

**Test of Obedience** 1John 2:3-11 bible-sermons.org October 18, 2009

Last week we looked at the first test of being in the light. It was the test of fellowship. ... *if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another...* 1 John 1:7 (NIV) We learned that that fellowship is with the Father and the Son and all believers. It is our oneness in Christ. It is sharing that indescribable unity of being of the same spirit. This kind of fellowship crosses culture, class, ethnicity and any other issues that tend to separate mankind. It is much more than attending a church service or getting together for a meal.

John tells us that we can know that we are living (walking) in the light by the fact that we have fellowship. That is his first qualifying statement or test of whether or not we are truly in Christ, or to use the term we hear more often, "saved". Are you saved? Are you right with God? If so, you experience genuine fellowship.

The Accuser of the Brethren, Satan, will tell you that you fall way short of deserving God's grace. He's right. But what he wants you to think is that you aren't right with God, that you don't have hope, and that it depends on some work that you are never quite able to perform. Then you won't have the joy and confident assurance in what Jesus did for you. Then you will think that giving in to sin is normal. (Romans 6:1-2) He wants you to be a lack luster, melt in with the crowd, silent believer. That is to say he wants your spiritual life to be ineffective and mediocre.

This is why John is giving us these experiential tests. These tests are to evaluate our lives and know if we are in Christ or if we are not. If we are, Satan's accusations can be ignored and we can walk in confident assurance of our salvation. This letter will go on to tell us of the by-products we can expect from that right relationship with God. One by-product already mentioned is joy. True believers have an abiding sense of joy. (John 15:11)

In our passage for today we read about the second test. It is the test of obedience. <sup>3</sup> *We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.* Let's pay close attention to the different phrases John uses for salvation. In the last chapter, he used the expression "walk in the light". This goes all the way back to his gospel where he described the righteous coming to the light to show their actions are of God, and the wicked loving darkness that hides their actions. (John 3:19-21) If you want to take these tests that John is applying to the churches in Asia and the false teachers, it means you want to be in the light and desire for your deeds to be the work of God. (John 3:21)

In our passage for today, John uses another term for salvation, "know him". You can know you are saved, born again, in the light, or come to know Him, by the fact that you keep His commands. First let me say what this is not teaching us. It is not teaching sinless perfection. It is not telling us that when we know Jesus we are suddenly perfected. Only a few verses earlier John tells us what to do when we sin. (1John 1:9)

**Commented [notes1]:** What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?  
2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?  
Romans 6:1-2 (NIV)

**Commented [notes2]:** 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.  
John 15:11 (NIV)

**Commented [notes3]:** John 3:19-21 (NIV)  
19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.  
20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.  
21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

**Commented [notes4]:** 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." [John 3:21 (NIV)]

**Commented [notes5]:** 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.  
1 John 1:9 (NIV)

It is telling us that there will be a complete change in our lifestyle and desires. John later clarifies that the commands of Jesus are to believe in Him, and love one another. (1John 3:23) That is a radical change from a selfish life to a selfless life. For the one that has come to know Jesus, there is a change in lifestyle that conforms to the Jesus' life, obedient to the Father. (John 8:28) That is the normal Christian life. It is the result of a love relationship. Obedience is the norm because of gratitude for what He has done for us, and because we want to please the One we love. To know Him is to love Him.

Do you remember that Linda Rhonstadt song, To Know Him Is To Love Him? Just to see Jesus' smile, makes our life worthwhile. That is why we obey. His life is in us and we have entered into that mystical union that changes everything about us. That is why we so desire real fellowship. The old nature is being transformed. It was dealt a deathblow on the cross (Galatians 5:24); we consider it to be dead (Romans 6:11), though the dying continues daily (1Corinthians 15:31). It is no longer our old life, but now the life of Christ in us that is growing day by day into His likeness. (Galatians 4:19)

We aren't going to go over all the Scripture that tells us this, but I encourage you to take the sermon text and look up the cross references if you are not already familiar with what I just shared. It is important for us to understand what the normal Christian life entails. It should be a continual walk closer to Christ, not the same old life of self-seeking with a bit of religion added to it.

*4 The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.* The false teachers at the end of the first century claimed to have a special knowledge of God, but lived morally corrupt lives. John declares them to be liars. That sounds harsh, but the true believers need to know that immorality and the true knowledge of God never go together. This false teaching of the flesh actions as being irrelevant was seductive but a flat out lie. To know God is to shun evil. To know God is to walk in the light, not darkness. To know God is to obey Jesus' teaching, and practicing immorality is not loving others. It is using others for your selfish gratification! (Ephesians 4:19)

