How Do We Know?

1 John 2:3-6

My daughter-in-law, Heather, has a picture frame with side by side slots for pictures. On one side is a picture of my son when he went into the navy and on the other is a picture of my grandson when he went into the navy. They look very much alike. They could be mistaken for twins. Because of their relationship they look alike. There is something special which is passed from a father to his children. This true also of our Lord Jesus. He passes on to those who trust him characteristics of his own being. Each believer should look like Jesus Christ because of the relationship they share with him. Of course our faces will look different but our behavior should cause others to see that special relationship believers enjoy. Do you look like Jesus or do you just think you look like Jesus?

You have heard me say that the most frightening passage in all of Scripture is MT 7:21 which is Jesus telling those who thought they were believers to go away because he does not know them. Some of you have asked how one can have the assurance that he/she does not fall into this category. The passage we just read can give you the assurance of your relationship with Jesus. This is not a passage about salvation. This is a passage to tell if one has that saving relationship with Jesus that will assure that he/she will be welcomed into God’s home to live forever. We want to have that assurance, don’t we?

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In verse 3 John says, “We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands.” We have a great number of things that Jesus told us to do. How many of those things do you do? This is where you might say, “Preacher, you have just crossed from preaching to meddling.” Not Quite. The important thing here is not that you keep a list of things that you must do but that you do what you sincerely believe that Jesus wants you to do. When I was in high school I had some pretty good friends and we enjoyed each other’s’ company. Most of the time things went well but there were a few times that I would not go with them to do something. They urged me saying that there was nothing wrong with it. Although what they wanted to do was legal, I did not want to do those things because I knew that my father would not approve. I wanted to please him, not just be legal.

John’s language becomes very plain here. By plain, I mean that it is coarse or street wise. This is street talk, not church talk. It is easy to understand. Here John tells us that if we say that we know Jesus but we do not do what he says, we are liars. That is pointed out and it can be painful. Do you say that you know Jesus? Do you live like Jesus taught? If your answer is yes, you are living in the truth but if the answer is no, then you are a liar. To know Jesus is to have a strong relationship with him and to have a strong relationship with him is to do as he said. To claim to have a relationship with Jesus but then act like the rest of the world acts is to make yourself a liar. Disobedience to Christ is proof that one does not know Jesus. Pastor John did not say that. The Bible says that so I must also say it but I say it with the authority of God’s Word.

There are a great many people who say they are children of God, but are they? It is one thing to say you are a child of God, and it is another to have a saving relationship with him. Here we are not talking about the Ten Commandments. Rather, we are talking about those instructions that Jesus gave to the church. A love for Jesus creates a desire to do what pleases him and that is to do those things he taught the church. Don’t get legalistic here. In your heart, if you are a believer, you know what he would have you do and what he would not have you do. Jesus gave us a good example of this in John 8:29 where he said, “…I do always those things that please [the Father]. If you do not have a sense of this, I encourage you to examine your relationship with Jesus. Jesus did not have a list of do’s and don’ts. He just did that he knew would please His Father.

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A number of years back there was a fad going around Christian circles. It was WWJD. This is an acronym for What Would Jesus Do? This is not a bad question to ask but our Scripture passage encourages us to ask WWJHMD; What Would Jesus Have Me Do?

What is it that Jesus would have his followers do? He would have them follow his teachings and to use their own intelligence to consider his teaching when making a decision. Jesus did not give us a command for every situation we encounter. What he did give us was enough information that we can make good decisions when we encounter a new situation. Just this week a woman testified before congress about the benefits of abortion. She was in seminary and her husband left her then she got pregnant “accidentally” so she had an abortion. She claimed that abortion enabled her to complete seminary so she could become a spiritual leader for people. How many things did this woman do that are not God honoring? She is not about leading people to Jesus. She is about doing what she wants to do.

This might be a time to have a heart check here. That heart check is to ask yourself the question, “Am I doing the right thing because I really want to do the right thing?” It is good to do the right thing but unbelievers can often do the right thing. But, why are you doing the right thing? Are you doing what is right to follow some rule or are you doing what is right because you want to do what pleases Jesus? There is a big difference. If it is your desire to please Jesus, you need not worry about whether what you are doing is right or not.

Jesus said in John 14:23, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.” The KJV says, “If a man loves me he will keep my words.” That is clear and easy to understand. Those who love Jesus do as he said. J Vernon McGee illustrates this with the following story. There was a family living on a farm. As the boy is about to leave for school, the father tells the boy that he will milk the cow when he comes in from the field but the boy is to chop firewood after school and stack it by the stove so mother can make dinner. Then one day the father is not well so he cannot milk the cow. When the boy got home from school he milked the cow and then went and chopped the necessary firewood. The boy chopped the firewood because he was told to but he milked the cow because he wanted to please his father. He milked the cow to please his father.

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In this way a child of God wants to obey God but he also wants to please God by what he does. He wants to please God in all that he does. Unfortunately, so many people want to live on the edge of doing just enough to get by. They want to live as much like the unsaved as they can and still be Christian.

Have you ever had someone ask you if a Christian could do this or that? This was probably a younger person but many adults ask questions like this. We should not answer this question. Instead we should tell them the right question to ask. This is, “Will this please my Heavenly Father?” You may encourage them to ask, “What can I do to please my Heavenly Father?” Do you see the difference? A genuine child of God wants to please God, not just be good enough to get by.

We are pressured in this age to be tolerant or to be inclusive. We are told how to treat others. This passage tells us to consider what would please God rather than to follow this world. If we read a bit further in this chapter of 1 John down to 2:15 we can see that he says that we are not to love this world because it is in conflict with God. We are to love Him instead of this world.

If you love Jesus, you will do more than keep all of his commands. Instead you will want to do more for him. You will want to do something extra, something above and beyond. A real believer does not desire to just get by. To try to just get by is like playing on the edge of a cliff. As long as both feet are on solid ground you are OK. However, if one slips near the edge, real disaster is a strong possibility. Would a mother or father be happy to have their children play at the edge of the cliff or would they be happier with the children if they played where it is safe?

Some people look only at the things we have been told not to do. But, if we want to please our Lord we should also be concerned with the things that we should do. Many people count the sins of commission and disregard the sins of omission. These are equally sin. The sins of commission can be avoided by not doing something wrong but the sins of omission can be committed by doing nothing. Is there something that we are not doing that we should be doing? If we love Jesus, we try to stay away from both types of sins.

If we go back to MT 7:21 where Jesus said, “Go away I don’t know you,” we can be troubled. But John tells us here how we can have that blessed assurance that we belong to Jesus. That is what this whole passage has been about. How can each person be assured that he/she will not hear those terrifying words, “Go away?” Instead This passage encourages us.

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I was in a church several years ago and the one preaching was saying that we cannot know if we are saved until the moment we die. Barbara was holding the back of my coat because she was expecting me to jump up and share the gospel. I almost did. This person was not teaching the truth. You can know. You can believe that God so loved the world that He gave His Son to pay for your sins. Jesus said whoever believes that will have eternal life. Do you really believe that? Then John offers assurance where you can know that your belief is genuine. If your belief is real you will be living your life with pleasing Jesus in mind. Never mind all of the rules; are you doing what you do because that pleases him?