

Confidence because we Obey

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, let me start by saying that there is a difference between knowing about someone generally and knowing someone personally, isn't there?
- I think we all realise that. For example, I know about this Hollywood star, John Travolta. I know that he used to be an ambassador for Qantas. I know that he's done lots of movies. His big one that kicked off his career, I think, was Grease with Olivia Newton-John. I also know that he's done this movie called Battlefield Earth you may never have heard of. And it is still to this day generally regarded in Hollywood as the worst movie ever made.
- So he has that claim to fame. See, I know about John Travolta. But we knew some people in Sydney. We used to have some friends who were in Sydney who know him personally, which makes a huge difference.
- And so when John was in Sydney, they had access to him and could talk meaningfully to him and know that he would listen and that he could talk to them as well.
- [1 : 0 5] In fact, he even gave things to them. Like one night or one time, he was staying in Sydney and he hired a hotel suite with harbour views that cost \$5,000 per night.
- But he had to fly back to the US unexpectedly, so he gave it to our friends to enjoy. I asked, how was it, to my friend Steve, and he said, oh, it was really nice. Not \$5,000 nice, but really nice.
- So you're not missing out on anything. The point is knowing someone personally means so much more than knowing about someone generally, doesn't it?
- And it's the same with God. We can know about God. We can know certain facts about him. But if we know him personally, then it makes all the difference.
- It means we have access to him, to talk meaningfully with him and know that he will listen. Even if he doesn't answer our prayers, how we want and when we want, we know that he still cares.
- [2 : 1 0] He sees the bigger picture. It means we can know that he talks to us by his word and spirit, a spirit convicting our conscience and so on. Guiding us on how to live in this sometimes confused and messed up world.
- And he gives us things too. And not a knight's accommodation, but the promise to work for our spiritual good in all things. And to provide strength to help us persevere.
- And not only forgiveness of sins, but then life eternal too. But here's the question for us this morning. How do you know that you know God personally?
- And not just about God generally? How can you have confidence that you know God personally? Because sometimes we might doubt that we do.
- Especially if we're going through a tough time or feeling spiritually dry. Or for John's readers, some people have left your church and they're now telling you that Jesus is not the Christ.

[3 : 17] So he's not the way to know God. Which means they're wondering if they really do know God at all. So how can we be confident that we know God personally? Well, John tells us today.

But it's not the usual way that we hear. And here I just want you to put your thinking caps on just for a moment. Because the Bible actually gives us two types of assurance. That gives us confidence.

There's objective assurance. That's based on an object outside of us like God's word. And it reassures us. It tells us that if we believe in Jesus, then we know God personally.

That's it. God's word doesn't change even if we are having a bad Christian day. You know, when we're not living his way or we're doubting or whatever it is. That objective assurance stays the same.

And that's generally the assurance we hear from the Bible. But to help us even be more confident, John adds some subjective assurance.

[4 : 22] Subjective because it's based on its subject that is us. What we say and do. Which I know immediately thinks, oh, that's a bit risky.

Because we don't always say and do the right things, do we? But John knows that God is at work in the lives of those who know him.

God is at work helping us to do and say the right things. And so it does provide us some assurance. That we know God. Like verse 3.

You have a look there in verse 3. We know that we have come to know God if we keep his commands. Which means the opposite is also true.

Verse 4. Whoever says I know him but does not do what he commands is a liar. And the truth is not in that person. You see, one way we can be confident.

[5 : 19] Verse 3. One way we can know that we know God is if we obey his commands. For it's a sign that God's love has worked in our hearts.

Enabling us and motivating us to love God in return. By, as we heard in the kids talk, by obeying his commands. See verse 5.

I said last week that John's style is a kind of style where he circles and circles back to common themes.

And each time he circles back, he often amplifies or expands with a bit more information. His writing style is called amplification. And so if we want to understand a bit more about what's happening here, we sometimes need to look ahead to where he amplifies it.

And so to show you the verse that I showed the kids, here we read later in chapter 5 that love for God is to keep his commands. It's quite straightforward, isn't it? It's not buying chocolates or flowers as we said.

[6 : 30] But as we heard in our first reading, where Israel were to love God by keeping his commands and teaching to their kids and so on. Our parents sometimes do this too. Our kids might ask what the parent wants for Mother's Day or Father's Day.

And the parent might say, I don't want any presents. I just want you kids to do what I ask without complaining for one day. Does that sound familiar to anyone?

But this is how we show love for God. And yet John will also say later on, though just before chapter 5, he will say that this love for God is only because, and in fact love for one another, is only because God first loved us.

