

Knowing the God of Light *Intimately!*
1 John 2.3-11

How well do you know God? Fellowship with God is more than a casual affiliation. It is intimate companionship. It's what John wants all of us to experience. What does knowing God intimately involve? More than just believing in Him! Do you know God *intimately*? Do you *want* to?

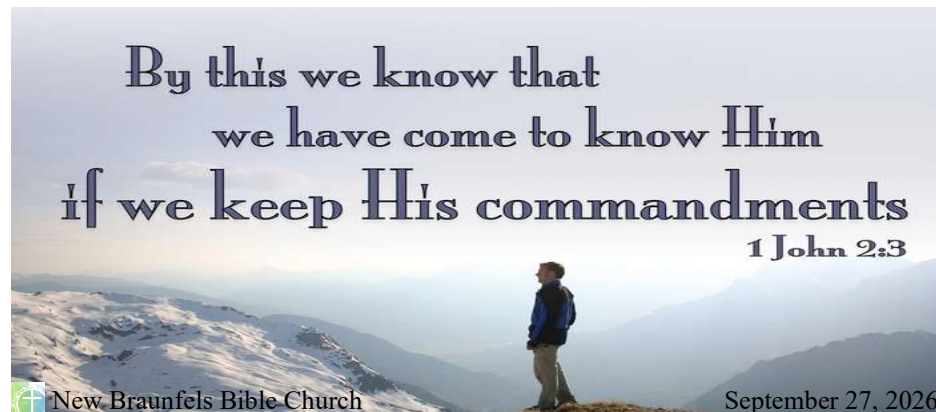
- Avoiding a common error: 'Knowing God' ≠ 'being a Christian'

Question: What does it mean 'to know God' (vv3-4)?

Wrong Answer: It means to 'be a Christian'.

Right Answer: It means to 'know God intimately'!

- Keeping God's commandments is His "love language" (2.3-5)
- Walking like Jesus in love (2.6-8)
- Avoiding the darkness of hate! (2.9-11)



John 2.3-11

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 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; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. 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. Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

About 25 years ago, marriage counselor Gary Chapman published his book *The Five Love Languages*. As a young husband trying to figure out how to love my wife, I bought the book. Chapman said there were five basic ways husbands and wives perceived love from each other: Words of affection, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch. Unfortunately, most husbands and wives don't have the same love language. Chapman said the key to marital intimacy is learning to speak your partner's "love language." As a husband and wife grow together through the ups and downs of life, experiencing joys and facing trials

together, they learn to show love for each other in ways that produces a response of love in their mate.

This is true in the spiritual realm as well. It's notable that in Scripture the relationship between Jesus Christ and the church – all those who have believed in Jesus as personal Savior – is described in terms of a marriage relationship. Jesus is our bridegroom; we are the bride of Christ. It should come as no surprise, then, that in our relationship with God, we have our 'love languages.'

What is God's love language for us? The supreme expression of God's love was sending His Son to die on the cross for our sins. Rom. 5.8 says, *God demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* The night before He died on the cross for our sins, Jesus said, *"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends"* (John 15.13). That expression of love was for every person in the world: *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life"* (John 3.16). God's 'love language' of sending Jesus to save us reflects all our human 'love languages': Jesus is "the Word" telling of God's love for us; Jesus gave us "quality time" – three years on earth! He gives us the greatest gift, eternal life! He's a suffering servant who meets our every need, and in our trials, He tells us to cast all our cares on Him.

"Great!" you say. "God really loves me!" But that raises a corresponding question: "What is God's 'love language'? How does He want us to show our love for Him? What can we do that communicates to God, 'I *really* love You!'?"

The answer to that is found in 1 John 2.3-11, but before we come to it, we need to avoid a common error.

- Avoiding a common error: 'Knowing God' ≠ 'being a Christian'

A few weeks ago when we began this series going through First John, I told you that pastors avoid preaching on 1 John like the plague. The first two verses we read this morning are one of the reasons. Let me read 1 John 2.3-4 again:

By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 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...

If you take what the Bible says seriously, those verses should trouble you. If I ask you, "Do you know God?", most of you would reply, "Yes, of course! I trusted in Christ years ago!"

If I then ask you, "Do you obey all the Lord's commands?", you might squirm, and say something like, "Well, I try to, but I don't *always* keep them *all perfectly* – who does?!!"

But wait a minute! We just read that if someone says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, he is a liar! So do you know the Lord, or are you a liar?!

