

Walking *in the Light*: Keeping His Commandments



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Lev. 19:18; Luke 14:26; John 3:20; 13; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 2:3–11.*

Memory Text: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments” (*1 John 2:3, NKJV*).

A pastor had been counseling a husband and wife. The problem? The husband had been having extramarital affairs. That’s not *an* extramarital affair but, in fact, many of them. The husband tried to calm the situation by telling the wife that although he had been with other women, it didn’t mean that he didn’t love her. In fact, he said, he loved her more than any of the others.

As could be expected, his words—far from solving the problem—only made it worse. Why? Because if you love someone, you show it by your actions, by your deeds, *not* just by what you say.

This week, John talks about what it means to know and to love God. Anyone can say that he or she loves the Lord. The question is, According to the Bible, how are we to reveal that love?

The Week at a Glance: What does it mean to know God, as opposed to just knowing *about* Him? What role does obedience to God’s law have in our relationship with God? What does John say about Jesus as a role model for behavior? What is the “new commandment” that John gives and how “new” is it really?

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 25.*

What Do We Know? (1 John 2:3–5)

The phrase “by this we know” (*NKJV*) appears twice in the above passages. Just what is it, according to John, that Christians know?

First, that they have come to know God (*vs. 3*) and, second, that they “are in Him” (*vs. 5, NKJV*). Considering what’s at stake—our eternal life or our eternal destruction (*see John 5:29*)—these are important things to know, are they not?

At the same time, we have to be careful that we don’t turn knowledge itself into the means of salvation. In fact, that’s the exact kind of heresy John was dealing with here and in other places, the idea that knowledge alone brings redemption.

Knowledge (gnosis) was a crucial term in ancient religion, and it was an important concept in the religious world of the first centuries after Christ. Probably by the second century it had developed into a full-fledged heresy among Christians called Gnosticism. In Gnosticism, there was little concern for moral behavior. The emphasis was on mystical experience and fancy myths about God and the nature of humanity. Salvation was gained through this secret knowledge rather than through a faith relationship with the Lord.

What do the following texts tell us about how the New Testament uses the idea of knowledge? *Matt. 13:11; Luke 1:34, 77; John 17:3; Rom. 3:20; 1 Cor. 8:1; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 4:8.*

In the New Testament *to know/knowledge* has a theoretical and theological meaning. However, it also describes relationships. To know God means to have an intimate relationship with Him. Obedience, love, and staying away from sin all point to the existence of such a relationship. The theoretical and the experiential side of knowledge must go together.

Although the verb *to know* is used frequently by John, he stays away from the noun *knowledge*. He may have decided to avoid the more technical term so that confusion with Gnosticism could be avoided.

Do you know the Lord, or do you just know about Him? What’s the crucial difference between these two concepts? Most important, if it’s only the latter, how can you change, and why is it important to do so?

Keeping the Commandments *(1 John 2:3–5)*

Anyone can say that they know God. In fact, a lot of people have done that, even people in John’s day. Many do today, as well. Talk, though, is cheap.

For John, what was the outward evidence, the outward proof, that a person knows God? What else does John say about this topic? *John 14:15, 21; John 15:10; 1 John 3:22, 24; 5:3; Rev. 12:17; 14:12.* How do these verses tie in with each other? How do they affirm us, as Adventists, in our position about the law?

Keeping the commandments is very important to John and to Jesus. The phrase occurs quite often in John’s writings. Keeping the commandments is a sign that we know God/Jesus and love Him. Love and obedience are connected here. The term *Him* can refer to either God the Father or Jesus and is somewhat ambiguous—probably on purpose too. First John 2:4 states the same truth in negative terms and may refer to a false claim made by those who say that you can come to know God and yet neglect keeping the commandments. John attacks this idea in very strong language, calling anyone who teaches it a liar.

Why would keeping the law reveal our knowledge of God? How does our *act* of keeping the law reveal the reality of our *knowledge* of God? How is one related to the other?

The kind of knowledge of God that the Bible talks about isn’t merely a cognizance of facts. It’s a knowledge that forms the basis of a love relationship. You can’t truly love someone you don’t know. And if you love someone, you are going to act a certain way. A man who truly loves his wife isn’t going to cheat on her. He can profess his love day and night, and yet if his actions don’t reveal that love, then he is, to use John’s term, “a liar.”

What other analogies can you think of that are helpful in understanding why our obedience, our deeds, form an inseparable part of what it means to know God?

What Would Jesus Do? *(1 John 2:6–8)*

Awhile back there was a fad during which young Christian people would wear bracelets with the English letters WWJD inscribed on them, standing for “What would Jesus do?” Though some derided the whole idea as childish, at least the idea behind it was good, and the idea was that when confronted with a situation, we should think about what Jesus would do and try to do likewise.

This fits in nicely with what John has been saying here. The first part of our passage has stressed that walking in the light and knowing God means to be obedient. The second part now calls Christians who want to abide in Him and walk in the light to follow Christ’s example in living their lives. How can they do this? They have to find out how Jesus lived, and on a daily basis they must compare their conduct to His.

In other words, “What would Jesus do?”

Skim through the Gospels. What are some of your favorite stories of Jesus; that is, what stories really speak to your heart about the kind of person Jesus was? How similar are you to Him in these areas?

Although the death of Jesus and His resurrection are the climax of the Gospels, sufficient information on Jesus’ teachings and His life are recorded so that we can understand how a human being, ideally, should live.

This is important to remember, because sometimes people want to focus only on Jesus as Savior, Jesus as their Substitute, and not on Jesus as their Lord and Example. John accepted Jesus both as Savior and as an example. In 1 John 1:7 he had mentioned the cleansing blood of Christ, which points to His death on the cross in our place. According to 1 John 2:2, Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. He was our substitute. But in our verses this week the other aspect shows up. Jesus lived an exemplary life. We should follow His footsteps.

