Christians obey Christ

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[0:00] Amen. In a post-truth world, times that we live in, how do we tell what is real from what is fake?

You know, we now live in a world that is dominated by artificial intelligence, and AI is now able very easily to generate those deep fakes. You know, they can take musicians' images and their voice, and they can create new songs, and it's really hard to spot whether this is something original, whether this is something computer-generated. More destructively, same people with knowledge of how computers work can put words in the mouth of a politician, can make a video that would suggest a particular politician is spouting lies and hate in order to attack and to discredit. So, how do we know what is real and true or what is fake and a lie?
In some ways, unless we are wise enough to know particular tests to apply, there's always the chance that we will be fooled. And it might be the case, if we don't know those tests to apply, that we might become fearful and indeed skeptical of any claims about truth.
John writes his letter to make clear that there is fake teaching and fake teachers within the Christian church, and it's important to recognize that. And so, he says that there are tests to apply.
There are marks to look for, so that you and I can know what is true from what is false. We saw one of them last week, the test of morality. How does a Christian or a Christian teacher view sin? Do they take it seriously and recognize that we need Jesus to be the atoning sacrifice?
[2:21] Well, this time the test is different. This time the test is about obedience, and particularly the relationship between love and obedience. So, we're going to think about three really simple and interrelated things this evening. Here's the first, and it's from verses 3 and 4.

However, Christians obey what Christ commands. Okay, so as John begins this short little section, he wants to give assurance, he wants to give encouragement to a true believer. He says, you can know that you know Christ. And that's important because it could be easy to be rattled and to become really uncertain about knowing anything. But John says, you can know that you know Christ, and here's how. First, he states it positively. We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. And then he states it negatively. Whoever says, I know him but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in them. If you don't obey, you don't know. If you do obey, you do know. What's his point? Real knowing of Christ leads to real obeying of Christ.
Or to put it more fully, a true Christian is someone who recognizes the true authority of Jesus as Lord and lives with true obedience. And so, this test of obedience then becomes really important because it allows us to reject certain false teaching and false attitudes around the issue of obedience. So, you may have come across the suggestion that any time a church speaks about obedience, uses the language perhaps of holiness, then that church is somehow legalistic, as if obedience becomes a bad thing. Now, of course, obedience can be followed in a legalistic way, perhaps we've all had, maybe even in our own lives, thinking, okay, I need to try and earn my salvation.
And so, obedience can be legalism, but that's not how it's supposed to be, and it's not how Jesus spoke about it, and Jesus spoke about it really positively. According to Jesus, the truth is very different.
Actually, obedience is freedom. You'll know God's truth, and the truth will set you free. It's freedom, because as we come to obey God, as we come to obey Christ, we are now living the way that we were designed to live. This is how life works best. And then, as we heard Jesus himself say, true obedience is actually an expression of love. If you love me, you'll obey my commandment.
[5:16] Obedience is not legalistic. Obedience, from the heart, is love for Jesus. So, the test helps us to deal with that error. Another error that we encounter, perhaps in our day for sure, is the idea that obedience is optional. You know, I'm saved by grace, and so what I do doesn't really matter.

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Obedience is optional. Does it make sense? Think about a family situation. If a child was to say, I love my parents, I just ignore every single rule they give me, is that the way that we show love?

No, because love in that context with authority includes honor. And so, you cannot separate loving Jesus from obeying His words. And so, John reminds us that we must know who Jesus truly is, not some kind of deep, fake, distorted Jesus that a false teacher might try and sell us. If we know that Jesus is our Creator, then obedience will follow, as we trust that living by the Maker's instructions is best for us, that those limits that Jesus gives are limits that provide freedom.
If we know Jesus is Lord and King, then obedience will follow, because we understand the significance of being loyal to His rule, that we want to live as citizens of the kingdom of God. If we know Him as Savior, then obedience follows gladly and joyfully. You know, as John reminded us last week, Jesus is our advocate, represents us, speaks for us. He is our atoning sacrifice. He laid down His life for us. And so, obedience gladly says, I will live my life directed by Him and for Him. And so, John, as a pastor, is teaching us here the importance of knowing our God, knowing our Savior, as He is revealed in the Bible, that we would know what He commands. We'd be governed by, directed by His truth, not our feelings, and that would lead us to obedience. That's always something that's supposed to have been fundamental to the Christian life. It was there in the Old Testament. God said, in Leviticus, be holy, because I am holy. We can go into the New Testament, go to the book of Hebrews, strive for holiness, because without it no one will see the Lord. So, holiness, a life of obedience, is fundamental to the Christian life. But we can easily forget. We can be tempted to ignore.
We can perhaps even be worried, oh, if I really focus on obedience, will that lead me into legalism? Perhaps we find ourselves in our, the people around us, and we can find ourselves focused so much on the cultural moment that we find ourselves living in. We're always thinking about, how am I going to defend the truth? That maybe we lose sight of the importance of every day growing in holiness.
[8:54] We live in a world that always wants to squeeze us into its mold. Do we understand how important it is to pursue obedience? Because if we lose track, we will inevitably drift.

