

## ***“How Can I Be Sure I Know Christ?”***

August 28, 2011

Text: 1 John 2:3-6

### **Our subject today is “How Can I Be Sure I Know Christ?”**

I.e., “How can I know for sure that I’m truly born again?”

There is no more important question anyone could ask in this life.

To know with confidence in our hearts that we are truly saved is the ultimate source of security/joy/consolation to the soul.

It allows us to insert our own selves into Jesus’ statement in Rev 3:5=> *“He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.”*

Assurance of salvation is a warm light in the night, that dispels our soul’s darkest fears. It gives us the faith we need to pray with confidence, knowing that we are indeed God’s adopted children, so we are praying to our Father.

It stirs up love for Him in our hearts, that results in obedience and spiritual zeal.

We value the Lord above all things.

Thomas Brooks (English Puritan) once wrote that such 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.”

On the other hand, a lack of assurance about our salvation is like playing Russian roulette with our eternal souls.

This is far too important a matter, to be left to mere conjecture.

Some Xns teach that it’s wrong to ever question our salvation.

Peter commanded us to do so (2 Pet 1:10)=> *“Brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you.”*

Peter was a Calvinist, who believed in God’s calling/election.

But he sounds like an Arminian, telling us to make certain of your own salvation.

Paul wrote (2 Cor 13:5)=> *“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!”*

### **Remarkably, most Xns seek assurance of their salvation in all the wrong (unbiblical) places=>**

E.g. the morality of their lives, as proof that they’ve earned God’s approval.

God doesn’t save on the basis of good deeds, and because of that truth, man “good people” who assume they’re saved, are not.

2) Intellectual knowledge about God & the Bible.

The scribes were first-class Bible scholars, but they were unsaved.

3) Involvement in ministry & religious activities.

Judas was deeply involved in X’s own ministry for 3 years, even going out and preaching in His name.

Then he betrayed the Lord, went out, and hung himself, a tragic example of a minister who died unsaved.

4) Conviction of sin and feelings of remorse for sin.

Governor Felix felt guilty as Paul preached, but he never repented, believed or become saved.

2 Cor 7:10=> *“The sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world [which is all that Felix ever experienced] produces death.”*

5) Feelings of excitement about the gospel & the Xn faith.

The rocky soil of Mt 13 pictured people who got excited like that, but never really gave their hearts to Jesus X to become saved.

I Jn 2:19=> *“They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.”*

6) Looking back to the time when one made a “decision for X” and prayed the “sinner’s prayer.” Even people on the wide road to destruction can do that.

7) Baptism—neither infant/adult baptism in/of itself saves a soul.

**One of the Apostle John’s purposes in writing his first epistle was to help Xns find assurance of their salvation.**

In 1 Jn 5:13 he wrote=> *“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may **know** that you **have eternal life.**”*

In today’s text (1 Jn 2:3-6), he will start out by saying=>

*“By this we **know** that we have come to **know Him.**”*

1 John is a book of certainties that is designed to eliminate confusion/doubt.

John comforts us as Xns w/ an understanding of the truth.

He knows that 1 of the certainties that comforts us most is knowing for sure that we are truly saved.

**In today’s text John will address the question, “How Can I Be Sure I Know Christ?” His answer will come in 4 parts...**

\* 1<sup>st</sup>, a test to determine whether/not we know X

\* 2<sup>nd</sup>, John’s explanation of a false claim to know X

\* 3<sup>rd</sup>, His explanation of a true claim to know X

\* 4<sup>th</sup>, a test to determine whether/not we abide in X

**\* The Test for Knowing Christ**

**[1 John 2:3]**=> *“And by this we **know** that we have come to **know Him**, if we keep His commandments.”*

**Notice that John uses the word “know” twice here.**

In both cases he uses a word that means to know by discovery & observation, rather than recognizing a self-evident truth.

I.e., we can determine whether/not we know X (are saved) by observing our own lives.

The 1<sup>st</sup> “know” is in the present tense, which means we are constantly observing/perceiving by our own experiences whether/not the evidence of our life indicates that we really do know X.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> “know” refers to our personal knowledge of Jesus.

It’s in a tense that means we formed a relationship with Him at conversion, that continues to impact our lives.

