

# 1 John

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## 1 John 2:3-6

- What does it truly mean to be “Christian”? This has been the question from the beginning since Christ’s ascension into Heaven. Many in the first generation of Christians argued that you must first be Jewish and follow all the Laws of Moses as Jesus did and affirmed, and only then could you be Christian. Then God moved through Peter in Acts 10 and soon in Paul, to show that being a Christian was a journey from the inside out, where God gives you a new heart and it demonstrates its reality in how one lives out their life. Salvation, Paul said, is by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ and the church saw that this was true as they considered the words of Christ. But some took this truth and began to twist it. The Gnostics in John’s time were totally on board with that definition of salvation, of what it means to a Christian. But they argued, as many do and practice today, that salvation is therefore a purely internal thing, purely a matter of the heart, purely a spiritual thing. Thus HOW you live your life is completely unrelated to WHAT you believe. This was an idea you can sell if you can convince people that salvation and the Christian life is purely a matter of right belief and of internal spiritual peace and that everything in life is compartmentalized with your faith over here and your day to day living waaaay over there. So then as today, many make salvation “a plan”, teach the right key components of belief – is Jesus the only true Son of God, did Jesus die on a cross to save you from your sins, did Jesus rise again alive on the third day – and tell people if they answer correctly to each question, they are saved. Here, salvation becomes purely an intellectual exercise – get people to learn the right key points and know the right key answers and BOOM, they are saved. 21<sup>st</sup> century Gnosticism at its best.
- In Matthew 25:31, Jesus makes it clear that at the final judgement it is NOT belief only that proves that a person is saved, but the proof of right belief is found in right living, in the way believers relate to other people and react to their needs. “I

was hungry, and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink..." (Matt. 25:35). Those who ignored people and people's needs were lost, regardless of what they said they believed. Only those who believed and ACTED according to those beliefs were saved. Jesus effectively says the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount, only even a touch more piercing. (read Matt. 7:21-23). The book of James says the same in James 2:19-20 (read). James is right of course, the demons in the story of the Garasene Demoniac knew Jesus plainly (Mark 5:1-7).

#### V. 3-4

- What does it mean to "know God"? To the early Greeks, it was a matter of study and reason, not unlike higher mathematics. Work hard at it long enough and you'll "GET" calculus and quantum physics, and you'll "GET" God the same way. By John's time, since so few people could GET it, knowing God was all about emotion. The indoctrination and worship of the gods was all about emotion and passion and working yourself up to a frenzy. To the Jews, and then to the Christians on another level, my knowing God was not initiated or dependent on my study or how much I could work myself up, but by God taking the initiative to reveal Himself. In the Jewish and Christian understanding of what it means "to know", there is an intimacy, a closeness. A newly married couple begins "to know" each other and so we see throughout scripture there is a constantly repeated metaphor of marriage and the implication of love-based obedience as a means of understanding the relationship God desires to have with us. As William Barclay puts it, ours is "the God who revealed Himself as a holy God and His holiness brought an obligation to His worshipper to be holy too." As God reveals Himself and His love for us, we become more obedient to Him and the more obedient we are to Him, the more of Himself He reveals to us. So John puts it in very plain language: we prove that we know God by being obedient to His commandments. The only way WE can know that we truly are Christian, truly are saved, and the only way others can see us and know that this is true, is the extent to which our life is an ever-improving imitation of Christ.

- John says of the person who says that they do know God but fails to keep God's commandments is a *liar*. Again, John does not necessarily mean that someone is purposefully trying to be deceptive, only that such a person doesn't understand reality. He is deluded into thinking that salvation and being Christian is all about internal belief and nothing more. He does not understand the truth so "the Truth is not in him." In this sense, Truth is both The Way of Christ and that which is real and genuine as opposed to false and illusion. And I would expect John would lay the blame for where this poor person finds themselves at the feet of their preachers and teachers who led them to a false gospel.

Vss. 5-6

- Before John takes a breath, he wants to drive home one of his primary points, that the love OF God and our love FOR God are inextricably tied to our obedience. My old Greek professor put it this way: "God's purpose in forgiving and claiming sinners is the complete transformation of their character and the elimination of all rebellion and disobedience." John wants you to know that it is God's will that your life from the day you were saved until the day you breath last on earth is to have your life more and more shaped by the teachings and example of Jesus. This is the process by which the love of God is perfected in us. It is the full and complete life of Jesus that is the standard we are to open ourselves to. Not that we should try to attain it on our own but submitting to the spiritual disciplines (prayer, Bible study, ethical practice, etc.) whereby the Spirit of God can continue to shape us to be more like Christ day by day.
- So then we are to "walk in the same manner as He walked." Again, we are to imitate not only the teachings of Jesus, but His example – to live utterly dependent on God, to live completely under His rule and to seek and to save that which was lost. Christ's teachings give His actions meaning. Christ's actions give His teachings teeth. By conforming our life day to day, by and through and under the power of the Holy Spirit, utterly obedient to the commands of Christ, is our salvation proved out and our wearing the badge of "Christian" not a lie, but a very visible truth.