

KNOWING THAT WE KNOW HIM

1 JOHN 2:1-11

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.

He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

When the accused man's lawyer approached him, the lawyer said, "I've got some good news and some bad news." His client replied, "*Start with the bad news.*"

The lawyer answered, "Well, your blood is all over the crime scene, and the DNA proves that you did it." The client moaned, "*Well, what's the good news?*" The lawyer smiled, and said, "Your cholesterol is only 98."

Lawyers can be helpful people sometimes.

In fact, I always wanted to have a lawyer in the family.

I would imagine that *updating last will and testaments*, and *contesting speeding tickets*, and *navigating IRS audits*, and *getting your money back from the used car dealer who sold you a lemon*, and *springing a drunk uncle from jail*, and *even closing on the sale of a home* would be a lot easier with a good lawyer in your corner.

A lawyer is a handy person to have around.

Well, this last September my dreams came true. My youngest son, Mack, married an attorney. And a very bright one at that. We now have a lawyer in the family!

Of course, I'm hoping we don't need her anytime soon, but if we do, we got one... *Megan Adams, esquire.*

But in reality I've had a lawyer in my family for a long time. Since the day I gave my life to Jesus, and joined His family, I've had the world's best lawyer in mine.

That's how John begins Chapter 2. He tells us that we have an "*Advocate,*" or *Lawyer*, practicing in God's court.

Our big brother is also our lawyer. He represents the members of His family - everyone who has fellowship with Him. And His name is *“Jesus Christ the righteous.”*

As I said, **a lawyer is handy person to have around!**

Chapter 2 begins, *“My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin.”* At the end of Chapter 1 John reminded us that no one is sinless.

Twice John reiterated, *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”*

We live in a *sin-infected body*, and in a *sin-infested world* which means we're vulnerable to the weakness of our flesh. Even as believers we're still **able to sin**.

But here's an equally vital truth, as believers we're also **able NOT to sin**. In fact, this is why John says he is writing his letter, that *“you may not sin.”* 1 John is an encouragement and catalyst to live above our frailties.

Imbedded in this letter is a description of the believer we don't often hear... ***A real Christian is a person who has fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus.***

Our sins are forgiven. We walk in God's light. His love motivates us to love. We're born of God We are the children of God. We have His nature. His Spirit lives in us. His Word abides in us. We've received eternal life. We have great power through prayer.

With all these advantages it's not unreasonable to expect a Christian to live a life that overcomes sin.

In fact, in 1:9 when John promises, “If we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness...” he’s not giving us a kind of get-out-of-jail-free card. So that now when we sin we can just flash 1 John 1:9 and pretend as if nothing happened. *That’s NOT why John writes...*

To the contrary, he hopes that by assuring us that Jesus is ready and willing to forgive us and cleanse us, it’ll endear us to Him. It’ll motivate us to want to be better - not hide our mediocrity behind flimsy excuses.

Over the years I played basketball for dozens of coaches. *Some had a quick hook.* Miss a shot or make a mistake, and they’d yank you from the game. I could never play for those coaches. I’d tighten up. It’s hard to play your best if your first mistake gets you benched.

This is why John writes 1:9... You can’t follow Jesus if you’re worried that your first mistake will get you benched. John gives us confidence by assuring us that forgiveness will never be denied to a repentant heart!

As a Christian our failures can’t defeat us.

Our fellowship with God hinges on the work of Jesus, not our perfect performance. When we realize God’s love, it changes us and makes us live to please Him.

In 2013 the South Dakota State mens basketball team made it into NCAA Tournament. The Jackrabbits, a 16th seed, were scheduled to face the #1 seeded Michigan Wolverines in the opening round. *They lost.*

But before the game their coach, Scott Nagy, gave a moving speech similar to what John is saying in these verses. He told his team, “I want you to play like you’re loved. Play freely. Love isn’t dependent on your performance. No matter how you play, you are loved. Play with that in mind.” And this is what John is saying, **you’re less likely to sin if you live like you’re loved!**

And again, to bolster our confidence, John writes in verse 2, **“And if anyone sins, (If you’re worried about God’s condemnation, you need to realize) we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”**

Here is our lawyer! The word translated, **“Advocate,”** means **“Attorney.”** Let me introduce you to, **“Jesus Christ, esquire.”** He’s our Advocate in the court of God.

And as I said a lawyer in the family is a good idea.