The catch-22 crisis I've just created is the result of a common error in understanding what John means when he writes, "By this we know that we have come to know Him..." The critical question we must answer is this:

Question: What does it mean ‘to know God’ (vv3-4)?

Wrong Answer: It means to ‘be a Christian’.

The common answer is that it means to be a Christian. Many people think v2 is saying this: *By this we know that we are Christians, if we keep His commandments.*” But this creates a huge problem: If that is true, *how can you ever know you are saved?* Answer: You can’t. Perhaps as you sit here in church, you might feel pretty sure you’re saved. But this afternoon, or tomorrow, or next week, when something happens and Satan trips you up, what about then? Are you unsaved?

Let me just say that this kind of constant “fruit inspecting” to determine whether or not you are saved, or whether someone else is saved, is a one-way ticket to despair. You will never have any assurance of salvation, and you’ll never have the joy in your Christian life God wants you to have.

As we have seen in 1 John chapter one, John is not trying to get us to *believe* in Jesus; He wants us to have *fellowship* with Him. He says it four times. Furthermore, he recognizes that we will always struggle with sin – in fact, he says that if we say we don’t have sin, we’re deceiving ourselves (1.8)! So what does John mean when he says, *By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments?*

Answer: It means to ‘know God intimately’!

The key to understanding this is Greek grammar, which I’m sure sounds about as exciting to you as Chinese water torture! So if you need to take a quick bathroom break, do it now! This is critical to getting John’s meaning right.

In 1 John 2.3-4, in the phrase “we have come to know Him,” the verb “to know” is in the perfect tense. If you had a good English teacher, you may have learned that the perfect tense describes something that happened in the past and has present results. For example, if I say, “I’ve lived in New Braunfels for over 20 years,” that means I started living here more than 20 years ago, and I still live here.” The Greek perfect tense does the same thing – it is present results of past action. And that’s the key to understanding.

If I ask you, “Do you know President Trump?”, you’d say, “Yes, of course. Who doesn’t?” But if I ask, “Have you come to know President Trump?”, that’s different. It means more than just knowing who he is; it means I got to know him some time ago, and since then I’ve gotten to know him personally. The Greek perfect tense with stative verbs like “to know” is *intensive*: It means to know someone *intimately*.

It’s the same in my relationship with my wife. When I first met Jen, I knew her, but not *intimately*. But since then, we’ve been married for over 40 years, and I *have come to know her*. Now, I know her *intensely* or *intimately*.

That’s the key to understanding John’s meaning. The perfect tense signals that he is talking about coming to know God intimately! This is all about *fellowship*, not *relationship*.

When you first heard that God sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross for your sins, and you believed in Him, you entered into a *relationship* with God. You were a child of God, a member of His forever family! But as every parent knows, after a child is born into your family, that isn’t the end of it. As your child grows, you want to know them intimately, and

for them to know you, too. You love them, and you want them to love you, too. That's *fellowship*. That's what John is talking about here.

So how do we experience that kind of fellowship with God? How do we come to know Him *intimately*?

- Keeping God's commandments is His "love language" (2.3-5)

The first thing John tells us is that God's "love language," the way we show we love Him, is by keeping His commandments.

Paraphrase of 1 John 2.3-5

Let me tell you how we can be sure that we know Christ intimately: By obeying His commandments. If anyone says, "I know Christ intimately," but doesn't obey His commands, that person is a liar. He doesn't have the truth living in him like he should! But if we obey His word, God's love will be developed and matured in us. That is the way to determine if we have become close to Jesus.

It's sad that today some Christians openly and arrogantly live sinful lifestyles, flaunting the commands of God in Scripture, yet claim to be in fellowship with God. Some Christians excuse their behavior – their circumstances were difficult, and God will surely understand why they did what they did.

Chuck Colson had a powerful role in the Nixon White House, but about the time of Watergate, his life radically changed. He put his trust in Jesus as his Savior, and while he could have easily avoided legal trouble, he knew he had done things that were wrong, and because he was now a follower of Christ, he

confessed what he had done. Obedience to the commands of God resulted in him spending time in prison. But where he once would have justified his actions, he now wanted to be in fellowship with God. Later in his life he wrote a book entitled *Loving God*, in which he wrote this:

"Loving God – really loving Him – means living out His commands no matter what the cost."

— Charles W. Colson, *Loving God*

If we want to be in fellowship with Jesus, walking in the light as He is in the light (1.7), we must keep His commandments.