These false teachers did not believe in the Jesus of the Gospels. They invented their own Jesus that allows them to live an immoral life. They do not obey His commands. They are called "sons of disobedience" in the Bible. (Ephesians 2:2) Yet they claim to know Him. They are liars. So is everyone who invents their own Jesus, a Jesus that is not in line with that recorded by Jesus' handpicked disciples. So also is everyone that claims to know God but does not love but rather uses others for their selfish purposes, be those purposes fame, or fortune, or fornication. If that stings, you are convicted and you need to repent and allow your sins to be crucified with Christ and invite Him to live through you. Only then can you truly know Him and His unselfish love. (1John 4:7)

*5 But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him.* To know Him is to love Him. To love Him is to obey Him. To obey Him means that His love will grow to completion in you. You will see love for others take over

**Commented [notes6]:** 23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. 1 John 3:23 (NIV)

**Commented [notes7]:** 28 So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [the one I claim to be] and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. John 8:28 (NIV)

**Commented [notes8]:** 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Gal 5:24 (NIV)

**Commented [notes9]:** 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Romans 6:11 (NIV)

**Commented [notes10]:** 31 I die every day--I mean that, brothers--just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. 1 Cor 15:31 (NIV)

**Commented [notes11]:** 19 My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, Gal 4:19 (NIV)

**Commented [notes12]:** 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. Eph 4:19 (NIV)

**Commented [notes13]:** 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. Eph 2:2 (NIV)

**Commented [notes14]:** 7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 1 John 4:7 (NIV)

your prayer time, your daily concerns, the way you react, and even the emotions of your heart.

Part of the problem in John's day was the Greek philosophy did little to discourage immorality, and in many ways encouraged it. In some Greek temples, prostitution was a part of the worship. The Greeks taught that reason was the foundation for life. The Bible teaches revelation is the way to wisdom. (1Corinthians 2:9-10) When man uses his own reasoning, he will always justify a way to indulge his carnal nature. Is it any different today?

Our culture is reverting to that of John's day when immorality was the norm. It's no wonder then that religious people claimed to know God and yet practiced immorality. The revelation of Christ reveals that ideology for what it truly is, selfish indulgence at others expense. Those obedient to the revelation of Jesus love one another with God's love, and that exposes selfish indulgence for what it truly is.

To those who would wear the name of Jesus but live as they pleased, John wrote, *This is how we know we are in him: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.* How can you claim to know Jesus, to have insight into His teaching and His life, and live in a way that is contrary to the way He lived? John is steering his flock away from the false teachers by giving them the obvious contrast of the life of the frauds with the life of Jesus.

To those who are in Christ, John has repeated a test of assurance. We know we are in Him because we obey His teaching. Obeying His commands is to live as He lived. (1Peter 2:21) No one walked their talk better than Jesus. When He said, "Love one another", He added, "as I have loved you." (John 13:34) He always demonstrated His commands. He loved the Pharisee by engaging them in confrontational conversations and even rebukes. (Luke 7:44-45) He loved the immoral woman by offering her what would truly satisfy her soul, living water. (John 4:10) He was called a friend of tax collectors and sinners. (Luke 7:34) The world used that as a derogatory expression, but it was a badge of honor, for Jesus. In doing so, He was like His Father who loved the world so much he sent His Son. (John 3:16)

Loving like Christ isn't being a pushover. It is listening to the Father and sharing with people what they need to hear. It is working with the Father and acting and speaking at His leading. Whether it is giving the commandments to the Rich Young Ruler (Mark 10:21), or healing that unfriendly man at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:7-8), or inviting Himself to dinner with a tax collector (Luke 19:5), Jesus dealt uniquely with every individual. That is the way Jesus walked. That is how we are to walk. You can't learn that in three easy lessons or in any other book than the Bible. It comes out of a personal relationship.

Do you live in Jesus? Do you live like He lived? Of course we all fall way short of Jesus' life, but do you seek to please your Father God in everything you do?

**Commented [notes15]:** 9 However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" --  
10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.  
1 Cor 2:9-10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes16]:** 21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.  
1 Peter 2:21 (NIV)

**Commented [notes17]:** 34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.  
John 13:34 (NIV)

**Commented [notes18]:** 44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.  
45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet.  
Luke 7:44-45 (NIV)

**Commented [notes19]:** 10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."  
John 4:10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes20]:** 34 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."  
Luke 7:34 (NIV)

**Commented [notes21]:** 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.  
John 3:16 (NIV)

**Commented [notes22]:** 21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."  
Mark 10:21 (NIV)

**Commented [notes23]:** 7 "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."  
8 Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."  
John 5:7-8 (NIV)

**Commented [notes24]:** 5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."  
Luke 19:5 (NIV)

(John 8:29) Do you commune with Him in sweet fellowship? Is God's love flowing through you to others in unique and life changing ways?

John goes on to explain, *7 Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard.* They knew from the Gospels and from John's gospel that Jesus taught us the two great commands in the Law, to love God with your all (Deuteronomy 6:5) and your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18). (Matthew 22:37-40; Romans 13:8-10) It was not a new thing though the emphasis had become universal and not just isolated to Israel. The prophets pointed to this, but Jesus lived it and made it clearer.

