

A test for authentic Christian faith1 John 2:3-6Pastor Tom Anderst
September 29, 2013

One of the great benefits of turning 50 is that your doctor begins looking at you differently. No longer are you that younger person who has little or nothing to worry about when it comes to health. Now that you've hit the magic number of Five O, you need a whole bunch of tests. So over the past couple of years, I've been through a lot of them. You may have experienced some of these.

There is the basic blood test where you have to go to a lab and have some medical person draw out blood from your body with a needle. That's fine as long as needles don't bother you. But I have a thing about needles. I just about fainted one time when getting immunized to go to Africa. So I don't like them. I don't even look when they are putting the needle in. It also doesn't help when someone approaches you with a needle 7 meters long and says "I'm going to draw your blood."

Another time, my doctor concluded I needed a stress test. Now you'd think with a stress test that the goal would be to reduce the stress in the patient's life. But is that what they do in a stress test? Oh no. It's all about putting your body under a great amount of physical stress to see what you and your heart can tolerate. So I love it when I'm kind of dying on the tread mill and the doctor says "keep going, keep going."

And of course, you need to keep active when you're fifty or else apparently the body just blows apart. So I think it was a couple winters ago, I signed up for 12 personal training sessions. Now this might have been a good decision if personal trainers weren't inherently evil and enjoyed seeing others suffer. But I didn't know that. It was like I lived in the middle ages. And I heard that the town torturer had some new racks to try. So I volunteer to test the effectiveness of the racks. Yeah, I want to experience that. During my torture sessions at the fitness center, prospective members would pass by touring the facility for the first time. I was tempted to shout out – "Don't do it. They're out to kill you." One time I actually failed to complete one of the exercises. My arm just gave out. My trainer was pleased that she had pushed me to the point of failure.

Tests. Who wants them? Who likes them? I don't know many people that love tests. I have yet to see someone walk by a room of students writing an exam and ask "I wonder how I could get in on that. Tests are so fun.

Yet, tests have their purpose. Tests reveal what's there. Sometimes they're vital for our lives. Blood tests reveal a lot about your body's function. Stress tests reveal how your body responds under stress and what can be done

to more effectively deal with it. Fitness tests expose where you're strong and where you're weak. A pregnancy test reveals whether your life is about to change dramatically.

The same is true in our Christian lives. We need testing periodically to ensure we're in good health. Though uncomfortable, they can help us discover what's really there. They can show us if we're weak and where we need strengthening. The test before us today is "how do we know we have come to know Christ?" What shows up in the lives of those who know Jesus personally?

The Apostle John provides the test. He was one of the twelve and one of the inner three. He got to see some very unique moments in Jesus' ministry. He also was very young during his apprenticeship under Jesus. After Jesus resurrected, John became a leader in the early church. He also reflected deeply on Christ's life, death and resurrection. Many of these reflections are found in the Gospel that bears his name. God also entrusted John with a vision of the things to come that we now call Revelation. But the text we're looking at this fall is 1st John.

It's a letter written to Christians in churches in the first century. They had experienced an exodus from those who attended their churches. John writes to encourage and remind them of what it looks to be a Christian. In today's text, he provides a test that will help them. It can help us discover what's really there if we will submit ourselves to it.

So first, I want you to see two indicators that point to a person who knows Christ. Then we'll talk about why these indicators might sometimes be missing from our lives. Finally, we'll see how we can actively reset our lives so that these indicators will show up much more clearly.

Our text is once again 1 John 2:1-6.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. **2** He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. **3** And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. **4** Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, **5** but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: **6** whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

How do we know we have come to know Him? What shows up in the lives of true Christians? John leads us to this in verse 3. "By this we know that we have come to know Him." But why doesn't John just say "Here's the proof" or "Here's the test." Instead he uses the word *know* twice. "This is how WE KNOW that we have COME TO KNOW HIM." It could be John deliberately plays on the word "know" and "knowledge." The group that left the church likely claimed

they had the secret KNOWLEDGE necessary to call themselves true Christ followers. But John offers the alternative.

We don't know him by gaining the secret knowledge. We know him "if we keep his commandments."

Indicator #1 - True Christians keep Jesus' commandments. (3) If we've really come to know Christ, our lives will look different. Our lifestyles will be affected. The way we think, talk and act will more and more follow Christ's commands. So to know Jesus, to know God, is not just a matter of correct thought but changed behavior.

Where do you find Jesus' commandments? They can be found throughout the first four books of the New Testament or the Gospels. Jesus commands us to "Love one another; love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." He has many commands about money, morality, marriage, relationships, church discipline and compassion. But Jesus' commandments extend beyond his actual words recorded in the Gospels. He is God who inspired the Scriptures. So the commandments through the rest of the New Testament are by extension Jesus' commandments. This test of an authentic faith is not a feeling or a sensation or a claim to be spiritual. The test is obedience to Christ's commands.