I’ve heard it put, **“A good lawyer knows the law, a great lawyer knows the judge.”** And this is true of Jesus! He’s God’s Son. He’s got clout with the Judge.

Forgiveness and fellowship with God is not about *how we roll* or *what we know* - it’s about *who we know*.

Once I was in the check-out line at the grocery store when the lady in front of me realized she’d forgotten an item on her shopping list. She left her son with the clerk while she went back into the store to get the item.

That boy ended up standing in the woman’s place...

And what a tough job this was! Folks in the line grew impatient. The clerk was obviously agitated. People began to

grumble. If the boy wasn't there they would've checked the lady out. *But the boy stood his ground...*

Despite the pressures of waiting, and the failure of his mom, **the boy saved her place....** And this is what Jesus is doing for us in heaven. He's interceding.

We're back in the store, while He's saving our place.

Jesus is our Advocate, even when others point to our failure, and grumble about the unfairness of it all, and demand that we get *checked out* - He stands up for us!

In the trial of [Heaven versus Sandy Adams](#), Jesus stands by my side. Of course, on the other side of the courtroom sits Satan. Revelation 12:10 calls him, ["the accuser of the brethren."](#) "Devil" means ["slanderer."](#)

Satan is the prosecutor who wants to condemn us.

And understand, Satan has mounds of incriminating evidence. Quite frankly we've made it easy for him. He doesn't even have to lie. He has *video tapes of our private sins, wire-taps of hateful words, surveillance of evil thoughts, scores of excoriating eye-witnesses...*

But just when Satan approaches the bench to call his first witness, our attorney jumps up and *objects!*

Jesus shouts, ["That evidence is inadmissible."](#)

He's already paid its penalty. Because of Jesus' completed work on the cross our sin is *fully forgiven* and *forever forgotten*. God puts our sin under the blood of Jesus, and out of the reach of anyone's recall.

For John tells us, “**And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.**” The word translated “*propitiation*” means “*place of mercy.*” *Where can we go to find God’s mercy?*

It reminds me of the sign on the wall of the convent. It read, “**NO PARKING! Violators will be prosecuted to the full extend of the Law.** - (signed) **Sisters Of Mercy.**”

Sadly, at times the Church isn’t very merciful. This is why John says Christ Himself is God’s place of mercy.

The Hebrew equivalent of this word “*propitiation*” is “*kipporeth*” - which in the OT is translated “*mercy seat.*”

The mercy seat was the solid gold lid on the Ark of the Covenant - *the box that sat in the holiest court of the Jewish Temple.* It’s where the Priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice and staved off God’s judgment.

Over the mercy seat hovered God’s glory - *under the mercy seat* sat the two tablets of the Law. God’s glory was the concentration of His love. The two tablets declared His righteousness. But between the demands of *His Law* and *His Love* sat this blood-stained slab.

It’s there that *God’s kindness* and *God’s justice* were both satisfied. The *sacrifice proved* God’s love for man. The *sacrifice paid* man’s penalty for sin. God’s Love and Law shook hands and agreed *at the mercy seat.*

Thus, in the OT the mercy seat became the only place on Earth where you could go to receive forgiveness for sins, and to obtain the mercies of God.

But now John declares a new and radical truth - **that God's mercy seat is no longer a lid, it's the Lord.**

Jesus Himself has become our mercy seat!

He is our *"propitiation,"* or **place of mercy.** In Christ *the Law of God* and *the love of God* have locked hands. Jesus is now the one place on earth where all peoples from all places - as John puts it, *"the whole world"* - can find mercy and help from God. If you've sinned, then please come to Jesus and obtain mercy!

Jesus is an *Advocate* and a *propitiation* for people who fellowship with God. **But how do we know that we know Him?** How do you tell the difference between a believer and someone who's not? Both Christians and non-Christians can look a lot alike. The day after I gave my life to Jesus I didn't wake up with three eyes.

I didn't add any additional appendages overnight.

Except for the smile on my face, *Sandy the Christian* looked about the same as *Sandy the heathen.* Even though the weight of the world had just rolled off my shoulders if I had gotten on the scales I probably would've weighed the same as I did the day before.

What are the distinguishing features of a Christian? *How do you know that you really know the Lord?*

Well, in verses 3-11 John provides us with **the Christian's self-test kit.** *These are important verses.*

John knows that Christians aren't tattooed on the back of the hand like concert-goers. We aren't issued dog tags to wear around our neck when we get saved.

