

THE TEST OF OBEDIENCE

1 John 2:3-6

Intro: In 1 John 5:13 we have learned that the Apostle John wrote this, the first of his three epistles which are in the Bible, that those who had trusted in Christ “might know” that they had eternal life. He meant that they could know with absolute certainty that they had been saved. Furthermore he was indicating how important it was that we know this. And so in the epistle he gives us some tests by which we can be assured that we truly have eternal life. He described eternal life as a life of fellowship “with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” It is a life in which the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has become our life. We have been united eternally to the Father and to Christ, and we have been changed by this wonderful work of salvation, changed so that progressively we are becoming more and more like Christ. We have been born into the family of God, and, as we grow we are taken on more of the divine family resemblance. People who knew me as a child and who watched me grow up, used to tell me when I became an adult, “Dwight, you are looking more like your Dad all of the time.” I always took that as a compliment, but I couldn’t take credit for it. It happened because I was born as his son. This is what happens when we are born into God’s family. As I have told many of you before, Dr. Chafer, my beloved theology teacher in seminary used to tell us that God is so delighted with His Son that He is filling heaven with people who are like He is.

If you are reading 1 John each week (and I sincerely hope that you are), you have probably noticed and been blessed by the second verse of chapter three, where we read,

2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

Actually the word “sons” is not the best translation because the Apostle John used the word *τέκνα* which is the Greek word for *children*, or even *born ones*. That is how we got into God’s family; we were born into His family. And we are being made like our Lord. That is why the Apostle John said that “we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” But even now, before that work of salvation is completed in any of us, we need to be living like our Lord lived. In chapter 2, verse 6, the Apostle John wrote, “He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.” If we are walking like our Lord walked, it means that we are living like He lived, not perfectly, but so much so that

the people of the world will see that we are a part of God's family.

We have learned that the starting point has to do with the character of God. This was the foundational message that John wanted the people of God to understand. This is the basic truth about God that all of us need to understand. What is it? You see it in verse 5 of chapter 1. (Quote.)

Most people don't know anything about God. Millions of people say that they don't believe there is a God. The Bible says that there are no true atheists because God has put in every human heart the knowledge that there is a God. The Apostle John said that "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." This means that God is a holy God, a righteous God, and that there is not even a single trace of sin in Him. He not only does not sin, and has not sinned, *but He cannot sin!* You and I need to be very careful about how we use His Name. You hear profanity on radio and television all of the time. Some people can't talk without taking the Lord's Name in vain. To do so is to commit a sin that is in the same category with God that murder is, that adultery is, that stealing is, that idolatry is.

So, since God is light, this makes us understand that anyone who has been born of God is going to be very, very careful not to sin. The Apostle John says that if you claim to know God and His Son Jesus Christ, and yet go on living in sin, you are a liar, and the truth is not in you. That is what he tells us beginning with chapter 1, verse 6 on down through chapter 2, verse 2. That is the first test that you and I need to apply to our lives, and pass it. For years there have been telling us that there are no absolutes, that we can't say this is wrong and that is right. But the people who try to get us to believe that nonsense, know in their hearts that they are not telling the truth. Sin is sin, and always under every condition it is sin. I'll tell you something about sin, and I know that most of you older people will agree with me, and it is this: for those of us who know the Lord, the older we get, the more terrible sin becomes to us.

What is sin? Sin is anything that is contrary to the nature of God. Sin is any and everything that is displeasing to God. Where do you learn what is displeasing to God? It is all that is in this Book. But, in addition, God has given all of us a conscience which confirms to us the sinfulness of sin. If you can live in such a way that it doesn't bother you when you do something wrong, or say something wrong, or think something wrong, then don't tell people that you are a child of God. Read 1 John 1:6

through 2:2 until that truth really gets into your heart and you begin to see that a true Christian is never comfortable with sin.

Now today in 1 John 2, verses 3 through 6, we come to another test. Let me read these verses to you. (Read 1 John 2:3-6.)

When many people talk about the commandments, they think only of the ten commandments which God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai. And it is good whenever they do even that much. The reason that there has been such an outcry recently about having the ten commandments on federal or state property, is because God gave the ten commandments, not so we could earn salvation by our own good works, but the ten commandments were given to teach people the meaning of sin. Listen to what the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 3:19-20:

19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin .

