



We saw last week that John made a bold claim: God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. He said you can't claim to know him and walk in the darkness. If you claim to know him, you'll show that by walking in the light. Part of that means you have a sensitivity to sin. You don't want to sin, you try not to sin, but when you do sin, you run to God and confess your sin and he forgives you because of what Jesus has done on the cross. Remember, there was a group of people in John's churches claiming to know God and walk in the light and even be without sin, but at the same time their lives were full of sin.

As we look at this week's passage John is going to get more specific about what it looks like to walk in the light. How can I be sure that I'm living a life that's authentically Christian? How do I know I know him? Doesn't it go deeper than bumper stickers and t-shirts and leaving a Bible on my desk at work?

This reminds me of a funny story. A painter took on a job where a woman wanted him to paint her living room the color of a small paint chip she presented to him. He mixed the colors and compared again and again and again until he had the perfect color. He then spent a week painting the room and when it was finished called in the woman to check his work. She compared the chip to the color of the room and said, "Nope, it's not the exact color. Do it again." So the painter mixed and mixed and mixed colors until he had the exact shade and spent the next week painting the room again. He called her into the room and she again compared the chip to the wall color and said, "This still isn't the right color." Right then the phone rang and she left to answer it. The painter was telling this story to his friend and told him how when the woman came back from her phone call and looked again, she said, "Hey, I guess I was wrong. It **is** the right color. It **is** a match," and she paid him for his work. The friend asked, "Well, what happened? Did the person on the other end of the call convince her it was the right color?" The painter said, "No, when she left the room, I painted the chip."

I believe that's what many so-called Christians are doing today: painting the chip. Instead of trying to match our lives to what the Scriptures say about authentic Christianity, we take the easy way out and change the standards. And usually we end up with a surface coat; a thin veneer which is a cheap substitute of the real thing.

So in 1 John 2:3–11 John shares two characteristics of those who know him.

We Know That We Know Him Because We Obey His Commands

Let's start with verses 3–6.

We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

First, we know we know him because we obey him. Remember, John just got done talking about what to do when we sin and how Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, but John doesn't want to give the wrong impression. The true believer's life isn't characterized by sin, but by obedience. He says, "*...if we keep his commands*" you can know you know him. You don't have to live in doubt or fear. The false teachers were causing these people to doubt their own authenticity as believers, but John assures them: You can know you know him if you obey him.

Now we've already seen that doesn't mean we never sin or stumble. He's not talking about isolated acts of sin; he's talking about that which characterizes our life; that which is ongoing, continuous and habitual. You can't live in ongoing disobedience and say you know God. That's a lie; the truth isn't in you if you say that. If you know him, you'll have a new aversion to sin, and when you do sin, you'll confess it.

We talked last week about how fundamental to the Christian life is this idea of change. When we enter into a relationship with Jesus, we change. We're a new creation. He comes to live within us. We get a new heart. We understand we have a new Master and we no longer have the right to run our own life. It's like, "You drive the car. I'm finished." In fact, the reason we came to him in the first place is we realized we made a mess of our lives and wanted him to take over.

By the way, don't change this around. You can't come to know God by trying to keep his commands. That's impossible. You come to know him by faith in Jesus and that results in keeping his commands. Martin Luther made the mistake of trying, as a monk, to know God by keeping his commands. He made a desperate effort to do everything he felt God required of him so he might know God. He beat himself, spent days fasting, laid for long, agonizing hours on the cold floor of his monastery cell,

but it only drove him to despair. It was only when by faith alone through grace alone he came to know God and really began to change. It must always come in that order. We receive Christ by faith, by believing his promise and accepting his invitation. When we do, he comes quietly into our life and begins his work of change.

We might ask, what does John mean by God's commands? Jesus said something quite similar. He said to his disciples in the Upper Room the night of his betrayal, *"If you love me, keep my commands"* (Jn 14:15). A little later he said, *"Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me"* (Jn. 14:21). His commands are found in his word. Notice down in verse 5 he talks about the one who *"obeys his word."* In his word, God gives us all kinds of commands. We don't make up the commands. We don't get to decide which ones we like and agree with and which we can ignore. We live our lives by his word, not our feelings, and not what our friends say.

It's easy to look at this as following a bunch of rules, but it goes deeper than that. Certainly, some of his commands have to do with outward behavior, but so many of them have to do with matters of the heart. Repeatedly, Jesus applied the Ten Commandments to the deeper issues of the heart. Remember, "You've heard that it was said, 'You shall not murder,' but I tell you if you're angry with your brother or sister and call them a fool you're under God's judgment" (Matt. 5:21-22). And then everyone's favorite, "You've heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery,' but I tell you anyone who looks at a person lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart" (Matt. 5:27-28).

The commands of Jesus go deep. One of the things we must come to grips with is we can't change our own heart by ourselves. Thankfully, the Spirit of God comes to live within us and he begins a lifelong process of changing us from the inside out. It doesn't all happen overnight, but he produces fruit in our life like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self control. It's like those boats in the America's Cup. It cost 100 million dollars to make those things. Guess what? Without any wind, they'd just sit dead in the water. Without the wind of the Holy Spirit in our lives, our hearts will never change.

