

Confidence because we Obey

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Date: 31 July 2022

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[0 : 00] Well, it'd be great if you could turn back to one John that Peter read for us, page 1228. Let me begin by saying that there is a difference between knowing about someone generally and knowing someone personally, isn't there?

So for example, I know about this Hollywood actor, John Travolta. I know that he used to be an ambassador for Qantas Airlines.

I know that he's done loads of movies. His first big one was Grease with Olivia Newton-John. And he's even done a movie that you probably haven't heard of called Battlefield Earth, which is generally known in Hollywood even today as the worst movie ever made.

But we have some friends from Sydney. We've kind of lost touch with them now, but when we knew them, they knew John Travolta personally, which makes a huge difference.

So when he was in Sydney, they had access to him. They could walk past security and talk meaningfully to him and know that he would listen. He could then talk to them.

[1 : 12] And it even meant that he gave things to them. So for example, one night, one time he was staying in Sydney and he hired out this luxurious hotel with a harbour water view, Sydney harbour views.

It was \$5,000 per night. But he had to fly back to the US unexpectedly. And so he gave the room to our friends to enjoy. And they did enjoy it.

I asked my friend, how was it? And he said, oh, it was really nice. Not \$5,000 nice. But so don't ever bother spending that much money. It never lives up to the hype. But the point is knowing someone personally means much more than knowing about someone generally.

And it's the same with God. We can know about God. But if we know God personally, it makes all the difference. It means we have access to him and to talk meaningfully to him in prayer, to vent, lament, cast our anxiety upon him, knowing that he listens and cares.

It means he talks to us by his word and spirit to help us live in this sometimes confused and messed up world. And he gives things to us too.

[2 : 31] And not a night's accommodation, but he's promised to work for our spiritual good in all things. His strength to help us persevere with forgiveness of sins and life eternal, which is worth way more than a \$5,000 hotel.

But here's the question for us today. How can you know that you know God personally? How can you be confident that you don't just know about him generally, but that you do know him personally and have all those things that come with it?

Because sometimes we can doubt that we do know him personally, especially if we're going through a tough time or feeling spiritually dry, or in the case of John's readers, as some have left your church and now deny that Jesus is the Christ.

And no longer the way to know God. And so you can't know God personally, it seems these false teachers are saying. So how can we be confident that we know God personally and not just generally?

Well, John tells us today, but he doesn't tell us in the usual way. Now here you're going to have to just put your thinking caps on just for a moment. Now there are two types of assurance in the Bible that gives us confidence.

[3 : 54] There's objective assurance that's based on an object that's outside of us, like God's word. Okay? So God's word says, if we believe in Jesus, we know God personally.

That's it. And God's word doesn't change, even if we're having a bad Christian day, you know, or we're doubting or something like that. It's objective. It's set in stone. That's the assurance we normally hear.

But John wants to give even more assurance. And so he talks about subjective assurance. Subjective because it's based on a subject, us. What we do and say. Which might sound risky because we don't always do and say what's right, do we? But here's the thing. John knows that those who truly know God personally have God working in their lives to help them do what's right.

And so it does provide a source of reassurance. Let me show you from the text itself. So 1 John 2, verse 3, he says, We know that we have come to know God if we, subjective, keep his commands. [5 : 18] Or the opposite, verse 4, Whoever says, I know him, but does not do what he commands, is a liar. And the truth is not in that person.

You see what John's saying? One way we can be confident that we know God personally is if we obey his commands. Because it's a sign that God's love has worked in our hearts, enabling and motivating us to love God in return.

By obeying his commands. That's what the point John seems to be making in the first part of verse 5. He says, But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them.

Last week I said that John writes in a kind of circular style. And as he kind of circles back to common themes, he amplifies them or expands on them. It's called amplification.

And so sometimes at the beginning of his letter, if we're not sure what he's going on about, we have to kind of go ahead to the end of his letter where he amplifies it a bit more. And if we do that, we can see that in chapter 5, Oops, sorry, I forgot to do this.

