

The Moral and Social Test of Our Salvation

1 John 2:3-14

“Until now John has been stating largely the historical groundings of the Christian faith and has been dealing with the reality of sin in Christians. Now, however, he begins to indicate in explicit language how a Christian may truly know that he is born again or, to use John’s own language, how he may know that he knows God.

*There are three answers or tests. These were highlighted years ago by Robert Law and have since been restated well by Stott. **First, there is the moral test**, which is the test of righteousness. This is developed first in 2:3-6, the verses being studied in this present chapter, and is brought forward at several other points throughout the letter. The point here is that one who knows God will increasingly lead a righteous life. For God is righteous. It does not mean that he will be sinless; John has already shown that anyone who claims this is lying. It simply means that he will be moving in a direction marked out by the righteousness of God. If he does not do this, if he is not increasingly dissatisfied with and distressed by sin, he is not a child of God. **The second test is social**, the test of love. It is developed first in 2:7-11 and is also restated several times later in the letter. **Finally, there is the doctrinal test**, which is the test of truth. It is found in 2:18-27, among other places.” Boice*

2:3 John uses the word “**know**” forty-two times throughout 1 John as a direct refutation of what the Gnostic heretics considered to be knowledge.

γινώσκω ginōskō; a prolonged form of a primary verb; to “know” (absolutely) in a great variety of applications and with many implications (as follow, with others not thus clearly expressed):—allow, be aware (of), feel, (have) know(-ledge), perceived, be resolved, can speak, be sure, understand. Strong’s

- John doesn’t say, “and by this we may know that we are born again,” or “and by this we may know that we are Christians.” Instead, he says, “**we know**” that we have come to know him, if we keep his commands.

“The word rendered keep (a form of the verb tērēō) stresses the idea of an observant, watchful obedience. It can also be translated “guard,” which would in this context mean guarding His Commandments since keep is a present, active subjunctive, it conveys that sense of believers continually safeguarding the commandments because they consider them precious.” MacArthur

Rom. 7:22 *For in my inner being I delight in God’s law;*

- Knowing God involves much more than knowing about Him or knowing Scripture and doctrine well concerning both the Old and New Testaments. It’s knowing Him in a way that changes who we are and how we live. It’s having a heartfelt knowledge of what it means to be in a vital relationship with the Lord, i.e. the triune God, because of our salvation.
- John says, knowing God is both intellectual and life changing. It means that we will want to live life His way by being obedient to His commands. His commands are the moral absolutes God expects us to live by. They are not the gray areas that Scripture does not speak out against, conscience dictates in those matters (Rom. 14) but instead are clear absolutes that are not to be violated. The ten commandments are moral absolutes. Jesus lays out many more, ones that the writers of the New Testament expand upon. To walk in the darkness by habitually and without any desire to repent and turn from sin, puts into question someone’s salvation.

- In 1 Cor. 5, Paul provides us with a good example of what it means to obey God's commands and how we are to respond to those who claim to know Christ but live as if they never knew Him.

1 Cor. 5:9-13 *9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— 10 not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. 11 But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people. 12 What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? 13 God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked person from among you.”*

- **Romans 1:18-32** and **1 Cor. 6:9-10** show us how God judges unbelievers.

2:4 If John calls someone who does not obey God's commands a liar, and if Paul calls that person wicked, then are they really saved? Do we have a right to judge their salvation? Do we have a right to run around like junior Holy Spirit's pointing out someone's sin?

Matt. 7:1-6 *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 3 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. 6 “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.*

- **Matthew 7:6** seems to reinforce **1 Cor. 5:11**.
- What's the difference between what John and Paul are saying and what Jesus is saying?
- John's argument centers on those who say they know God but habitually live as if they don't. Their influence could have a devastating effect on the spiritual wellbeing of a church, like a cancer that eats away at the churches mooring in Christ.
- He is not at all referring to true believers who by nature are sinners and know it, believers who understand **1 Jn. 1:9** and the importance of what it means to habitually walk in the light in increasing measure as the Lord takes them through progressive sanctification.

