**WE KNOW GOD BY OBEYING HIS COMMANDS**

October 14, 2012

1 John 2:3-27

Key Verse: 2:3 “We know that we have come to him if we obey his commands.”

Last week we learned that Jesus is the Lamb of God. He was crucified on the cross for our sins to make us a kingdom and priests to serve our God and reign with him for ever and ever. He is worthy to receive honor and glory and praise. Right now he is in heaven to speak to the Father in our defense whenever we sin. So if we confess our sins, our heavenly Father will forgive all our sins and restore fellowship with him and with one another. St. John fights against two kinds of false teachers. One was those who thought of Christianity as like science, an intellectual exercise. Their way of believing God was just talking a lot; they did not practice the love of God. They are pleasure-seeking people in their great talkativeness. The other kind was the mystics, who thought of religion as emotional experience. It was a kind of religious drug. Its aim was to escape from ordinary life. They had no regards for God’s commandments. St. John warns the early Christians to practice what they know of Jesus. John also teaches them that they must tightly hold on to the basic knowledge of Jesus, so that they would not be deceived by false teachers.

**First**, we know God by obeying his commands. God is invisible; it is often hard to really feel certain that we know him and are having real fellowship with him. Many people chat online with strangers and think they’ve become friends but when someone asks “do you really know this person?” they begin to question themselves. Such is the same way with many of us when we honestly talk about knowing God. Many Christians believe wrongly that we can study our way into a closer relationship with God. But often theologians who studied the Bible in their entire lives do not know God at all. They say and do many un-Christian things. Since knowledge is not the way, what is the way to know God? Look at verse 3. “We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.” The key words or verbs in this sentence are “know and obey.” Here “know” is used to also mean “we can be certain.” There is a way we can know him and it is by obeying his commands. If we go back to the beginning of the creation, we discover that it was through disobedience that man lost fellowship with God. So it makes perfect sense that the only way to restore fellowship with God is through obedience. We cannot expect to come to know God unless we obey his commands.

Look at verse 4. “The man who says ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar and the truth is not in him.” When we obey God’s commands, there is real spiritual union between us and him. When Abraham heard and obeyed just one command from God “To leave your country, your people and your father’s house and go to the land I will show you,” he came to know God intimately. When some servants obeyed Jesus by filling the jars to the brim at the wedding in Cana in John chapter 2, they could experience God’s glory and power and as a result put their faith in him. In both of these cases they didn’t know much about God at the time. Abraham had no Bible and the servants had just met Jesus, but by faith they trusted and obeyed God’s command. Some people study the Bible for years and years and never have real fellowship with the Father because they won’t obey. But another can study just 1 passage, accept it, and obey it, and can give you the most heart moving testimony. Going further in our walk with God starts having an absolute attitude toward obeying whatever word you do have. In the time of Ezekiel, people loved hearing the message, but they did not put them into practice. God’s judgment fell on them. Ezekiel 33:31-32 says, “My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.”

One of the most important commands we should obey is “Love another.” Jesus said in John 13:34, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” This command is an old one from the Old Testament. But it became new because of the new and dramatic illustration of divine love on the cross through Jesus. Before Jesus’ time, we could say that nobody had ever experienced love the way Jesus showed throughout his life. Jesus humbled himself to come down to have fellowship with dirty sinners like you and me. Jesus washed disciples’ feet in order to show the full extent of his love. Real love requires a sacrifice. Real love requires denying ourselves and doing something which we wouldn’t naturally want to do in order to help someone else. People today have a hard time to love because they cannot sacrifice and they cannot forgive. But when Jesus was being sacrificed for the sins of the world he shouted “Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” If you want to walk in the light, you must learn to love as Jesus did.

Practically speaking we can love our brother by serving, forgiving, helping to build our brother up by prayer and encouraging them to obey God’s words. I would not be here today without love and support from my Bible teachers and my wife. Look at verse 10. “Whoever loves his brother lives in the light and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.” This verse shows us that there is a way to remove our stumbling blocks within us such as our pride, selfishness, laziness, lust and jealousy which prevent us from walking in the light and enjoying fellowship with God. It says when we love our brother, it will remove those stumbling blocks within us. How? When we look at all of these carefully, we find they come about because we are focused on ourselves. Pride is the result of us putting ourselves high above others. Selfishness comes when we think we want and deserve more. Laziness is a result of our own fatalism. It’s hard to find any of these traits in a person who is loving his brother. Colossians 3:14 says “and over all these virtues put on love, which binds them together in perfect unity.” May God bless you to take to heart his command and decide to actively love one brother or sister.