When we were in Berlin a couple summers ago, every souvenir shop had little pieces of concrete for sale. They all claimed to be pieces of the now shattered Berlin Wall. But how would I, a tourist, know that those were actually from the Berlin Wall? If I asked the clerk in the store, "is this really a piece of the Berlin wall," of course they're going to say "Yes." We actually had no way of knowing. Now if we walked up to a still standing piece of the wall and the merchant carved a piece off the wall, then I'd say that was pretty authentic. But to just say this was a piece of the wall did not convince me. A person can say they're a Christian. They can claim to be spiritual. But unless they back these claims up with a life that follows Christ's commands, the claim is called into question. True Christians keep Christ's commands.

John gives us another indicator in the last 2 verses of this passage. **Indicator #2 - True Christians walk as Jesus' walked. (5-6)** In the latter half of verse 5 John writes, "By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." Living our lives after the pattern of Jesus indicates true Christian faith.

What were some essential elements of Jesus' walk? Jesus showed his love for the Father through long seasons of private prayer. Mark 1:35 is a prime example. "Very early in the morning while it was still dark, Jesus got up and went to a solitary place to pray." Jesus made time for His Father and was in constant communication with Him. When

Jesus had a big decision to make, He made more time for His Father in prayer. When he chose the disciples, he spent all night in prayer.

Jesus also was morally faithful to God. He constantly wanted to do the will of His Father. John 4:34 – Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.” Jesus’ whole life demonstrated this desire to fulfill His Father’s mission and walk in harmony with Him.

John had the privilege of observing Jesus’ life close up. He saw Jesus’ practices and the way he interacted with people. So John calls the Christian to pattern their lives after the Lords.

Now this is not as foreign a concept as we might think. All of us have opportunity to observe other people’s lives and how they do things. Perhaps the greatest influencers upon our lives were our parents or those who raised us. I am amazed at how often I think or do things based on my parent’s lives. In some cases I will do the exact opposite of what they did. In other situations, I will do it the same way. I’ve just spent the last couple of weeks working like mad in our garage to make room for both cars to be parked inside through the winter. Why did I do that? Some people are find leaving their cars outside all winter. Some people park one car in the garage and the other outside. Why do I want both our cars inside? I remember my Dad constantly saying to me “keeping a vehicle inside protects it from the weather and keeps the car at least 10 degrees warmer.” So now I follow that pattern. If you’re a parent of younger children, you likely have drawn on your parent’s example for information on how to raise kids. Whether we realize it or not, we pattern our lives after others we get to know. John calls us to get to know Jesus and the way He lived more intimately. The more we know of Jesus’ way, the more likely it is that we will live Jesus’ way.

So the true Christian desires to do the will of his or her Heavenly Father. That will be a high priority on our list. And she or he will cultivate that love relationship with the Father. We will make time for Him in our lives. We will adjust our lives to listen to Him. We will soak in His Word and bring our big and small decisions to Him in prayer. Obeying Jesus’ commands – living as He lived.

So the test for authentic Christianity is pretty straightforward. We know we have come to know Him if we obey Jesus’ commands and live as Jesus lived. But it’s a lot easier to talk about this than actually do it. We sometimes or often don’t obey or live like Jesus’ lived. Why?

I could think of about 7 reasons. I’m sure you could think of more. Why might we disobey Jesus’ commands?

1. Our sinful nature – According to the New Testament, every one of us has a sinful or fleshly nature. This nature wants us to sin. It is satisfied when we sin. So to obey Christ's commands requires saying no to sin. Our sinful nature works against that and sometimes we follow it.
2. The enemy – Satan and his forces do not want us to honor God through obedience. Satan disobeyed the Lord and wants to take down as many as he can with him. So he will actively oppose God's people in their intention to obey.
3. It's hard – Obeying Christ's command is going against the stream. Most of us want to fit in. It's easier to go with the flow. So we have to accept that living this out will require effort.
4. Obedience seems so contrary to a loving relationship. It seems so far from the freedom we have in Christ. In our culture, love and moral restraint are seen to be mutually exclusive. You can show some moral restraint and do what you're supposed to do. Or you can go after love even if it means you go beyond moral boundaries. In pop culture, the person who morally restrains themselves is rarely the hero. The one who takes hold of the freedom to love who they're really in love with can be glorified. So when we talk about loving Christ and obedience, it can seem like a strange combination. How can you truly love Jesus through obedience?

