

Knowing That You Know

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Preacher: Cory Brock

[0 : 0 0] We are working on Sunday morning through First John, and we've done that for a few weeks now. What a letter First John is. It is a letter, and its words are actually quite simple, but its teaching is incredibly profound.

And today, John brings us to ask another very significant question as he's done the past couple of weeks, and that's, can you know if you know, if you know that you know, can you know that you know God?

Can you know that you know Him? And how can you know that you know God? In other words, how can you be assured that you have fellowship with God? John has said that the point of human existence is to be in fellowship with the living God.

And today he takes up that great question, do you know that you know Him? And to know Him means to have fellowship with Him, to have eternal life. And you can see it right here in verse 3, he says, by this we know that we've come to know Him.

And that's sort of like the newspaper headline for which verses 3-11 becomes the article. By this we can know that you know Him, and I'm about to tell you how, the ways, the tests that you can know that you're in living relationship with the living God.

[1 : 2 0] And so the classical word for this that Christians have used throughout the centuries in English is the word assurance. We're just thinking about it, assurance is the old word that just means an inner certainty in our minds and in our hearts that we really are in a relationship with God, that we've been saved, that we've been forgiven.

And so John comes to talk to us about that today. Do you, the question, do you want to live your life knowing that you're safe in Christ?

And that's, that no matter what comes, no matter what confronts you in life, you do have life beyond death. You do have life with God.

The very thing you were made for, do you want that? Do you want to know that? And that's what John speaks about. So John gives us here three tests for how you can know that you know Him.

But before that, I want to think about two other things with you. And that's first, the fact of assurance, and then secondly, the gospel that assures.

[2 : 2 3] And then finally, we'll look at the tests that He gives us for our assurance. Okay, so first, the fact of assurance. Now let me read the beginning of verse three again. It says, chapter two, verse three, it says, by this we know that we've come to know Him.

To know God, we said, is very personal. It's to have fellowship with God. That's when the penny drops in your life. And your knowledge of God is more than just intellectual.

It's love, it's relational. And it's both legal and relational. It's legal in that God says, I've forgiven your sins legally. That's to know God. But then it's relational.

It's to respond to God's love in your life by loving Him, by being in fellowship with Him throughout your life. Now John says that there are tests here for you to subjectively know that you know Him.

But before that, before that, before that, before you, in other words, before you ask the question that you're going to ask today, that we're all going to ask today.

[3 : 29] And that is John saying that if I cannot pass these tests, I need to question whether or not I'm a Christian. Before you ask that, there's something else to see here.

You know, he says in verse three that you can know that you know Him if you keep His commands. And immediately we're all going to say in our hearts, is He saying that every time I break one of God's commands, I need to question whether I'm actually in a relationship with God, whether I've been saved from my sins?

Before you ask that, I want you to see first that John is actually doing something positive here, not negative. That's the negative approach. That's the, and it is an important question, but the positive is to first see this.

John says to you today, it is possible to know that you know God with certainty. You see what he's saying? He's saying to you, you can actually walk through this life and know that you know God, that that's possible, that there's a way to do that.

There's a way to not question whether or not you know God. There's a way to have assurance. And that's the very first thing he tells us here, that you can be confident that there's a way to be certain that your assurance and your relationship with God is real, and that it's not going anywhere, and that it's unquestionable.

[4 : 54] And that's what he actually gives us here. It's positive before it's negative. And so John's purpose here today is not to get everybody asking, although maybe this is the right question.

Maybe. Am I really a Christian? Maybe, but that's not his primary work here. His primary work here is for Christians to be able to say, is to say, I know him.

I know him, and I'm certain about it. I know that I know him. So that's the first thing. Secondly, the gospel that assures. All right, we have to, when we start to talk about these three tests that he's going to give us in verse four to 11, we've got to be exact, and we've got to be precise, and we've got to be careful.

And again, verse three, you got to be careful, because what is verse three not say? That's the first question to ask. It says, by this you can know that you know him, but what it does not say is, here is how you can know him.

