

## 1 John 2:3-6: The Test of Obedience

Exegetical Big Idea: Joyful, consistent, lasting obedience to the Lord is the sign of true fellowship with God.

Homiletical Big Idea: **Authentic Faith leads to Joyful, lasting obedience to God.**

Fallen Condition Focus: We too often let obedience wane, but if we are truly in fellowship with God we cannot and will not let this happen.

Intro:

Mathew and Mark both tell the story of Jesus' encounter with a fig tree. As Mark tells it, Jesus and his disciples were coming to the town of Bethany and Jesus was hungry. He looks up and sees a fig tree some distance away, and sees that it's full of leaves and decides he'll walk over there and pick himself some figs. But when he walks over there, he searches the tree and finds that even though it is full and green and looks healthy, it has no figs! Jesus then curses the fig tree and says "may no one ever eat fruit from you again". Now at first this seems rather odd, but the disciples don't think much of it. After they are finished in Bethany, Jesus and the disciples pass by this same fig tree and to the disciples' amazement, it's all withered and dead! They turn to Jesus and say "hey, isn't this the fig tree you cursed?" Of course it was. Now when we read this are we to understand that Jesus was just mad at not finding any figs? No, there is a deeper meaning here. The point is that there is a big, healthy fruit tree, and you'd expect this tree to do what it is supposed to do because of what it is, namely make figs! It's a picture of the man or woman of God. The person who is truly in Christ has their identity in Christ and the very nature of that person is to do what he or she is supposed to do, namely, produce the fruit of obedience to Jesus! Mark even mentions that when Jesus cursed the tree, it wasn't even the season for figs. But that makes this all the more poignant. For God's people, there should always be evidence in our lives of our love for Christ.

If we are truly in Christ, then we should be bursting with fruit. If Christ were to examine us today, would he find obedience and be honoured, or would search and find us empty. It's not a cutesy question, Christ cursed that fig tree because it had no fruit, and it withered and died.

Authentic Christianity produces fruit, it produces action and real change in the lives of its people. Authentic Faith in Jesus leads to joyful, lasting obedience to God.

**Authentic Faith leads to Joyful, lasting obedience to God.**

### **Verses 3-4 Knowing God means valuing his commands**

Having just dealt with the reality of sin and the claims that sin doesn't need to be taken seriously, John switches to talk about the opposite of sin, namely obedience. John doesn't waste any time in telling us what he means. Look at verse 3 with me. "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands" The false teachers of course if you remember from last week were teaching that obedience to God's commands didn't mean much. That you could have fellowship with God on a mental level and whether you wanted to obey or not or engage in sin or not had no effect on your fellowship with God.

But John here says in no uncertain terms that that is wrong.

John is clear that the sign of a person who knows God is obedience to his law. Now it's important that John uses the term "know" here. See the false teachers were claiming that you could have a secret knowledge of God that you could obtain if you were "spiritual" enough. They didn't mean "spiritual" in a moral or ethical sense, they meant if you separated yourself from the material world enough.

So John directly addresses them by using this word "know". We can "know" God, not through a mental process or a secret wisdom. Knowing God is not a feeling or a certain amount of information.

Our God is a God of relationship. To know God is to have relationship with him, not just a knowledge of him.

All through the Old Testament you have a phrase that is repeated over and over again that drills into our minds that our God is a God of relationship. God continually tells his people "I will be your God and you will be my people."

[This is one of the things that makes the God of the Bible different than any other religious that claims to be legitimate. If you've studied or read the Quran or know anything about the Islamic religion, you'll know that relationship with Allah is never ever the point. The entire point of Islam is submission to Allah. The word Islam literally means "submission". Impersonal, unemotional, forced if necessary submission to Allah. You can never know Allah because according to the Quran doesn't care to be known, he cares to be submitted to. How cold. How impersonal. How depressing. How hopeless.]

How different is our God! Our God has revealed himself to us and wants relationship with us, his creation! When God made us he looked down and said "it is good!" And then he proceeded to walk with humanity in the Garden of Eden. God wants relationship with his people, and the mark of relationship with his people is the desire among his people to obey his commands.

But listen very carefully, this obedience is not a forced, burdensome obedience as if God needed us to serve him, this obedience is a gift from God.

That word "obey" in verse 4 is the word for "keeping" or "guarding".

This word is used in other passages to mean the guarding of something of value. It's the word used in John's gospel when Jesus turns water into wine. The master of the banquet said that everyone else brings out the good wine first but you guys *kept* the good wine till the end. Peter uses this word talk about our inheritance that is in heaven *kept* for us.

What is John trying to say here? That the commands of God are no burden, but a treasure of great value to be guarded.

