ within us. If we are a true disciple, then we will have been born again and transformed by the power of God in the gospel and there will be fruit from that transformation. Now, I am not talking about perfection here. None of us is perfect - all of us fall short. All of us sin. When we do, we must deal with that sin by confessing it and the forgiveness of God in Christ will heal us and refine us. So, we are not talking about perfection here, but a life characterised by obedience.

Obedience reveals a changed heart – which is surrendered to Christ. Obedience reveals that we have true faith. Faith is always validated by works. In other words, the works that we do reveal that the faith we say we have is genuine faith. If we live a life characterised by obedience to God, we don't ever have to question if we truly know Him ... the fruit of obedience in our life comes from knowing God. That's why John writes that if someone says, "*I know Him*," but does not do what He commands – they're lying. The truth is not in them. But if anyone obeys God's word, God's love is truly made complete in them. (1 John 2:4-5)

Who we must follow ...

We come now to the third essential. There is not only something we must *know*, and something we must *do*, there is also Someone we must follow. In 1 John 1:5-6 we read, "*This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.*" Jesus is the One we must follow. He is the standard by which we evaluate our Christian lives. So here's the question: How did Jesus walk?

In order to answer this question, let me take you back to John's Gospel. There we see that Jesus lived His life in total dependence upon the Father, through the Holy Spirit. Listen to the words of Jesus.

John 4:34

"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."

John 5:17

"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."

John 5:19

"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."

John 5:30

"By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me."

John 6:38

"For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me."

John 7:16

"My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me."

John 8:28

"I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me."

The way Jesus lived His life was in utter and total dependence upon the Father. Through the Holy Spirit, He listened for the Father speaking. He watched for the Father's leadership. His life was a life of complete communion with God. Jesus showed us what an obedient, authentic God-centred human life looks like and then He called us to follow Him and live the same way, in Him, through Him and for Him. Walking in the light is walking in Christ, depending daily on the Holy Spirit to connect us with the voice of God, the purpose of God, the heart of God and the love of God.

For three years, Jesus spent 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with the disciples showing them clearly how to live and called, Spirit-led men and women of God and then just before He left this earthly world He said, *As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*" And with that he breathed on them and said, *'Receive the Holy Spirit.'*" (John 20:21-22)

There is only one mission – the mission of Christ - and Jesus is still calling men, women and young people to embrace that mission as His disciples and He is still pouring our His Spirit upon the Church He promised to build.

Those who are listening will still hear His Word.

Those who are willing, will still receive His Spirit.

Those who live in Him, will walk as He walked, live as He lived and change the world as He changed the world.

So how then shall we live in light of God's word to us today? The answer is always the same, we shall live ... we MUST live ... in Christ, through Christ and for Christ! Then, and only then, will we truly know that we are His and we will share eternity in His glorious presence.