**Coming to know God by forming a personal relationship with Jesus X is what life is all about.**

It is the reason for which God has placed us on this earth.

It is the highest privilege to which man can aspire (a personal relationship w/ the Creator of the universe).

Jer 9:24 (God)=> “*Let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and **knows Me**, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice, & righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things, declares the LORD.*”

**In a sense, knowing God is like knowing anyone else.**

\* It involves becoming acquainted-with/acknowledging Him as He is=> transcendent God on the one hand, and yet as our own caring Shepherd, on the other.

So Jesus said (John 10:27)=> “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*”

We acknowledge Jesus as our Savior/Redeemer/Lord/King.

\* But knowing God goes beyond that, to actually believing in Him.

We form such a trusting relationship with Him thru Jesus, that we place our souls in His hands for safekeeping.

\* Knowing God also means that we have personal experience of His power working in our lives.

Rom 8:28=> “*We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*”

We can look back over our lives, & see with “eyes of faith” the clear evidence of His involvement in our lives, working all things together for good.

When I use the phrase “eyes of faith,” I’m alluding to the prophet Ezekiel’s words in Ezek 12:2, where he spoke of eyes that don’t see and ears that don’t hear.

They approach Scripture with an unwillingness to believe it.

In Mt 11:14-15, Jesus used this same analogy, saying=> “*If you care to accept it, he himself is Elijah, who was to come. / He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*”

In retrospect, we can see with eyes of faith how He has woven all the loose ends together to fulfill His good purposes in us.

\* In addition, knowing God means communing w/ Him in prayer, sometimes laying our hearts open to Him, sometimes praising Him, sometimes just talking things over w/ Him.

Certain theologians like to talk about “the historical Jesus.”

We smile, because He’s so much more than that to us.

He’s like someone we can talk to across the kitchen table.

When John mentions “coming to know Him,” he means far more than merely coming to know about Him.

It is knowing Him personally, being known by Him, and rejoicing in Him (I Pet 1:8).

If you know Jesus X like that, all is well with your immortal soul;

If not, you’re ignorant of the 1 thing that can save your soul.

**While in 1 sense, knowing God is like knowing anyone else, in another it’s very different, because He is, after all, God.**

Knowing Him produces moral changes in a person’s character.

The prophet Hosea warned Israel=> “*The LORD has a case against the inhabitants of the land, Because there is no faithfulness or kindness Or **knowledge of God** in the land. / There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing, and adultery. They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed*” (Hos 4:1-2).

There was swearing & all the other sins *because* there was no knowledge of God in the land.

The same was true in Jeremiah’s day when God said=> “*They bend their tongue like their bow; Lies and not truth prevail in the land; For they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not **know Me**, declares the LORD*” (Jer 9:3).

Born again Xns who truly know the Lord find that their relationship with Him has a moral impact on their hearts/lives.

Their will comes more/more into harmony with His will.

By contrast, He'll condemn those who never come to know Him, or give Him an opportunity to reform them morally.

Mt 7:23 (Jesus)=> *"I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'"*

They practice lawlessness because they have never known Jesus.

**Now John gives us the test by which we can determine whether/not we really know**

**God=> "...we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments."**

That follows logically from what we have just seen=>

Jesus' power has moral impact on the lives of those He knows, so that they keep His commandments.

They have become new creatures in X.

Old things have passed away in their hearts.

New things have come (II Cor 5:17).

In Jer 31:33, God was describing the New Covenant to Jeremiah when He said=> *"I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it."*

When a person becomes born again, God writes His law on the person's heart, so that it becomes a part of him.

That's 1 reason why our sin bothers us so much.

That's why Paul wrote=> *"I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, / but I see a different law in the members of my body [his flesh]"* (Rom 7:22-23).

**Instead of saying, "If we obey His commandments," verse 3 of our text says, "If we keep His commandments."**

"Keep" includes the idea of obedience, but it also goes beyond that, to imply guarding God's commands like a treasure in our hearts.

It is keeping them always in view/memory w/ devout reverence so that they can change our whole perspective on life.

It's a living/loving observance of the spirit of God's Law as good/pure/right, not like the burdensome/unwelcome weight which it became to legalistic Jews.

We know we have come to know God, when we love His commandments as David did, so that they preoccupy our minds, and impact our behavior.

