

THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

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SUBJECT: ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

TITLE: TO KNOW AND KNOW YOU KNOW

TEXT: 1 John 2:3-5

INTRODUCTION. We often over-simplify biblical lessons. For example, I heard someone saying that there are just two themes in the New Testament: how to be saved and how the saved ought to live. That sounds good on the surface, but upon further consideration it is woefully inadequate. The central theme of the New Testament is Jesus Christ. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, so salvation is a major theme. However, the nature of God, the character of God, and the will of God are all major themes of the New Testament. And what about the ministry of the Holy Spirit? And then there is Eschatology, the study of last things.

While I am fully aware of the problem of over-simplification, I am going to risk that as I look at the three verses we are looking at today, 1 John 2:3-5. As we have seen the stated purpose in the Gospel According to John is to convince people that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and to persuade them to trust Him for salvation. Without a doubt, a central theme of the First Epistle is found in the words, "And hereby do we know that we know him..." (Vs. 3a). Those who subscribe to the doctrine of perseverance of saints, or security of believers, will cite a number of proof texts in this little epistle. However, I want to focus on the assurance of salvation at this time.

I have often found that when I preach on assurance of salvation there is a response that I had not anticipated at first. It is not so much that those commenting on the message were doubting their salvation, as it was that they just appreciated the assurance that they really are children of God, born-again believers, the redeemed of the Lord. I know my wife loves me but if she never told me so I would be disappointed. I know my two sons will always be my biological sons but is especially gratifying to hear them say, "I love you." In the same way, yet in a higher way, it is with a sense of love, wonder, and gratitude that I read this little epistle and with the ears of my spirit hear my God say, "Yes, I have saved you and you are Mine. I love you, and I want you to know without a doubt that you belong to Me. Let Me give you some tests that will always help you to know that you know Me."

I. GOD WANTS YOU TO KNOW THAT YOU KNOW HIM, 2:3-4.

A. This Assurance Is Intended Only for Those Who Have Been Born-Again.

1. We must never offer false hope to one who is not saved.
 - a. Lost people may seek assurance in baptism.
 - b. They may place faith in church membership.

- c. They may have confidence in good works.
- d. Many call God Lord who are not His.

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:21-23).

I have been called on to deliver the funeral message for many relatives and some close friends. I have on some occasions made some people a little nervous when I preached the Gospel rather than simply delivering a eulogy. I once make an urgent appeal to a large number of people who were attending the service for one of our relatives. I said:

I have preached a lot of funerals and talked with a lot of families over the years. What a joy it is to see a family with absolute assurance that their mother or father was saved, and thus “prepared to meet the Lord.” Their grief was understandable, but their joy was unmistakable. As one man said after his mother’s death, “Heaven is going to be a little bit sweeter now.” However, when there are serious doubts as to whether the deceased was a true believer, families tend to rationalize. Some times they place a lot of faith in some rather flimsy evidence. Now, let me make this urgent appeal to you. If you are a Christian, please do not keep it a secret from your family and friends. Please do not let your family come to a service like this and wonder whether or not you ever received Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord.

ILLUSTRATION. The story is told of a family that moved into a new community. They were promptly visited by two elders and the pastor of a nearby church who cordially invited them to attend the services on the Lord's Day. The man assured them that he would come just as soon as he got straightened out. Several months passed, and he still hadn't put in an appearance, so the minister called again and repeated his invitation. But he received the same reply. The fellow hadn't yet gotten everything straightened out, but he'd be there just as soon as he did. A few weeks later he died, and his widow asked to have the funeral services in the church. The preacher graciously agreed. It was indeed a sad affair. Later when a member of the congregation asked the pastor if the man was a Christian, he answered, "He never attended services here, and no one can recall ever hearing him give a testimony of his faith in Christ, so I can't say. I only know he was a man of his word. He promised to come to church just as soon as he got straightened out -- and he did!"

- 2. You must be saved by grace, through faith, Eph. 2:8-9.
- 3. The Gospel of John tells us how to be saved, John 3:1ff; 16-18.

I was intrigued by the testimony of the late Dr. H. Leo Eddleman. I had known him for years. His father had been pastor of my home church and he and my pastor were friends. We spent a lot of time in the gym together when I was in seminary. As a matter of fact, on the day of my graduation, he

sought me out and came over and said, “Johnny, do you think we might call a little conference in the gym later this afternoon?”

There are many things I still remember about Dr. Eddleman, both from seminary, personal visits, and from two revivals he preached for me. Before the revival my son John, seven at the time, and I picked him up at the airport in Monroe, Louisiana and drove him back to Bastrop. We had talked about a number of things on the trip back, and as we entered Bastrop, he suddenly, asked, “Johnny, what kind of car is this?”

“It’s a Buick.”

“I think I have a Buick.”

It took my mental computer a few seconds to compute that matter-of-fact statement. If I had made a statement like that my friends would be justified in recommending professional help for me. But to Dr. Eddleman, an automobile was simply something Mrs. Eddleman used to drive him to the airport. I don’t think he could have cared less whether it was a BMW or a Volkswagon.

There are other things that stands out in my mind from that week. For one, he was writing a commentary on the Book of Acts, and he spent every spare moment working on it. For another, he spoke each morning at the Cherry Ridge Christian School and just over one hundred children responded to the simple presentation of the Gospel and made professions of faith that week. The pastor assured me that they had followed up on each profession of faith and that something like 92-94 of them were baptized in one of the local churches.