It's not only difficult to recognize if someone else is a Christian, some people can even deceive ourselves.

It's interesting, when a woman wants to know if she's pregnant she can purchase **a self-test kit**. There's a certain hormone that's always present in the urine of a pregnant woman. The test checks for that hormone.

Look up how to take a pregnancy test on the internet, and you'll find pretty detailed instructions...

One line stood out. It read, "After moistening the testing stick, place it on a clean, level surface. Wait time is typically 1 to 5 minutes. **Try not to stare at the stick for the duration of the waiting period**; time will seem to go slower and you'll become even more anxious. Do something to distract yourself, like making a cup of tea or doing some stretches or exercises."

"*Try not to stare*" is probably good advice for a woman who's wondering if she's pregnant. But when we're talking *the Christian's self-test* we need to give it our undivided attention. The stakes are high. *That stick indicates **physical life**, but John tests for **eternal life**.*

And just like the pregnancy hormone there're certain characteristics present in the life of every Christian...

Not whether you carry a big Bible, or give a tithe, or pray eloquent prayers, or quote a lot of Bible verses, or teach Sunday School, or lift your hands in worship, or cook a delicious casserole for every pot-luck...

No, John says **the Christian's self-test** is two-fold.

First, verse 3-6, **do you keep God's commandments?** And second, verses 7-11, **do you love your brother?**

Verse 3 begins, **"Now by this we know that we know Him..."** First, let me say, **it is possible** to know that we know God. Other religions are guessing games... In Islam and Mormonism you never really know where you stand. You die wondering if you've done enough.

But assurance of salvation is a hallmark of Christianity. Verse 3, we **can** ***"know that we know Him."***

It was Benjamin Franklin who penned the famous phrase, **"Nothing is certain, but death and taxes."**

But John would disagree. Fellowship with Jesus is also something we can count on! The word ***"know"*** appears 39 times in 1 John. He writes so we can know.

When the Christian scientist and statesman, Michael Faraday, was dying, a journalist came to his death bed.

He asked Faraday a question, **"Would you care to comment on your speculations about the afterlife?"**

Faraday replied, **"Speculations! I know nothing of speculations. I am resting on certainties. I know my Redeemer lives, and because He lives I will live also."**

As Christians we can be certain we know God, and the first indicator is ***"if we keep His commandments."***

Verse 4 tells us, **"He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is**

perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.” Understand the idea John espouses of “*keeping the Lord’s commandments*” is different than the legalism taught in other religions.

Earlier I mentioned Islam and Mormonism. In these religions, *as in most*, obedience is a duty, an obligation.

You climb a legalistic ladder as high as you can through your own efforts, and perseverance, and skill.

Whereas, John talks of *keeping His commandments* as an outgrowth of influence, and gratitude, and love.

We don’t *keep God’s commands* to earn His favor. Our obedience is a sign we already possess His favor.

Having lived with Jesus for three years, John knew firsthand that Jesus had such a potent persona it’s impossible to know Him and not be influenced by Him.

Occasionally, we run into charismatic people who impact us, but this is nothing compared to the hold God takes on our lives. If you’re *not enchanted by His love, intrigued by His ways, desirous of His kindness, and longing for His character* - if you don’t want to follow God and become more like Him - John says there’s only one explanation - *you must’ve never met Him!*

Again verse 5, “*But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.*” Our obedience is compelled by His love. If you’ve tasted of God’s love you’ll want to obey.

It's been said, "We obey God not because we *have to*, but because we *want to*." My obedience to God is the "*perfection*," or *the fulfillment*, of His love in me.

In Hosea 11:4 God described His influence on Israel, "I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love."

And God's love still has an endearing, and attracting effect on people. It's His love that produces in us a desire to follow Him. He draws us "with bands of love."

And the more God's love spreads out into the tentacles of my life - the more I get caught up in wanting to please Him. *When His love fills me - my heart melts, and my utmost desire is to keep His Word.*

As John says in verse 6, "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked."

But "*keeping His commandments*" is just the first of a two-fold test. Verses 7-11 reveal part two of the test.

"Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning." In a sense the notion of loving your brother was *old school*. Over 1500 years before the days of John, and the birth of the Christian Church, Moses had written to the Hebrews in Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself..."

To a biblically informed mind love was nothing new.

