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A0427 -- July 4, 2004 -- 1 John 2:3-5 -- Knowing God

We now embark on the third section of John's 1st epistle. Section 1 was the "Prologue" (1 John 1:1-4), section 2 was "Walking in the Light" (1 John 1:5-2:2). We're going to call section 3 "Knowing the God of Light". This section extends from 2:3-2:11.

THE TEST OF INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE (1 John 2:3)

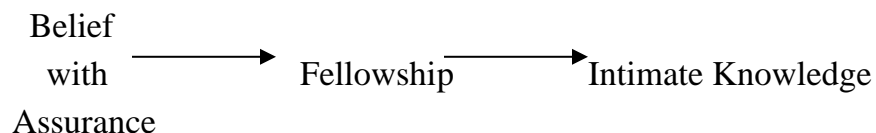
And in this we know (Present Tense) that we have come to know (Perfect Tense) Him, if we keep His commandments.

This is where many commentators jump ship and begin on a faulty track in interpreting the book. Most commentators tell you that this is the first test of true saving faith. When John says "By this we know that we have come to know Him", they say that "coming to know Him" refers to exercising saving faith. This is supposedly a test to see whether we really have saving faith. The supposed test is to check and see if we are keeping His commandments. We are told that "we cannot know whether our faith is real unless we **keep His commandments.**"²¹ The idea that someone can believe in Christ, without knowing whether they *really* believed is complete nonsense. The theological issue at stake is where assurance is found. Is it found in works or faith? Put another way, "do I find assurance of my salvation in my works or is assurance inseparable from faith itself?" If assurance of salvation is really based on whether we are keeping His commandments or not (i.e., works) then we have some major problems. For example, John elsewhere teaches that assurance of salvation is inseparable from saving faith. How do I know if I am saved? If I believe I know that I am saved. People can and do know that they are saved. John says in his gospel "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." (John 5:24). When Jesus spoke to Martha in John 11:26 He asked her, "Do you believe this?"²⁷ She said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, *even* He who comes into the world." She did not say, "I'm not sure whether I really believe this or not, I have to check to see whether I am following the commandments." She said "yes

Lord I have believed (perfect tense)". There was no air of doubt in Martha's words. She knew once for all that she had eternal life because she believed. The Bible never says that a Christian can believe without knowing whether he has *really* believed or not. We are never taught that the test to see whether we are really a believer is to check whether we are keeping His commandments. This is a false conclusion drawn from a false theology.

But if coming to know Him doesn't refer to coming to saving faith then what does it refer to? The Greek word for "know" is *ginosko*. It is used twice here; first in the

present tense and second in the *perfect* tense as noted on the back of your bulletin. So, the verse is saying, "**by this we presently know that we have come to know Him**". The second use of *ginosko*, the one in the perfect tense refers to the results of a completed action in the past. So, coming to know Him refers to the results of being in fellowship with Him which is the previous context. Fellowship is basic to the Christian life. The more we are in fellowship the more we come to know Him. Coming to know Him is therefore an advance in the Christian life that results from being in fellowship. Coming to know Him therefore means coming to know Him intimately, on a deeper level. In a sense all believer's know God (John 17:3), but there is an intimate level of knowing God that comes through hearing and learning the word of God continually while one stays in close fellowship with God. This concept of intimate knowledge of God is what John is wanting to communicate. A new believer knows God in a sense but he does not know all the commandments he needs to keep until he is taught just what the commandments are. So, the pre-requisite for coming to know Him intimately is learning the commandments. Only when you learn what the commandments are can you then keep the commandments. The only time you can learn the commandments is while you are in fellowship. This is not rocket science. Coming to know God intimately requires us to know and keep His commandments. His commandments are the general will of God for all believer's lives. The sequence...



1) you believe and this belief necessarily gives you assurance of your standing before God. Because of your assurance that you are acceptable to Him you have the confidence 2) to walk in fellowship with God. When you get out of fellowship you simply acknowledge your sin(s) and God is faithful and righteous to send away each sin restoring fellowship. 3)

As you spend more and more time in fellowship your knowledge of God increases to a deeper level.

