

WHY ARE GOD'S COMMANDMENTS IMPORTANT FOR US?

1 John 2:3-8

Intro: Although the Apostle John says frequently in writing 1 John, “These things have I written unto you,” and then goes on to say why. Among all of these, most Bible teachers that I have known, or whose works I have read, believe that the statement in 1 John 5:13, most closely states the main purpose that the Apostle John had in writing this epistle. Let me read it for you again. (Read 1 John 5:13.)

So in his letter the Apostle John mentions various ways that we can know that we have eternal life. The first of these is our knowledge and understanding of *sin*. We have that in chapter 1 and going down into through the second verse of chapter 2. But it begins by learning that God is light, meaning that He is totally without sin, and if we are to have fellowship with Him, we must avoid sin – and that applies to sins of all kinds.

But this morning we come to a second evidence, beginning with chapter 2 and verse 3. We are going to take a special interest in the commandments of God which are recorded for us in the Bible. In fact, they are going to determine how we live.

Now not every commandment in Scripture applies to us. Many applied to Israel throughout the OT. But those commandments of God were to determine how they were to live. Some OT commandments do apply to us, but the Lord gives us discernment to know which commandments apply to us as well as to the OT people of God. But there is plenty in the Gospels, and practically all of the commandments in the NT epistles do apply to us. They tell us how the Lord wants us to live, what we are to be, what we are to do, and what we are *not* to do. The Lord Jesus told His disciples just before His arrest and crucifixion, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15), and he emphasized this with them more than once in that chapter.

Now I reminded you, as others have done, that in 1 John, the Apostle John came back to some of his subjects more than once. As you read through 1 John, you find it, as many have illustrated it, like you were climbing a circular staircase. The Apostle would touch on a subject, then go to other subjects, then come back to the subject he had mentioned before, and he does this yet a third time. In this way he was emphasizing

how important the things were that he had written to them.

Now in our text for today, the Apostle mention the Lord's commandments first in chapter 2, verses 3 through 8.

Then as we go on reading, we discover that in chapter 3, verses 22 through 24 he came back to speak of the commandments of the Lord again.

And then as you continue reading, he mentions commandments a third time in chapter 4, verse 21, and concludes what he wanted to tell us about the commandments of the Lord in chapter 5, verses 2 and 3.

When you notice verses like these, it ought to make you want to read through this epistle to note especially what commandments the Apostle John gave us in this epistle. And in the second place it ought to make you and me want to read the rest of the Bible looking for the commandments that the Lord has given to us through the writers of Scripture.

Now the prevailing theme of this epistle is fellowship with God and with His Son Jesus Christ. And we learned in chapter 1 that you and I cannot claim to have fellowship with God if we are careless about sin, that is, if we can do anything that is sin in God's sight, without being grieved about it, and without seeking forgiveness and cleansing from the Lord Himself.

Now I say the same thing about the commandments of God. They may come to us in the epistles of John, or the epistles of Paul, or the epistles of Peter, or the epistle of James, but they are actually from God. Every book of the Bible was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. So what we learn from the Bible is what God wants us to know. What the Bible tells us that is wrong with us and what we need, is what God wants us to know. And how the Bible tells us to live, is what God wants us to live, and what we are to avoid. But I say about the Lord's commandments what I said about sin, and that it is impossible to be in fellowship with God if you are not obeying the commandments of Scripture.

But now let us look at our text.

Assurance of salvation comes to a great extent through our relationship with the Word of God. And the particular part of the Word that the Apostle John had in mind were the commandments of Scripture. But the

key to this assurance is in the word “keep.” To keep the commandments is to obey the commandments. And it means that right now as you look at me, or as I look at you, this is what you are doing – obeying the Word of God. But when the Greeks used the present tense they often had in mind not only that I am doing this now, *but that this is the way I live, or am seeking to live.* A person might act like a Christian when he comes to church, but if I see him in his home or at his job on Monday morning, do I see the same kind of a person. Is he living then and on through the week like he wants me to think that he is living on Sunday.

So what the Apostle John means by verse 3 is that we can know that we know the Lord if we are keeping His commandments day after day, that the Lord’s commandments direct the way I live. Do you see the difference? Now it doesn’t mean that we keep them perfectly, but that it is our intention day by day to obey the Word of God, the commandments of Scripture. Is so, I can be assured that I know the Lord. This verse is for you, and it is for me.

In verse 4 we are back to the expression we had several times in chapter 1, the words, “If we say . . .” It is interesting to see that in the first century there was already a lot of what we can call, empty profession, that is, people who made great claims about their relationship with God and with Christ, but whose lives did not back up what they were saying with their mouths. But if we are all talk, and no walk, then to say that we know the Lord just is not true – and I am softening it more than the Apostle John did. He said if we fall into the category of verse 4 we are lying.