[I like to do a lot of cooking at our house. And what often goes underappreciated in the kitchen, but which is a must for me, is a good quality, well sharpened knife. I specifically looked for a decent knife block set when we got married. I also have a set of whet stones that I use from time to time to sharpen my knives so that they are always sharp. I use the honing tool to make sure they stay sharp. After I sharpen them I do the tomato test to see if they are up to my standard. If the knife can easily cut a thin slice of tomato with the slightest of pressure, it's sharp enough. Well last Christmas Alana bought me a small utility knife of very high quality. It's made of 77 layers of steel, etched with acid to give it a beautiful design, and it came very very sharp. Now, for a knife of that quality, it doesn't go in the dishwasher, it doesn't sit on the counter dirty for days, it doesn't get tossed in the drawer. It gets hand

washed, right after you use it, and put back in the knife block to protect it. Why do I do all this? Because I value that knife, and because I value it I keep it and guard it from damage.]

Do we value the commands of God? Or do we flippantly throw them aside when it's convenient? Do we see the commands of God as a joy to obey or a burden to submit to? If we know God, and know his nature, that he is love and cares for his people, and knows us better than we know ourselves, and only gives us good gifts, then the natural response to the law of God for his people is joyful obedience.

The person who confesses with their mouth that they love Jesus, and maybe they even know their Bibles a decent amount. Maybe they can use all the Christian lingo. Maybe they are in a position of leadership in a church. If their life is one of disobedience to God's law, his or her heart is far from the Lord, and they lie, and the truth is not in him or her. They pose as authentic Christians but they are as counterfeit as a purse at a flea market.

May we not be a people who honour God with our lips, but whose hearts are far from him.

### **Authentic Faith leads to Joyful, lasting obedience to God.**

#### **Verse 5: Obedience grows our Love for God**

John continues by upping the ante when he then says that if anyone obeys God's "Word"

Now we know that John loves to use the word "Word" with a bit of a double meaning. John makes it clear here that it's not just the commands of God that we are to obey, but the whole of Scripture. Cover to cover.

You can't just love a piece of God's Word. We hear so much today that the Scriptures "contain" the Word of God. That's a very sneaky way of saying that all of the Bible is not the Word of God, only the parts I like. The parts that I don't like, I just say are not God's Word, and therefore I can build the Jesus that suits me and is comforting to me. There's only one problem with that. John makes it clear that Jesus is the Word of God in the flesh! You can't love Jesus without loving the *entire* Word of God.

But look at how this is actually a good thing. John says that if anyone obeys his Word, "God's love is truly made complete in him". Now let's stop and think about that for a minute. John could mean two things here. It could mean, that the love God has for us is made complete as we obey his Word. But I'm not convinced that's what it means. We know that God's love is made complete by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and our faith in him, just as John pointed out in the verses above. There is another option, and I think this is what John is saying. John could mean that the love we have for God is made complete as we obey more and more his Word.

Here's the reality. Obedience is joyful! As we search the Scriptures, we come to know God more and more, and the more we know God, the more glorious we realize he is, and the more glorious we realize he is, the more we want to be like him, and obedience to his Word makes us into the likeness of Jesus!

Obedience and love for God go hand in hand! John's already told us that holiness is the goal of the Christian, and here we see it because there is true freedom and satisfaction in obedience to the Word of God.

That's what the false teachers don't understand. They believe their joy comes from freedom *from* the commands of God. That's our society isn't it? We have convinced ourselves that true freedom is being our own God. It's not.

[Isn't this the heart of sin? Isn't this what happened in the Garden of Eden? Adam and Eve were given all that they could ever dream of! They were given provision, they lived in a time of communion with God. He walked with them! They talked with him! They enjoyed relationship with him and no evil or painful thing happened to them. They were given all the garden to explore and to work, and given the command to be fruitful and multiply. Genesis 1:28 records the very first command of God to humanity. The command was to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and rule over it. That's a good command! It was only after this that God commanded them not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Freedom in the Garden of Eden was obedience to the good commands of God. But Adam and Eve decided that their version of freedom was to be their own God and make their own rules. They plunged all of humanity into the pit of sin, from which we cannot climb out. Ever since then humanity has been trying to find freedom *from* God, which in reality is only destruction and sorrow. Real freedom is in obeying the commands of the Lord! Real Freedom is confessing that you are God and I am not! You are worthy of worship, and I am not!]

Psalm 34 says "taste and see the LORD is good" Tasting means experiencing! Not just investigating, or learning about, or memorizing even, but experiencing. Experiencing the commands of the LORD in obedience leads to joy. Go read Psalm 119. The entire Psalm is a praise of the Word of God, why? Because through them the person knows and takes great joy in the LORD.

I want for us to be a church that obey the Word of the Lord. Want to know why I want that most of all? Because obedience to the Lord is good for us!

There is a direct correlation between our willing, joyful, trusting, obedience to God, and our Joy in the LORD. You want to increase your joy in the Lord? Obey the Word of the Lord, by the power of the Spirit who lives inside of you.

If you are finding that the joy of the Lord is lacking in your life at the moment, could it be that your obedience to him is slipping? Are you finding the Word of the Lord dry and uninteresting? Do you lack the desire to meet with other Christians to worship? It may be caused by a number of things, but it may be caused by a lack of obedience.

Perhaps you are here this morning and you have never experienced the joy of the LORD. Perhaps you are looking for joy in other places. If that's you, you know full well that that fleeting happiness that brings is not lasting. You are engaging in idolatry and that will only lead to pain and sorrow.