Another thing we must come to grips with is obedience always comes down to trust. We experience this in parenting all the time. If you have small kids, you tell them not to cross a busy street, not to jump on the bed, to eat their vegetables, to do their homework. That's just part of parenting. But, let's face it, there are times when our rules don't make any sense at all to our kids. "Why shouldn't I jump on the bed, it's fun?" This is where trust comes in. We want our kids to trust us enough to obey us even when it doesn't make sense to them. There are times when we think we know better than God. God says, "I want you to be open

handed with your resources. I want you to be generous. I want you to meet needs. You do that and I'll take care of you." But then things get tight and we start holding on to what we have. It's all about trust. God says, "I want you to be equally yoked in marriage. I want you to marry someone who shares your love for me and will be a full partner with you in serving me." But then we fall in love with someone and we begin to rationalize and look for loopholes and find reasons why we're the exception to the rule. The truth is we think we know better than God. We don't really trust that our Father is looking out for us.

Notice he says for those who obey his word, *"love for God is truly made complete in them."* Literally, he says, "the love of God is truly made complete in them." That can refer to our love for God or God's love for us or maybe even both. Here's how I see it: When I'm choosing to not obey his commands, my love relationship with my heavenly Father is marred. For that love we share to reach its fullest expression, for it to be made complete, I need to listen to him. I need to obey him. Again, it's the same way with my kids. I love my kids. As they grew up, I loved my kids when they obeyed me and I loved them when they didn't obey me. But, when they didn't obey me, that love relationship was marred and what they felt wasn't my love but my wrath; my judgment. I still loved them, but they weren't enjoying my love. Do you want to enjoy that love relationship with your Father? Then trust him enough to obey him.

There's something else I want you to see here and this will blow your mind. In verse 6 he makes an astounding statement: *"Whoever claims to live (abide) in him must live (walk) as Jesus did."* Did he really say that? One of things we know is Jesus obeyed the Father's commands. Again, in the Upper Room he said, *"If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love"* (Jn. 15:10) Remember the What Would Jesus Do fad from a few years ago? There's some truth to that. We should ask what he'd do. I don't believe this means we mimic him. "Jesus never owned a house, so neither will I. Jesus never got married, so I won't either. Jesus called people snakes, so I can too." Instead, this is the kind of imitation that involves him living his life in and through us. Notice it says, *"...those who live (abide) in him."* We don't just ask what he'd do, although that's part of it, but we also stay connected to him in the process. That's what Jesus did. He once said, *"...it is the Father, living in me, who is doing this work"* (Jn. 14:10) That is, "I'm not doing this; it's the Father who dwells in me; he's doing it. I'm just available to him." How did Jesus walk? He walked in unbroken fellowship and dependence upon the Father living in him. Our attitude is, "I can do this myself!" We think we have the ability in ourselves to be like Jesus, and if we fail him the whole program falls apart, but if we do it God should be eternally grateful to us for our faithfulness. I could never play basketball and jump as high as LeBron James. It

would be ridiculous to even try. But if the spirit of LeBron came into my life, then and only then could I do the kind of work he does.

We Know That We Know Him Because We Love Our Brothers and Sisters

Now when we talk about God's commands, we can't help but think of what Jesus said it all boiled down to. Remember that guy came to him and asked what's the greatest commandment, and Jesus responded by saying, "All the 600 plus commandments in the Old Testament boil down to this: love God with your whole being and love your neighbor as yourself." So, it's no surprise what John says next in verses 7–11.

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. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.

John started by saying we know we know him because we obey him. Here he gets more specific and says we know we know him because we love our brothers and sisters in Christ. By the way, he's going to come back to this repeatedly throughout this book. You see, this was one of the problems with the Gnostics. They didn't love ordinary believers; they excluded them and saw themselves as superior to them. So John wants to expose what they're doing.

By the way, that's not an unloving thing to do. John has some very strong things to say, like, if you hate your fellow believers, you're in the darkness. We think, "Don't be judgmental, John, They're just doing their best. They're just doing what they believe is right. Everyone has the right to their opinion." We think love means you're nice to everyone and never say a mean thing and just accept whatever anyone wants to do as okay, but that's not what John models here. This is more like "tough love." This is a willingness to speak the truth in love and tell people they're wrong.

So John starts out and says this command to love one another is both old and new. It's old because we've been telling you this from the very start. Ever since we preached the gospel to you, we've been telling you to love one another. Isn't that interesting? That tells us this message to love one another ought to be part of the most basic instruction we give to new believers. Right off the

bat, we need to encourage new believers that being a Christian means you're joining a new family and your relationship with your new family is part of the bread and butter of the Christian life. You can't grow without close, loving, honest relationships with other believers. So, John says this is nothing new. We've been telling you this from the start.