Romans 8:28-30 *28 And we know that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified....*

2:5 This is the first occurrence of the word love in 1 John. It is our love for God that is perfected in us.

John 14:21 *Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”*

“The point here is that the one who knows God will increasingly lead a righteous life, for God is righteous. It does not mean that he will be sinless; John has already shown that anyone who claims this is lying. It simply means that he will be moving in a direction marked out by the righteousness of God. If he does not do this, if he is not increasingly dissatisfied with and distressed by sin, he is not God’s child.” (Boice)

2:6 Jesus set the standard of obedience to the Father that all believers are to follow.

Jn. 14:31 *but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father...*

Phil. 2:8 *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

- The call is to emulate Jesus in our conduct. It is having a willingness to be his disciple, to let him teach and tutor us in spiritual matters. If we need teachers and tutors and coaches in this world, then we most certainly need that even more so in the world that counts. It’s not living by rules, but by his example, which makes our discipleship personal, active, and costly.
- It is **Personal** because it can’t be passed off to another. It is **Active** because the Lord himself is proactive toward us. To be inactive is to be left behind in too many ways. It is **costly** because to walk as Jesus did, we must learn to die to self just like Jesus did.

Philippians 3:10 *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection of the dead.*

2:7-11 The social test of knowing Him is seen in how willing we are to love others. The command to love one another is emphasized because believers are to make it a preeminent feature of their lives. God’s love is to be one of the greatest character traits that believers possess.

Vs. 7 The command to love God and one another has always been expected of those who know God.

Deut. 6:5 *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

Lev. 19:18 *“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.*

Rom. 13:8-10 *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

Vs. 8 *“In Jesus love became new in two directions. It became new in the extent to which it reached. In Jesus love reached out to the sinner... Love became new in Jesus because he widened its boundaries until there were none outside its boundaries. It became new in the lengths to which it would go. No lack of response, nothing that men could ever do to him, could turn Jesus’s love to hate. He could even pray for God’s mercy on those who were nailing him to his Cross. the commandment to love was old in the sense that men had known of it for long; but it was new because in Jesus Christ*

love had reached a standard which it had never reached before and it was by that standard that men were bidden to love.” Barclay

Vv. 9-11 To walk in the light means that the light of Christ’s love is to be seen in how we treat others.

- When a believer claims to walk in the light yet hates someone for whatever reason, it affects their behavior and emotional wellbeing. It causes them to stumble spiritually and in their relationship with God. It grieves the Holy Spirit, steals their joy, and blinds them to the importance of living the gospel well. Hatred can take on many forms like passive aggressiveness, indifference, slander, or outright hostility toward someone.

Ephesians 4:30-32 *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

2:12-14 John addresses different levels of spiritual maturity.

- “I write to you **dear children**” refers to all believers whose sins are forgiven on account of Jesus (vs. 12) and who have known the Father (vs. 13b). This could also refer to those new in the faith.

Col. 2:13-14 *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.*

Rom. 8:15-16 *The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.*

- “I write to you **fathers**” refers to seasoned mature believers who are well along in what progressive sanctification has meant for them.

“It is fathers who, as the result of a lifetime of spiritual experience, have known the Eternal One and have come fully to trust him.” Boice

“This is what spiritual maturity has its roots in. It is not so much in an intellectual knowledge (though that is a part of it), but more so in the depth of fellowship and relationship we have with Jesus. There is no substitute for years and years of an experiential relationship with Jesus.” Guzik

- “I write to you **young men**” refers to believers who are progressing in the faith no matter their age. From an eternal perspective, the soul is young.

- John notes two important truths that enable someone to progressively walk in the light:
 1. They have overcome the evil one, meaning that they now have full access to the armor of God (Eph. 6:10-18) which enables them to recognize Satan’s attacks, resist him and stand firm in their love for the Lord (1 Peter 5:8-9).
 2. They are strong, meaning that they now have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to deepen their faith (1 Peter 1:3-11).