[6 : 29] In chapter 5, verse 3, he says, This is love for God, to keep his commands. You know, so we love God not by buying him chocolates or flowers, but by obeying his commands.

Just like in our first reading, Israel were to love God by obeying his commands. Our parents sometimes do this too. Kids might ask their parents what they want for Mother's Day or Father's Day.

And the parent says, I don't want any present. I just want you to do what I say without complaining for one day. It's hypothetical, of course.

I don't know any parent who said that before. But this is how we also show love for God too, by obeying him. And yet John will also say later on the letter in chapter 4, that we love only because he first loved us.

You see, God loves us, not by giving us chocolates or flowers either, but by giving his son to pay for our sins, and his spirit to work in our hearts, bringing us into relationship with him where we know him, and are able and motivated to love him in return, by obeying his commands.

[7 : 52] And this is how the love of God comes full circle, as verse 5 puts it, truly made complete in us. It's as though God's love comes down from us in his son and spirit, works in our hearts, enabling us and motivating us to then love God in return, by obeying his commands.

It's kind of this circular thing. All of which shows that we do have a relationship with him, that we do know him personally. And in case we haven't got the point, John amplifies it again in our passage, saying the same thing with different words.

The rest of verse 5, he says, this is how we know we are in him. Whoever claims to live in him, must live as Jesus did.

Here John talks about knowing God in terms of living in God, that is being united spiritually to God, being in his family, if you like. And being united to God means he's always with us, doesn't it? You know, never to leave us nor forsake us. And being connected to God, you know, in God, united to him, also means we have access, constant access, to an infinite supply of grace and strength to sustain us.

[9 : 13] I mean, it's worth knowing God, isn't it? And we can be confident that we do, if we live as Jesus did, verse 6. And so how did Jesus live?

Well, in obedience, didn't he? He was obedient to even death on a cross. In fact, in John's gospel, he says, Jesus says, I love the Father.

How does Jesus love the Father? Well, he does exactly, he obeys, what my Father has commanded me, you see. Jesus obeys.

That's what it means to walk or live as Jesus did in obedience. Now, immediately we think, oh dear, I don't always obey like Jesus obeys.

And so, do I really live in God? Do I really know God personally? Am I really a Christian? But John knows that no one perfectly lives as Jesus did.

[10:13] I mean, last week we heard him say that we all still sin. Anyone who claims to be without sin deceives themselves, he said. Rather, John is thinking of those who obey God's commands generally, not perfectly, because no one can.

Let me try a little game to try and illustrate. You ready? Stand up if you are perfect. I should sit down too. Okay.

Yeah. Okay. All right. Okay. This time, stand up if you generally ignore God and don't try to obey his word. Oh, so that means that we all do generally listen to God and we do try to obey his word, doesn't it?

You see, we may not be perfect, but we do try to obey. And John says, this shows, this is assurance that you do know God personally, that his love has worked in your heart.

I mean, people who don't know God, they don't care what God says, do they? They don't even try to obey his word. But we do, because we know him.

[11:27] That's what John's saying. Here's the first bit of subjective assurance. We can be confident we know God personally, because we obey his commands generally.

The second bit of subjective assurance, though, is that we love one another. So point to verses seven and eight. He says, dear friends, I'm not writing you a new command, but an old one, which you have had since the beginning.

This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I'm writing you a new command. Its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is already passing, and the true light is already shining.

Oh, John, is it clear as mud? It's old and not old and new. And what's he saying? And this is why we need to sit John slowly, because he kind of packs a lot in.

John here moves from God's commands, plural, to one command in particular. And he says, it's both old and new. It's new because Jesus called it new.

[12:32] And do you remember what Jesus said in John's gospel? A new command that I give unto you. I keep, the song keeps coming in my head. Love one another as, as I have loved you.

So you must love one another by this, or we'll know that you are my disciples. Jesus, it's new because Jesus called it new. And why did he call it new?