And again, he didn't love us by giving us chocolates or flowers either, but by giving his son to pay for our sin and his spirit to work in our hearts. So that we can be brought into a relationship with God.

Where we know him. Where we know him. And are enabled and motivated to love him in return. By obeying his commands. This is how the love of God comes full circle.

[7 : 41] Or as verse 5 puts it, is truly made complete in us. God's love comes down to us in his son. And spirit works in our hearts. Enables us to then love God in response by obeying him.

You see. All of which shows that we do have a relationship with him. That we do know him personally. And in case we don't quite get the point, John amplifies it.

Says the same thing with slightly different words. So the rest of verse 5 and 6. He goes on to say, look, this is how we know we are in him. Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

John talks about knowing God in terms of living in God. That is being united to God spiritually. Which means he's always with us, actually. Never to leave us nor forsake us.

And being connected to God means we have constant access to an infinite supply of grace and strength. To help us in our times of need.

[8 : 48] That really is worth knowing God, isn't it? But we can be confident we do if we walk or live as Jesus did. How did Jesus live?

Well, in obedience. In fact, Jesus says in John's Gospel that I love the Father. How? How? Well, he does exactly. He obeys what my Father has commanded me.

He was obedient to death. Even death on a cross. Now, immediately we think, oh dear. I don't always obey as Jesus did.

So do I really live in God? Do I really know God personally? Am I really a Christian? No. But John knows that no one perfectly walks as Jesus did.

He just said last week that we all still sin. Remember? Anyone who says that we're without sin deceives themselves and the truth is not in them. We saw that last week. Rather, John is thinking of those who seek to obey God's commands.

[9 : 55] Generally, not perfectly. Let me try a little game to see if I can illustrate this. Stand up if you are perfect. I'm going to sit there. No one?

Okay. All right. Next one then. Stand up if you generally ignore God and try not to obey God. You see, none of us may be perfect, but we do try to obey God, don't we?

And John says this shows that you know him personally. This is his love that has worked in your heart. I mean, people who don't know God, they simply don't care about what God says, do they?

And they certainly don't try and obey God, do they? But we do because we know God personally.

Here is the first bit of subjective assurance. We can be confident we know God personally because generally we do obey his commands. The second bit of subjective assurance is that we love one another.

[11 : 06] That's a point to verse seven. Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command, but an old one, which you've had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard.

Yet I am writing you a new command. Its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

Is that clear as mud? Is it old or new? This is why we need to sip John slowly because he packs it in. But John moves here from God's commands, plural, to one in particular.

And he says it's both old and new. It's new because Jesus called it new. Do you remember what Jesus said in John's gospel? A new command I give you, love one another.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another. I keep trying to sing that old song based on these verses. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples. Why did Jesus call it new, though?

[12 : 10] There was commands to love your neighbor as yourself in the Old Testament. Well, the new part is as I have loved you. Not just as we would, which is kind of, it's as Jesus has loved us.

And how did Jesus love us? Sacrificially, didn't he? That's the new aspect. We're to love one another sacrificially. And so that's why it's a new command.

But verse 7 says it's also an old command because it's been around since the beginning of Christianity. And the beginning of them, the readers, becoming Christians. In fact, it was part of the Christian message they heard.

And they didn't just hear that Jesus is the Christ who saves them from sin. They also heard that how in response we had a trust in him and love one another.

And the great news is his readers are doing this. Because if you look at verse 8, John sees the truth of this love lived out not just in him, that is Jesus, but in you, his readers.

[13 : 20] How good is that? And can I say I've seen it in you too. I've seen people give up their time, you know, sacrifice in order to serve others.

We had lots of people doing that yesterday, didn't we? Or else, other times, providing meals or lifts and so on. In fact, I was to catch up with someone from 5pm Church last week, but he also caught COVID.

And so he texts me to cancel. I asked him, is there anything you need? And his response was this. He said, no, the church family has been overwhelmingly supportive.

How good is that? When people here find out others in need, they do love sacrificially and it's brilliant. But again, we're only able to do this because Jesus has been at work in us by his spirit.

Or in this case, he has revealed the truth to us. That's what light does. If you remember last week, John wrote in his gospel, the true light that is Jesus that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

[14 : 32] Well, here in verse 8, it says the true light is already shining in the world. Jesus has already come. He's already revealed the truth about eternal life and how to live this life like loving one another.

And as his light of truth is revealed, then the darkness of falsehood passes away. The more people hear the truth that there is eternal life, the more the falsehood of darkness passes away.