Do you hear the difference? It says, by this you can know that you know him, it does not say these three tests are how you can know him in the first place.

[6 : 06] And those are very different things. He's talking in the tests about a subjective certainty in your life, a way that you can look at your life and say, I know him because of some of the evidence that appears.

He's not at all saying this is the way to get to know God in the first place. And those are very different. And that's why verse three comes right after verse two.

Did you know that? It's just basic mathematics. Verse three comes right after verse two, and did you see what verse two says? Verse two says, Jesus Christ is the propitiation of our sins, and not ours only, but also for the whole world.

And then he says, and here's some tests how you can know if Jesus is the propitiation of your sins. You see, that's a very important order. In other words, we say, Derek was just talking about this, that here at St. C's we say that we are a city center church committed above all else to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And right here in the way John lays this out, he gives us verse two, the gospel before he says, now let me give you the tests of your assurance in your life.

[7 : 23] The gospel always comes first. I was reading this week at breakfast. We often will do the children's storybook Bible with our kids.

And sometimes no matter how far along you are in studying the Bible, no matter how far along you are in studying theology or any of it, the best thing you can do is just read the children's storybook Bible.

That happens to me all the time when I'm reading through it with my children. And this week we were reading the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. It's a hard story to talk with kids about.

And it's from Genesis 18. And remember that God says to Abraham, Sodom is so wicked and evil and bent and broken from top to bottom that it deserves to be punished for its crimes.

And I'm going to judge it. But Abraham struggled with that because Lot, his nephew, lived in Sodom and he wanted Lot to be rescued.

[8 : 25] And so remember what Abraham does? He says, Lord, if there are 50 people who follow you in this city, would you save it? Would you spare it? And God says, yes.

And then Abraham says, if there are 45, God says, yes, 40, yes, 35, 30, yes, yes, yes. All the way down to 10. And this is what the storybook Bible helpfully pointed out is that when you get to that point and Abraham stops, you know, he stops at 10.

God says, if there are 10 people who love me here, I will, I will spare this place. And then he stops and the storybook Bible said, you know what we should have said to Abraham? What you should say to Abraham when you read that, you dummy.

Because Abraham, do you see the pattern? Count down by fives. The next number is five. And then after that, God is saying to you that why don't you just say one?

If there is one in this city that is righteous and loves you, would you spare Sodom? And God would have said what? Yes.

[9 : 28] And you see what's happening? He's saying that it is possible in the mercy of God that one righteous person can stand in the place of the wicked, that just one could stand in the place of all the wicked.

And in verse two, it says that Jesus Christ is the propitiation of our sins. And that means that he, he is the answer to the problem of Sodom.

He is the one righteous that could stand in the place of the wicked. He has propitiated our sin. He has so taken the sin of humanity and the world upon and in himself that he has turned the wrath of God away from us and he ate it, he drank it, he was burned.

He stood in the midst of the evil city of Sodom and he had the fire rain down upon him at the cross. You see? That's what verse two means and that is the gospel. It's the beginning of the gospel.

It is that the good news is that one man could do it. He could stand in the place of the wicked and the pronouncement of God upon humanity is God has done it in Jesus Christ and that you can have it and that that's how you enter into living relationship with God, that the one man stands in your place.

[10 : 42] Now, receiving that, receiving that is so important. I like to think of receiving the gospel in this way.

You know, you got to today, if you want to even approach the three tests that we're about to unfold here in just a few minutes, if you want to even approach them, don't approach them.

Don't approach them. Don't even think about them unless you have first received the man himself, the righteous one who stood in the place of the many. And how do you do that?

I like to think of it like this. Imagine that you were walking through the highlands and you get lost. And you get really lost. And you're out there for days on days.

And of course, there's always water to drink in the highlands, but you have no food. You're hungry. And you're weary and you're broken and you've been traveling and traveling and traveling and looking for life and looking for salvation and it's not calm.

[11 : 41] And you're at the very end of your rope. And all of a sudden you cross a road and there's an end, a little bitty end. And out comes the endkeeper and he sees you coming from the distance and he comes out and he sees you that you are broken and he comes out to you.