Think about some practical ways that this can happen. You know, think about the whole topic of money, just for a moment. God in His Word has particular things to say about money, but our culture says something quite different. And if we're not being guided by God's Word into obedience, then perhaps we'll just sort of thoughtlessly follow our culture into pursuing more and more money. And we'll forget God's call to sacrificial generosity. We'll forget that we're called to use our resources to serve His kingdom. Maybe in our particular fields, when we think about ethics in our workplace or even in a university context, if we lose sight of God's Word and we follow the drift of culture, well, maybe we'll find ourselves claiming credit for work that's not ours. Perhaps we'll find ourselves cutting corners to make profits. We lose sight of God's commands about justice and not stealing.
And so what we need as a people is to know our God and to know His Word, that His Word speaks with authority and His Word, when it is obeyed, gives freedom. And then we need to obey Him as an act of worship.
So Christians obey what Christ commands. Secondly, Christians show love for God by obeying His Word. Again, it's very much interrelated. It's the first part, of verse 5, but if anyone obeys His Word, love for God is truly made complete in them. So the but there shifts attention back towards the positive example, away from the negative with the logic.
[10:56] The more obedience that we show, the more love for God we grow. Perhaps it's helpful to think about some of our common phrases. You know the phrase, actions speak louder than words, or talk is cheap or talk is easy.

How is love for God made complete according to John? He says it's not in our talk, in our theological statements, as correct or as fancy as they might be. It's not in our big talk about how we will serve and how we will change the world. John says love is made complete by our loving obedience to God's Word. Jesus taught His disciples that true. We read one example of it, John 14, verse 15, and onwards, if you love me, keep my commandments. John 15, verse 10, if you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love. Love is a way to show, obedience is a way to show love. Obedience is a way to remain in His love. So for Jesus, love and obedience belong together. And for Jesus, obedience is always a positive thing for one of His followers. And again, that's not necessarily a popular view today.

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Obedience to authority, the authority of Jesus or any authority can often sound, come across as limiting, a loss of freedom. This is denying me my right to self-expression. And how do we respond to that criticism, that challenge? Well, I think we must first recognize that not everyone who says, obey me, has another person's good in view. We understand and we hear it all too often, even within the church, that authority can be abused, that power can be used to manipulate, that obedience can become a weapon to hurt the person who is being asked to do something. But if we know that we can trust the one who says, obey me, then absolutely love and obedience can and should go together. Again, to use the analogy of a family, to think about parents, good parents parents want what's best for their children. Parents have got a perspective and a wisdom that children don't have. And sometimes that their obedience and their limits would keep a child from disaster and danger. And so to obey that kind of parent is good and it's wise. And it's all within a relationship of love. Now, how does this apply to Jesus' words, if you love me, obey my command? Well, I would suggest if we understand the message of the Bible, the message of the gospel, it tells us in Jesus we have an authority we can trust. And we can trust Him knowing that He loves us. Think about how the gospel comes to us.

We have the truth that the eternal God establishes an eternal plan of salvation. So even before this world was made or any of us was made, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit established this plan that in the fullness of time, the eternal Son of God would come into this earth and become one of us. And as one of us, He would live in perfect obedience to God's law. He would live a life of perfect love. And He would demonstrate that perfect love for God and for sinful humanity by dying on the cross as a cross. As a substitute, as a sacrifice, taking upon Himself the penalty that our sin deserves, bearing in His own body the punishment that our sin deserves, experiencing the wrath of God, separation from God that we deserve to face. And then Jesus rose again and returned to heaven, where He now rules and reigns over all things. And to understand the gospel is to understand who Jesus is. He is our Creator. And He has come into this world, and He has gone to the cross in order to restore the relationship that you and I were made for. We were made to live in relationship with God as image-based, to worship Him, to enjoy Him. He has come as our Savior on a rescue mission, to rescue us, to redeem us from our sin. And He's come into this world as our Lord, and He comes to reveal the goodness and glory of our God to us. So, we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus.

And John's point is that the more we grow in the knowledge of our God and Savior, the Lord Jesus, the more we will grow in our love for our God and our Savior. Christians show love for God by obeying His Word. One last thing to say, and again, it's very much related. Christians live as Jesus lived.