If our knowledge of God is not life-changing because it is mind-changing, it's not for real.

Eph 2:2 says that before we were saved, we were "sons of disobedience," but I Pet 1:14 says that now we have become "sons of obedience."

**What "commandments" are we to keep?**

All the moral imperatives we find in Scripture, which Jesus summarized in 2 statements=>

*"LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART & WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, & WITH ALL YOUR MIND"* and *"LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF"*

(Mt 22:37, 39).

Realistically, we cannot keep God's commands perfectly, but the heart of a Xn embraces them as his own standard of purity.

**\*\* God measures obedience differently under His grace, for those who truly know Him, than the Law measures obedience to its commands.**

Under the New Covenant, God accepts a Xn's loving, sincere, but imperfect obedience, and He forgives our disobedience.

Our hearts' constant aim is to fulfill His commandments.

In Jn 17:6, X made an amazing statement about His Apostles, as He prayed in the Upper Room=> *"I manifested Thy name to the men whom Thou gavest Me out of the world; Thine they were, and Thou gavest them to Me, and **they have kept Thy word.**"*

Our natural reaction is=> Really? They've kept Thy word?

Does that include James/John, who sent their mother to Jesus, asking that they be allowed to sit on X's right/left in the Kingdom?

And on another occasion wanted to call God's wrath down on a Samaritan village to destroy it?

And does that include Peter, who discouraged Jesus from going up to Jerusalem and being crucified, so that our Lord had to tell him, *"Get behind Me, Satan"?*

John Calvin=> "He [John] does not mean that those who wholly satisfy the Law keep His commandments (and no such instance can be found in the world), but those who strive, according to the capacity of human infirmity, to form their life in obedience to God."

**Someone: "This is still a hard teaching to accept. I know Xns (real Xns) who live sinful lives, or whose lives are very different outside the church from what you see of them on Sundays."**

Ans: According to what John says in I Jn 2:3, they don't know X, and their disobedience of His commands proves it.

I.e., they aren't actually saved, but are on the broad road to destruction, not the narrow road that leads to life.

Here's how John explains it=>

**\* John's Explanation of a False Claim to Know Christ**

[1 John 2:4]=> *"The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;"*

This is not a pejorative statement like "That dirty liar!"

John is simply explaining how someone can think he is saved but not be saved.

**Let's be clear about which is the cause, & which is the effect.**

It's not that the truth is not in him because he's a liar.

It's that he's a liar because the truth is not in him.

His character is that of liar because God's truth is not an operating principle in his heart affecting his thoughts, shaping his conscience/character.

In Jn 8:44, X explained to the Jews why they were liars=> *"You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is **no truth in him.** Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from **his own nature**; for he is a liar, and the father of lies."*

There is no truth in him, therefore, he's a liar.

He's a liar, therefore, he speaks lies.

Liars lie because they have the principle of deception (not truthfulness) built right into their nature/character.

Their character becomes so perverted they can't even recognize the truth of God when they hear it.

As Ezekiel said, they have ears that don't hear and eyes that don't see the truth.

So in the next verse, Jesus added (Jn 8:45)=> *“Because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.”*

Truth is what their ears can no longer hear, because they aren't attuned to it.

**Those who claim to know God, but don't keep His commands deceive themselves into thinking that they tell the truth.**

Jesus said that on Judgment Day, they'll try to defend themselves with the same tired old lies they've always told & have actually come to believe, saying=> *“Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?”* (Mt 7:22)

Then they'll be inescapably confronted as never before w/ the truth their lawless disobedience of God's commands has always proven about them, but which they have learned to ignore, and have refused to hear.

As we saw earlier, X will tell them, *“I never **knew** you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHOPRACTICE LAWLESSNESS’* (Mt 7:23).

**Why would anyone deceive himself like that?**

It can happen in a church like this because of social pressure from family/friends, to say w/ everyone else that we know X, even though we haven't really repented or really believed in Him.

We might at first say, “I hope I know Him,” then come to feel we're expected to be more definitive than that.

So we change it to, “I think I do, & others tell me I do.”

We get baptized, and then feel hypocritical about saying anything less than, “Yes, I'm sure I know Jesus.”

We may even get involved in ministry like the people the read about in Mt 7 who said, *“Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name?”* in order to bolster our confidence about it all.