But Jesus put a new spin on love. So much so, that John could pen, **“Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now.”** The way Jesus loved made the commandment to love a whole new venture.

Jesus didn't just love His brother - or neighbor - He loved even His enemy. Jesus loved unconditionally. He loved people with no strings attached. He even loved the unlovely. Jesus loved lavishly, but His love never contradicted or betrayed His righteousness and truth.

Human love is clumsy at best. Look at our love and it resembles a sack race... but Jesus turned love into a beautiful ballet. To love the way Jesus loved turned what was *old school* into a *whole new commandment*.

In the light of Jesus, the commandment for us to love one another, becomes new, and daring and beautiful.

Jesus took love off the books, and put it to practice.

A dusty old commandment that was written on stone tablets was now *personified* by Jesus. As one commentator puts it, **“The Law came to life in Jesus.”**

And this new commandment comes to life wherever the light of Jesus shines. The light, and presence, and warmth of Jesus brings His love into loveless spaces - even the cold, vacant chambers of our own hearts.

John writes, **“He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.”**

The word “*abide*” means to “ *dwell or stay.*” Often on the street people ask, “*where do you stay?*” rather than “*where do you live?*” The slang phrase is actually more accurate. People today are constantly on the go. Folks don’t always *stay* where they live - at least not for long.

Where we “*abide*” isn’t the address where we get our mail - it’s where we let our hair down. It’s the influences to which we submit ourselves. ***Where do you stay?***

Do you hangout in the dark corners of this world, or do you expose yourself to the marvelous light of God?

And how you treat others is the surest indicator of *where you’ve been staying!* If you love your brother there’s a great probability you’re abiding in God’s light.

But if there’s hatred in your heart - *I’m sorry, but I don’t care what address is on your driver’s license* - you are not living in the light of our Lord Jesus.

This is the second time John uses this word “*abide.*”

Link **verse 6** to **verse 10**, and the person who *abides* in Jesus - *who lives under His influence* - is the person who **walks as He walks** and **loves as He loves.**

John says in verse 10 there’s no stumbling over this truth. Again, this is how you “*know that you know God.*” *The light of God shines His rays of love into our hearts.*

I’m a son of the South - born and bred in the heart of Dixie - raised in the 60s, amidst the racial bigotry and discrimination of segregation. Even the *churches*, at least the white churches, were steeped in racism.

As a boy growing up there was no one in my world who didn't support the notion of equal but separate.

In fact, from the same Sunday School teachers who taught me biblical orthodoxy - *that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus, and that the Bible is inerrant, and that the Church will be raptured* - I heard the Bible twisted and distorted to justify segregation and bigotry.

I was 10 years old when Dr. King was shot at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. It's sad to say, but the horror of that moment didn't hit me until several years later. For as a child, I grew up with hatred in my heart.

Today, for people of color, or for the younger generation, *you wonder how could this hatred fester?*

Realize, I'm ashamed to admit it festered in me.

I would much prefer you think I was always loving and accepting of people. But that's not true. I was blind to the heart of the God I professed to actually serve.

John explains how this happens in verse 11, **“But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”** This kind of blindness is very real. It can blanket whole segments of society. We even see it raising it's ugly head today.

What changed my life forever was the day I truly met the Jesus I previously thought I knew.

When Jesus filled my heart with His light, it drove out the darkness of hatred and prejudice. His light shined so *brightly*, it filled me so *fully*, there was no longer any room for the

hatred I harbored. Instantly, my attitude changed. I had a love for all people regardless of their skin tone. *I marveled at how I could've been so blind.*

Some Christians talk about being instantly delivered from alcohol, or tobacco, or a vile temper, or drugs - *I was instantly delivered from bigotry and prejudice!*

I want to read verse 11 again, but here's the sad reality, if there's hatred and darkness in you - if your eyes have been blinded - verse 11 is going to bounce off your heart like a rock skipping across the concrete.

I'm going to read verse 11, but before I do, you need to know I've spent several days this week praying for this moment. Like a lightning bolt piercing a night sky, I'm praying this verse penetrates your darkness and opens your eyes. *You need to know where you stand.*

Here it is, **“He who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”**

Blindness is the problem Jesus still intends to solve.

While on earth our Lord opened blind eyes. And He wants to cure us of our blindness as well. Part of abiding in Christ is living with **our eyes wide open.**

Hatred and blindness go together. It's when my eyes are wide open to God's light - and when they're open to the needs of others - hatred begins to dissipate.

