

Knowing God

1 John Sermon Series

1 John 2:3-6

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INTRODUCTION

A. Do you know God?

1. That is a question that immediately brings us to attention
2. It has some answers that reflect our discomfort with too bold a claim to the positive
 - a. some might say, “No one can know God personally, or intimately”
 - b. others might say, “Any claim to know God is impertinent and overly bold”
 - c. still, the desire to know God is one of the deep yearnings of human beings

B. William Barclay wrote about three basic lines of thought about knowing God that were Popular in the ancient world – they are remarkably up-to-date

1. There is the idea that man can know God by the sheer process of intellectual reasoning and argument
 - a. to the ancient Greeks, knowledge and the intellect were glorified
 - b. the Greeks developed the concept of philosophy and still impacts the world today
 - c. this was part of the problem addressed by John with the Gnostics, who took their name from the Greek word meaning “to know, or knowledge”
 - d. the problem with this approach is that God is reduced to something akin to higher mathematics or physics
 - e. the goal becomes little more than the satisfaction gained by any intellectual exercise
 - f. the failure of this approach is that many great thinkers are not very good at all
 - 1) great thinkers are not necessarily moral people
 - 2) a person could, intellectually, know a great deal about God, but that might not necessarily make him or her a very good person
2. The second is the idea that God is known through emotional experience
 - a. this is the philosophical base underlying any number of religious groups who put a premium on experience in lieu of knowledge
 - b. in the ancient world, we might have called these the “mystery religions”
 - c. in more modern times, it is still the world of mystics, of “felt” religion, and highly emotionally charged forms of worship
 - d. but it is little more than an escape from reality

- e. this does not necessarily develop a more moral person either, for judgments about God are based on little more than how a person “feels” about it
3. Then there is the more Jewish approach – knowledge of God comes not from man’s speculation or emotional experience, but instead it comes by God’s own revelation
- a. thus the idea that God is holy and righteous comes from God himself
 - b. any idea as to how that affects the believer is based on revelation from God

C. John faced this problem directly

1. He saw clearly the problem of people claiming to know God but failing to show the evidence of it in their lives
 - a. some claimed to know God based on their intellectual understanding, but there was something lacking – if they “knew” God why didn’t it change them?
 - b. some claimed to know God based on wild emotional experiences, but there was still something lacking – if they “knew” God why didn’t it change them?
2. John knew the truth – the person who comes to know God is a different person than before they knew him

D. This morning, we’re going to look at 1 Jn 2:3-6

1. 1 John 2:3-6 -- By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. NASB95
2. We should all be able to answer the question, “Do you know God?”

I. HOW TO KNOW THAT YOU KNOW GOD

A. Here is what we’ve learned from John so far

1. If you want to talk about that which is known, then John has plenty to say
 - a. John has heard with his ears and he has seen with his eyes
 - b. what he wants to talk about is something he has examined through close inspection and actually handled with his hands
 - c. so he provides testimony that is reliable, and he can certainly make a claim to know at least as much as others, and probably more since the very nature of his evidence is more than they could claim
 - d. on the basis of that knowledge, John had something to say about God
2. The message is that God is light and in him is no darkness at all
 - a. anybody who claims to have fellowship with God but continues to walk in the darkness is a liar
 - b. if you want to have fellowship with God, you have to walk in the light

B. Now, John wants to expand this thought and make crystal clear what he's talking about

1. Anybody can claim to know God
 - a. David Jackman – “Not long ago a young Christian told me that he no longer needed to obey God's word (or even read it) because, ‘I just love Him.’ By contrast Jesus said, ‘If you obey my commandments, you will remain in my love, just As I have obeyed my Father's commands, and remain in His love.’”
-- The Message of John's Letters, p. 48
 - b. Jackman – “The young couple who told me that they were living together, although unmarried, because they had prayed about it and felt God was saying it was all right for them were flatly contradicting the fact that God had already said in Scripture that it was not all right. Either they did not know God's character or they did not love him enough to obey him.”
2. There is a simple way to know if you really know God
 - a. look and see if you are keeping his commands
 - b. keep this in balance with John's presentation of both the ideal and the real of Christianity
 - 1) the ideal – that we might not ever sin
 - 2) the real – if we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous and his blood continues to cleanse us from our sins
 - c. what we're talking about is a life based on obeying God, not on disobeying him
 - d. really knowing God necessarily produces the fruit of righteousness in our lives

II. HOW TO KNOW IF SOMEONE DOESN'T REALLY KNOW GOD

A. 1 John 2:4 -- The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; NASB95

1. John is talking about the person who makes the claim to know God but who does not demonstrate the effect of knowing God in his or her life
2. That person is a liar and devoid of truth

B. Ever since the early days of Christianity, there have been people who talked the talk, but who Never walked the walk – and it is the walk that proves the talk

1. Romans 6:4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. NASB95
2. Galatians 5:16-25 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just

as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. NASB95

3. Ephesians 4:1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, NASB95
4. Ephesians 4:17-32 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE *of you* WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another. BE ANGRY, AND *yet* DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a *word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. NASB95

C. Those who make the claim to know God but who do not obey his commands evidence some Dangerous problems

1. On what basis do they justify their disobedience?
 - a. if by their intellectual knowledge and understanding of God, then how did they determine that God had changed his mind about sin, or goodness?
 - b. if by their emotional experience, how do they know that what might feel good and appropriate but contradicts God's will is good or right?
2. The fact is that whenever a person's intellect or emotions lead them to contradict the will of God, they are only demonstrating that they do not really know him at all
 - a. they are liars and deceivers
 - b. they wouldn't recognize the truth if it hit them on the head

D. But, let's turn this around again, so you can know that you know God

1. Can you know and obey God's will
 - a. the answer is yes – he has revealed his will to us; we know his commands
 - b. can you obey his commands – the answer is yes, for even when you fail, God provides forgiveness, but not for people who do not want to obey

2. 1 John 2:5-6 -- but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. NASB95

CONCLUSION

A. We're a funny folk sometimes

1. We assume that the person who knows all the right answers is the one who knows God the best
2. The fellow who is able to quote the most scripture, or who can provide all the correct theological arguments to any question that comes up is sometimes judged to be the one who really knows God
3. Or, we're awed at the emotional claims of people who have supposedly gone through all sorts of amazing religious experiences, who claim to have seen and done astounding things – surely they know God
4. But, there is a better way, a simpler way, and one that often gets overlooked
 1. How well does a person live what they say they believe?
 - a. I think that's amazingly close to asking if they are faithful
 - b. it neither denies or ignores anything a person might know Intellectually, or have experienced, but it does put the demand in the right place – how do they live?

B. It's a matter of fruit

1. Matthew 7:16-20 -- "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they? "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. "So then, you will know them by their fruits. NASB95
2. Colossians 1:9-10 -- For this reason also, since the day we heard of *it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; NASB95

C. Invitation