

1 John 2:3-6

“Do you Know that you Know”

Introduction

“Assurance,” wrote the seventeenth-century English Puritan Thomas Brooks, is a reflex act of a gracious soul, whereby he clearly and evidently sees himself in a gracious, blessed, and happy state; it is a sensible feeling, and an experimental [experiential] discerning of a man’s being in a state of grace . . . assurance is a believer’s ark, where he sits, Noah-like, quiet and still in the midst of all distractions and destructions, commotions and confusions.

But unfortunately, as Brooks goes on to say, **assurance is a pearl that most want, a crown that few wear**... Little well-grounded assurance . . . is to be found among most Christians. Most Christians live between fears and hopes, and hang, as it were, between heaven and hell, sometimes they hope that their state is good, at other times they fear that their state is bad: now they hope that all is well, and that it shall go well with them forever; anon [shortly] they fear that they shall perish by the hand of such a corruption, or by the prevalence of such or such a temptation; **and so they are like a ship in a storm, tossed here and there.** (*Heaven on Earth: A Treatise on Christian Assurance* [reprint; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982], 14, 11) (*Heaven on Earth*, 15, 11)

The writers of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1648) composed the following paragraph: This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it: yet, being enabled by the Spirit to know the things which are freely given him of God, he may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto. **And therefore it is the duty of everyone to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure, that thereby his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, in love and thankfulness to God, and**

in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience, the proper fruits of this assurance; so far is it from inclining men to looseness. (Chapter XVIII, Article III)

Trying to live the Christian life without the assurance of your salvation is like trying to drive your car while pressing the gas and the break at the same time, you don't get very far. The Apostle John is writing to genuine believers who were evidently struggling with whether they were truly converted or said another way, they were unsure if they possessed eternal life. You might have experienced this uncertainty in the past, or you may experience this periodically, or it may be something that you live with. This passage addresses at least three *area's* that will help you be able to know that you know the Lord (v.3)! You may not struggle with doubt or uncertainty and assume you do not need to hear this message. To you I commend the words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 13:5, "Examine yourself [to see] whether ye be in the faith, prove [test] your own selves." We should always put ourselves to the text of scripture so that we can be sure. So that we can know that we know the Lord. These three *area's* addresses *two groups* of people. I would like to spend our time tonight looking at them.

The first group this text addresses is the Pretenders (V.4).

V.4 - He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

1. The Pretenders

a. The pretenders Testimony that is spoken

I Know Him – To the Greeks or Gnostics and the theory that was going around, to “know” something implies that you grasp the full reality and nature of the object under consideration. I have titled this group pretenders because that is exactly what they are. They are pretending. They say “I know God” and do not keep or observe His

commandments but yet they admittedly assert that they know God. That they have fellowship with Him. That they are believers or saved.

b. The pretenders Trajectory to sin

Keepeth not his commandments. Those who testify of knowing God and do not keep His commandments walk that path of disobedience. They live a life of rebellion. They continually oppose the word of God.

“They profess that they know God; but in works they deny *him*, being abominable/detestable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate/unfit” (Titus 1:16 KJV).

John is not implying that believers or Christians never sin. That has been made clear in 1:8-2:2. This is talking about the “trajectory” or the direction of someone’s life. **A pretender is someone who confesses that they know God but continually lives in a way that contradicts that claim.** This is aiming at our character. A pretender is not a pretender because of what they do but because of who they are. Once again, the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. They live like they live because they love who they love and it’s not God! “If you love me, keep my commandments” Jesus. Conduct reveals character! Our life reveals our love. Their conduct betrays and nullifies their confession!

c. The pretenders Truth that is stated

John doesn’t mince words. He isn’t politically correct. Emboldened by the Spirit of God it is as if John looks these pretenders square in the eye and says you are a liar! If you say you know God and do not keep his commandments then you are a liar. You would

think after such a strong statement John would ease up on the next one. No. John goes in for the knockout punch. He continues by saying if you don't keep his commandments but say you know him, you are a liar and the truth is not in you! Pretenders have no truth in them.

Do you remember what we said about the Gnostic idea that you could obtain knowledge about a subject intellectually? They believed that they could achieve divine knowledge the same way and they believed that if they had knowledge on a subject they had a grasp of the full reality of that topic. They would have said they had a grasp on the full reality of God. John writes they have no truth in them which means they have no divine reality in them! Not all of it, not some of it, but none of it! Pretenders possess no life of God. No divine reality.

