

1 John 2:1-6 – In his steps

Page 1 – Trouble in the Text

The author of the letter, which is attributed to John, is writing to his congregation. And he really loves them. His words, "my dear children" are very personable. He's probably pretty old at this point. So I can imagine this elderly man at a desk and writing a letter to the people that he knows and loves. And he's very pastoral. There are some church and cultural issues happening at this time and so John is responding to them and guiding his congregation.

One of the issues that the people are concerned about is their salvation. They are asking him, "Hey, how do I know that I'm saved? How do I know for sure?" And another other issue was about how they are supposed to live. They are asking him, "Hey, if I'm a Christian, does that mean I have to obey all of these rules?"

In Greek culture there was this mindset that people could never arrive at truth. People come into the world without even asking to They are born without their consent and largely have no influence or control over what happens. So the world is seen like a prison. In order to be free from behind these imaginary bars, the key was knowledge. A knowledge that came from outside the universe. And to receive this

knowledge, people could either engage in magic, mysticism, or fanatic rituals. This knowledge was believed to show people their salvation, guide them to their freedom.

This knowledge had a really glossy cover. Seemed beautiful. Seemed graceful even. But it had a dirty inside. Because all it really was; was just a sad attempt for people to save themselves. To coerce grace and force salvation.

This culture mindset expressed itself in how people lived. The Gnostics, the people who followed this teaching, believed they were superior to everyone else because they claimed that they were the only ones to know God. Because of that there was no reason for them to obey any of the rules. Rules, to these Gnostics, meant prison again. Any kind of ethical teaching or obedience meant slavery. It meant bars.

No wonder the church was confused! The culture around them is saying that if you really know God, then you don't have to obey his rules. The culture is saying that obeying rules is evidence that you don't really know God. It means that you're in chains. And what's more, the culture around them is telling them that you have to engage in particular rituals to receive this knowledge of God.

And John sees the concerns of his congregation and so he writes to them to answer their questions. He writes to tell them the truth.

When he begins to address this issue the first thing he tells his congregation is that they are sinners. Including himself. If you notice verse 1 it says, "if anyone has sinned" and the Greek clause in there assumes that everyone has sinned. He writes it in a way that it is obvious to everyone reading it that they have all missed the mark. John is not doing this to condemn his congregation here, he is doing it to level out the playing field. No one is superior to anyone. There is no such thing as first class and second class human beings. 5 star and 1 star humans do not exist. Everyone has sinned. Everyone is equally guilty of falling short of the glory of God. This is a given.

Page 2 – Grace in the text

And he doesn't stop there because when John responds to this confusion, he doesn't tell them what to believe, he responds by telling them about the One whom they should love. He tells them about the Righteous One who they should know. He explains that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice of all their sins. Jesus is the Righteous One. He is the one who is sinless. His death atoned for all of the sins of the world.

But that's not how he answers the question of how they know they're saved. That's how he sets up the answer. And he answers in verse 3. He writes, "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands." He expands on that in verse 4 and says again that people who profess that they know Jesus, but do not do what he commands is lying. They actually do not know Jesus even though they profess they do. Then in verse 5 he flips the statement in verse 3 and states that if anyone obeys his commands, then it means they know him.

To know God is to obey him and when we obey him then we know that we know him. There is an **unbreakable connection** between knowing Jesus and obeying Jesus. Both of them go hand in and hand. They are 2 sides of the same coin. In other words, our text rejects all these cultural claims. If we really know God, then we will obey his rules. Obeying God's law is evidence that we do know God. This truth breaks chains. The gospel sets us free. And to receive this knowledge of God is entirely by grace. There is no ritual to perform. There is no way to coerce grace. God cannot and will not be manipulated. He does what he wants and will do as he says.

The Greek culture took the beautiful word "knowing" and twisted it. The congregation forgot what it meant to know God. To know God is a deeply complex and personal concept. To

know God is all throughout scripture. The Hebrew word for knowing is "yada." It means to notice or observe something, like when Adam and Eve sinned and they "yada" that they were naked and sewed fig leaves to cover themselves. Or it can mean to learn, like how it says that Proverbs were written to yada wisdom and discipline. To know can also mean sexual relations, like in Genesis 4, when Adam yada his wife Eve and she bore him a son. It can also mean to have a personal relationship without sexual involvement like in Deuteronomy 34 when it speaks of Moses, whom the Lord yada face to face.

