

1 JOHN 2:7-11

INTRODUCTION

We must keep at the forefront of our minds the purpose of this book. We discover that in 5:13. The purpose is to assure the Christians of Asia Minor that they do know God and that they can know for sure that they have eternal life. The faith of the true believers had taken a pounding from the false teachers. These heretics were once members of the church but have now left and they claim that they know God because of a special anointing of the Holy Spirit that imparted to them an intimate knowledge of God.

By implication they were saying that without this experience then you cannot know God or at best you know God in a very inferior way. But John has been expounding in this chapter the tests that are necessary to discover whether one really does know God. Those tests have nothing to do with some extra spiritual experience or some special and secret knowledge passed on to us by the Spirit. No! The tests are much easier to measure than those ones.

Last time we looked at the first test, it is a very simple tests do we obey God? If we do then that is a sure sign that we know God. If we don't obey God then that is a sign that we do not know God. John is simply assuring his readers that they can be sure that they have eternal life because they know God and the proof of that is the demonstration of obedient lives to Jesus Christ. Now we come to John's second test.

1. HOW CAN WE BE SURE WE KNOW GOD?

We have to take these verses together to understand what John means in verses 7-8. What is this new command John is talking about. Well we find the answer in verses 9-11. It is to love one another. So to answer our question how can we be sure that we know God? The answer should be found in our love for one another.

a) Love One Another – Now when John talks about this love he tells us it is both old and new. He says that this is not a new command that I am giving you but an old one, one that you have had since the beginning, it is the very same message that they heard when they came to know Christ. Yet John also says that it is new (v 8), this seems a contradiction doesn't it? But what John is saying is exactly what Jesus said in John 13:34-35.

Jesus command to love was not new; we are commanded in the Old Testament to both love God and to love others (Deuteronomy 6:5 and 19:18). In fact Jesus said that these two commandments summarise all the law and the prophets (Marks 12:28-34). So in what sense then did Jesus and John mean that it was a new command? Greek has two different words for our English word 'new.' One means new in time and the other one means new in quality. It is the second word that is being used here. Loving others is not new in time but it is now new in quality. It is new in quality because Jesus Christ himself invested it with a richer and deeper meaning than that seen within the Old Testament.

Christ loved with a self-giving sacrificial love, and likewise Christians are not just to love our neighbours as ourselves but we are to do so with a self-giving and sacrificial love towards them. Of course we need to remember that our neighbour is anyone who needs our compassion and help irrespective of race and rank. This love is also new in the sense that it is developing and will be seen in new expressions of love within the life of the believer as we develop in our relationship with Christ.

So here is the second mark of assurance. If we obey God then we know that we know him. If we love one another then we can be sure that we know God. Now this love although new in the ways described is not new in other ways. This is not something invented by John or the church but this is something that they received at the beginning, which I take to mean at the beginning of their spiritual life i.e. at their conversion. This truth is central to the message of the gospel, which they heard, for Christ is central to the gospel and of course you can't preach the gospel without the cross of Jesus Christ, which is a demonstration of God's love for sinners. Yet the new dimension of love is seen in Christ but it is also seen in believers, as we possess Christ through the Spirit. Therefore this self-giving sacrificial and indiscriminate love is a clear mark that one has come to real faith in Jesus Christ.

When one looks at Jesus Christ one sees love embodied and exemplified in Him. So in commanding us to love, Jesus does not ask us to do something that he has not already done and continues to do. In verse 8 John is saying that Jesus lived by this principle of love for others and he will enable us to follow His example. Just think of Jesus love for his disciples. O how they must have broken his heart with their slowness of heart to learn from Him and their apparent inability to comprehend and understand his teaching.

He was patient with impulsive Peter and with the unbelief of Thomas. We also need to consider our Lord's love for all kinds of people, the religious, the wealthy and the lowest of people all experienced his great love. Even his enemies knew his love as he prayed for those who were crucifying Him asking that they might be forgiven for they did not know what they were doing. In Jesus Christ we have a new illustration of the old truth of love for others. Now the great challenge for us is how does our love match up to that of Jesus. How patient are we with others, how do we express our love to the wealthy, the religious and even the lowest of all people? How do we cope with our fellow brothers and sisters in the church?

Deep down if we do know God there will be a love for people because to know God is to have his life in us and as we have seen love was central to the life of the Lord Jesus. So if we struggle with assurance of salvation then we have to ask ourselves do we obey God and do we love others. If the answer is yes then you can have confidence that you have come into the light that the darkness is passing and that Christ as the true light is already shining in your heart.

b) An illustration (vs. 9-11) - John continues his argument with an illustration of his point. It is so easy to claim to know God the false teachers in John's day were saying that, but it is not easy to fake the implications of knowing God which is love for others and in particular love for our fellow Christians That's why John says that anyone (clearly thinking of the heretics who have left the church) who claims to be in the light, that is the light of knowing God but does not love his brother is in fact not in the light

but in the darkness instead. It is easy to live a Christianity of words, singing the right hymns, using the right vocabulary, praying for right things and through it all deceiving ourselves into thinking that we know God. But the evidence of Christianity is seen in action, in obedience to Christ's commands and in love towards our brothers and sisters in Christ. That's why John says that whoever loves his brother is in the light, such people know God. God is love and his character will be demonstrated in those who know him.

Therefore the opposite is also true. If you do not love, you hate there is no in between and therefore if anyone hates his brother that is if one professing believer hates another professing believer then that just shows that such a person does not know God; he is not in the light but is in darkness. That darkness blinds him so that he does not know where he is going; he has no real purpose or meaning in life. Hatred is what rules his life not love for others.

Now you might say that you do not hate anyone. But what John is saying is that hate is the opposite of love and love is a self-giving and sacrificial for others. To fail to show this love is to hate and live life without God.

So you can see the clear application. We need to look deep within our hearts here and ask do we love others. But how can we know for our hearts can so easily deceive us. We know by our actions towards others especially towards our brothers and sisters in this church. Is our action towards others self giving and sacrificial or is it selfish. Do we give in order to get. So much that is called love today is selfish it is concerned with what we get out of it, but true Christian love gives and gives and gives again and never asks questions like what am I getting out of this. What did Christ get out of his death on the cross, he died because he loved us and wanted to save us from our sin and hell. He gave and gave so that we could be redeemed.

Therefore as we conclude we need to look for these marks within our lives and we need to pray that God may increase our love for others, that our love may grow and develop and find new ways of expressing itself towards others. There is no doubt in my mind that others will see the difference between those who know God and those who say they know God. That difference is seen in obedience to Christ's commands and true self-giving love towards others. May those marks be increasingly seen in your life and mine?

Amen