*8 Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.* The revelation of Jesus' life showed us in a new and vivid way of what it truly means to love. He lovingly dealt with each individual in the way that He was led by the Father. (John 5:19) He taught in word and actions that love served others. His words and life were the shining of the light of God into the darkness of this world. So that we couldn't misinterpret the message, He demonstrated it.

But it is not only seen in Jesus, it is seen in all true followers of Jesus. They follow Him. His love flows through them. The same agape love can be seen in their lives when they sacrifice their time, finances, and even emotions for those who are hurting. The darkness is passing from your lives and those you influence because the light of Jesus is shining through you! (Ephesians 5:2)

*9 Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness.* This was the way to identify false teachers. They don't love like Jesus loved. They hate individuals. They are still in darkness. It doesn't matter the reasoning or excuses for the hatred; it is darkness. Jesus confronted a popular misconception that you could love God but hate certain individuals. (Matthew 5:43) He declared that to hate was tantamount to murder. How could a murderer be in the light? The only difference between hatred and murder is a lack of opportunity. Hatred would end another's life if one was certain he or she wouldn't be caught and have to pay the penalty. That is to annihilate someone made in the image of God with the potential to have that image restored. It is to take away the life from one who was granted life by Almighty God. It is to declare your allegiance to Satan who has come to kill and destroy. (John 10:10) It is the utmost act of selfishness. That is hatred unmasked for what it really is.

*10 Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.* You can't have agape love without being in the light, living in Jesus, experiencing His life in you. That unselfish love just doesn't come naturally. You can be kind to people. You can help them. You can even sacrifice something for them, but to have agape love that expects nothing in return is a God thing. You can't work it up. It has to come from living in the light.

**Commented [notes25]:** 29 The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."  
John 8:29 (NIV)

**Commented [notes26]:** 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.  
Deut 6:5 (NIV)

**Commented [notes27]:** 18 "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.  
Lev 19:18 (NIV)

**Commented [notes28]:** 37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."  
38 This is the first and greatest commandment.  
39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'  
40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."  
Matt 22:37-40 (NIV)

**Commented [notes29]:** 8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.  
9 The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself."  
10 Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.  
Romans 13:8-10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes30]:** 19 Jesus gave them this answer: "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 5:19 (NIV)

**Commented [notes31]:** Ephesians 5:2 (NIV)  
2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

**Commented [notes32]:** 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'  
Matt 5:43 (NIV)

**Commented [notes33]:** 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.  
John 10:10 (NIV)

To “stumble” is to sin. If someone is in the light, the sin nature has been dealt with. Again, lest we misunderstand, John has made it clear that we are not talking about sinless perfection, but about the changed heart. The new heart is not predisposed to evil. We will still sin, but we are no longer enslaved by it. There is no longer anything in us that is unable to refrain from sin. We have the power to say, “No!” We can resist temptation that comes our way. The heart now longs for that which is good. (Ezekiel 36:26)

*11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.* Those who hate have shown they are in darkness, blinded to spiritual realities. They haven’t allowed the light of Christ to release them from sin against Him, so they will not release others from sins against them. They demand an apology while refusing to repent to their Maker for all their offenses against Him. (Matthew 18:32-33) In fact, God is often the One they hate the most.

It is often the case that the sin of others has so wounded their lives that have become bitter against God, as if He should have stepped in and miraculously prevented people from exercising their will. We would call God a tyrant if He did, and we call Him uncaring when He doesn’t. Reality is that we just want it our way. We want to hold grudges, but we want God to forgive our continual disobedience toward Him. Hatred is the clear fruit of a soul that is in darkness.

It is amazing to see the forgiveness of sincere believers to the most unimaginable wrongs, and yet it is expected. Why? Because we are to be like our Father who continually forgives us when we come to Him and confess our sins.

Let us close by returning to verse 6. *6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.* The first time that verse really gripped me, I didn’t get all the implications, but I knew I was in trouble. There was no way I could say I lived like Jesus. It called me to a deeper commitment. It challenged me to go further in my spiritual life and let go of the things I clung to that were holding me back. It still does. (Hebrews 12:1) It will until the day I see Him face to face. (Philippians 3:20-21)

Do you claim to live in Him? Then you must walk as Jesus did. That means listening to your heavenly Father and living according to His leading. It means learning the Scriptures and letting them guide you. You must love your brothers with Jesus’ kind of love. That is obeying His commands, and that is proof that you know God.

**Commented [notes34]:** 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. Ezek 36:26 (NIV)

**Commented [notes35]:** 32 "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' Matt 18:32-33 (NIV)

**Commented [notes36]:** Hebrews 12:1 (NIV) 1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

**Commented [notes37]:** 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. Phil 3:20-21 (NIV)