Sometimes when we talk about something and there is so much to say we will often use term yada. Yada is often used to shorten our stories with things we don't want or feel to need to say. Maybe one of the GEMS comes home after an event and her parents asks her, "how was it?" And the GEM might respond and say, "It was good, we had lessons and yada yada yada."

Yada yada yada is sort of the equivalent to saying, blah blah blah. We use the word yada yada to shorten things because we either don't think they are important or because it's predictable what is going to be said. But whenever it comes to the really exciting or important things, we usually can't find enough words to say.

Yada, to know, is deeply complex and deeply personal. Whenever it is used in scripture it always has to do with God and how he reveals Himself to us through his words and actions. Such as in Jeremiah 22 when it says, "Your father did what was right and just, so all went well with him. He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to yada me?" declares the Lord.

To know God means to be in an intimate and personal relationship with him. Knowledge is not detached like the Greeks were claiming. To know God means to obey God and to do justice, love mercy, and to walk humbly with him. Knowledge does not mean one can scorn obedience as the Greeks demonstrated. To know God means to obey him and when we obey him we can know that we know him. This is an unbreakable connection.

John is not making up something new here. Rather he is affirming the entire truth of the bible and what it has always been. God does not change. He was, is, and always will be a God who is deeply complex and deeply personal. Who desires for all of his children, whom he knows, to know Him and to obey Him. This is how John reassures his congregation with all of their good questions.

Page 3 – Trouble in the world

These questions have not gone away. We still ask these kinds of questions today in the church. If anything, we ask more of them and more complicated ones. Our culture is different, but still very similar. And like the Christians to whom this letter was meant for originally, we are very influenced by our culture. For example,

There are a lot of people in our culture who define themselves as being spiritual. Who are in touch with the universe and it guides them. They believe that there is a Being or a higher power. What is so interesting when you talk to people who are New Age, it's not hard for them to believe that there is a God watching out for them, but it is very impersonal. My friend and I were talking once about one of our friends who is New Age and what she believes and my friend made a comment that she didn't know what was so hard about our friend to believe that that God she believed in was personal. She didn't think it would be that far of a stretch. But it is. The higher power of those who are spiritual is very detached and unpersonable. And the idea that they would have to be saved from something is unimaginable. Because they believe that they are good. So, we do have a movement now that is similar

to the Gnostics which says that God is detached and only really bad people, like murderers, need saving.

Another example is when we meet people who say they are Christians, but then we look at how they live and we get confused. Maybe they are very greedy or swear a lot or don't come to church or don't know anything about the bible. And so we wonder, "are they really Christians?" Are they just going through a hard time right now or immature in their faith?" Something inside of us knows that if someone claims to be a Christ follower then they should live according to biblical standards, but we also know that people, including ourselves, are sinners. We're not always sure how to respond.

There are also different answers to when people ask whether or not they are saved. I remember watching a video of a Christian speaker one time and he looked at the camera and said, if you want to be saved, just repeat after me. Then he prayed the famous sinners prayer. After he was done he assured everyone that if they prayed that prayer and they really meant it, then they were saved and good to go.

We've also confused with passages in the bible like Matthew 7. Which says that a lot of people who do good works will be turned away from heaven. They will say "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out

demons and perform many miracles?" And then Jesus tells them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evil doers."

To add more turbulence to the mix, we are also familiar with Pharisees in the bible who knew the scriptures better than anyone. They knew a lot about God. But they didn't know God.

Our culture and church culture gives us mixed messages about salvation. No wonder that church is confused! And of course we've all asked the question, "How do I know that I'm saved? How do I know for sure?" "Does it mean that I have to obey all of these rules? These can be haunting questions.

When I heard a couple months ago that Billy Graham died, a quote from him got shared repeatedly on social media and the news. He was quoted as saying, "Someday you will read or hear that Billy Graham is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. I shall be more alive than I am now. I will just have changed my address. I will have gone into the presence of God."

When we hear this quote we assume that Billy Graham was 100% confident of his eternal destination. And I wonder if any of us wish that we could be 100% confident too. And I also wonder if any of us think that only people like Billy Graham, could be that confident. Because it's Billy Graham! Look at all

the things he did! Congregation. Billy Graham was a sinner just like us. He was not a 1st class human being. He was not a 5 star human being. Superiority among humans does not exist. We have all sinned. We are equally guilty of falling short of the glory of God. This is a given.