And what do you do? You can't take another step. You throw your arms over his shoulders and you hang. And he carries you back and he feeds you and he clothes you and he gives you everything you need.

And you see, that's faith. That's what faith is like. Faith is not the power that saves you. No, not at all. Only the endkeeper, only Jesus Christ saves.

It's not your faith that saves you. It's not your love for God that saves you. It's not good enough. It's not powerful enough. It's not a work that could get you through the door. Only he does it.

He is the objective assurance. The only full and final assurance you can ever have is to know that he did it. He did it all. It's completely objective. It's completely outside of you and your faith is so weak.

[12 : 43] It's just hanging on by a thread to him. And that's giving yourself and receiving his work into your life. And that's the beginning of knowing God. And that's the only pathway to even think about these tests that we're about to think about.

I saw this week the story of Shia LeBuff. Shia LeBuff, many of you will know, the very famous actor. He starred in Transformers and other films, Transformers and also Transformers.

And then he did Indiana Jones 5, that was the low point. But then he was in Transformers again, I think. And however many there have been, he's been in all of them. And Shia, he came to faith in Christ very recently.

And this is what I heard his testimony this week. And this is what he says. He says, I had shame in my life like I've never experienced before. I had a gun on my table.

I was at the end and I wanted to not live any longer. And then I read the Gospels and I heard God say to me, let go on every page.

[13 : 52] And then God used my ego in a way I could not imagine to bring me to him. And he did away with all of my worldly desires.

And you see, for Shia, in the past just a couple months, the penny dropped. And he threw his arms over the innkeeper. And that's faith, that's being in fellowship with God.

That's verse 2. And that gets you to verse 3 to 11. Now let's think then about the tests of assurance. Finally, verse 4 to 11, you have the test.

Verse 3 is kind of the newspaper headline. By this you can know if you obey his commands. That's general. And then he's going to get specific from verse 4 to 11 in three different ways.

Now immediately when I say there are tests by which you can know that you can have subjective certainty, evidence in your life, assurance that you're a Christian, you're going to say, like me, I do not like the sound of that.

[14 : 51] I don't like the sound that there's a test that I need to be looking for evidences. I don't like the sound of that. The first thing to say is, well, it's right here in the Bible.

So you don't get to like it or not. No, I'm just kidding. But partially that's true. We've got to be willing to come underneath this actually, because it's right here in John.

But let me spin it a little bit and say this, that there are actually two great things about it. One is that these three tests are actually ways of helping you find assurance.

It's ways of God saying, let me help you so that you can know that you know. Secondly it's also a diagnostic tool. So when we go through these, and I'm just going to rattle through them very quickly, it won't take long.

But they're a way for you to actually say, I don't know how I can answer this one. And maybe that simply means it's a diagnostic for your life where you can say, I'm not really growing in this area.

[15 : 51] And I need to repent and I need to be obedient in this area of my life. That's what these assurances actually offer us. So first you can see them in verse four, verse six, verse nine.

And you'll see if you look down in verse four it says, quote, whoever says. And then if you look down in verse six it says, quote, whoever says.

And then in verse nine it begins by saying, whoever says. It's the same couple of words in Greek every time. And it's that little line that lets us know he's moving on to the next test.

So test one, two, three is verse four, six, and nine. And here's the first one. Verse seven, verses four and five. And it has a negative aspect and a positive aspect.

And here's the negative aspect in verse four. He says, if you say I know him, but you don't keep his commandments, then that's lying. Now what he's saying there is that if you use your mouth to say publicly, I'm a Christian, I'm a Christian.

[16 : 54] And then your life bears that out in no way that there's an issue there, that things are bumping up against each other, that there's something that's not true in the midst of that.

Now look, every single one of us has and will fail God's commands as Christians for the remainder of our lives.

John is in no way saying here that the first test is that you need to be reaching a point where you don't have sin in your life. Do try to reach that point, but that's not the test.

