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Knowing that You Know Christ: The Ethical Test

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The great puritan pastor Richard Baxter once said that his job as a minister was to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comforted.

This is a great summation of the pastor's duty. And it is exactly what I hope to do today.

Some people who are sitting here this morning might be enjoying a great deal of unfounded comfort. In all reality, your soul ought to be quaking with extreme torment because you do not really know the Lord Jesus.

Others of you might be experiencing a great deal of grief in your spirit. You



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are in agony because, though you *are* a true believer, you lack the assurance of this relationship. I hope that this morning those sufferings will be quieted.

In our passage this morning (1 John 2:3-6) John expresses how one can know if you have a true relationship with Jesus. He helps us distinguish between the one who truly knows Christ and the one that merely says he knows Christ. In order to help us each determine where we stand, he provides us with a sure fire way of discerning which camp to which we belong. It is what we might call “the ethical test.” He says all we have to do to determine whether or not we really know Jesus is answer one question: Do we keep his commandments?

Verse 3 states the proposition, “By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.” The next verse simply states the opposite. “Whoever says he knows him but does not keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him.” The following verses state it positively again, just with different words.

This is basically an echo of what Jesus himself said during his earthly life. You remember Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” John simply reiterates this teaching in the verses before us.

I know that this will be a comfort to many of you.

I. There is a great comfort to those of us who are truly Christians.

There are many who struggle with this. There are people who absolutely *do* know Christ but do not have the assurance that they do. When asked if they are a Christian, they say to themselves, “I think I am. I hope I am. Or I wish that I was.” These people are in a pitiful state. They are living their lives in a continual state of frustration and confusion.

This may describe some of you too. One of you may very well be in this sorry state of affairs. You feel like you are in a night that is so dark that it makes midnight almost seem like high noon. This lack of assurance has robbed you of joy and you feel like you are in a state of spiritual flux.

Now your prayer life is being greatly hindered. It’s like your prayers are flitting around like butterflies—they go here and there, but they never truly fly unto heaven with any zeal or confidence. You find yourself praying, “Lord, if you are out there, can you please help.” You do not come boldly before the

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yourself praying, “Lord, if you are out there, can you please help. You do not come delay before the throne of grace as a Christian ought.

If you are one such person who lacks this assurance, I want you to know that you can know that you know the Lord Jesus. And it is imperative that you do know. Charles Spurgeon once said that, next to knowing Christ, there is nothing more important than *knowing* that you know Christ.

And John here provides a way for you to have this sure knowledge. All the comfort you need may be found in this: Are you really and truly obeying the Lord? Are you concerned that you are living the Christian life as fully as you can? Do you find it your aim to keep from sin and follow his commandments?

Now, understand, as you look at these commandments you will find that you aren't perfect. As a matter of fact, the harder you look, the worse things will seem!

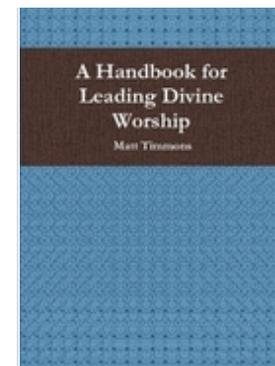
I remember the time when I led a study on the 10 commandments. For six months we studied virtually every nook and cranny of the law of God. And at the end of every class, we all walked out of there recognizing that we had failed yet again. There was not one point where we could kick up our heels and say, “I did it!” Not at all. Every time we came to class, we saw our failure.

So if you look at God's law and see your failure, don't let that worry you. That shouldn't drag you down or make you more depressed. You have to remember that our relationship with the Lord isn't built upon our performance. Our relationship is based on grace and what Christ has done on our behalf.

John doesn't want you to think that your relationship is built on what you can do. He is simply saying that our obedience to the commandments can give us something of a confirmation. If we are truly seeking to heed these commandments the best we can, we may rest assured that we really do know Christ.

Notice what it says in verse 6 again, “Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way that he walked.” Obviously, we can't walk exactly like Jesus. That's impossible. But we can mimic it in some degree.

My daughter Geneva is just learning to walk. And one of the things that we like to do in our house to exhaust some pent up energy is have races. We will start in our living room, race through the dining



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room to my office, and then race back to see who wins. The other day little Geneva saw Paige and I racing. Do you know what she did? She got up and started doing her little baby walk down to my office and back. Now it was hilarious to watch. There's a reason why they call them toddlers! She teetered and tottered. She fell down and sometimes started slipping off to the side as if gravity shifted on her. But she did her best to race just like us.

Now was she just like her father? Absolutely not. But she sought to walk in the way her father did.

And that is what is being said here. You can know that you are Christ's if you are seeking to walk as he did. You might just be a toddler, but you are walking.

So just ask yourself: Do you take his commandments seriously? Do you really long to have no other gods before him? Do you love and cherish his name so much that you wish never to take it in vain. What about the Lord's Day? Is it a day that you delight in? Is it your aim to honor your father and mother?" If you answer is yes, then there is your proof!

And if you can't answer it without weeping—if you grieve that you don't love him the way you should, then you can let that be your assurance. If you are saddened that you can't please him the way you ought, then that's a great proof. That's what we call repentance. And that's what He wants more than anything!

If you are walking, even if it's not that great, then you should not let your mind rattle you any longer. Be comforted. Rest assured, good Christian, that you have a genuine relationship with the Lord.

But if that doesn't describe you, then you better think twice about the genuineness of your faith. This passage will most certainly be a comfort to some in this congregation. But it very well may cause others a great deal of discomfort. For it serves as a warning to people who think they are Christians, but are not.