Page 4 – Grace in the world

I'm so thankful that God loves us so much that he has not left us in the dark, but he has enlightened our hearts to know Him through his word. As we read through our text to understand how we can be confident of our salvation, we might expect John to write something like, "Hey, do you believe that Jesus died for you? You do? Great. That means you're saved." Or we might expect him to write something like "The bible gives us rules to follow, but it's ok if we make mistakes and disobey sometimes, it's not a big deal, we're saved by grace." But John doesn't write that. He doesn't write that at all.

He writes about knowing Jesus. And there is an unbreakable connection between knowing Jesus and obeying Jesus. To know Jesus is to obey him. God demands that his live our lives in a certain way. And we mature into that. First we may start by disliking and rejecting God's commands. Then we grow to just trying to get away with as much as possible. We know the rule, and so we'll obey it, but we'll do what we can to

get around it. Then we mature even more to being delighted to obey because we know Jesus. We love the law of the Lord. We delight at the opportunity to obey to show Jesus how much we love his authority in our lives. We don't obey because we're legalistic; we obey out of delight of knowing Jesus.

One of my favorite hymns in the Psalter Hymnal is "Trust and Obey." The history behind the hymn is pretty simple. There was a young man at a meeting who shared part of his testimony about his confidence of his salvation. And at this gathering, he just said something like...I'm not really sure...but you know...I'm just going to trust and obey. Then someone at the meeting was so moved by this man's testimony that he wrote to his friend about. And his friend wrote the hymn. A profound truth from a simple statement. To know Jesus is to obey him and when we obey him we can know that we know him.

Obeying Jesus does not save us, but is it evidence that we know Jesus. This truth breaks chains. This sets us free. Because there is no ritual to perform to receive this knowledge, but it completely grace.

Our culture has taken the concept of knowing Jesus and twisted it. To know Jesus is deeply complex and deeply

personal and our culture tells us the lie that knowing who Jesus is; is predictable and even boring.

This leads us to thinking things like, "Jesus died on the cross for our sins and yada yada yada." Or "We respond to God's grace to us by obeying him and yada yada yada." The gospel of Jesus Christ and what happened on that cross is anything but boring. It is deeply complex and deeply personal. So, let's fill in those yadas with some really sound theological true words, shall we? When someone who asks us how we know we are saved, we can say,

Jesus knew us before we were even born. And he knew that we would sin. He knew that we would not be able to obey all his commands perfectly. He knew the deepest and darkest thoughts we would think. He knew the entirety of our being. And He wanted us to know him too. But he knew we couldn't because he knew that our sin meant that we were unable to. Disobedience separates us from knowing God.

So, what did he do? He became our substitute. He took our place on that cross. He knew us so well that he didn't want us to go up there. Jesus Christ who knew no sin went to the cross. He walked in complete obedience and lived the life that we could not. And then he died the death that we should have.

Jesus was obedient to the Father to the point of death on a cross and he did so out of freedom.

He is the atoning sacrifice. Not just for us, but for the whole world. He became our advocate. And he could defend our cause because he knew us. And he could speak for us on our behalf.

His action on the cross meant that we can also know Jesus. So, that means that we can notice Jesus working throughout our day and in our lives in intricate ways. We can be enlightened and learn about Jesus through his word. We can tell Him anything about ourselves because he knows it all anyways. We can talk to him like we would our best friends. And we are so consumed with knowing Jesus that we respond by obeying what He says and delighting to do so. Because we know that he knows what is best for us.

Not only is it possible for us to know him, but we were made to know Jesus. Knowing Jesus for who He is and the supreme value he holds glorifies God. And we want others to know Jesus because we love to know Him. We were made to know Jesus Christ. And we can be 100% confident of the salvation that comes from Him, the Righteous One.

Jeremiah 1:5 has another meaning of yada. It also can be translated as choose. The word of God says, "Before I formed

you in your mother's womb. I yada you." People of God, be assured that when God knows you, there is no letting go. It is an unbreakable connection.

Let us respond to His grace to us. Let us love his commands. Let us walk in his steps. Let us do all of these things because we know him. Let us love Jesus. Let us grow to know him more intimately and fall even more in love with Him. Let us show the world that that is the best way to walk. The way that is free. To know Jesus is to obey Him. And when we obey him, we can know that we know him. So let us walk in his steps.