There's an important lesson here=> Never pretend or profess more about your own spiritual condition/standing than you absolutely know to be true/accurate.

There's too good a chance that you will trick your own mind into believing the lie you tell about yourself.

X's words in Lk 19:22 disturb me, as they should disturb all of us=> *“By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave.”*

**Someone: How can I avoid becoming spiritually self-deceived like that?**

1) We must begin by filling our minds w/ truth (God's Word).

Jesus prayed this for His disciples in Jn 17:17=> *“Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.”*

2) Then we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to obey God's 9<sup>th</sup> commandment—not to bear false witness.

And that must include lying by exaggeration.

Instead, we must be scrupulously careful to always & only speak the truth with accuracy.

**\* John's Explanation of a True Claim to Know Christ**

[1 Jn 2:5a]=> *“But whoever **keeps His word**, in him the love of God has truly been perfected.”*  
Coming right after verse 4 as this does, we might expect John to say “Whoever keeps His word, in him is God's truth.”

But John ratchets it up another notch and says instead=> “Whoever keeps God’s Word, in him is God’s *love*.”

**Commentators debate whether the “*love of God*” refers to God’s love for us, or our love for God.**

I agree with Gk scholar, Brooke Westcott, that it’s meaning here must be determined by its meaning in 1 Jn 3:1=> “*See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us*” (how greatly He values/loves us).

I.e., here in verse 5, John refers to God’s love for us.

But he’s also implying more than that.

John is saying that God has loved us, making us recipients of His love, & pouring it out into our hearts (as Rom 5:5 says it).

God’s love for us is an endowment given to us as believers at the time we become born again.

It is part of the divine-life God gives to us when we are regenerated.

He expresses His love for us, and gives us a love of Himself, His truth, and His people.

We respond and return that love God has given to us, by obeying His Word out of our value/love for Him and our love for His truth, which we “keep” like a treasure in our hearts.

This becomes the “perfection” of His love—the mature development/expression of His love, operating within us and working itself out in our behavior.

It is the outgrowth of our being brought into a love relationship with God the Father and God the Son.

It is the fulfillment of Jn 14:21 (Jesus)=> “*He who has My commandments & keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him.*”

So in contrast to the liar, who says he knows God but doesn’t keep His commandments, we keep His Word, out of love and become recipients of His love.

That becomes an assurance, that we’ve truly come to know Him.

On a subjective level, Rom 8:16 says=> “*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*”

**\* A Test for Abiding in Christ**

[1 John 2:5b-6]=> “*By this we know that we are in Him: / the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.*”

**The test to determine if we are in X—and abide in X—is whether/not we imitate His life, with our lives.**

Or to put it as John puts it=> whether/not we recognize our obligation to walk (live) as He did.

If we are spiritually connected to the Godhead, Jesus’ life/character should be reflected in our life/character.

This is how we know we are truly born again.

We cannot truthfully claim to abide in Him unless His influence is clearly seen in our lives.

**In his relationship/fellowship with Jesus X, a true Xn has entered a powerful new moral/spiritual union w/ Him.**

It profoundly influences the way he thinks/lives, because it changes his heart, making his life different from that of a non-Xn.

1 Jn 5:19=> *"We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."*

Just as the nonbeliever lies in the power of the evil one, a believer lies in the power of the H.S., within him.

We are *"of God"*—our life/nature are now from God.

II Pet 1:4=> We have become partakers of the divine nature.

We are the branches Jesus spoke about in John 15, saying that they abide in the vine.

He is the vine in which we abide, to which we are connected, and from which we draw spiritual life.

Our *"abiding"* in X means we remain in a permanent life-giving, life-sustaining union with Him.

John says *"we are in Him [in X],"* which is synonymous with *"abiding in Him"* (vs 6) and *"knowing Him"* (vs 3).

This is what *"eternal life"* is all about (Jn 17:3)=> *"This is eternal life that they may know Thee the only true God, & Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."*

Through the power of this loving spiritual union we have w/ X, we come to know Him better/better, and to become increasingly like Him.

**So let's examine ourselves and ask some questions:**

1. Do we see God's influence at work in our lives?

Phil 2 says=> *"[God] is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure"* (2:13).