The world has lots of lies like there is no eternal life. And if you only and you only love others, if it's convenient for you or if they love you back, otherwise you cut them off.

But because Jesus's light is already shining, the world's darkness of falsehood is already passing. And yet we cannot claim to live in the light of Jesus and still hate one another.

Verse 9. Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. You see, the light of Jesus's truth says we're to love one another.

[15 : 44] So if you hate, then you're clearly not in the light, are you? You're in darkness. On the other hand, if we do love one another, as I've seen people do, then it shows we do live in the light of his truth.

We are his disciples. Verse 10. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light. And there is nothing in them to make them stumble.

But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going because the darkness has blinded them. John's point here is that those who love one another sacrificially like Jesus live in the light of his truth.

It shows we are his disciples. It is evidence that we know God personally. And so to summarize the passage, because John likes circles, starting with at the top, you know God if you obey his commands like his command to love one another, which shows you live in the light and means you know God.

And around it goes. That's the passage so far. But again, of course, we can think, oh dear, I don't always love my fellow Christians sacrificially.

[17 : 05] In fact, some of my fellow Christians I try to avoid actively. And so does that mean I don't walk in the light? That I'm not really a disciple?

That I don't know God personally? But again, John knows that we don't love each other perfectly. He's talking about seeking to love each other generally.

And so to do our little game again, stand up if you hate your brothers and sisters in this room. Excuse me. Okay, all right. Different one. Stand up if you never try to love your brothers and sisters in this room.

You see, we do try, don't we? And John is saying there's some reassurance that you know God.

In fact, John is writing because he knows that they know God. You see verse 12? I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

[18 : 03] I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father.

I write to you, fathers, because you know 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.

Dear children is John's way of referring to the whole church. It's what he did at the beginning of chapter 2 and what he does later on. And he's confident, did you notice, that his dear children, the people he's writing to, have their sins forgiven and do know the Father.

And so his intention here is not to see if they're real Christians and see if they know God by testing whether they obey or not or whether they love or not.

He already knows that they know God. Rather, his intention then is to reassure them that they really do know God, despite what those false teachers who left say.

[19 : 09] And this means there's a right and wrong way to apply this passage today. It reminds me of this funny iPad video I may have shown you before. It's only 30 seconds long, so I'll show you again.

It's by a German comedy group. And the daughter begins by saying, so, Dad, how do you like the iPad I bought for your birthday? We need sound. How did you get the new iPad to come to you with the new iPad?

Good. Are you ready for the apps? What are those apps? Go ahead and get the switch to the side. What's wrong?

You see, the point is just as there's a right and wrong way to use an iPad, there's a right and wrong way to apply this passage. It would be very easy for us to feel guilty and very easy for me to challenge us to obey God more and love each other better.

After all, I know some people love application that challenges them. And if that's you, don't worry. John will do that later in chapter three, where he will say we are to love not with words, but with action.

[20 : 32] But that's not his intention here today. I could apply it like that. But it'd be like using an iPad as a chopping board. Rather, John writes because they do know God, that their sins have been forgiven.

He wants to reassure them of these things. And so the right way to apply this passage today is simply to say, look back at your life.

See how God has worked in it to help you obey and love one another. And let that provide reassurance that you really do know God personally.

And it's worth being sure that you know God personally. Because it comes with all those things I said at the start. Like access to him to talk meaningfully in prayer.

Knowing that he'll listen, even if he doesn't give the answer we want or when we want. We know that he still cares. He sees the bigger picture. It gives us confidence to know that he will talk to us by his word, by his spirit through our conscience.

[21 : 39] Helping us to live the right way in this sometimes confused and messed up world. And it gives us confidence that he will give us those things. Like his strength to help us persevere.

Like forgiveness of sins. And like life eternal. After all, Jesus himself said in John's Gospel, this is eternal life.

That they know you. The only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. And so it's worth being sure that we know God, isn't it?

Eternal life kind of depends on it, doesn't it? And so, John says, look back at your lives. See how God has worked in them to help you obey and to help you love one another.

And know with confidence that you do know God personally. Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we thank you for the great assurance that you give us.

[22 : 47] Not only that objective assurance like your word, which does not change even when we're having bad days. But we also thank you for that subjective assurance. For the way you've worked in our lives.

The way you help us to obey and love one another. Father, we pray that you would remind us of these things when we doubt whether we know you or not.

That we may be confident that we know you personally. And have all the privileges that come with that. Help us in this, we pray in Jesus name.

Amen. Amen.