

1 JOHN 2:3-6

INTRODUCTION

While doing door to door work I often meet people who tell me they are Christians. When I ask what church they go to on most occasions I am told that they don't go to church but they worship God in their own way at home. There are others who claim to be Christians but who do not seem keen to talk about the Lord. There are others who happily call themselves Christians but seem to care little that they are in clear disobedience to God's word.

I have also talked with Christians who adopt the policy that says, "who are we to judge" and therefore they simply take people's word for it. Now let me say that no one can ultimately judge the hearts of people except God but that does not mean that we cannot judge according to the evidence presented to us. After all when we admit people into membership of the church we are making a judgement about that person's spiritual state before God.

I am also sure that there have been times in your life as there has been in my life when we have been extremely low spiritually. At such times we might ask the question how do I know I am a Christian is it not just possible that I could be deceiving myself. Perhaps we have committed sin that we didn't realise we were guilty of committing or some other Christian that we have respected has committed sin that we did not believe they were capable of and it leads to us asking is he or she really a Christian or for that matter as they appeared to be more spiritual than me am I a Christian? It's a very good question and it is one that was being asked by John. How can I be sure I am a Christian? In the context of 1 John the false teachers had broken away from the church claiming that they had a special knowledge of God given to them through an anointing of the Holy Spirit (2:20).

The claim made by these false teachers is that they truly knew God. The implication was that the churches that John is writing to did not know God. So this would raise questions in the mind of the churches, questions like how can you be sure that you know God. It is this question that John is attempting to answer in this section. John says that we know that we have come to know God by looking for some simple but clear evidence.

1. HOW CAN I BE SURE I KNOW GOD (vs. 3-6)?

John gives us three clear pieces of evidence that ought to be showing in the life of someone who knows God. It is because of these verses that we can apply these tests to those people I met on the doors or to those who fall into sin or to those who say we cannot and should not judge others. So what evidence should we look for in someone's life? If someone professes to know God how can we be sure that their claim is not false?

a) Do they obey God's commands (vs. 3-4) – A Christian is someone who has come to know Jesus as Saviour and as Lord therefore if Jesus is Lord then that should be evident in one's life. It is so easy to say He is Lord, but it is not the sort of thing that is easy to hide, if Jesus is Lord it will be evident if he is not Lord it is also evident.

The obvious evidence will be in obedience to His commands. If he is Master then he is the one who dictates how we live, we as his slaves and we ought simply to humbly submit to his will and follow his commands.

Therefore a Christian is someone who obeys God's commands. Now in some circles this basic statement is not a popular view. The fact that we talk about obedience to commands is often seen as legalism in some circles. We can so easily be called legalistic Christians. The argument is often put in terms of love. Some will say look we love the Lord whereas you legalistically follow commands, our Christianity comes from the heart and the implication is that ours doesn't.

But Jesus said that if you love me keep my commands (John 14:10). In true Christianity it is not a case of love or obedience but it is both, we obey because we love God through Christ. The grace of God does not abolish God's law it internalises it by writing it on our hearts. We say don't we that actions speak louder than words and what we mean is that the actions of people are a closer indication of the real person, actions are like a window into the soul of people.

Words are comparatively cheap it is easy for someone to say I am a Christian, words can so easily deceive but actions show whether our words are genuine or not.

So to claim that Jesus is Lord and yet live for self is to deceive ourselves. John doesn't mince his words here, he says that the man who claims to know God and does not obey his Lord's commands then that person is a liar and the truth is not in him (v 4). This is clearly referring to the false teachers who did boast that they knew God but a look at their lives showed clearly that their claim was false for they did not obey God's commands.

Anyone who truly knows God will bow unquestioningly to God's authority over ones life. Such a person says 'that you O God know what is best and therefore that is the way I want to go.'

In fact if we disobey God's commands we are actually saying that God does not know what is best for us and that we know better than God. Now we need to be clear here for it is so easy to deceive ourselves. It is all so easy to say, "I know God that I love him and that I do his commands" but we must check ourselves to see if we do obey God's commands. Now I am not going to list every command that we find in the bible that would be far to time consuming but I want us all to ask if we are obeying God in the following areas.

- i) Use of our Time.
- ii) Use of our money.
- iii) Use of our mind.
- iv) Our commitment to our church.
- v) In how we love one another.