But then he says it's also a new commandment. It's like one of those old/new things. You know how you buy a really old piece of furniture because they don't make furniture like that anymore. It has the old tongue and groove joints. It's not some kind of composite wood, but it's solid maple or walnut. But, it still needs to be restored. Gouges need to be stripped and refinished. Slats and spindles need to be redone. Rusted out screws need to be replaced. A few parts need to be re-glued. The nice thing is many of the products we have today are better than when the piece was made, so if you're careful you can end up with an even better piece of furniture than it was in its original condition!

So this old commandment to love one another is new and better because Jesus gave it a new quality. Remember what Jesus said? *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another"* (John 13:34). The command to love one another isn't new, but when he says, *"...as I have loved you, so you must love one another,"* that's new. It's the same command, but it's filled with a new meaning and given a higher quality because of the way Jesus loved us. How did he love us? He died for us. He gave his life up for us. He took the blame and endured the punishment for something we did. He didn't do it because we're particularly lovable or even likable. Paul says in Romans, *"For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:7,8). It's new because no one has ever loved like that.

But now **we** are called to love like that. Notice John says this new commandment is seen *"in him and in you."* I'd expect him to say it was seen in him, but he also says it's seen in you. And the fact that it's seen in you means, as he says, *"the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining."* Jesus came to usher in a new age of light and love, and the fact that we see that love not only in Jesus but in us means a new age is dawning. It's not here yet in its fullness. That will only happen when Jesus returns, but we can see the light on the horizon. I think of the ways I've seen the love of Christ demonstrated in the people of CPC over the past 27 years. It's astounding to me. Last night we had almost 90 people at our house in a gathering of young couples at CPC. One of the couples told me the reason they started coming to CPC was that they were part of a ministry to homeless people called "Street Church" in Redwood City and they kept meeting these volunteers from this church called CPC and more than anyone

else they loved on these people. Man, that made my pastor's heart proud! "It's true in him and in you."

Notice John talks in very black and white terms. You either love your fellow believers or you hate them. There are no gray areas for John. If you don't love them, you hate them. There's no in-between. There's no, "Well, I don't like so and so. He annoys me so I just sort of ignore him." You don't have the right to do that. You can be annoyed at a fellow believer, but what do you do with that? You can be disappointed by a fellow believer, but what do you do with that? You can be hurt by a fellow believer, but what do you do with that? You can even be angry at a fellow believer, but what do you do with that anger? We move beyond being annoyed to hatred when we cut that person out of our lives. We move beyond disappointment to hatred when we gossip about that person. We move beyond hurt to hatred when we try to hurt them as badly as they've hurt us. We move beyond anger to hatred when we let bitterness fester.

Let me ask you—Who do you hate? How do you justify that? Let me ask you something else—Would God be justified in hating you? What have you done to him? Do you think you ever annoy God? Do you ever disappoint him or hurt him or anger him? Ephesians says, *"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you"* (Eph. 4:32 NASB). How much has he forgiven you? Before he forgave you, did he put you on probation? Did he withhold love and forgiveness until you showed you really meant to change?

John closes this section by saying our choice to withhold love affects our perspective on everything. He says, *"But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them."* John is tracing the progressive nature of hatred here. The one who hates his brother is in the darkness and has no idea where it will lead. He goes blindly on, stumbling on in his hateful attempt to do evil to his friend, or brother, or companion, whoever it may be. But the result is, he's only damaging himself and all he loves. John says, "The darkness has blinded them." The word means "to make insensitive." It implies that if we live in this way, we ultimately come to the place where we no longer can respond. Hatred hardens our heart. This is the warning that runs all through the Scriptures about the

nature of human life. When we give way to feelings of hatred we inevitably harden our own heart.

This should be very challenging for us. You can't say you know God and just cut a brother or sister out of your life. I know stuff happens. But how are we any different from the world if we just treat people like they treat us? How are we any different if we just befriend people we have a natural affinity with? Who do you love that you never would have loved if you didn't know God? Knowing God isn't proven by our claims or our feelings or our spiritual experiences, but by love for his people; all of them that God puts into our lives.

How do we know we know him? It's very simple: we know we know him because we obey him, and that shows up most of all in our love for one another. How can we possibly live up to this? Only if we remember what he called us at the start of verse 7. "Dear friends" isn't a very good translation. A better translation is "Beloved." You've heard of *agape* love; well, the Greek word is here is *agapeto*. John is addressing them as those who are loved; those who are the beloved of God. It's his love that changes us from those who rebel against his commands to those who love his commands. It's his love that changes us from those who hate his people to those who love his people.

Friday I had the privilege of attending the final adoption signing of Brenden Judah Hall, the third child of Rob and Missy Hall. Rob is our North Campus Pastor. There were 33 of us there to officially welcome Brendan into the Hall family. As we were sitting there waiting to be called in to the courtroom I was thinking of how the whole trajectory of this child's life will be different because he's now part of a family who loves him. Everything has changed for him. It's the same with us. As John says later in this very letter, *"We love because he first loved us."* You can't know that love and remain unchanged. We know we know him because we obey him, and that shows up most of all in our love for one another.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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