II. There is a great warning to those of us who merely profess to be Christians.

Some of you have been lying to yourselves. You've been walking around thinking that you have no worries when, in all reality, the fires of hell are ready to break upon you. You think that you are a Christian, but the truth is you have no relationship with Christ at all.

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You've been duped. Maybe you are the kind that thinks that knowing Christ means having a great deal of doctrinal knowledge—as if a relationship was built on *intellectual acumen*. Though you might have known much about Christ, you have never really known Christ himself. You might be able to talk a great deal, you've read so many books and you follow all kinds of religious blogs, but when it comes to really having a relationship with Christ you've got nothing. It's all been bouncing around in your head. If you really would take a look at your life, you'd see that there is a hardness—a coldness that is uncharacteristic of Christ.

You'll even pull out the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. You'll say, "Once saved always saved." But making such a claim is to make a mockery of the doctrine. I believe that. Yes, it is true: Once saved, always saved. But if your life is bereft of any noticeable obedience, then dear friend, you've never been saved! If you know anything about Jesus, you then should know that he came to save us from our sins.

Maybe you are not the heady type. Maybe you are the kind who thinks you are a Christian because you once had a *radical religious experience*. I know that it is common today to think that you have a relationship with Christ because you have prayed a prayer once or because you walked down and "asked Jesus to come into your heart." There was a time when you made some profession of faith and maybe it was even accompanied by all kinds of tears. You know, you just "felt something!"

But dear friend, if you are looking to something that happened long ago and far away, don't think for a moment that you are a friend to Jesus. It is not your religious experience that makes you a Christian. If you do not continue to have tears of repentance and are not diligently attending to his word, then you are not a Christian.

Just look at what it says in verse 4. "Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

I speak with people oh so often, and I have found many liars. I've found many who claimed to be Christians—they say that they love the Lord, and then in another conversation they go on to talk about women in some of the most offensive ways. Sometimes I am amused at how it all plays out. We'll be talking about the Lord one moment, then in the very next they will be talking about how they can't wait to go carousing this weekend.

But you're going to say to me, "But I believe in Jesus!" Well, don't you forget that even the demons

But you're going to say to me, "But I believe in Jesus!" Well, don't you forget that even the demons believe. The only difference between the demons and you is that they actually shudder at the name of Jesus.

This is what Dietrich Beonhoffer called "cheap grace." It can also be called, "easy believism." It's easy to say you believe in Jesus. But you have to understand: when Christ comes into your life, things must change. If you don't think differently about the way your living—if you don't have a different attitude towards sin and holiness, then that's an evidence that nothing really has truly happened in your life.

The text here says that if you claim to know him but do not follow his commandments *you have lied*. You have lied to yourself about having a relationship with Christ. You have lied to yourself about having any hope of heaven. You have lied to yourself about ever having the chance to enjoy any of the joys that await us there.

If you continue on the path that you are now on, then you will one day find yourself experiencing a very rude awakening. After you close your eyes in death, you will awaken in hell. You will find yourself, not in the embrace of a benevolent Father, but in the strong grip of a very angry God.

You might say, "Pastor, you are making me very uneasy." If that is so, good. There is no reason for you to be comfortable.

Conclusion:

In Matthew 25 Jesus tells a sobering parable. You may be familiar with it. He says that on the last day there is going to be a great separation. When he comes again the goats are going to be put on one side and the sheep are going to be put on another side. And he's going to say to the sheep, "Come you blessed of my Father, enter into the kingdom for I was hungry and you gave me bread. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me."

And they are going to be surprised and say, "Lord, when did we see you in these conditions?" And he will respond by saying, "As you did it to the least of these, you did it to me."

And to those on the left he will say, "Depart from me you cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." And they are surprised! "Wait a minute!" they say, "Lord, when did we see you hunarv? When were you thirstv? When were you in prison?"

Paul Washer gives a very good insight into this passage. He helps us to understand that this isn't about doing prison ministry per say. But in places in this world you can be put in prison because you believe in Jesus. The life that you've lead, and the things that you've said, got you in trouble. So you are put in prison. And when you are in prison, they don't treat you like we treat our prisoners. The guys I visit each week have it very good. In many places around the world, when you are put in prison, they don't feed you. They don't do anything for you. They just leave you there to die. And so they are dependent upon other people to bring them food and provide the essentials of life for them.

Now, if you go visit that person in that prison and you provide these things for them, you are basically testifying to the fact that you are a Christian too. You are placing yourself in jeopardy by virtue of your actions.

And Jesus' point is that a Christian is one who is willing to turn his back on everything in this world. A Christian is one whose life is dedicated to following Jesus. He's one who is willing to sacrifice everything to follow Jesus.

So you can't just accept Jesus into your heart. What has to happen is that all the other gods in the pantheon of your chest must be emptied out. You must say good-bye and good riddance to your life of sin. You must say, I will follow Christ even to the death.

If this describes you, if you hate sin, then you may rest in knowing that Christ is yours. Maybe this story strikes fear in your heart. Maybe you don't like it. But its not so much that you will be cast into hell, but your fear lies more in is that you might deny Christ. You don't want to do that, but you're scared that you might because you are not strong enough. If that describes you, then you don't have to be scared at all. This proves that you do belong to Christ!

If this kind of adherence to the commandments of God does not describe you, then you ought to be very uncomfortable. You have been lying to yourself. And, if you do not repent of your sins, you will one day find yourself among the goats that are being herded off into hell.

I pray that you may not let that happen. I pray that you will learn to say with the rest of us, "O how I love your law."

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