Now please let's not kid ourselves, is the Lordship of Christ controlling the way I use my time, money and mind. Is obedient service to the Lord the deepest desire of my heart? Does my commitment to the church and the activities of the church prove clearly that I know God? Do I love my brothers and sisters in Christ? Those are

tough questions but they are important questions. If you can answer positively those questions then that is evidence that you have come to know God.

Now our enemy the devil will often try to get us to doubt our salvation he will point his figure at us and accuse us of not knowing God, especially when we sin. But at such times true believers can point to our obedience to the Lord's commands as evidence of our salvation. Of course our obedience does not lead or earn us salvation but is a result of our salvation. We cannot point to our obedience and say I must be a Christian for surely God will be pleased with my obedience, for that is salvation by works. Instead we point to our obedience and say now there is evidence that God has saved me, for I now honestly desire to follow Him in obedience to his commands

Now I am aware that we all fail the Lord and we can all point to times over this past week when we have not obeyed the Lord. John himself knew that Christians sin that's why as we saw last week we have an advocate with the Father Jesus Christ the righteous one (vs. 1-2). So every time we disobey our Lord we must be careful that we do not think that we are not Christians. What we must do is to confess that sin and find forgiveness for it through Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice for our sins.

But what John is thinking about here is a general desire and a general lifestyle. Someone who claims to be a Christian and never goes to church is not generally obeying God. If such a person has no desire in their heart to worship with God's people then we have to say that they are not Christians. If people claim to be Christians and generally are not using their money, time and mind in the Lord's service then we can say that they are showing no evidence of being a Christian.

Now do you see what John is saying, if you generally within your heart have a desire for God and as a result of that desire you are seeking under God to obey his commands then that is clear evidence that we have come to know God.

b) Do We Love God? (v 5) – Here is more evidence that I am a Christian if God's love is being made complete in me. If it is then that is evidence that I am obeying his word and submitting myself to his authority. However what does it for God's love to be made complete in us. Now commentators are undecided whether God's love means God's love for man or man's love for God. The fact is that both meanings are possible in the Greek.

It is true that our love for God is a reflection of God's love for us and a response to it so that keeping God's word could be a sign that God's love has done its work in us in that it is fulfilling its purpose in us, which is love and obedience to God. In that sense it is being made complete in us. On the other hand obedience to God's word is evidence of our advancing and maturing love for God and in that sense God's love is being made complete in us. Paul probably had both meanings in mind when he used the word. God's loving purposes for us who believe is to lead us into humble obedience to His word. In doing so our love for the Lord matures and develops so that our desire to obey God's word becomes greater.

So loving God is seen in obeying his word and if that is happening in our lives then we can simply claim to know God. Knowing God means loving God and loving God

means obeying his word. So here is the application, we can be assured of our salvation if as we examine our lives we find that there is a real genuine love for God. This love is not just a feeling but it is expressed in obedience to the written word of God. So a disobedient Christian is someone who does not love God, as he or she should.

Of course no ones love for God is perfect but what John is saying is that the more we submit to God's authority and obey his word then the more our love for Him grows and matures. A growing Christian is a loving Christian and an obedient Christian. So we who are believers must ask if our love for the Lord is growing. The clear evidence of a maturing love for God is a daily, detailed, disciplined obedience to the word of God. Is that what marks our lives?

c) They Walk as Jesus Walked (v 6) – Here is the third and last evidence that someone knows God. Those who claim to live in him that is they have a relationship with him must walk as Jesus did. Here John is presenting the earthly life of Jesus as an example that true Christians must follow. This is how Jesus himself saw his life it was an example for others to follow (John 15:15). John can assume that his readers were familiar with the lifestyle of Jesus.

John doesn't give us any specific examples concerning the life of Jesus but his point is clear enough the test of true Christian experience is whether it produces in us something of the life of Jesus in our everyday activities. Our speech, actions and attitudes ought to reflect something of the words actions and attitudes of Jesus. There should be something in our lifestyle that is attractive to others and yet at the same time causes uneasiness with others.

Our words should always be truthful and yet gracious and our love should always be sacrificial. There ought to be a concern for others especially a concern for those who are lost. Of course many of these things will be far from perfect in our lives but they ought to be there even if in seed form if we are true Christians. However we also have to be honest and realise that if we fail this test then our religious experience is false and we do not know God.

If having examined your life tonight you are convinced that your profession is not genuine then let me point you to the one who can save you and bring you into a genuine relationship with God. That person is Jesus Christ. Come to him. Trust him and then by his grace obey his commands.

Amen