

David Meiklejohn

20 January 2019

Walking in the Knowledge of God

1 John 2 v 3-28

Introduction

How do you tell a true diamond from glass? There are several ways:

- **Hardness** - diamond is harder than any other substance, so it will scratch anything else. That means it will scratch a glass pane or mirror. Some other minerals will too, but glass will not.
- **Refraction** - comparing diamond with other substances, it has a high refractive index, so bends light more, giving it more glitter. Comparing it with other diamonds should show it has a similar sparkle.
- **Conductivity** - diamonds conduct electricity while most other crystals will not. You can test it with a simple meter.
- **Toughness** - diamonds are tough. If you heat one up and then drop it into a glass of water it will survive, while most other crystals will shatter.
- If you steam up a diamond with your breath it will very quickly clear. Glass will take a lot longer.

So if you have a diamond and want to check its authenticity, there are some things you could try. Now I don't think it really matters if a stone is a true diamond or not. It can still function just as well. However, spiritual authenticity is another matter, and is vitally important.

Alan introduced us to 1 John last week. We heard that John lived in a time of turmoil. The new church was expanding rapidly, but there were different teachings and it could be hard to determine which was correct. All these teachers claimed to be Christians and have the truth, but which were really true? And how can we know that we ourselves are Christians? We can't look inside ourselves or others and see our souls, but what we can see is our walk - the external signs of an inward truth. And so John gives us 7 tests we can carry out - on ourselves and on others - to determine a true Christian.

Test 1 - The Test of Obedience (v3-6)

- a true Christian will walk in obedience to God

v3 does not say “if we keep His commandments we will be saved”. That is what most religions teach: that if we keep to the path and don’t veer to left or right, we might eventually make our way to God’s favour. John instead starts from the point of favour. Our journey on the narrow path starts at the cross. After that our sticking to the path shows that we are saved. It is an act of thanksgiving, not an attempt to gain God’s favour. An obedient Christian is showing an outward sign of an inward change, just like the 9 brothers and sisters who were baptised here last Sunday. Their baptism didn’t change them, but it was a witness of a change that had already happened inside.

v4 seems very direct. We like to be cautious about judging people, and perhaps give them the benefit of the doubt. But John is pretty straight forward: “Whoever says ‘I know Him’ but does not keep His commandments is a liar”. If someone is not walking in obedience to God, we must doubt their salvation.

Not that any of us are perfect. We all fail at times, even the most mature Christian. But there should be an obvious pattern of obedience in our lives if we are saved. This implies something that is different from the world: something more than we might see from a “good” unsaved person. What does that look like? v6 tells us that our pattern is Jesus. We “ought to walk in the same way in which he walked”.

Test 2 - The Test of Brotherly Love (v7-11)

- a true Christian will love Christians

What is the “new commandment” John talks about? It is the very one Jesus gave in John 13v34 - to love one another as He loved us. John wants to make it clear this isn’t something he has made up. In that way it is “no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning”. But in a way it is new: we might have heard it before, but only once we are saved and start walking in the light do we really appreciate it and are able to obey it.

Once again, John is very direct: if we say we walk in the light but don’t love one another, we are liars. v11 - “whoever hates his brother is in the darkness”. Jesus said much the same thing: “by this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”.

Walking in darkness is a dangerous thing. There was a film recently released called “Bird Box”, where a family had to navigate a river blindfold. Some people have tried copying

this in real life, walking across the road blindfolded, or driving blindfolded. And they have been injured. When we walk in the light we can see the dangers, and see the reason for the commandment.

Test 3 - The Test of Maturity (v12-14)

- a true Christian will grow in the knowledge of the Lord

The next passage is a little bit of poetry that John writes, illustrating this walk that we are all on. It features little children, children, young men and fathers, representing Christians at different stages of maturity. We each have reasons to be glad:

- Little children - because our sins are forgiven
- Children - because we are getting to know the Father
- Young men - because we are gaining strength in the faith and overcoming
- Fathers - because we him who is from the beginning

It doesn't matter where we are in this progression of learning and knowing God, what matters is that:

- a) we are progressing - if we are stuck at an early stage there is a problem
- b) we are helping others to progress - this isn't a competition, we are working together as a team. Galatians 6v2 says we should "bear one another's burdens".