The second group this text addresses is the Possessors (V.5).

V.5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

2. The Possessors

a. Possessors are Committed

John transitions from pretenders and professors to the second group, possessors. Those who do possess the truth. "Whoso keepeth his word." You can see this interprets the previous verse. Those who do not know God do not keep his commandments. Those who do, keep His word. This is two ways of saying the same thing.

To keep his word means that we persist in obedience, it means that we observe Christ's teaching, it means that we do what Christ says. Those who truly possess the

truth and are really saved are committed to living by what God says. True believers are marked by their commitment to obey what Christ's commands!

b. Possessors are Complete

John continues, if you keep His commandments then the love of God is perfected in you. This simply means that the target the love of God aims for is obedience. There is not more to the Christian life after obedience, rather obedience is the goal that true love for God desires to achieve. Herein lies the difference. A true Christian loves Jesus and desires to live in a way that pleases Him, which is by obeying His word. If that is the condition of your heart then what assurance that you are complete in Christ and that God is at work in you causing you to will and to do His good pleasure!

c. Possessors are Confirmed

John continues, hereby [by this] know we that we are in Him. A person's response to God's Word reveals the reality of their standing before God. If you keep His Word, it is because His love has performed a gracious operation in you. Taking out your heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh. John says THIS is how you know that you are IN Him. This is God's word and promise to you (V.3,5)!

"Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the Lord, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They

will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “**for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.**” (Jer. 31:31–34)

Finally, I want to say a word about the purpose of this passage.

⁶ *He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.*

3. The Purpose of the Passage

- a. This passage Characterizes true Christians
 - i. This passage Comforts those Concerned
 - ii. This passage Condemns the Counterfeit

These verses differentiate the unregenerate from the regenerate; Paul refers to the unregenerate as “children of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2), while Peter identifies the regenerate “as obedient children” (1 Peter 1:14). Jesus said, “**If ye [you] love me, keep my commandments**” (John 14:15). “**If ye [you] keep My commandments, ye [you] shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love**” (John 15:10).

“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.” Those who possess the truth are both challenged and characterized by the realization of their obligation to God. It is no trivial matter to say you’re a Christian. To claim to know God is a weighty claim. In our modern day this claim is made by foolish people every day but it still matters. It is still weighty. And such a claim obligates a life lived in conformity to our confession. In fact a life that contradicts our confession nullifies it.

A profession of faith is worth nothing. John the Baptist call still echoes in our ears today, “bring forth fruit meet [worthy] of repentance.” James said faith without works is dead! Saying I

have faith is meaningless unless I live a life that is the fruit of my professed faith! I am going to give the closing word to the Apostle Peter who describes in detail how we can make sure of our salvation!

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue [moral excellence]; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance [self-control]; and to temperance patience [perseverance]; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity [love]. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither *be* barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:5–11).

Conclusion

If this is the direction of your life and the aim of your heart’s desire, then you can be assured or you can know that you have come to know the Lord, but if this does not describe you then it doesn’t matter what prayer you prayed, what experience you had, or even the sincerity of your heart, you do not know the Lord. The implication of these verses are simple. If you aren’t described as a possessor, repent of your sin by letting go of everything you are trusting in and cling to Jesus Christ! If you are saved but live with doubt and fear, if you can see the fruit of your faith by the character of your life being confirmed to the image of Christ then you have reason to be comforted! The same one who promised to save you has assured you that He has if you are living in submission to Him by obeying His word!

Assurance of salvation, in the subjective sense, comes by examining one's life to see if there is evidence of the Spirit's working in one's attitudes. Such spiritual dispositions manifest themselves in corresponding acts of "love, joy, peace," and so forth, in submission to the commands of Scripture. Assurance comes from obeying God's commandments in Scripture. John

MacArthur, *1-3 John*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary; Accordance electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 2007), 54-55.

https://accordance.bible/link/read/MacArthur_NTC-3#64338 John MacArthur, *1-3 John*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary;

Accordance electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 2007), 55.

https://accordance.bible/link/read/MacArthur_NTC-3#64343