Because he's just told us in verse eight, if you Christians say that you have no sin, chapter one verse eight, if you say that you're a Christian with your mouth and then you say, and I'm not a sinner any longer, then you are a liar.

So he's just said that. And so we know that that's not what he's saying at all. He can't be saying that. Instead here's what I think he's saying, the negative part. I think some of us maybe need to hear this today.

[17 : 54] Lots of people in our world need to hear this. It's that we can speak with our mouth that we're Christians, but our lives are lived out in open rebellion against God and the ways of God and the way of Christ and the moral life that God expects of us.

And there's been no change in any way in our desires, in the way we live, in the way we act, in the way we treat the church, nothing from the time that we professed faith.

Then that's presumptuous, John is saying, to say that you have certainty, that there's something missing there, that that is a warning signal, a danger, that if you speak with your mouth but you don't walk in any way in a changed life, even in the smallest degree, that that's a warning that you may not know the God that you profess with your mouth that you know.

Now he's speaking of a life that is basically apathetic to the things of God, even though it says otherwise. He's not talking to the Christian who can say today, maybe this is you, you say, I'm struggling with the same exact sin that I've been struggling with since day one.

That's not who he's, that's not what he's talking about. Because you're saying it, you're saying I'm struggling with the same sin. I don't want it to be there, but it still comes up and I want to have victory over it.

[19 : 24] That's not what he's talking about. He's talking about something different, an open rebellion. But then he plays it out more in verse five, the positive side of test one. And this is a tricky verse to translate.

But let me read it and then I'll give you the clearest way I think we can say it. Whoever keeps his word in him truly the love of God is perfected.

It's very tricky verse, but this is what most commentators think he means. And I'll put it like this. If you keep his word, your love for God is growing in the way it should be.

So it's ambiguous there whether when he says the love of God is perfected in you, whether it's your love for God or God's love for you being perfected. But most New Testament scholars think it's your love for God is growing and being perfected over time if you keep his word.

And so here's the positive side of test one, keep his word. What does that mean? Each of these three tests is actually a quote from the Gospel of John.

[20 : 29] And so in the Gospel of John, Jesus says, keep my word. And that's in John 14. And in context, it's very clear what he means. And he says, keep my word.

In John's Gospel, John 14, he's saying, hold fast to the confession that I am the Son of God and that I am your Savior.

That's the first thing. You see, that's the first test. It's that simple. It's, are you holding fast, weaken and weak out to the confession that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that he's your Savior?

And that's keeping the word, keeping the profession that Jesus really is God. That's test one. In other words, we could put it very simple. Do you, test one, do you have love for Jesus Christ at all?

Do you love him? You are not saved by your love for Jesus because your love is up and down. It's weak and bruised. Only the cross of Christ saves.

[21 : 29] But there is evidence in your life. If you have love for Jesus, do you love him? In any way, just an inkling, then be assured that you know him.

That's test number one. Test number two is in verse six. Verse six, you'll see it. Whoever says he abides in him. Now, I've just said that each of the three tests come as quotes from the Gospel of John and as soon as you read verse six, if you read the John's Gospel, you'll see that.

Whoever says he abides in Christ. Remember in the farewell discourse, John 15, 16, 14, he says multiple times, abide in me, abide in me, abide in me.

So John here is quoting from his own Gospel. He's taking the test right out of the farewell discourse of John's Gospel. And here it is. He's saying, if you abide in me, what does he say?

If you abide in me, you'll walk in the same way Jesus walked. And so the second test is this. If you are abiding in him, knowing him in fellowship with him, then in some way you're following the example of Jesus in your life.

[22 : 37] And again, that's very specific in John's Gospel. John 14 says, abide in me. Here he says, abide in Jesus by following his example.

And in John 13, he says something very specific. He says in John 13, I have given you an example that you should follow. That's Jesus's words.

All right? He says, well, what is your example? What is the example of Jesus that we must follow? And it's the very last thing he says at the end of the episode where he washes the disciples' feet.