In verse 5 we are back to a present, continuous action in the word “keep-eth.” If we are seeking to live by the Word of God, then “verily,” truly, “the love of God is perfected.” Bishop Westcott in his commentary on 1 John, said that in every passage in the NT where this expression, “the love of God” is used, except 1 Thessalonians 3:5, it always means the love that comes from God. And for it to be perfected means that through our obedience to the Word of God we will increasingly manifest the love of God to others and even to God Himself. What is not move us to obey the Lord is His love for us, and we manifest it by our obedience in showing our love for the Lord in return.

But at the end of verse 5 the Apostle John made a very important statement which is similar to what we have been seeing in Ephesians in our

Tuesday Bible Class. And it is this: “Hereby know we that we are in Him.”

Now this is a very important point when we talk about obeying the Lord. The Lord does not give us a lot of commandments, and leave it to us to do them, to work them out in our own strength. If that is what we are doing we do not understand our fellowship with the Lord. The Lord Jesus illustrated it with the vine and the branches in John 15. There is a living union between the Christian and his Lord whereby He abides in us, and we abide in Him. The Apostle Paul expressed it this way in 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.

Without the Lord we can do nothing, and that comes right down to the way we need to obey the Lord day by day.

Now look at verse 6. How can you know that you are “abiding in Him, *i.e., in Christ?* Your life will begin to take on a similarity to the life which the Lord Jesus lived when He was here on earth. Now this is a very important point in this First Epistle of John. And I believe that it has a lot to do with distinguishing between the old commandment and the new commandment which the Apostle John mentioned in verse 7 and 8.

The Apostle John began in verse 6 by saying that he was not writing a new commandment to them, that it was the old commandment which they had from the beginning. But then in verse 8 he said that it is a new commandment. What did he mean? Was he getting mixed up in what he was saying, as we sometimes do when we get older? Do think for a moment that the Lord, or the Spirit of God, would allow such a thing to happen to one who was appointed to give us a part, and a very important part of the Word of God. There is no mistake here.

What the Apostle John was saying was that since the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His ascension into heaven, a most blessed change has taken place in the lives of the people of God. And it involves all Three Persons of the Godhead. Here we would do well to go to what is called The Upper Room Discourse in John 13, 14, 15, and 16, and refresh our minds on what the Lord Jesus said to His disciples on that

last evening He had with them before His death. For example, he said in John 14:20, “At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in Me, and I in you.” What day was He talking about? It was the day that He had just spoken to them about in John 14, verse 15, 16 and 17. Listen to our Lord’s words to His disciples in those verses:

15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.

16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;

17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

Things were to be forever changed when the Holy Spirit came to dwell for ever in the hearts of the people of God. He been *with* the Lord’s people in the OT; after the Holy Spirit was given to them, He would be with them forever.

You see this was the difference between the old command and the new commandment. The commandment was the same to love the Lord their God and to show their love by their obedience to His commandments, but there would be a stronger enablement than ever before.

Why was all of this necessary? Because through this inward divine enabling, the people of God would “walk, even as He (the Lord Jesus Christ) walked” (1 John 2:6).

Now let us go back to the beginning of this epistle and see what the Apostle John had to say about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world.

Have you noticed that, even though John was evidently writing about the Lord Jesus Christ. He did not use His Name, except to call Him “the Word of life” at the end of verse 1. He simply said that the One he was talking about was “that which was from the beginning” (and that fits our Lord, doesn’t it?). He went on to say that “we have heard” Him, and “seen” Him, and “looked upon” Him, and “handled” Him. All of that had to do with our Lord’s physical appearance, and the apostles’ relationship to Him as a human being.

But then in verse 2 John went on to say twice that “the life was manifested” to them, and John used this word twice (as he did in the Greek). “Manifested” means revealed, made known, declared to be – all of which

means that our Lord was positively made known to them as “the Life.” This means that when they looked at the Lord they just saw Him as another human being like themselves. But when they saw how He lived, what He taught, the work that He did, they knew that He had to be the Son of God. They did not know Him by His physical appearance, but they knew Him by His walk which, of course, included His talk. They had never known anyone to talk like He did. They had never known anyone to live like He did.

Now it is absolutely impossible for anyone to see the Lord Jesus Christ as the disciples saw Him as a Man upon earth. The apostles and many others were convinced of His true identity by the way He lived and what He did and what He taught. People could see that He was a true human being, but the convincing part about our Lord was the Person that He was.

The Lord Jesus was the Light of the world. The Lord said that “ye are the light of the world” now that He is gone. The light in us is Christ. God has saved us to make us like Christ. And it is the change that abiding in Christ, drawing from Him the power to be what He wants us to be, like Himself, that is the light that God will use today to awaken people to the fact that we could not be what we are, as failing as we might be, except for our relationship to the Son of God. What we are in Christ is what the Lord will use to open people’s heart to the Gospel that we present to them as to why we are what and who we are. Where we need to be changed is inwardly because only then can we show outwardly what Christ has done for us. Our talk to them is important, but it must always come second. What is most important is our walk.

Remember our Lord’s words in Matthew 5:14-16:

14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.

15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

And remember the words of the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3:15-16:

15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

Also Paul’s words in Galatians 2:20.