

The Books of 1, 2, and 3 John

Lesson 3: Keeping His Commandments; Knowing Him -- 1 John 2:3–17

We use the word “know” in a hundred easy ways. I know that road. I know that song. I know him, we say of a man we have met twice. But there is another kind of knowing, the kind a husband means after forty years of marriage, the kind that has been tested by time and proven by a thousand shared days. John is interested in that deeper knowing, and he asks a piercing question: how can you tell whether you really know God, or only know about Him?

His answer is bracing in its simplicity. “By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.” Not by how much we feel, not by how religious we sound, but by whether His word actually shapes how we live. The one who says “I know him” but does not keep His commandments, John says flatly, is a liar. Real knowledge of God shows up in obedience, and obedience grows into love, until keeping His word is no longer a burden but the very air we breathe.

Then John holds up a single command that is somehow both old and new: love one another. It is old because it was there from the beginning. It is new because Jesus has shown us what it looks like and poured it into a new people. And the test is honest and exposing: you cannot claim to walk in the light while hating your brother. Light and love travel together, or neither is really there.

Finally John lifts our eyes to where our love is aimed. Do not love the world, he says, not the people in it, but the whole system of craving and pride that pulls our hearts away from the Father. The world and all its desires are passing away. But the one who does the will of God abides forever. So this passage sets two loves before us and asks the question we must each answer: where, really, is your heart?

Group Discussion: John says that the way we know we truly know God is that we keep His commandments. Why do you think we are so tempted to measure our relationship with God by our feelings or our religious activity rather than by our obedience?

Personal Reflection: John warns against loving the world, “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life.” Which of these three has the strongest grip on your heart right now, and how is it competing with your love for the Father?

Read 1 John 2:3–17

Study Questions

1. John says, “By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments” (v. 3). What does this teach us about the relationship between truly

knowing God and obeying Him, and what does it expose about a faith that claims to know God but ignores His word?

2. John says that in the one who keeps God's word, "truly the love of God is perfected" (v. 5). Think honestly about your own obedience: do you obey God mostly out of fear or duty, or is your obedience growing into genuine love? What would help it grow?
3. John says, "whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" (v. 6). What does it mean to walk as Jesus walked, and why is the life of Christ, and not merely our own ideas of goodness, the pattern for the Christian?
4. John speaks of loving and hating our brother as the test of whether we are walking in the light (vv. 9–11). Is there a brother or sister you are holding in your heart at arm's length, with resentment or coldness? What is that revealing, and what does Christ call you to do about it?
5. John calls the command to love one another both an "old commandment" and "a new commandment" (vv. 7–8). In what sense is it old, and in what sense has Jesus made it new, and how does His coming change what love among God's people looks like?
6. John addresses children, fathers, and young men at different stages of spiritual maturity (vv. 12–14). Where are you in that picture right now, and what is the next step of growth God is calling you to take?
7. John commands, "Do not love the world or the things in the world" (v. 15), yet God "so loved the world" that He sent His Son. How do we make sense of this, and what exactly is the "world" that we must not love?
8. John says the love of the world and the love of the Father cannot live together in the same heart (v. 15). What is one specific worldly attachment that is quietly crowding out your love for God, and what would it look like to loosen its grip?
9. John exposes the world as "the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life," all of which "is passing away" (vv. 16–17). Why is it foolish to give our hearts to what is passing away, and how does setting our love on doing the will of God change the whole direction of a life?
10. Look back across this passage, from knowing God through obedience, to loving one another, to refusing the love of the world. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you, through this passage, into someone whose love is set on the Father and on doing His will.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 13:34–35, the new commandment to love as Jesus loved; John 14:15, 21–24, loving Jesus shown by keeping His commandments; Matthew 6:19–24, laying up treasure in heaven and the impossibility of serving two masters; Romans 12:1–2, not conformed to this world but transformed; James 4:4, friendship with the world as enmity with God.