Instead, there is a better way. John reminds us earlier in the letter that if we confess our sins, he, that is Jesus, is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

If you haven't done that, you need to do it this morning. If you are in a season of disobedience and you are feeling the crushing weight of your sin, turn to Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and start walking in obedience by the power of the Holy Spirit that is given to each and every believer. I say this for your joy! I say this because this is the first step of obedience. John writes later in his letter in 3:23 "*and this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ...*"

Guess what we'll be able to do in Heaven with obstacle...obey the LORD fully! God's law is not going to magically disappear in the New Heavens and the New Earth. God does not change, nor does his law. What will change is our ability to obey his law and our complete joy as we are able to fully.

### **Authentic Faith leads to Joyful, lasting obedience to God.**

#### **Verses 5b -6 authentic faith produces lasting obedience**

So far John has taught us that we know we have to come know God if we obey his command, and that his commands bring us ultimate joy as we live in obedience, and finally we see that God give his people the gift of assurance of their faith as we walk in obedience, and this comes from a lasting walk with Jesus.

We see that relationship language come back here. John say that we know we are "in him", that is in Jesus. The focus on this part here is on the knowing that the believer has.

How do we know we are new creations in Jesus? It's not like we get a special t-shirt that says so. We can't get our blood taken and analyzed to see if we are authentic Christians. We don't have a physical mark on our bodies. So how do we truly know that we are in Christ?

Well if that is true, and the believer receives a new life after belief in Jesus, then that must mean that the old is gone and the new has come. Sure there is no physical sign of this, but surely there must be some way to know that we are in Christ. There must be some mark.

There is, but it's one that is continuously given. It's the mark of lasting obedience.

John writes "this is how we *know*" this is your mark, this is how you know God is doing his keeping work in you that only he can do. John continues "whoever claims to live in him, must walk as Jesus did"

First of all, we need to see that Jesus "walked" past tense. He has completed his walk. It's a done deal. So what was his walk? Complete obedience to the Father. Remember his time in the garden of Gethsemane right before he would go to the cross? Knowing what was before him he prayed and said if it is possible God take this cup from me, and yet not my will by yours be done. In his humanity he knew the anguish and pain that awaited him, but more than desiring that pain to be removed was his desire to obey his Father in heaven.

Jesus' work on the cross completed his work of obedience. His resurrection proved this and now he is in glory with God in heaven.

So if we claim to be in Jesus, then we are to walk in obedience just as Jesus did. And notice that Jesus work is in the past tense "he walked" but our work is in the present tense "we must walk"

That means continual, not for a while, not good at the beginning, but continual.

[I recently started watching a documentary on the making of the Jurassic Park movie. The movie is about a scientist who figured how to clone dinosaur and so he did and put them all on an island and his plan was to turn it into an amusement park. What could go wrong right? So before the grand opening, he invites some people to the island to see it. There are a few paleontologists, a lawyer, and of course the owners grandkids. Well obviously things go wrong and the dinosaurs get out and eat everyone. So this movie came out in 1993, and computers were not what they are now. But they were just at the point

where they could create computer generated images to put in movies. Before this everything had to be done by hand, but now they can make computer dinosaurs. So there is the point in the movie when the visitors first get there and they drive out into this field that is full of dinosaurs. Now as they are filming this, the actors drive up to this field and they are told to act as if they are seeing dinosaurs for the first time, because the dinosaurs will be added in later by the computer. So here are these actors with shocked looks on their faces reacting to literally an empty field! They do a really good job because when you watch the movie it looks as if they are really seeing them, but the reality is that they are reacting to literally nothing. ]

You don't need to be a Hollywood actor to fake Christianity for a period of time. It's not hard, for a time, to know the lingo, attend the services, serve in church, play music up here, or even fill the pulpit. But pretending to be follow Jesus *for a time* does not make you an authentic Christian.

Whoever claims to be in him must *walk*, present tense, as Jesus did.

Thus the authentic Christian *currently* is walking as Jesus walked. It makes no sense for a Christian to look back on his or her life and say "for many years I did such and such in the church, but now I'm not so interested for whatever reason" That's not acceptable here to John. John says to us that we must look at our live *right now*. Are you, currently, this week or month or year, walking as Jesus walked? If the answer is no, your faith may not be authentic.

How do we know each other are Christians? Well in one sense, we confess together our faith in Christ and his death and resurrection. Our lives reflect that as we live together and serve together and worship together and we see the fruit of obedience in our lives. But you do realize that all of that is totally fakable for a period of time. How do you know I'm a Christian? In another sense, you'll know I'm a Christian if I've made it till the end.

This is not an easy task, Jesus obedience led him to a cross! Nobody said this was easy.

I don't know where obedience will lead us church. I don't know where God will call you personally, and I don't know what God will call us to as a church, but whatever it is, obedience is worth it!

I need a genuine faith in Christ, the power of his Spirit in me, the Word of God as my guide, for joyful, lasting obedience.

Obedience led Jesus to the cross, but the reward for his obedience was resurrection life.

If that's what obedience to God means for us, and it does, I want to walk as Jesus walked.

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