When we talk about the commandments, we are not talking about the ten commandments. The 10 commandments were a part of a rule of life God gave the nation of Israel. It is often called the Mosaic Law. There were actually 613 commands that were a part of this Law. We are not under the Mosaic Law any more than we are under Canadian Law or Russian Law. Rom. 10:4 says that ***“Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”*** The Mosaic Law was the expressed will of God for the nation of Israel. But the Church is not Israel. Israel was a physical entity based on physical descent. The Church is a spiritual entity based on belief in Jesus Christ. God has expressed His will for the Church primarily in the NT epistles. It is in the NT epistles, beginning with Romans, that the commandments we are to follow are found. Actually, there are far more than 613 commands for the Church, there are over 1,000 commands we are to follow. Very little in the gospels is the expressed will of God for the Church, most of it is in the Epistles. Remember that Christ lived under the Mosaic Law. We don't live under that Law. So, the entire 613 laws of the Mosaic Law are totally and completely nullified for believers today. After Pentecost in Acts 2 a whole new set of commandments was given to the Church. However, some of the commandments are the same as given in the Mosaic Law. In fact, 9 of the 10 commandments are repeated for the Church. But this does not mean that 9 of the 10 commandments were carried over from the Mosaic Law which was strictly for Israel. An analogy might be made by comparing two different editions of the same textbook. It's like comparing a 1st Edition with the 15th Edition. Sometimes the information is the same, often it is different but all the information came from the same publishing company. In the same way the Mosaic Law finds its source in the eternal law of God and is compatible with His character. The commandments that God gave to the Church also find their source in the eternal law of God and are compatible with God's character. But they often differ in their precise content. It's like God has an infinite body of commandments from which He can choose to dispense to different peoples in different times. God is raising humanity in the same way a parent raises a child. You start with simple external commands and move to more complex and inward commands. God teaches humanity pedagogically, building principle on principle. However, do not walk away from this thinking that we should therefore ignore the OT because it's for Israel and not for us. This would be a vast mistake. All of Scripture is profitable according to 2 Tim. 3:16-17. To ignore the OT would be like avoiding childhood and trying to be a man or woman at age 2. The principles that are found in the OT are applicable. So, while the OT law is directly applicable to OT Israel there are general wisdom principles that are applicable to you and which you can extract and apply to everyday life. In fact, to understand the NT I would argue that one first has to first understand the OT. The reason there is so much confusion and disagreement over the

complex doctrines of the NT is because of a failure to understand the basic categories established in the OT. We ought to spend about 2/3 of our time in the OT. Notice that 2/3 of the Bible is pre-Jesus. God didn't begin history with Jesus. He could have but then Jesus wouldn't have been understood. Why then do we start children off with Jesus? Jesus is a complex unique individual and yet we take children directly to Jesus forgetting that God spent the first 4,000 years of history preparing the world and humanity for Jesus. So, if you want your child to understand the gospel and who Jesus is then I would suggest we learn something from the way the God Himself taught humanity. And the first principle is not Jesus, the first principle is God...the second is man...and the third is nature...the fourth is sin...the fifth is grace...the sixth is judgment...and the seventh is salvation...and so forth. Those are the doctrines of the first 8 chapters of Genesis. Genesis is the foundation. You start with Genesis and you move forward just like the Holy Spirit did. I mean can't we learn something from how God teaches mankind? Or are we so bold and prideful that we think that we, in all our brilliance, have a better method? When you do this, you will realize that there is really not much new in the NT. And this is why people don't understand the NT, because they never really studied the OT. Back to 1 John 2:3.