And so what John is saying here is a second evidence, second test is, are you following the example of Jesus to wash people's feet? That's what he's referring to here.

Now what is that? It's so many things. It's not literal. Don't do it. Literally, it would be very weird today to wash people's feet. I've seen it happen a couple times in wedding ceremonies.

[23 : 33] Don't do that. Now if you did, it's okay. But that's not what he's talking about here. What's he talking about? What is washing feet? Washing feet is going low and getting dirty and whatever that means in your context.

In service for other human beings, in deep love, taking on the menial task and love for somebody around you. That's what Jesus was doing when he washed the disciples' feet and that's what he means right here.

We could put it like this. Are you growing in character to the point where you want to serve other people in deed ministry in any way?

Whatever that might mean, that's a test and evidence that you know Jesus, that you followed the example. Remember, he cannot be your example unless he's your savior and you can't get those flipped around.

He can only be your example if he is first your savior. He can never be your example in order to become your savior. But if he is your savior today, is he also your example? If he is, then that's an evidence that God is working in your life, that you have fellowship with God.

[24 : 37] I think there's nothing more radical in some ways today than washing feet, to put it metaphorically, in the ethic of expressive individualism as it's lived out on the streets of our city.

What is the ethic of the street? If you commute to work, you know it. It's leave me alone. I want to be left alone. Don't talk to me. I have my headphones in.

It's radical individualism. I don't want to engage with other people at all. But washing feet says that we want to engage with other people by serving them, by loving on them.

And that's the example of Jesus Christ. And it's an evidence of real faith. Now finally, test three. He says in test three, verse nine to 11, sorry, verse seven to 11, I should say.

He signals it to us in verse nine, whoever says, but he starts it all the way back in verse seven. He says, beloved, I'm writing to you, no new commandment. He says, beloved, or dear friends is another way to translate that.

[25 : 42] Now let me say this about it. He says, dear friend, I'm about to give you the third test, dear friend, beloved. And that means that what John is saying is I'm not here to say gotcha.

I'm not here to give you tests that are meant to trip you up, to make you confused, to make you feel weak and hopeless. I'm here to say to you, my beloved, my dear friends, here's a way that you can know that you know.

And these work, these three tests as a crescendo. The third one is the most specific. And here it comes to us in starting in verse nine, starting in verse seven.

I'm writing to you, no new commandment, but an old commandment. And then in verse nine, whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in the darkness. Here's the third test.

It's not a new commandment. It's an old commandment. But at the same time, it's also a new commandment. That's what he says. That's the third test. This commandment. Now, have you heard that before? If you read John's gospel, that is a direct quote from the gospel of John when Jesus said, very explicitly in John 13, 34, I'm leaving you with a new commandment, but it's also an old commandment.

[26 : 51] And what was it that you love one another as I have loved you? And he's talking in John 13 about the same thing John talks about here.

Love one another. Love verse nine, your brothers and sisters in Christ. So the very specific test here is that we follow the command of Jesus to love Christian people as he loves the church.

And it's an old commandment because it shows up all the way back in Leviticus 19, Anoddronomy 6, when God says, love God and love your neighbor as yourself. But then he repeats it and he makes it new.

How does he make it new? Because now this commandment to love the people of God is made new because it's the love of the cross itself for people.

What's new about it is that the cross has happened. And to see the love of Jesus that he has for the church is to look at the cross itself and to see this is how much Jesus loves the brothers and sisters in Christ, the church.

[27 : 57] And now John is saying, here's an evidence that you know him, that you love the church, that you love the brothers and sisters, that you don't hate them, but you love them in a cruciform way.

Like Jesus went to the cross for them, that you have love for them. It's the kind of love in the Prodigal Son story when the Father sees his wayward son out on the horizon on the hill and his son has wasted his inheritance.

He's done everything to shame his father. And yet the dad rolls his robe up and runs out to the hill and the son tries to speak.

He tries to say, dad forgive me, but the dad won't even let him. He just hugs him and grips him and grabs him up and it's unconditional love.