Where are we on the maturity scale? A recent fad has been for people to show a photo of themselves from 10 years ago, and another one from today, to see how we have changed. What if we could take a spiritual selfie? Would it look any different from 10 years ago?

Test 4 - The Test of Worldliness (v15-17)

- a true Christian will not love the world

v15 - "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

What is the world here? It is not the physical globe. Neither is it all the people. It is a system, a way of living. It is the philosophy that says "look out for number one", "follow your heart" and "you're worth it". The Bible tells us that we should put others first, the heart is deceitful above all things and all have come short of the glory of God.

It is so easy to fall into following the world's value system. Worth is measured by wealth, influence and fame. We are made to think these are things we should chase. John lists the temptations of the world in v16:

- the desires of the flesh - what make us feel good
- the desires of the eyes - what looks good to us

- the pride of life - what puffs us up

When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness these are the same three ways he attacked:

- Make the stones into bread to satisfy your hunger - what a meal that would be!
- Throw yourself off the tower and the angels will save you - what a spectacle!
- Bow and worship me and I will give you all the lands - what power you will have!

They are also the same temptations used on Eve in the garden: the apple tasted good, it looked good and he said it would make them like gods.

These are real and strong temptations. How do we fight them? Like Jesus we use the word of God. And John helps us in v17 by reminding us that “the world is passing away, along with its desires”.

Who do we love? The world? Or the Father?

Test 5 - The Test of Doctrine (v18-25)

- a true Christian will confess Jesus is the Son of God

Now this was one of the big problems facing the Christians at this time. A number of groups had split off and taught a different gospel. Some were teaching that all physical matter is evil. And that meant that Jesus either couldn't have been really human, or couldn't have been divine.

John mentions the antichrist, a person prophecies to come in the last days, but he says that these people teaching falsities are antichrists - just like the evil one and preaching against Christ. They came from among the group of Christians (v19 - “They went out from us, but were not of us”), but weren't Christians themselves, which was made obvious by their false doctrine. They denied some of the basic truths: Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah; and Jesus is the Son of God.

John urges us to stick with original scriptures, what we have heard from the beginning, and not listen to new, fanciful ideas dreamt up by false teachers.

Test 6 - The Test of Holy Spirit Anointing (v26-27)

- a true Christian lives under the guidance of the Holy Spirit

John has dealt with the issue of God the Son, and now he brings up the Holy Spirit. Every saved person has what John calls the anointing. On receiving Christ we receive the Spirit, and He lives in all children of God. Because of this anointing we don't have to treat any teacher as absolute authority on spiritual matters. God is our authority and the Spirit is our teacher.

So as the Spirit teaches us, so we should live lives that are guided by Him. Can we see evidence that we are letting the Spirit guide us in our lives?

Test 7 - The Test of Confidence in Christ (v28)

- a true Christian will have confidence in the power of Jesus in their life

How will we feel if Jesus returns tomorrow? Will we be ashamed? Will we be overjoyed? Will we want time to do all the things we know we should have but haven't got around to yet?

John urges to abide in Jesus. To live our lives for Him and in Him. And the result of this is that we have confidence. Not in our own abilities or achievements, but in the power of Christ to forgive our sins and to "present us faultless".

Summary

In v28 John addresses us as "little children". He knows we still have a long way to go in our walk with God. But if we're on that walk we should see evidence of it. It should be obvious because our walk is one of:

- Obedience
- Brotherly love
- A maturing relationship with God
- Love for the Father and not the world
- Knowing and confessing the truth: that Jesus is the Son of God
- Spirit-directed
- Confidence in the power of Christ in us

