

How to Know You Know Jesus | Reading: 1 John 2:1-6

If I was to ask you how you know you know Jesus what would your answer be? Where would you look? What would you point to as evidence? To help us answer John gives us three tests which he returns to again & again in this letter. The doctrinal test, the obedience test & the love test. We could put these tests as three questions. 1. Do we believe the right things about Jesus? 2. Do we obey the commands of Jesus? 3. Do we love one another as Jesus loved us? John has already introduced the doctrinal test. Do we believe the right things about Jesus & do we have a realistic view about ourselves & sin? Now in this section he introduces the obedience test (3-6) & in the next section (7-11) he introduces the love test. Today we're going to think about the obedience test. However we're going to start in the same two verses we finished in last week. By considering Jesus as our advocate & atonement (1-2)! These verses remind us why having a right view of Jesus is so important & they provide a firm foundation for talking about Christian obedience. Let's read verses 1-2; **“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”**

In these verses John refers to the righteous life of Christ, the atoning sacrifice of Christ & to the fact he is presently & eternally our advocate with the Father (cf. Rom 8:34). The reason Jesus is able to be our atoning sacrifice is because of his perfectly righteous life & the reason he is able to be our advocate is because of his atoning death. It is on the grounds of his perfect life & atoning death that Jesus stands as our advocate before the Father. We entrust ourselves to the merits of the Righteous One!

The word **“propitiation”** (ESV) appears only a handful of times in the NT but at important times (Rom 3:25). Yet the reality expressed in the term echo's throughout the Bible's main storyline; with the whole idea of atonement in the OT laying the foundation for Christ's atoning work in the NT. The concept we need to have in our minds is this: The atoning sacrifice which satisfies the just wrath of God towards human sin. The whole sacrificial system of the OT pointed to the truth expressed in these verses. Christ became the once for all sacrifice for sin, through his death Jesus absorbed the just wrath of God towards us because of our sin & in so doing opened the way for God's full favour to be shown to all who believe in him. To truly trust in Christ is to step out from under deserved condemnation into the full favour of God! In other words Jesus is our Great High Priest who not only made a sacrifice for sin but who became the very once for all sacrifice for our sins & for the sins of the whole world. Now he lives as our advocate before the Father. His case being so strong on our behalf we cannot lose. Paul puts it this way in 1 Timothy 2:5; **“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”** The terms advocate, mediator & atoning sacrifice all point to Christ in his priestly role. Christ is our Great High Priest!

Now with that said here is the thing we need to understand & what John goes on to say helps enforce the point I'm going to go on & make here. When we take verses 1-6 together we can come to no other conclusion. Before I make the point let me read what John says next (v3); **“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.”** By this we know that we know who? Our advocate & propitiation, Jesus Christ the Righteous One! We know that we know him if we keep his commandments John says. So there are two inseparable sides to Authentic Christianity: trusting in the atoning blood of Christ & obeying his commandments. One is the solid foundation of our salvation & the other is the solid evidence of our salvation that shows we actually really do know & trust him!

1. A WHOLE CHRIST

Down through the centuries Christian's have understood this truth in this way. In the OT they had prophets, priests & kings leading God's people. Each of these roles was distinctive yet each of these roles pointed to Christ & found their completion in Christ. So in the NT Jesus becomes our ultimate Prophet, Priest & King. To understand who Christ is to the Christian we need to see, know & trust him in all his offices. He comes not only as Priest but as Prophet, Priest & King. It is a three in one deal & it is all or nothing.

Here is the thing about trusting & following Jesus, you either trust & follow him as he is or you don't trust & follow him at all. You cannot trust only a part of him; you cannot know him as Saviour & not know him as Lord. As John says plainly in verse 4; **“Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”** To truly know Christ is to embrace every part of Christ, Christ in all his offices, Christ as Saviour & Lord; his person & his work, his atoning work & his commandments for Christian living. To embrace only one aspect or office of Christ is to fashion a little christ in our image. Many want a Saviour but not a Lord. Many want a little saviour who only exists to save, serve & bless them but they do not want a prophet who confronts sin in them & speaks reality into their lives & they do not want a King who commands them & rules over their wishes & whims.

Puritan writer Thomas Brooks says it this way; *“The terms upon which God offers Christ in the gospel are these, namely, that we shall accept of a whole Christ with a whole heart.”* I think his words sum up well John's words in these verses. Christ himself comes & offers himself to us as prophet, priest & king not as prophet, priest or king. In these 6 verses John holds up a whole Christ as Thomas Brooks puts it & if we are to be Authentic Christians we have to place our trust in a whole Christ with our whole heart.

John is making clear that we can know that we know Jesus Christ, the Righteous One – he who is the propitiation of our sins & therefore our Advocate – if we keep his commandments. Isn't that very striking? Then he goes on & says the exact same thing from the opposite angle in verse 4; **“Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”** Here is what John is

saying. He is saying you cannot claim Christ as your atonement & advocate if you do not keep his commandments. In other words you either know him as Saviour & Lord (as Prophet, Priest & King) or you do not know him at all. It takes a whole Christ to produce Authentic Christianity!