But, you ask, what does that mean? How do I know that I'm keeping His commandments? John answers that in two short follow-up sections – vv6-8 and vv9-11.

- Walking like Jesus in love (2.6-8)

In 1 Jn. 2.6 John says: *The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.* Let me paraphrase that for you: "Those who say they have intimacy with God *must* live and act like Jesus." We are to 'walk like Jesus in love.'

In vv7-8, John he's giving them an "old commandment" they have heard before, and he is giving it to them now as a "new commandment" for the times in which they are living. Where was this commandment given before?

Here John harkens back to the night Jesus was betrayed. On that night, Jesus prepared the disciples for living the Christian life after He was gone, and gave them a 'new commandment':

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” (Jn. 13.34)

A little later, He said (Jn. 14.15),

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”

A little later, He said that He was the vine, and they were the branches, and that they needed to abide in Him. How could they do that? Jesus said (Jn. 15.10a):

“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love.”

Here is a simple litmus test to determine if you are walking in fellowship with the Lord: Am I walking like Jesus in love?

This is a challenge for all of us. As one quip put it: “I love everyone in the world. It’s the person next door I can’t stand!” Or as the old rhyme puts it,

*To live above with those we love – that will be glory!
To live below with those we know – well that’s another story!*

- Avoid the darkness of hate! (2.9-11)

The flip side of this is in verses 9-11: Avoid the darkness of hate! John writes that the person who says they are walking in the light, but hates their brother, is actually walking in the darkness. Furthermore, this darkness can so control them that they become spiritually blind to their own sin (v11).

Dave Anderson, who has planted a number of churches in Texas over many years, and has seen how churches divide and splinter, writes this:

*“Hatred hides behind the pew of every church just waiting for a chance to infect Christians with a disease so debilitating I am going to suggest it is our biggest barrier we face when it comes to getting close to God.” (Dave Anderson, *Maximum Joy*, 85)*

I don’t know what problems people in the churches to which John wrote had, but he did, and here he’s touching an exposed nerve. Division was an issue facing every first-century church in the New Testament. It’s an issue facing churches today. It’s an issue facing New Braunfels Bible Church, too.

We are seeking a new senior pastor. As we go through this process, there will be different opinions. Make no mistake: Satan knows this will be an opportunity to create division in NBBC. The application for every one of us is clear: *Do I know God intimately? Am I walking like Jesus in love? Am I avoiding the darkness of hate?*

As we go through the process of calling a new pastor, let’s all commit ourselves to obey God’s commandments, to walk in love for one another, and avoid the darkness of hate. That’s how to really live in fellowship with God!

Digging Deeper

1. It's critical when studying a New Testament epistle to never forget who the author is addressing in his letter, and what his primary goal is in writing. Let's do a quick review of what we've covered so far. Is John writing to Christians or non-Christians? How does he refer to them? Is he calling on them to believe in Jesus in order to be saved, or to live their Christian lives in fellowship with God? What does he say about dealing with sin in their lives?
2. John is a good teacher, and as an old saying puts it, "Repetition is the mother of learning." John uses repeated phrases to emphasize his message (do you see any in chapter one?). What phrase does John repeat three times in 1 John 2.3, 6, and 9? In each case, a person is claiming something about their Christian life. What is their claim, and what does John say shows whether their claim is true or not?
3. John's references to loving God, keeping His commandments, and abiding in Him, remind us of perhaps the most memorable night in John's life – in the Upper Room the night Jesus was betrayed. On that night, Jesus prepared His disciples for their lives after He was gone – He instructed them on essentials for the Christian life! Read John 13.34; 14.15, 21a, 23a, 24a; 15.4-14. What lessons that Jesus gave on that night does John pass on to his own disciples here?
4. We say "I've come to know the Lord" to describe that we are saved (going to heaven), but that isn't what John is talking about in 2.3-4. How do we know? The verb "know" is in the perfect tense in Greek, and means "to know Him *intimately*." What must we do to "know" God in this way? What does this show about us (v5)?
5. John continues to focus on what we must do to have intimacy with God in 1 John 2.6-11. What will a Christian who says he is abiding in Christ do (v6)? When was this "old commandment" given (v7)? How is it a "new commandment" now (v8)? What is passing away (v17)? What 'new world' is coming? What does our attitude toward other Christians show about our intimacy with God (9-11)? What is the effect of a lack of love on our spiritual lives?