

Loved and Loving: John's Epistles
Walking in the Light: Keeping His Commandments

Lesson #4 for July 25, 2009

Scriptures: Leviticus 19:18; Luke 14:26; John 3:20; 13:1-35; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:18; 1 John 2:3-11.

1. This lesson focuses on the idea that those who are walking in the light are also keeping His commandments. Which commandments are being referred to? The ten? The two? The one? What about 1 John 3:23?
2. How would you distinguish between "knowing God" and knowing "about" God? What is the relationship between knowing God and obeying Him or keeping His commandments? Couldn't we just follow the example of Jesus? Do we make too much of the idea of keeping the commandments?
3. Jesus talked about a new commandment. What is that new commandment? How does it relate to the "old commandment"? (Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:5)
4. Do we have to know *about* God before we can know Him? The Gnostics of John's day believed that having access to certain secret mystical knowledge gave them salvation. John seemed to suggest that there is more involved in the Christian life. What more?
5. If we know that God has forgiven our sins and we claim justification, isn't that enough? Is it necessary to "do" certain things? Is sanctification essential for salvation? To a great degree, the Protestant Reformation centered on the question of whether we have to do anything to be saved. Roman Catholics said, "Yes!" And Protestants said, "No!"
6. What does it mean to "know" God? Read Genesis 4:1; 1 Kings 1:4; Matthew 13:11; Luke 1:34,77; John 17:3; Romans 3:20; 1 Corinthians 8:1; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:18; 1 John 4:8. What do all of these verses scattered through both the Old Testament and the New Testament tell us about the meaning of the word *know* in Scripture. It should be clear—especially from the Old Testament passages—that this is not just a casual knowledge. To *know* in the Bible refers to a very intimate sharing, a kind of knowledge which affects one's behavior. John went so far as to write that not loving means we do not know God. Paul wrote that knowledge by itself just puffs up. Peter tells us we need to continue to grow in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. What do you think these three separate apostles had in mind?
7. Is it really possible to have an intimate relationship with someone you have never seen, never touched, and never heard audibly? How do we do that with God?
8. When John referred to knowing "Him," was he referring to Jesus or to God the Father? Or did he intentionally leave the term ambiguous? Would it make any difference?
9. John seems to have made it very clear that if we do not keep the commandments, we do not know God. By contrast, if we really know and love God, we will experience a continuous revelation of the life of Jesus. Does knowing God guarantee our salvation? What about Lucifer? Didn't he stand next to God's very throne? Didn't he go forth to represent God to the angels? Didn't Lucifer have every opportunity to "know" God? What is the relationship between knowing, loving, and making choices? If we know God, will we automatically keep the commandments? What is the relationship between knowing God and keeping the commandments? Does knowing God somehow lead us to "do what is right because it is right"? It has been suggested that "to know God is to love Him."
10. If it is so important to know God, what happened in the case of Lucifer? Was there a time when Lucifer had a wonderful, loving relationship with God? Why did he choose to rebel?
11. If someone were to ask you, what would you say is the relationship between love and obedience? How can we nurture both to maintain a right balance?
12. We live in a "postmodern" society that emphasizes feelings and experience. The only thing modern people seem to care about is "me"! How do feelings and experience relate to the knowledge, love, and obedience that John emphasized?