Another thing I will always remember is that Dr. Eddleman shared his personal testimony with us. He had made a profession of faith as a child but as a nineteen year old math major at Mississippi College he had an encounter with the Lord that totally overshadowed anything else that had ever happened in his life. He explained that he did not know for sure that he had not been saved as a child, but his experience at MC was so powerful that considered that his salvation experience and his call to the ministry. Then, from age nineteen to twenty-five, he allowed himself one date per year. He was so focused on his studies that he put his social life on hold. He assured me that his greatest regret was the way he had wasted so much time in his youth: “I could have learned five languages between thirteen and nineteen.” There was a time when people called that dedication; today someone would probably come up with a psychological term for it.

If Dr. Eddleman, who went on to serve as seminary professor, college president, and missionary to Israel before serving a seminary president, could not tell for sure whether he was saved as a child, or college student, it is understandable that many others would have similar questions. The important thing is that after what happened in his life when he was nineteen he knew for sure that he was saved.

B. The Scripture Say That We Can Know That We Know Him, vs. 3.

“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.”

1. The first “know” is in the present tense - we can know right now.
2. The second “know” is perfect active indicative.

A. T. Robertson, in his *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, translates it, “Know we that **we have come to know** and **still know him** (emphasis added).” He explains the significance of the tense: “The Gnostics boasted of their superior knowledge of Christ, and John here challenges their boast by an appeal to experimental knowledge of Christ which is shown by keeping his (αὐτοῦ, Christ’s) commandments, thoroughly Johannine phrase (12 times in the Gospel, 6 in this Epistle, 6 in the Apocalypse).”

The Gospel of John was written that we might know that Jesus is the Christ, and that we might trust Him for our salvation (John 20:30). This verse reveals the purpose of the First Epistle of John: That we might have present and continuous knowledge that we have come to a personal knowledge of Him. This is the answer to Gnostic claims of special, or mystical knowledge. This knowledge is available, not just to certain specially gifted, or blessed individuals who might boast of superior knowledge, but to every believer.

If you are a born-again believer, you can know right now that you have come to know Jesus Christ as Savior at some time in the past, and that you still know Him. God wants you to know this, and I must know it. That is the reason the Holy Spirit inspired the writing of this epistle.

C. We Have Assurance That We Know Him if We Keep His Commandments.

1. This does not say that we are saved by keeping His commandments.
2. Keeping His commandments is proof that we do know Him.
3. In 1 John 5:3, John expands this:

“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”

4. This teaches that we abstain from sinful practices because we love the Lord.
5. It teaches that obedience is not burdensome to God’s children.
 - a. Witnessing is not burdensome to God’s children.
 - b. Worship is not burdensome His children.
 - c. Ministry is not burdensome to true believers.
 - d. Stewardship is not burdensome to those who know that they know Jesus Christ.

- e. Prayer is not burdensome to those who know Him.
- f. Bible study is not burdensome to those who know Him.

D. John Amplifies This in Verse 4.

“He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

1. If you say you know God and do not keep his commandments, you are a liar.
 - a. This is strong language, (see also, 1:8, 10).
 - b. Please understand that it is God Who is calling you a liar, not the preacher.
2. Such a deceitful claim comes only from one who does not know the truth.
 - a. The truth includes sound doctrine.
 - b. The truth here includes the inner reality.

In John 14:6, we find the familiar words, “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Jesus is the eternal truth. The person who claims to know God but senses neither need nor desire to keep His commandments is deceiving himself. A lost person cannot know the truth, but a Christian can be confused if he is walking in the flesh. The Holy Spirit, who testifies to your spirit that you belong to God, is grieved by sin, and His influence is quenched when the individual persists in trying to serve God in his own power. We must first know Jesus as “the Way,” and then we need to understand the doctrinal principle at work here. The love of God will manifest itself in obedience to God.

II. THE LOVE OF GOD IS MANIFESTED IN OBEDIENCE TO HIM, 1:5.

“ But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.”

A. The Love of God Is Perfected in Those Who Keep His Word.

1. Obedience to God is a sacred obligation.
2. The Love of God is manifested through obedience.
3. The Love of God is perfected in those who are obedient to God.

The Greek word for perfect (*teleios*), may be defined as “having reached its end.” That means complete

or mature. A grown man is the *teleios* of a little boy. A great oak tree is the *teleios* of an acorn that fell to the earth many years ago. A mature Christian is an obedient servant of the Lord, whose obedience manifests both love for God and the love of God.

B. By Our Obedience We Know That We Are in God.

1. "In God" denotes a personal relationship with Him.
2. We are not positioned "in God" by good works (Eph. 2:9; Gal. 2:16).
3. Obedience is proof that we are "in God."

Obedience here denotes habitual obedience, not occasional acts of obedience. To the child of God, obedience is a way of life, a source of joy. It is never a burden. Someone has said, "I was often tired in the work, but never tired of the work."

William Bradford, the governor of the Plymouth Colony of pilgrims, insisted, "Those who believe in the Holy Scriptures are bound to observe its teachings. Those who do not are to be bound by its consequences."

In his book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Phillip Keller asks:

- Do I really belong to Him?
 - Do I really recognize His right to me?
 - Do I respond to His authority and acknowledge His ownership?
 - Do I find freedom and complete fulfillment in this arrangement?
 - Do I sense a purpose and deep contentment because I am under His direction?
 - Do I know rest and repose, beside a definite sense of exciting adventure, in belonging to Him?
- Before I can say He is my shepherd, I need answers to these questions.

CONCLUSION. God wants you to know Him personally and intimately. If you have never been born-again, the Bible says this is the day of salvation. If you searching for something but do not understand terms like "born-again," will you let me try to explain that to you and pray for you. If you are a born-again believer in Jesus Christ, you will often look for assurance, and while there are many passages on the subject, it make sense to begin right here:

"Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments."

INVITATION