Now, we know where the commandments are, they are in the NT epistles and they are given to the Church. But, what does it mean to "keep" His commandments? Does it mean to simply follow the commandments? Well, it means a bit more than that. The word for "keep" is *tereo* and it means "to guard over". The idea is that the one who has come to know Him carefully and attentively guards over the commandments. The commandments of God are precious to him and he therefore carefully keeps watch over his life, seeing that his life is in accord with the commandments. So, 1 John 2:3 is saying that when we attentively guard over the commandments of God the spiritual environment is right for God to make Himself known to us. This is the concept Jesus taught in John 14. Turn to John 14:21. ***"He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."*** Number 1 you have to have the commandments, you have to know what they are. Number 2 you have to keep the commandments. Same word, *tereo*, you have to "guard over, watch carefully" the commandments. When we do this, we love Jesus Christ. Loving Jesus is not about some emotional experience, some spiritual high. Loving Jesus is about knowing and doing His commandments. It's amazing what most Christians think today about loving Jesus. Loving Jesus has been reduced to an emotional experience for most Christians. It has become some external expression. Well, according to Jesus it has nothing to do with that. Loving Jesus means being loyal to His commandments. This means studying the 1,000 commands and then guarding over them, attentively following them. When a believer does this Jesus says I ***will disclose Myself to him***. The word for disclose is *emphanizo* and it means "to make clear, to notify, to disclose". Jesus will make Himself

clear to you if you follow His commandments. This has nothing to do with knowledge that comes from outside of Scripture. Don't get that idea. What I would suggest is that this disclosure has to do with a true and intimate knowledge of God through Scripture. To put it in architectural terms, what this disclosure entails is the revealing of a blueprint of the mind of God. How does God's mind work? What does God's mind look like? Of course, this is what the Scriptures really are, a blueprint of the mind of God. It's a framework of His mentality that reveals His thoughts about every area of life. If you know and keep His commandments Christ will disclose His thoughts from the Scripture to your mind. When Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers to come to *epignosis* (true, correct knowledge) of God in Eph. 1:17 he was driving at the same thing John is driving at.

THE LYING DISCIPLE (1 John 2:4)

He who is saying that 'I have come to know (Perfect Tense) Him' but is not keeping (Present Tense) His commandments, is (presently) a liar and the truth is not (presently) in him:

Well, what about the claim in verse 4? Here we have some believers who "claim to have come to know Him intimately" but do not follow His commandments. John says the person making this claim is a liar and the truth is not presently in him. This doesn't mean he's not a believer, it simply means the truth is not in him in a dynamic and controlling way such that his attitude and behavior reflects divine viewpoint. This is just like **1 John 1:6**. There the believer claimed to have fellowship with God but was actually walking in the darkness. The test in 2:3 is whether he is keeping the commandments. If he keeps the commandments, he knows God intimately, if not then he does not know God intimately. This is a classic Christian problem. Christians say they know God as a way of covering up or compensating for their failure to advance spiritually. I hear and see this all the time. Some Christian going about life saying, "Oh, I know the Scriptures" and then their lives look just like the world. They'll say, "oh, I know what the Bible says about marriage" but their marriage is in trouble. "Oh, I know how to raise children", but their children are having solvable problems. Why is this? Well, these people never really came to know what the Bible taught. They never really grasped it. James says it this way, "They heard it but they don't do it." There are two problems today in the modern church related to this issue of why believers don't move on and become obedient disciples who know God intimately. The first problem is that there is a whole lot of nothing coming out of most pulpits. A lot of blah blah blah, hot air, feel good, tickling the ears, avoiding everyone's toes, lots of nice stories and no doctrine, no systematic teaching. Second, what about churches who aren't full of hot air, churches that teach doctrine and systematic theology. Often there is a lot of hearing going