13. John did not spare words in describing those who profess to know God but fail to keep His commandments! He simply calls them liars! (1 John 2:4) Is that a kind thing to say?
14. Religious people have made many different claims down through the centuries. Almost all religious people claim to have some knowledge of the true God or some other “god” which they choose to worship. What verifiable evidence could you supply to suggest that you know God? (John 15:10,15,21; 1 John 3:22,24; 5:3; Revelation 12:17; 14:12) These verses suggest that if we truly love God, we will obey Him. They go on to suggest that God’s faithful people at the end of time will be known for keeping His commandments. How do these verses relate to John 13:34,35? What is the new commandment? Was John suggesting here that if Christians really loved with an *agape* kind of love, they would stand out like a sore thumb in this world full of selfish people? Are we all born selfish? How do we become loving?
15. What is obedience? If someone feels under pressure to do something and then does it, is that obedience? Or do we have to do it because we want to do it? The Greek word for *obedience* is *hupakoe*. This word implies “a humble willingness to listen.” It does not focus on actual behavior. If we listen to God and choose to do His will, we may not be able to carry it out perfectly, but if our intentions are correct, it is counted as obedience. (Romans 7:17-25)
16. How does God compare the experience of the person who “obeys” because he feels he is required to do so with the person who chooses to do right because he believes it is right? **The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey.** When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God. *Christ’s Object Lessons* 97,98 (1900)
17. Are you convinced that you have a personal relationship with God? What experiences in your life have helped to “grow” that relationship? Are there things that we can do to improve our relationship with God? The traditional answer to that question is Bible study, prayer, and witnessing.
18. We all know that there are different kinds of Christians. There are some Christians who profess Christianity because in their situation they believe it makes their life easier and simpler. It may even put food in their tummies! Such Christians have been known as “rice” Christians or even “loaves-and-fishes” Christians. Other Christians choose to join a Christian group for the social benefits. Still others join because they believe they are required to carry out certain ceremonial steps in order to become saved. Others simply attend church for certain “ceremonies” such as a baptism, marriage, or a funeral.
19. John stated—quoting Jesus’ final prayer with His disciples as told in John 17:3—“This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (John 17:3, *NKJV*) What was Jesus trying to suggest by those words? How do they relate to Acts 16:31 where Luke/Paul says faith is the only requirement for salvation. Dr. Maxwell used to suggest regularly that *faith* is just a word we use to describe a relationship with a person well known. So, is knowing God the key to salvation? Was John referring to the true, personal, intimate relationship? Or would knowing “about” God be enough?
20. Read 1 John 2:6-8. The question is: What would Jesus do? If we are going to take those words seriously, we must understand something of the life and death of Jesus. Then we must have some concept of how we can mirror His conduct in our own lives.
21. Do you find it is easy to look at the experiences in the life of Jesus and try to live accordingly? Or do you find that things are so different in the society of our day that it is hard to compare them? Jesus healed, walked on the water, raised people from the dead, and cleansed the lepers. I can’t do any of those things. How do I follow His example in 2009?
22. Almost every Christian claims that he wants Jesus to be his Savior. That is certainly a worthy goal.

The World Council of Churches suggests that to be a member, one must accept that “Jesus is Lord.” Does that mean that we truly believe that His life is an example for us in everything? Why do people want to go to heaven? Most of them want to go for selfish reasons! Do we choose to follow Him as closely as we can in our day-by-day experiences when we face challenges or problems at work or at home? Do we raise the question, “What would Jesus do?” Think of all the very surprising things that Jesus did. (Read John 8:1-11) Or, do we become so buried in our day-to-day problems that we do not even think about Jesus? How many advertisements on television encourage us to live by Christian principles? It is all about getting! Who talks about giving?