So far John mentioned very rigorous tests to be in Jesus Christ and to have fellowship with the Father. It seems like nobody is going to pass the tests. So in verses 12-14, John assures his readers of their salvation. These are some of the most encouraging and assuring words found in the Bible. “I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.”

**Second**, do not love the world. Look at verses 15-16. “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.” Why can’t we love the world? The Bible tells us in John 3:16 that God so loved the world, so why can’t we? In order to answer that question, one must understand that the word “world” is used with several different meanings in scripture. The word “world” is used in the Bible to refer to the created world, lost people, and the world system under the evil influence of Satan. In John 3:16 “world” is used in the sense of lost people. However, in our text, it is used in the latter sense. In 5:19 John writes: “We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.” This is the world that John commands us not to fall in love with.

You will notice that there is no middle ground with this issue. Either you love God or you love the world. You cannot love both: “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Jesus taught us in Matthew 6:24 that it is impossible for us to serve two masters. Physically speaking, when we put water in a bottle, the air in the bottle comes out. Two things cannot be in the bottle at the same time. John’s command is in the present tense imperative. This indicates that not loving the world is to be a way of life for the believer in Christ. The problem is that sometimes Christians get too attached to the things of this world. There are three things we should watch out.

Firstly, “the cravings of sinful man.” The Revised Standard Version calls this “the lust of the flesh.” “Flesh” is another one of those words that can have multiple meanings. It can be used to refer to our physical body or the sinful nature that all of mankind is born with. Our bodies have many needs or desires (food, sex, love) that in and of themselves are perfectly fine. However, these same needs can become sins when they are taken to extremes or perverted. For example, the need for food when taken to extremes becomes gluttony. The cravings of the flesh can be so strong that we feel like there is no hope of overcoming them. The good news is that Jesus set an example for us when he was tempted in the same way. After fasting in the wilderness for forty days, Satan tempted him to turn stones into bread in order to satisfy his hunger. Jesus responded, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Matt 4:4). We must understand that our purpose in life is not to gratify our cravings but to do the will of our heavenly Father.

Secondly, “the lust of his eyes.” It is covetousness, the desire to have everything that you set your eyes on. Advertisers understand this concept all too well. They flash images on the TV screen of everything from cars to clothes to iPhone especially designed to make you covet what they are selling. The grass always looks greener on the other side of the fence and so you will do almost anything to get what the advertisers say is on the other side. The problem is that when you get what’s on the other side, you are never satisfied. You feel empty and unsatisfied and so you covet all the more. The burger on the TV ad is never as big and juicy when we buy. Jesus also had to face down the temptation to covet and in doing so he showed us how to overcome it. Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and offered to give them to him if he would kneel before him and worship. Jesus responded, “Away from me Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only’” (Matt 4:10). Jesus recognized that to indulge oneself in materialism was to actually worship these things. And to worship the things of the world is to worship the one to whom they belong, Satan. So the essence of materialism is Satan worship.   
  
Thirdly, “the boasting of what he has and does.” The RSV call this “the pride of life”. This “pride of life” essentially consists of two things: (1) Boasting about material possessions; and (2) Boasting about accomplishments. If you are proud of either your position in life or your possessions in life, it is sin. Such pride causes you to put your faith in yourself rather than in God. Therefore, such pride will ultimately cut you off from the grace of God because his grace is received through faith alone. If we have been blessed with positions and possessions, we must be careful not to put our confidence in them because verse 17 tells us that they will not last.

Look at verse 17. “The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” The Bible teaches us that one day the world and all the things of the world will be destroyed by fire (2 Peter 3:10-11). If you have lived your life only for the things of this world, what will you have left on that day? Nothing! The following quote says it well: “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past; only what is done for Christ will last.” Are you living for eternity or for the now? Are you more concerned about laying up treasure for retirement or for heaven? Are you more concerned about what people will think of you today or about what God will think of you on Judgment Day?

**Third**, remain in Jesus (18-29). Look at verse 18. “Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.” Many people have strange ideas about the end of the world and the antichrist and become fearful. But antichrists are simply those who deny Jesus Christ. Verse 22 says, “Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son.” Despite antichrists’ false teachings and fear, we should faithfully hold on to Jesus’ teachings and remain in him. Look at verse 24. “See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.”

May God bless you to remain in Jesus by obeying his commands so that you may overcome the world and enjoy eternal life as he promised us.