[17:04] End of verse 5, this is how we know, there's assurance again, we are in Him. Whoever claims to live in Him must live as Jesus did. Let's just return to a moment to the dangers of those artificial intelligence, deep fakes that are being produced, the fake news that is being generated. Because we understand that what happens with false messages, anger and hate can spread really quickly.

We can see a loss of trust. We can see attacks on public figures' integrity. And so, the public can lose confidence that a mob mentality can be stirred up. It's profoundly dangerous if we are exposed to, and if we listen to, false messages. And so, John is determined to tackle a lie that is spreading, a distorted, a distorted, a deep fake picture of Jesus that is being presented in the first century. People saying of Jesus, He was not who He claimed to be, not truly God and truly man. Sin in your life doesn't matter to Jesus. Obeying Jesus is optional. These were the lies that were beginning to spread out of Ephesus where John was writing, and he wants to confront that. Because he knows to let this false message spread, well, it will cast doubt on what the apostles are teaching.

It may well lead people to reject God's rule, God's words, as they turn their back on a life of obedience, and it's going to drag Jesus' name through the mud too. Why? Because of verse 6. Whoever claims to live in Jesus must live as Jesus did. John is reminding us that Christians are to live like Jesus, to walk like Jesus. And for you and I, if we're Christians, to say, I am a Christian is intended to be an invitation to people to examine our lives in order to discover something of what is Jesus like. What difference does Jesus make? What values does Jesus have? Now we understand, I think, why true obedience is massively important. That Christians are obeying Jesus matters for the honor of Jesus. That Christians are obeying also matters for the mission of Jesus' church.

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[20:16] And so it's a wonderful gift to us that we have this letter of 1 John, because remember, John was Jesus' best friend during his three years of earthly ministry. John saw how Jesus lived, and John is ready to present him at the beginning as the eternal Son of God, as the way into fellowship with God, but also to present him as our example and our teacher. How are we to love? How are we to live?

How are we to obey? John says, look at Jesus, learn from Jesus, walk like Jesus. John 15, verse 10. Jesus said this, he said, if you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. Jesus' life on earth was one of active obedience and remaining in the Father's love, and those two things were connected. Jesus is the Son who delights to do the Father's will, and he is the Son the Father is delighted with. And we heard the Father's voice at Jesus' baptism, this is my Son whom I love, with him I am well pleased. To look at the Gospels, to consider the life of Jesus, is to consider the only one who ever perfectly kept the two great commands, love for God. Jesus' whole life was one of worship, giving glory to his Father. His whole life was one of being concerned for the Father's will, of doing the Father's work. He was a true worshiper, showing love for God his Father. And he is the only one who lived with perfect love for his neighbor. A life full of compassion. You know, Jesus can look at the crowd on one particular day and feel compassion for them, so he feeds them because they're hungry. Again, a crowd gathers and he feels compassion, and he gives them truth, because they're spiritually in the dark, and their teachers are not directing them to Jesus as the way of salvation. And of course, we see his love for neighbor in his laying down his life for his friends. And John says Christians live as Jesus lived, pursuing love for God, pursuing love for our neighbor. How is your walk? How is mine? Becomes a really important question to ask. Are our lives heading in the same direction as Jesus? Do we have the same desires as Jesus? Would we say with Jesus, God's Word is my daily bread? Do we find ourselves so filled with the good news that we say, I must preach the good news to other people? Is our desire, like Jesus, to spend time alone with our Father in prayer? Are we willing to say, not my will, not my will, but God's be done? Think about the statements that Jesus makes of himself, and then apply them to ourselves. It could be a really helpful way to think. Is my walk in line with that of Jesus? Of course, not that we will ever do it perfectly.
John Calvin is really helpful here. He says this is thinking about not those who wholly satisfy the law, because that's nobody, but those who strive to form their life in obedience to God.
[24:10] Are we striving to form our lives in obedience to God? Then we'll want to walk as Jesus did. Do we want to live in Christ? Enjoying fellowship and love? Then we must live like Christ, walking in his footsteps of love and obedience, of love and obedience. So, John here very helpfully applies for us this obedience test to help to help us determine what is true from what is fake. Just as AI can generate deep fakes, so too can Christian teachers and Christian churches spout a message that is both dangerous and deceptive, and what we need. And what we need is the test of truth, a test of what we say. And John supplies a test for us here.

John's point is simple. True Christians obey Christ. To know that we know God, to know that we know Christ as He truly is, Jesus. John says we'll obey like Jesus. We will love God's Word like Jesus. We will seek to live like Jesus.
Christians obey Christ. Indeed, if we change the grammar, we have it in the form of a command. Christians obey Christ. Let's pray and ask for healing.

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