I mean, there are commands to love your neighbor as yourself in the Old Testament. So why does Jesus call this new? Well, I've kind of highlighted the reason for you. You see, we're no longer just to love our neighbor as ourselves.

We're to love one another as Jesus loved us. And how did he love us? Sacrificially, didn't he? That's the new part.

We had to love one another sacrificially. But verse seven says, it's also old. Because it's been around since the time of Jesus, and the beginning of Christianity, and the beginning of them becoming Christians.

[13:34] It was part of the message they heard. They didn't just hear that Jesus is the Christ who saves them from sin. They also heard how in response, we are to trust in him and love one another.

Even sacrificially. And the great news is they are doing this. Because halfway through verse eight, John sees the truth of this sacrificial love lived out, not just in him.

That's Jesus. He also sees it. And in you, his readers, you see. And can I say, I've seen it in you too.

I've seen people who sacrifice their time and money to serve others, to love others, whether it's through providing meals or lifts, or serving in other ways.

In fact, I was to meet up with someone last week, just to catch up, a younger guy from the evening service that I tried to disciple a bit. But he called to cancel because he had COVID.

[14:43] And so I texted him back and said, look, is there anything you need? And he wrote back and said, no, the church family has been overwhelmingly supportive. How good is that?

When people here find out that others are in need, you do love sacrificially. It's brilliant. But again, we're only able to do this because Jesus has revealed the truth to us.

And remember last week, that's what light does. In fact, John wrote in his gospel, and I showed you this last week as well, the true light, Jesus, that gives the light, reveals truth to everyone, was coming into the world.

And here in verse eight here, it says that he's already shining because he's already coming to the world. Hasn't he? He's already revealed the truth about eternal life and about how to live this life,

like loving one another.

And when the light shines, you know, when the day the sun comes up and the light shines, the darkness passes, doesn't it? Well, as the truth of Jesus shines in our world through people like, like us, the more the darkness of this world's lies pass.

[15:58] Lies like, there is no eternal life. But as the truth of Jesus shines, people hear there is eternal life. Or lies like, you only love others if it's convenient.

Or if they love you back. And if not, you cut them off. But it's the truth that Jesus shines, that we should love each other sacrificially, even if they don't love us back.

Then that lies of the darkness pass away, you see. And yet we cannot claim to live in the light of Jesus's truth and hate one another.

And so verse nine says, anyone who claims to be in the light, but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness.

You see, the light of Jesus's truth says we're to love one another. And so if we hate, then we're clearly not living in his light, are we?

[16:54] We're by default living in the darkness. On the other hand, if we do love one another, as I've seen you do, then it shows we do live in the light of his truth, that we are his disciples.

That's what he goes on to say in verse 10. He says, anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble.

But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness, and walks around in the darkness.

They do not know where they're going, because the darkness has blinded them. And so John's point here is that those who love one another sacrificially, like Jesus, do live in the light of his truth.

They do show that they are his disciples, that they do really know God personally. And so to kind of summarize the passage so far, I've got it in a circle, because John likes circles.

So starting at the top, you know God, if you obey his commands, like his command to love one another, which shows you live in the light, and means you know God.

[18:04] And around and around it goes. Of course, we could again think, oh, oh dear, I don't always love my brothers and sisters.

In fact, sometimes I try to avoid certain brothers and sisters. Does that mean I don't live in the light? That I don't really know God? But again, John knows we don't love each other perfectly.

He's talking about that we try to love each other sacrificially. And so let's play that little game again. Stand up if you hate your brothers and sisters in this room.

No? Okay. All right. Stand up if you never try to love your brothers and sisters in this room. We do try, don't we?

And so it shows us that we do live in the light, that we do know God personally. In fact, this is why John writes to them, verse 12.

[19:09] He says, I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. I'm writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

I'm writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you know the father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men, because you are strong. And the word of God lives in you. And you have overcome the evil one. Dear children, is John's way of referring to the whole church, like at the beginning of chapter two.

