

How Can I Know?

Lesson 3: The Obedience Test: Keeping His Commands -- 1 John 2:3-6

Imagine a man who tells everyone he is devoted to his wife. He says it warmly and often, to coworkers, to neighbors, to anyone who will listen. Yet he never calls when he travels, forgets every anniversary, makes no room for her in his schedule, and arranges his whole life as though she did not exist. At some point the words stop meaning anything. We would not say he is lying exactly; he may even believe himself. But love that never shows up in a single changed action is not really love. It is a feeling that evaporates the moment it is asked to cost something.

John knew that the same thing can happen with God. People can say they know Him, claim a relationship with Him, even feel sincere about it, while their daily lives run on as though He had never spoken. So John offers a test, plain and bracing: "By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments" (1 John 2:3). Not by how spiritual we feel. Not by a prayer we once prayed. We know that we know Him by whether His words actually shape the way we live.

Now, this is exactly the kind of verse that can be heard in two opposite and equally mistaken ways. The careless hearer waves it off, assuming that knowing God is mostly a matter of belief and feeling, and that obedience is optional, a bonus for the especially keen. The anxious hearer panics, scanning his imperfect obedience and concluding that since he stumbles he must not know God at all. John means to correct both. He is not setting up a standard of flawless performance, and he is not making obedience optional. He is describing the unmistakable evidence that a real relationship with God is present and growing.

Here is the heart of it for our study on assurance. John gives us this test not to torment the sincere but to reassure them. A life that is genuinely, if imperfectly, learning to keep God's commands is a life in which the Spirit is at work. The desire to obey, the grief when we fail, the slow reshaping of our choices around His will: these are not the things that earn salvation, but they are the fingerprints of a salvation already received. Read these verses, and let the obedience test do its reassuring work.

Group Discussion: John says, "By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments" (v. 3). Why do you think people find it so easy to claim a relationship with God while living as though His commands were optional? How can we tell the difference between truly knowing God and simply knowing about Him?

Personal Reflection: John ties knowing God to actually keeping His word. Where in your own life is there a gap between what you say you believe and how you actually live? Name one command of God that your daily choices have quietly been treating as optional.

Read 1 John 2:3-6

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 John mean by "knowing" God here, and why does he point to obedience as the evidence of it?
2. Think honestly about your own obedience to God. Is there a command of His that you have quietly filed away as optional or negotiable? What would it look like this week to take that command seriously as the word of the One you say you love?
3. John speaks bluntly: "Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (v. 4). Why does John use such strong language, and what is he warning against?
4. It is possible to obey God outwardly while the heart remains far from Him. Examine your own obedience: where is it flowing from love for God, and where has it hardened into mere duty, habit, or fear of looking bad?
5. John promises, "Whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected" (v. 5). What does it mean that God's love is "perfected," or brought to its goal, in those who keep His word?

6. John says the one who claims to abide in Christ “ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (v. 6). When you look honestly at how Jesus lived, in what specific way is He calling you to walk more like Him right now?
7. Some treat obedience as legalism and assume that emphasizing it undermines grace. How does John relate obedience to genuine faith, and why is keeping God’s commands not the same thing as legalism?
8. Obedience often costs us most in the small, hidden choices no one else sees. Where is God asking you to obey in a place where it would be easy to cut corners because no one would know? How does your private obedience reveal what you truly believe about God?
9. Some teach that since we are saved by faith, obedience is optional, a kind of bonus for the especially committed. How does this passage answer the idea of salvation by “faith only,” and how do we hold faith and obedience together without falling into either license or legalism?
10. Look back across this lesson on keeping God’s commands. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses, and the single truth from 1 John 2:3–6 that you most need to carry into the coming week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 14:15, if you love me, you will keep my commandments; James 2:14–26, faith without works is dead and cannot save; Matthew 7:21–27, not everyone who says 'Lord, Lord' but the one who does the Father's will; Luke 6:46, why call me Lord and not do what I say; Titus 2:11–14, the grace of God training us to live godly lives.