Do we see God at work in our hearts, giving us a love for His Word, changing our will and our desires to match His as we feed on His Word, and causing us to keep His word and His commands?

If so, we can say with confidence that we know X.

2. Do we see a *"life-growth dynamic"* taking place within us?

Phil 1:6=> *"He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."*

This means the direction of our lives should be progressively towards greater/greater spiritual maturity, sanctification, and holiness.

Is it? If so, we know X and are born again.

3. Do people see X's life more/more clearly in our lives?

Acts 10:38 says Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and *"He went about doing good."*

If we are truly saved, we too are anointed with the H.S.

So do we go about doing good?

If so, we abide in X.

4. Is X's humility increasingly becoming a part of our character?

He said=> *"Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart"* (Mt 11:29).

He humbly washed the disciples' feet.

So do we humbly serve others as He did?

Rom 15:2-3=> *"Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. / For even Christ did not please Himself."*

Can we see the evidence of God's power having worked in our lives over time, making us more like X in terms of loving attitudes and humble selflessness?

If so, we know we are saved.

**Of course, our obedience to God's commands will never be perfect in this life as Jesus' was.**

But His life is the pattern we are to follow.

If we can legitimately claim to know Him, to love Him, & to abide in Him, it will become evident in the general pattern of our own lives.

If we are truly born again, we'll guard/obey His commands out of our love/value for the truth, & for the God of truth.

Therein we find the assurance of our salvation, and can say with confident sincerity=> "I know for sure that I know X, and will spend eternity with Him in heaven."

### ***"How Can I Be Sure I Know Christ?"***

August 28, 2011

Text: 1 John 2:3-6

1. To know with confidence in our hearts that we are truly saved is the ultimate source of [18 security], joy and consolation to the soul.

Rev 3:5; II Pet 1:10; II Cor 13:5

2. Remarkably, most Christians seek assurance of their salvation in all the wrong ( [24 unbiblical] ) places.

I Jn 5:13

**In today's text John will ask the question, "How Can I Be Sure I Know Christ?" His answer will come in four parts...**

#### **\* A Test for Knowing Christ**

**[1 John 2:3]**

3. The word "*know*" means to know by observation; in other words, we can determine whether or not we know Christ (are saved) by [22 observing] our own lives.

Jer 9:24; Jn 10:27

4. Knowing God also means that we have personal experience of His [12 power] working in our lives.

Rom 8:28

5. Knowing Him produces [12 moral] changes in a person's character.  
Hos 4:1-2; Jer 9:3; Mt 7:23
6. Jesus' power has a moral impact on the lives of those He knows, so that they [10 keep] His commandments.  
II Cor 5:17; Jer 31:33; Rom 7:22-23
7. We know we have come to know God when we love His commandments so that they preoccupy our minds, and [14 impact] our behavior.  
Eph 2:2; I Pet 1:14; Mt 22:37, 39

**\* John's Explanation of a False Claim to Know Christ**  
**[1 John 2:4]**

8. His character is that of liar because God's truth is not an operating principle in his heart [24 affecting] his thoughts.  
Jn 8:44, 45; Mt 7:23
9. There's an important lesson here: Never pretend or profess more about your own spiritual standing than you absolutely [10 know] to be true.  
Lk 19:22; Jn 17:17

**\* John's Explanation of a True Claim to Know Christ**  
**[1 Jn 2:5a]**

10. God expresses His love for us and gives us a love of Himself, His truth, and His people; we return that love by [18 obeying] His Word.  
I Jn 3:1; Rom 5:5
- Jn 14:21

**\* A Test for Abiding in Christ**

**[1 John 2:5b-6]**

11. The test to determine if we are in Christ—and abide in Christ—is whether or not we [16 imitate] His life with our lives.
12. In his relationship and fellowship with Jesus Christ, a true Christian has entered a powerful new moral and spiritual [12 union] with Him.  
I Jn 5:19; Jn 17:3
13. Through the power of this loving spiritual union, we come to know Him better and better, and to become increasingly [10 like] Him.  
Phil 2:13; 1:6; Acts 10:38; Mt 11:29; Rom 15:2-3
14. Of course, our obedience to God's commands will never be perfect in this life as Jesus' was; but His life is the [16 pattern] we are to follow.