And notice he is confident that they know the father, that they know God. And so his intention is not to see if they do, by saying, do you obey God's commands?

Do you love one another? I'm trying to work out if you're a real Christian or not. He knows they already are real Christians, that they know God. And so rather his intention, is to try and reassure them that they do.

[20:11] Because these false teachers have shaken their confidence. And this means there's a right way and a wrong way to apply this passage. I kind of like that funny video I think I've shown you before.

It's only 30 seconds long. It's by a German comedy group. And so it's in German. But the daughter begins by saying, so dad, how do you like the iPad I bought for your birthday? Sag mal, Papa, habe ich dich noch gar nicht gefragt?

Wie kommst du eigentlich mit dem neuen iPad zurecht, was wir dir zum Geburtstag geschenkt haben? Gut. Gut. Bei den ganzen Apps kommst du klar? Was denn für Apps? Geh mal bitte einen Schritt zur Seite. Where is your iPad?

What? And the point... It's always worth watching. But the point is, there's a right way and a wrong way to use an iPad. Just as it says, there's a right way and a wrong way to apply this passage. You see, it'd be very easy for us to feel guilty that we don't obey God or we don't love one another. [21 : 30] And it'd be very easy for me as a preacher to kind of make you feel guilty and say, oh, we should love God more, obey God more, we should love one another more. And we all know we should, don't we?

In fact, I know some people who love application that challenges them. And if that's you, don't worry, John will do that later on in chapter three when he says to love, not just with words, but with actions. But that's not his intention here.

How we could apply it like that, but it'd be like using an iPad as a chopping board. Rather, John writes because they do know God and so his intention is to reassure them that they know God. And so the right way to apply this passage to us today is to say, look back at your life and see how God has worked to help you obey his commands and love one another.

Look back and see how God has worked in your life in those ways so that you might have that subjective assurance that you really do know God.

[22 : 34] You really are one of his children. That you know him, not just generally, but personally. Of course, if you're not a Christian here today or online, the first step to knowing God is to trust in Jesus.

And we have a Christianity Explained course coming up next month that can help you do that. But for us who already do, then we can be confident we know God personally.

Not just because his word says so, objective assurance, but by looking at our lives to see God's work in them such that we do seek to obey and we do love one another, subjective assurance. And it's worth being confident that we know God and not just about him, but know him personally because when life is hard, it means we can also be confident we have all those good things that come with knowing God personally.

Like access to him, to talk meaningfully in prayer, to vent, lament, cast our anxiety upon him. Knowing that he, even if he doesn't give the answer we want or when we want, we know that he still listens and cares.

[23 : 43] We know that he sees the bigger picture. It means he talks to us by his word and spirit, guiding us in this sometimes confused and messed up world.

And we can have confidence that he gives to us too. Not a night's accommodation overlooking Sydney Harbour, but his promise to work for our spiritual good. His strength to help us persevere along with forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

In fact, Jesus said this in John's Gospel. He says, now this is eternal life that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

And so it's worth being sure that you know God personally, isn't it? I mean, eternal life kind of depends on it. And John says, if we obey his commands and love one another as you do, you can be sure.

Last week, I buried another member of our church who has been here for over 60 years. But because he knew God, he was also, he also knew that he had eternal life.

[24 : 55] In fact, he would often tell me and Vijay and others that he couldn't wait to go home. You see, it's worth being sure you don't just know about God, but that you really do know God personally.

And John says, if we obey his word and love one another as you do, then you can be confident. Let's pray. Gracious Father, we thank you so much for the assurance you give us like your word, which tells us if we believe, we really do know you personally and have all those privileges that come with it.

But Father, we thank you for your word to us this morning that tells us we have another type of assurance. We have that assurance where we see your work in our lives, helping us to obey your word and love one another.

And so, Father, whenever we doubt that we know you personally, help us to look back and see your work in our lives and know with confidence that we know you and have all those privileges that

come with it.
Father, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.