23. What would happen if Jesus worked where you work? What if He had a desk right next to yours? What if He did exactly what you do in parallel with you every day? Would you be embarrassed as people began to compare your behavior and output with His?
24. What is the true relationship between *faith*—the word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a person well known—and *works*—often equated with keeping the commandments? Do we really believe that our lives would be better if we always did what God wants us to do? Or does selfishness come through fairly often, suggesting that we would rather do our will in a certain given situation?
25. Do you know any fellow Christians who live lives that are even close to the life of Jesus?
26. Read 1 John 2:5,6. Do you know anyone who lives up to these verses? Was John suggesting that both love and obedience are tests of the true Christian? What do we have to do to qualify as a “saint”? Paul called the Corinthian Christians “saints,” (1 Corinthians 1:2) and they were doing some pretty bad things!
27. Read John 13. Focus especially John 13:34,35. What was Jesus suggesting when He talked about a new commandment? We have already discovered that 1500 years before the days of Jesus, Moses told the children of Israel to love their neighbors. So, what was new about the commandment to love? Was it that they were to love as He had loved them? How is that different? Do you think John was referring to His words in John 13:34,35 when he wrote 1 John 2:6-8?
28. Jesus gave this new commandment very soon after washing the disciples feet—even the feet of Judas. Why did He do that? What are we supposed to learn from that experience? Is that ceremony intended to be a time for us to humble ourselves and to act the role of a servant and wash someone else’s feet? Or is this a time to marvel that God would get down on His knees and wash our feet? What is the relationship between that story and exercising God’s love toward those around us?
29. In order to make it perfectly clear what he had in mind, John “drew” some very stark contrasts. He said that those who hate their brother or sister are walking in darkness. There is no love in them. (1 John 2:11)
30. On one occasion Jesus was asked, “Who is my neighbor?” As we know, He related the true story about the good Samaritan. Ellen G. White in the *Desire of Ages*, p. 503 stated, “Our neighbor is every soul who is wounded and bruised by the adversary. Our neighbor is everyone who is the property of God.” This suggests that we are to love “without any borders.” True love has no caste system, no gender or racial inequalities. Every wall and barrier is gone when the true love of Jesus is exercised. (Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 2:14)
31. Do you think the formerly-Jewish members of the Christian churches were happy to be associating with Gentiles? Do you think the formerly-pagan Christians were happy to be associating with Jews in the new Christian church? Which group do you think found it harder to accept the other?
32. John went one step further—claiming that if we hate our brother or sister, we are literally blind. (1 John 2:11) What do you think he was implying?
33. John was not discussing people from other nations! He was not discussing our enemies. He was talking about the other members in the church!
34. Jesus said that we should love our enemies! (Matthew 5:44; 6:24; 24:9,10; Luke 14:26; John 3:20) What did Jesus mean when He said that we should hate our fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters? (Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 14:26,27) By comparing Scripture with Scripture, it should be clear

that *hate* in that context simply means *to love less*. God must have first priority in our lives. If we approach the end of this world's history and we are still putting other human beings above God in our thoughts, Satan will certainly use those other human beings to try to twist and distort us to get us to give up true Christianity.

35. Is it possible for Christians living in our day to live sinless lives—truly loving, unbiased lives? If we are just a little bit biased, does that mean we are hating?
36. Read the short book of Philemon in the New Testament. Notice how diplomatically Paul dealt with the challenging question of a slave coming back after running away. What does that story teach us about a right relationship with other church members and with those who have done wrong?
37. There are many stories in the Bible about those who chose to do right even when it was very difficult to do so. Genesis 39:7-12 speaks about Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Daniel 3:8-18 speaks about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego on the plain of Dura. Revelation 13:16 tells us that the mark of the beast will be placed on those who compromise with the truth. Revelation 14:5 says that there will be no lies found on the lips of the true followers of Jesus at the end. They will be "faultless." What does that mean to us?
38. Some Christians have tried to carefully follow all those directions in their lives. After faithfully trying to keep the commandments for some period of time, it becomes very easy for them to begin getting the feeling that they are "earning" their way to salvation! Have you ever met such a person? Have you ever felt a little that way yourself?
39. For those who have come to espouse the "great controversy, trust, healing" model of the plan of salvation, it should be clear that the goal in the Christian life is ultimately to do what is right because it is right. Is this hard? Does understanding the issues in the great controversy and what God has done to answer the questions and accusations against Him make it easier to live that kind of life? Are you truly thankful for an understanding of the life and death of Jesus? Do you honestly believe that you are getting to know Him as a Friend more and more every day? Do you think that you know Him well enough so that when you finally meet Him in person, you will be comfortable in giving Him a hug? What does it mean to be a "friend" of God?

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Last Modified: June 16, 2009

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