Our culture says true love and moral restraint are *mutually exclusive*. The Bible says true love and moral restraint are *mutually essential*. Love and moral restraint are essential for an enduring marriage. Faithful partners restrain themselves from loving others in a romantic, marital way to give their love to their one and only. With God, the same applies. Love and moral restraint is necessary to truly love Him. We restrain ourselves from loving other gods or giving our hearts to something else. We show love by obeying His commands. John draws this together in verse 5 of our passage – “Whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.”

5. We believe we have to perfectly obey all the time so we give up. We might conclude that John is saying only those who keep the commands perfectly are true Christians.

But John can't mean that because he's already talked about confessing sin. We saw last week that we have an advocate in Jesus who intercedes for us when we do sin. So John must mean that we aim to obey Christ's commands and walk in his ways. That's our goal. We're always striving for that. We have a desire to

obey. We recognize the call to not sin. We still sin. But if we are troubled by our sin, that's an excellent indicator that we are one of Christ's. If we're totally okay with where we're at and think we have no more growing to do, that's a red flag.

6. Flawed human authorities – Everyone has lived or worked under someone else in authority over us. Some have been very good. All have flaws. Some may have abused their position of authority and even used phrases like “you must obey me.” But we cannot project the flawed human authorities in our lives onto Christ. He is the perfect commander. His commandments are never stupid or reckless. They are for our good and blessing. But if we don't notice that we might project our negative experiences with other authorities onto Jesus, we might not realize why we keep disobeying his commands.
7. We've never received Christ. (4) This is one of John's purposes in this passage. He fires a shot across the bow of those who claim to be Christians but are not living lives of obedience. In fact, John calls such people liars in whom there is no truth. We might be offended by the force of John's language. But souls are at stake for John. He doesn't want anyone to merrily travel into Hell thinking they're okay with God.

So we're called to obey and walk as Jesus' walked. We face obstacles in actually obeying and resisting sins against Christ's commands. Struggling with sin is a reality of the Christian life. Romans 7:21-25 talks about this struggle – So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

But it is possible to overcome sin in our lives by the power the Holy Spirit. Romans 8 is a classic passage. He talks about not walking according to the sinful nature and setting our minds not on the things of the world but on things above. We do all this by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God.

I'm going to invite us to practice this right now. I want to take you through a pattern that can move you down the path towards overcoming a particular sin in your life. You might want to close your eyes so you can concentrate or just listen. But I encourage you to start by offering a prayer to Jesus something like this – *Lord Jesus, I want to draw nearer to you. I*

want to demonstrate my love for you through obeying your commands. Will you please reveal a sin in my life that you want to work on with me?

- So identify some sin that your struggling with:
 - Sexual immorality; impurity; sensuality; idolatry; sorcery; enmity; strife; jealousy; fits of anger; rivalries; dissensions; divisions; envy; drunkenness; (Galatians 5:19-21)
 - Callous, greedy, given over to every kind of impurity; falsehood; stealing; laziness; corrupting talk; bitterness; wrath; anger; clamor; slander; malice. (Ephesians 4:17-31)
 - Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk from your mouths, lying. (Colossians 3:5-11)
 - Despair, Worry, Anxiety – Refusing to put faith and trust in God (Matthew 6:25-34)
- Acknowledge and confess that this is sin.
 - If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)
- Resolve that you want to leave behind that sin. You want to walk according to the Spirit. You want to walk as Jesus' walked.
 - My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. (1 John 2:1)
- Identify the opposite of that sin
 - Sexual immorality; impurity – Purity.
 - Greedy – Generous.
 - Bitterness – Sweetness
 - Jealousy/Coveting – Good will
 - Slander – Compliment
 - Fits of Anger – Calm
 - Despair/Worry – Faith/Trust
 - Sorcery/Witchcraft – Father, Son, Holy Spirit
 - Lying – Truth
 - Strife/Division/Dissension/Rivalries – Union; Consent; Maintaining unity of the Spirit
 - Obscene Talk/Corrupting Talk – Decent/Dignified talk
 - Stealing – Returning
 - Drunkenness/Drugged – Sober
 - Callous – Sympathetic
 - Complacency towards God – Intentional Regular Worship
- Set your mind on the opposite and things above.
 - Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8)
- Constantly pray and ask the Holy Spirit to empower, strengthen and grow in you the opposite of your sin.
 - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23)

This is all in response to the spiritual test.

Most tests aren't fun. But some can save your life. The test of obedience and walking as Jesus' walked can assure you that you know Him. If you have a desire for obedience, even though you fail, that's a great indicator that you know Christ. I pray that He will use this to spur us all forward and grow us in Him.