on in the sense that you hear what I'm saying now, external hearing, but there is no internal hearing, no assimilation of doctrine so that true knowledge and application results. How I detect this is by observing fleeting moments of obedience. Oh, we get really excited about something, some retreat or some book we just read and two months later we're back to our old habits. Why is that? Well, it has to do with a failure among believers to study their Bible's daily and really know the Scriptures. This is one of the biggest problems in doctrinal churches today, particularly among the men. We think we can leach off of a good Bible teacher on Sundays and Wednesdays. Let me be clear that no Bible teacher can carry anyone spiritually and no one else can carry you spiritually either. No one can protect you against the devils scheming deceptions. We're all individually responsible. And we have to study the Bible for ourselves. Now, I'm up here giving you enough to contemplate and study the entire week. You have tapes at your disposal and the manuscripts for these teachings are available to review. All my resources are listed at the end of these manuscripts if you want to go further. There are other good doctrinal teachers and authors who can help you study the Bible. If you're taking what I'm feeding you and you're studying and following what you are learning then you will come to know Him intimately. It's a fact. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17). You just have to lock in daily. You can't miss a day. It's not an option. Let me ask you a very practical question; how many days of your life have eating food been an option for you? Ever said, "well eating's not necessary; I'll just give it up?" No, if you give up eating, you will die. Food supports the physical body giving it the nutrients it needs to produce energy. Now, what about your human spirit? Man is a body and a spirit. The spirit animates the body. The body is the vessel through which our spirit operates and interacts with the physical world. Now, the spirit needs nourishment just like the body. Problem is physical food won't nourish the human spirit. The human spirit needs spiritual food. Spiritual food comes in the form of Bible doctrine. Bible doctrine is what nourishes the human spirit. How do you think your human spirit is going to look if you don't nourish it? Now, the physical body is a good example of human spirits. Look at some of the bodies in the world; there are all sorts of variously shaped bodies, different size bodies, and bodies at different levels of fitness. Now, apply that idea to your human spirit. Where is your human spirit? Is it fit? Is it strong? Or is it weak? Is it flabby? See, your physical body is going to deteriorate. It's going to die. It has some importance Paul tells us, but not much. Turn to **1 Timothy 4:7-8** "On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; ⁸ for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and *also* for the *life* to come." Now, look at Paul's perspective. Do you see what he's saying? He's saying spend time disciplining your spirit. It's your spirit that ought to correspond to Arnold Schwarzenegger's body! There is "little profit" for disciplining the body. I think we get this out of balance in American culture, way out of balance! I'm

not talking about living a healthy life. I'm talking about the emphasis on bodily exercise to create a form that is pleasing to the American eye. Some idealistic fantasy. Paul says that what the culture says about the importance of the physical shape has "little profit". If you haven't realized it, look around, you may be young today but you're going to be old tomorrow. Your body is going to waste away. However, your spirit is not. It remains in the life to come. Ok, so my body is not that important, it is important to a degree, but what about my human spirit. Obviously, it is important...but what does it look like? Where is it at right now? Many theologians, including myself believe that the moment you physically die and your spirit goes into the presence of God that your spiritual training will pick up where it left off in this life. You don't leap to a new spiritual level the moment you die. You don't all of a sudden know the Bible. Instead, you have to pick up where you left off in this life and training continues. Granted you won't have the presence of sin anymore so you'll be able to assimilate doctrine at a faster rate, but nevertheless you still have to keep training and learning Bible doctrine. Who knows, you may have to even learn Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek so you can read the eternal word of God in heaven and communicate with other believers who speak these languages. Obviously, Paul didn't know English...did he? On the other side of the coin, I highly doubt that men like Robert Dick Wilson who learned over 35 languages, including all the Semitic languages are going to suddenly lose that when they step into eternity.

THE OBEDIENT DISCIPLE (1 John 2:5)

but whoever may keep His word, truly in him the love of God has been perfected (Perfect Tense), in this we know that we are (presently) in Him.

On the flipside is the believer who does *keep His word*. The phrase *keep His word* obviously refers to "keeping the commandments" spoken of in verses 3 and 4. The one who *keeps His word* undergoes a special encounter with the *love of God*. To *keep His word* obviously implies that His word is known. New believers or immature believers should be taught the basics of Christianity so that they can *keep His word* and grow in the knowledge of God and ultimately enjoy the love of God. It is very clear that the seedbed for this teaching is found in John's gospel (chapters 13-17; the only section written to believers). Turn once again to **John 14:21** *"He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."* So, there are two conditions for Christ's self-disclosure to you. 1) you have to *have* the word and 2) you have to *keep* the word. Only when these two conditions are met does Christ's self-disclosure take place. Notice also verses 23-24, *"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will*

come to him and make Our abode with him. ²⁴ "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me."