Are your eyes open to God and to others?

I want to say something to our church - especially the white members. Some of us brag about how we're **color-blind**. ***We don't see color. We're not black or white, we're just people. We're all just children of God.***

But that's not entirely true. It's not true for black folks.

The reality of the situation in American culture is that black people **do** get racially profiled. Society makes assumptions all the time based on skin color. And often these conjectures are negative, harmful, and unfair.

And it's not just white people profiling black people. Black folks can also hold preconceived notions about white people. None of us are *totally color-blind*. Our sin, and past racial issues, shape our present reality.

A loving church isn't going to say we're **neither** white **or** black... it says we're **both** white **and** black.

We respect our diversity - we don't deny it.

A church committed to racial reconciliation and unity doesn't just make politically-correct statements and symbolic gestures, it goes further and seeks to understand each other. *We ask Jesus to open our eyes.* Folks of different races learn to love one another by daring to get to know each other and empathize.

We need to be color-brave not color-blind.

Ed Gilbreath is a Christian pastor who happens to be an African-American. Ed tells the following story...

"It was my third year in ministry when I got a call from a prominent white Christian leader, asking me to go to lunch. As we sat down to eat, suddenly this guy starts crying.... He

explains that God has blessed him, but he's having a hard time getting to sleep. He'd just gotten back from a conference where the subject was racial reconciliation. In front of other pastors he'd admitted to telling bigoted jokes and using the N-word.

He'd come home convicted and wanted to make things right. He said to me, *"How can we be friends?"*

Ed writes, "I was silent for a moment, then I asked him, *"Do you like football?"* He seemed puzzled, but said yes. *"I do, too,"* I told him. *"I used to coach, and I have a lot of friends who played. I love the game, and I love to cook out. So here's what we do: I need to get to know you, and you need to get to know me. Why don't you come over to my house? Bring your wife and meet my wife. We'll just sit and talk and get to know each other. I'll barbecue some steaks, and we'll start there."*

Ed continues, "The white pastor was taken back. He said, ***"You want me to come to your house?"***

"Yes," I said. *"If you want me to sit here and clear your conscience for all the crap you've done, I can't do that. Friendship is not cheap. It takes time and commitment."* I gave him my home phone number and told him to give me a call." *And here it is, drop the mic.*

Ed writes, **"I never heard from him again."**

I hear so much talk today about racial reconciliation, as if we'll learn to get along by attending a rally, holding hands, and everyone singing *"We Shall Overcome."*

No, if we're serious about living together we'll all make a commitment to really get to know each other.

This is my prayer for CC Stone Mountain!

Frederick Douglass was born into slavery. As a child he was sold to Maryland slaveholders. Over his first twenty years he was beaten, and abused, and tortured.

He suffered all the indignities of American slavery.

As a young boy he heard of Christ and the Gospel, but even then he had questions, “Why am I a slave? Where is God? Why is God silent in our suffering?”

Regardless of the justifications he heard from his white masters, Douglass began to reason, perhaps it “was not color, but crime, and not God, but man” that created slavery. Eventually, he put his faith in the Gospel of the Bible - and embraced Jesus as his Lord.

In 1838, and at 20 years old, Douglass left behind his chains and bravely escaped from his slaveholders.

He settled in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and tried to make a living in the shipyards. But Douglass had a voice - a way with words. He spoke out against the slavery he had known. Especially the hypocrisy of so-called Christians who supported the evils of slavery.

For the remainder of his life Frederick Douglass traveled America calling for the abolition of slavery.

Many of his speeches repeated a chastening refrain. He would tell his largely white and Christian audience, “Between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference.” Wow, “*the widest possible difference.*”

I want to close with some questions... *How much distance is there between the Christianity we practice, and the Christianity John writes about - the Christianity of Christ? Are we closing down those differences?*

Or is our Christianity a religion of convenience?

*Are we picking out **commandments to keep** that most compliment our current lifestyle?... Do we choose to love the people who are easiest for us to love?...*

Or do we love God enough to keep His commands because they're important to Him? And do we love the people God created regardless of our preferences?

I want to challenge us all, **does our Christianity rise to the level of the Christianity of Christ?**

*How do we know that we know Him? We **can** know! But it goes beyond platitudes and what's convenient.*

Do we keep His commandments?

And *do we love our brother?*