The Law puts all of us in the same category before God: GUILTY. You may think that it doesn't make any difference what you do, or what you say, or even what you think, *but try telling that to God!* "By the law is the knowledge of sin." The Law never saved anyone. The Law was given to show us our sinfulness, and therefore it shows that we need a Savior.

But the person who reads the Bible knows that we don't have a special priesthood today like the Jews did in OT times. Nor are we required to bring the sacrifices that the Jews brought to the Tabernacle and then to the Temple because Christ came as the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. Those animal sacrifices were types which our Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled by His own sacrificial death on the Cross.

But does that mean that since we are not saved by our own works, and because Christ has died to save sinners from their sins, does this mean that we don't have to be concerned about the commandments of Scripture?

Let me take you back to the Gospel of John for a few moments this morning, beginning with chapter 13, and then looking briefly at John 14.

The Lord was with His disciples in the Upper Room just hours before His

arrest and crucifixion. It was a most important time for Him to speak to His disciples, and it was a most important time for them to learn what He had to say. He spoke about commandments, *His* commandments. Look with me at verses 34 and 35 in John 13.

What was “new” about the commandment that the Lord gave His disciples here? The Lord Jesus Himself said that the second greatest commandment in the Law of Moses, was not one of the ten, but it was the commandment about how they, as the Lord’s people were to love each other. You remember it, don’t you? You will find it in Leviticus 19:18 where we read these words:

18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

How was the “new commandment” of our Lord different? It was not that they were to love each other as they loved themselves, but that they were to love each other as the Lord had loved them. And then the Lord added, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” In our desire to get people to listen to the Gospel, we need to remember that it is our love for each other, a self-sacrificing love, that is going to cause the world to realize that there really is something to the Gospel.

But now turn to John 14. Look with me at verse 15, and then verse 21, and then at verse 23. The Lord measures our love for Himself by our obedience to His commandments. It is good to tell the Lord that we love Him, but our words must be backed up by daily obedience to the Word of God. There are hundreds of commandments in the Scriptures that tell us what the Lord wants us to be, and what He does not want us to be. And many of the commandments tell us what the Lord wants us to do, and what He doesn’t want us to do.

Now let me ask you a question. I am assuming that we all have read our Bibles this morning before we came to church. Or, if you didn’t have time this morning, you have surely been reading your Bible this week. How many of the Lord’s commandments did you notice in your reading? We have the Lord’s commandments in our Bibles, but we have to read our Bibles to find them. Our main purpose in life should be to show our love for the Lord, but we can only do that by seeking to obey the commandments of the Lord. These two verses, John 14:21 and 23, will do more to transform our lives than anything else. But we need to

remember that only by the enabling grace of God will we be able to keep His commandments. Remember Philippians 2:12 and 13:

12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Now in our text, how do we know that we know the Lord? By keeping His commandments. What are we to think about a person who claims to be a Christian, but does not keep the commandments of the Lord? What will happen in the life of a person who consistently seeks to obey the Word of God? Three things: first, the love of God will be perfected in him; second, his assurance will be strengthened; third, his life will begin to be like the Lord's life.

We need to be doers of the Word, not just hearers only. If we know what the Lord wants us to do, and then do it, we find joy in doing what the Lord wants us to do.

Now, in the time that remains, I want to briefly go through 1 John and point out to you fifteen practical commandments that the Apostle John has given to us. There aren't as many in this epistle because John's main objective seems to be teaching us about how all of these evidences of salvation work together. But follow in your Bible as we look at the commandments the Apostle John has given us that come from the Lord:

God's Commandments in 1 John

2:1 - "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not."

2:15 - "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world."

2:24 - "Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning."

2:28 - "And now, little children, abide in Him."

3:8 - "Little children, let no man deceive you."

3:11 - "For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we

should love one another.”

3:13 - “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.”

3:16 - “And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

3:18 - “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”

3:23 - “And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment.”

4:1 - “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God.”

4:7 - “Beloved, let us love one another.”

4:11 - “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”

4:21 - “And this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”

5:21 - “Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.”

Concl: What is a commandment? It is not just a suggestion which we can obey or forget. In Scripture it is a loving order given to us to express our love for the Lord first, knowing that every command is given for our eternal good, and to keep us from wasting our lives in things that are not really important.

The Apostle John comes back to this subject of commandments in 1 John 3:22-24 and 5:2-3. Notice that the commandments are not “grievous.” They are not a burden, but a joy and a means of constant blessing.