Realize that this statement was made 3 ½ years after the disciples had begun receiving teaching from Jesus Christ. Only after 3 ½ years did they have the commands and were being called to keep the commands to show their love for Him. Not immediately when they became believers. This is discipleship teaching not teaching about eternal salvation. "Love for Christ and obedience to His word are in no way a test of saving faith, despite the repeated claim by many that they are. Instead, they are tests of genuine, heartfelt discipleship to the One who loved us and gave Himself for us (Galatians 2:20)."ⁱⁱ What is clear from John 14:21, 23, 24 is that "keeping His word" is inseparably connected to the "love of God". The one who keeps His word loves God and the one who disobeys His word does not love God. The one who loves God is the special object of the love of the Father and the Son.

John goes on and says that *truly in him the love of God has been perfected*. The Greek word translated *perfected* is *teleioo* and means "to bring to completion". God loves the whole world according to John 3:16, believers and unbelievers. The child of God realizes the great love of the Father at the point of salvation (1 John 3:1). But the individual believer becomes aware of the "complete" or "perfect" love of God only when the believer returns that love by obedience. When the believer is obedient and knows God, he knows the deeply personal love of the Father and the Son. It is obvious that 1 John 2:3-11 is concerned about one who has been a believer for some time. He has heard the Lord's commands and has learned to obey the commands. By doing so he has come to know God and His love in a deeper way. This goes beyond 1 John 1:5-2:2 which dealt with fellowship. Fellowship only requires that one willingly respond to the sin which the light reveals and to acknowledge that sin. A babe in Christ can live in fellowship with the Lord. But in time He will hear and learn God's general will for His life through the word of God and if he keeps God's will then he will enter into more advanced stages of fellowship as He comes to know God and His love. In such a person the *love of God has been perfected*.

The next phrase probably goes with verse 5 and not with verse 6. There is no grammatical reason to tie verse 5 to verse 6. The NASB should not have a period in the middle of verse 5. Therefore, this last phrase *by this we know that we are (presently) in Him* refers to the preceding clause. *In this* refers to the *love of God*. The one who has the love of God perfected in Him knows that he is *in Him*. The words *in Him* introduce a very important principle in John's writings; the principle of "abiding". When *in Him* is used by John it should not be confused with the way Paul uses the words *in Him*. Paul uses *in Him* to speak of being in *union* with Christ, John uses it of being in *communion* with Christ. Paul uses it of *relationship*, John of *fellowship*. The seedbed for John's use of *in Him* is found in John 15:1-8, a section of Scripture popularly known as "the Vine and the

Branches”, but might be better titled “The Christian’s Abiding”. What does John mean by *in* Him? Turn to **John 15:1-8**. Here our Lord is discussing believers (branches) who are either abiding or not abiding in Him (the vine). The context is not comparing believers with unbelievers (relational) but abiding believers with non-abiding believers (fellowship). The Greek word for “abiding” is *meno*. It means “to remain or stay”. When the believer “remains” in Him He produces much fruit. When he does not “remain” in Him he is not able to bear fruit at all. John 15:1-8 has nothing to do with loss of salvation or comparing believers with unbelievers but rather the abiding believer versus the non-abiding believer; the ones who merely possess eternal life versus those who both possess and are enjoying the abundance of the Christian life (John 10:10). So, as we can see from 2:6, the very next verse, when John uses *in Him*, he is obviously referring to the discipleship relationship between Teacher and disciple. So, when we come to know the love of God, we know that we are abiding in Him, we are enjoying the abundance of the Christian life.

CONCLUSION

So, 1 John 2:3-5 is an advance on the basic doctrine of fellowship. New or immature believers begin by recognizing sin and acknowledging sin as they learn the commands of God. Intimate knowledge is one step higher; it is an advance to deeper and more meaningful fellowship with God. It takes some time to get to this point because one has to learn the word of God and then keep the word of God. When these two conditions are met the spiritual environment is ready for Christ to disclose Himself to the obedient disciple so that the disciple can comprehend the depth of God’s love and character. The believer who claims to know Him but does not keep the commandments of God is a liar and the truth is not in him in a dynamic or controlling way. The one who does keep the commandments and enjoys the deep realization of the love of God has entered the abiding stage of Christian fruit-bearing.

ⁱ Hodges, Zane, *The Epistles of John* (Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 76.

ⁱⁱ Hodges, Zane, *The Epistles of John* (Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 80.

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