It's love that says, I'm not even going to let you ask for forgiveness before I say to you, I love you and you're forgiven. That's the love of Christ on the cross. He actually, you know what God did in Sodom and Gomorrah?

[28 : 58] Lot did not want to leave. And so he snatched him out to save him. And that's the love of Jesus. He loves you even before you ever asked for forgiveness.

And the third test is, do you love the people of God like that? Do you love your brothers and sisters in Christ like that? The last thing is this, he uses a metaphor to describe it.

He says that the world is full of darkness, but loving the church like Jesus loves, his church is like bringing light into the midst of a dark cavern.

One of my favorite moments in the hobbit, Tolkien's the hobbit, is when the dwarves in the hobbit, Bilbo, have gotten themselves in quite a mess. They are wrapped up and ready for mountain trolls stew.

The mountain trolls have captured them and they've shaken salt and pepper all over their bodies and they're about to dip them one at a time into the mountain troll stew. But the thing about the trolls is that they hate the light.

[30 : 00] Their evil creatures created, and I won't get into it, but Morgoth and all these other beings from the past, they came about through evil and they're evil creatures and they cannot handle the light.

They only are fit for darkness. And so they're standing behind a massive boulder because the sun is coming up, but they're hidden in the shadows. And what does Gandalf the great wizard do?

He takes his staff and he cracks the rock and the light pours forth just enough in the midst of this little cavern that the dwarves are struck. The evil is struck by the light and it turns into stone in the hobbit and the dwarves are saved.

And John says that when you love the people of God in a small way like Jesus loved them when he went to the cross for them, that you are shining a light through the crack of the rock into the midst of a dark world.

Just like light penetrating a dark cavern that it is light, it is witness to the world. Now that means here's the diagnostic questions to end on. Do you have good Christian relationships amongst the people of God?

[31 : 06] Do you have relationships that you would not have except for the gospel? That there are people here that you have friendships with that you would have never in a thousand years imagined you would be friends with but for Jesus because of Jesus' work in your life?

Are you staying reconciled with people here? Do you keep short accounts when you're sinned against and when you sin against people in the church, do you keep short accounts? Do you ask for forgiveness and give that forgiveness?

Do you have relationships with other Christians that are hard to love because boy, the church attracts people that are hard to love and you're one of them. You know that?

Me too. That some of us are harder to love than others and do you have relationships because of Jesus with people in the church that are hard to love?

This is walking in the light. Do you love Jesus? Do you follow his example? Do you love the brothers and sisters? These are evidences that you know the living God.

[32 : 06] They're not the way Jesus is the way but they're evidences. Now today if you say, and this is my last word, if you say today, I'm not sure that I can say yes to these things.

I'm not sure that I do have love for Jesus. I'm not sure that I follow his example in any way. I'm not sure that I love the people of God. That's not there.

Number one, it's not necessary for you to immediately say, well, I'm not a Christian. Instead, the first step is to say this is a diagnostic, a calling that maybe you're in a season where your heart is hard and today is the day where you can just come and say, I need to repent, I need to grow, I need to be reignited in love for Jesus Christ.

Maybe that's all you need today or maybe it is to say simply this, throw your arms over the innkeeper today and then you cling to Jesus by faith today and you don't have to not know.

You can have him. You can have his salvation today. And if you can say yes in the smallest way to these questions, the smallest way, then there is evidence today that you can say with certainty, I know that I know him.

[33 : 22] And walk into this world with confidence that God has kept you and you're safe. Not that you're perfect, not that you have a life without sin, not at all, but that in the midst of your sinfulness, in the midst of your failures that you have in some way desire to conform to Jesus Christ, then you can hear today that Jesus Christ is yours and you are his.

Let's pray. Father, we ask that you would strengthen our assurance today. Give us more love for you. Give us more love for people. Give us more love for the brothers and sisters of the church.

And in that, give us certainty that we are safe in Jesus. And for those who don't know what to say about it, God, I pray that you would be at work in their lives, that you would use your words here to help them see hope in Christ.

And so we pray these things now in Jesus' name. Amen.