To preach the gospel properly & with Biblical honesty we must not only preach the benefits of Christ, but the complete person of Christ. Listen again to Thomas Brooks; *“A hypocrite may be willing to embrace Christ as a priest to save him from wrath, from the curse, from hell, from everlasting burning—but he is never sincerely willing to embrace Christ as a prophet to teach & instruct him, & as a king to rule & reign over him. Many hypocrites are willing to embrace a saving Christ—but they are not willing to embrace a ruling Christ, a commanding Christ... A hypocrite is willing to receive Christ in one office—but not in every office; & this is the stumbling stone at which hypocrites stumble & fall, & are broken to pieces... Christ & his offices may be distinguished—but Christ & his offices can never be divided.”* John Starke says; *“A nominal Christian finds Christ useful. A true Christian finds Christ beautiful.”*

2. A WHOLE HEART

This is a good time to remember that before we get to verses 3-6 John has taught us 1. We cannot claim to be a Christian & walk in darkness. 2. We cannot claim to be a Christian & claim to be sinless – either by claiming we are not inherently sinful or by claiming we have reached perfection. None of these things are true for the Authentic Christian in this life. We struggle with sin but we do not live in sin & when we do sin we have an advocate. John has been very careful to say this first. However with that said he goes on to say this in verses 3-6; **“And we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we know that we are in him: whoever abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.”**

We could sum up what we just read like this: A heart that knows him keeps his commandments, a heart that loves him keeps his word & a heart that abides in him follows his example. In Ezekiel 11:19 God promises that he will give his people an undivided heart as well as a new spirit (NIV). John is telling us what it looks like to have such a heart. John Stott comments; *“True love for God is expressed not in sentimental language or mystical experience but in moral obedience (cf 5:3; John 14:15, 21, 23, 15:10). The proof of love is loyalty.”* An undivided heart does not have divided loyalties. Obedience to Christ’s commandments & word reflects how much loyalty there is to Jesus in our hearts.

I. A heart that knows him keeps his commandments (3-4)

Note that it says commandments... In the NT we find commandments for every area of life. We find doctrinal commands, moral commands, social commands, spiritual commands, missional commands.

These commands can all be summarised under what Jesus said were the first & second greatest commandments. The other commands solidly show us what love for God & others looks like in the Christian life. We are not to pick & choose between the commandments of our Lord Jesus, we are to seek to obey him in every area of our lives; in our relationships, in our finances, in our priorities, in our morality & piety. He has commandments for every realm of life. Obedience to Christ ought to rule over our feelings & preferences in every given moment. We should ask; “what is his will, what would he have us do?” The authentic Christian is not ruled by feelings or preferences but by the commands of Christ. We can allow our feelings & preferences to convince us of all sorts of things, but Christ’s commandments are a much more reliable guide - he always knows better than our feelings! Listen to how Thomas Watson puts all this;

*“True obedience is entire & uniform. A good heart, like the needle, points the way in which the loadstone draws. This is one great difference between a child of God & a hypocrite. The hypocrite picks & chooses in religion. He will perform some duties which are easier, & gratify his pride or interest—but other duties he takes no notice of: **“Woe to you, scribes & Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint & dill & cumin, & have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice & mercy & faithfulness. These things you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.”** To sweat in some duties & freeze in others—is the symptom of a disordered Christian... This shows that men are not good in truth—when they are good by halves.”* You see it’s not only that we need a whole Christ we are also called to offer him our whole hearts, our whole lives, our whole obedience. We do so because we trust him to be good & for us...

II. A heart that loves him keeps his word (5)

John then tells us **“whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.”** Love for God is perfected by keeping his word. John goes broader here. He moves from an aspect of God’s word (commandments) to God’s word in general. A Christian won’t become well grounded & rounded by latching onto only a few favourite Scriptures. We need the whole counsel of God. Our lives are to be aligned, shaped & conformed to God’s word. Jesus said; **“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.”**

We should be like Mary treasuring the words of Jesus in our hearts. The word “keep” conveys the idea of guarding. We should guard Christ’s commands & word as precious treasure & as we do our hearts will be strengthened & assured. It is a life of true worship that delights in the commandments & word of God. The thermometer of our passion for Christ, our love for Christ, according to John; is not how emotional we get in a worship service but how committed you are to keeping his word in everyday life. Keeping his word means keeping to it & living it out.

III. A heart that abides in him follows his example (6)

John says **“whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.”** To truly live in Christ is to have the life of Christ flowing out of us... This is the evidence we are abiding in him. Our obedience to Christ will mirror his obedience to his Father. To abide in Christ means that his life of obedience becomes our pattern for living! If we truly believe in Christ & belong to him & are in him we will behave like Christ. This is the first time out of 23 times that John uses this word **“abide”** in the letter & of course it points us back to Jesus’ teaching in John 15.

Concluding word

The Authentic Christian will love Christ’s commandments, will see them as good & make it his or her aim to obey him in everything. The Authentic Christian’s heart is set on pleasing God. Yet at the same time the Authentic Christian knows his or her obedience is imperfect. So again we remember the essence of what John has already taught: The Authentic Christian neither walks in sin nor is sinless. We depend on the blood of Jesus. We have things to confess & unrighteousness to be cleansed from. Yet at the same time because our heart is captivated by our Advocate we are committed to obeying him. For we know that the One who became our propitiation can be trusted in everything. This is the Authentic Christian reality: Our keeping his commandments is imperfect, yet at the same time our hearts are now inclined towards obedience. And while our obedience is not perfect Christ our advocate *“puts his merits into the scales—and then there is full weight”* (as Thomas Watson puts it)!