Most of us, no matter who we are, are facing some sort of difficulties in life. Think about your greatest challenge, your greatest struggle. Then ask yourself the question, “What would Jesus do?” After you have what you deem your best answer, ask yourself, “What’s stopping me from doing the same?”

The New Commandment *(1 John 2:7, 8)*

After stressing the importance of obeying the commandments (*1 John 2:3, 4*), John in verses 7 and 8 introduces the idea of a “new commandment.” What is this “new commandment”? The answer is found in John 13:34, where the same expression, “new commandment,” appears.

Read John 13. What is the context that helps us understand what this “new commandment” is?

After having shown His disciples what it means to serve, namely, even to step down and perform the lowly task of washing someone’s feet, Jesus issued His “new commandment.” His disciples should love each other just as Jesus loved them.

A similar situation occurs in 1 John 2:6–8. After having talked about walking as Jesus did, John pointed to Jesus’ commandment in John 13. It is this literary connection with John 13:34, 35 that helps us unlock the meaning of 1 John 2:7, 8. The commandment John is talking about is the commandment about brotherly and sisterly love.

But why does he state that he is writing not a new commandment but an old one? That’s because the commandment of neighborly love was already present in the Old Testament (*Lev. 19:18*). When John wrote his letter, Jesus’ “new commandment” of John 13:34 had already been a commandment for many years.

Yet in a sense, this commandment was new in that it was continuously realized in the life of Jesus (“in Him” [*1 John 2:6, NKJV*]) and was to be seen in His followers (“and in you” [*vs. 8, NKJV*]) in an unprecedented way because of the new age inaugurated with Jesus’ first advent (“the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining” [*vs. 8, NKJV*]).

Finally, the concept of God’s law connects the first part of our passage (*1 John 2:3–6*) with the second (*1 John 2:7, 8*). The commandments are summarized in the commandment to love each other. To walk in the Light and to walk as Jesus did means to keep the commandments and love each other.

When was the last time you “washed someone’s feet,” figuratively speaking? If it has been a long time, what does that tell you about yourself and about how you relate to others? Why is the kind of death to self that leads to the service of others so hard to realize in our own lives?

Loving Others (1 John 2:9–11)

Summarize what John is saying to us in the above verses.

Love was mentioned briefly in 1 John 2:5. Obviously that love refers to our love toward God, which is manifested when we keep His commandments. Love was indirectly dealt with in the second part of our passage, the new commandment (vss. 6–9). Love toward fellow Christians is, however, clearly spelled out in the last section of our paragraph (vss. 9–11). It also begins with the phrase “he who says” (see vss. 4, 6, 9, NKJV).

Verse 9 makes a statement about the church member who hates his brother. This person is in darkness. Verse 10 shows the positive side, namely, a person who loves his brother. Verse 11 returns to hating one’s brother. Not only is such a person in darkness, but his or her eyes have been blinded.

In his letter John is interested primarily in the Christian community. That does not mean he would deny the fact that Christians are called to love their neighbors and even their enemies, but this is not his concern here. He has other problems at hand.

Hating one’s brother is a strong statement, and we may not like applying it to us and our behavior. We may prefer to say that we are irritated or offended, but Scripture oftentimes uses the term *hate* in ways that we don’t commonly use today. How is the term *hate* used, and how is it to be understood in the following texts? *Matt. 6:24; 24:9, 10; Luke 14:26; John 3:20.*

In Scripture *hate* stands not only for what we may call hate today but also for preferring one person over another or neglecting somebody. In other words, you don’t have to despise someone to reveal “hate” as it’s sometimes understood in the Bible.

Is there someone you hate, and maybe with good reason, too? If so, ask yourself the question, What would Jesus do?

Further Study: Read Genesis 39:7–12, Daniel 3:8–18, Revelation 13:16, 14:5.

Walking in the light, which includes keeping the commandments, living like Jesus, and exercising love, is especially important at the end of the world's history. God's law is being challenged, and the issue of true worship and obedience to the Creator will come even more to the front. In Scripture, examples are mentioned, people who remained faithful even under the most challenging circumstances: Joseph, Daniel's friends, Daniel, and many others. The prime example is Jesus. We must make the decision to follow His lead, no matter what.

“John tells us that true love for God will be revealed in obedience to all His commandments. It is not enough to believe the theory of truth, to make a profession of faith in Christ, to believe that Jesus is no impostor, and that the religion of the Bible is no cunningly devised fable. . . . John did not teach that salvation was to be earned by obedience; but that obedience was the fruit of faith and love.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 563.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ It's one thing to keep the Ten Commandments; it's another thing to love other people. What's the difference? Which is easier to do, and why?
- ❷ French philosopher Michael Foucault once differentiated between two kinds of knowledge: the kind that changed the one who acquired that knowledge and the kind of knowledge that brought no change at all. What could be some examples of these two types of knowledge? More important, what kind of knowledge is the knowledge of God, and what kind of changes should it bring to the ones knowing it?
- ❸ How can we avoid falling into the trap of trying to earn our salvation by keeping the commandments, while at the same time avoiding the trap of believing that we can be saved in disobedience to the law?
- ❹ What can you, as a class, do to help your local church as a whole better understand what it means to manifest love? Is there even such a thing as corporate love? Picture what the ideal and perfectly loving local church would be like. How well does your local church match up?

Instant Answer to Prayer

by SAMUEL LABAG

When we pray we know that sometimes God answers Yes, sometimes No, and sometimes Wait. Recently God's answer to my urgent prayer was an instant Yes!

I work in Zamboanga, on the western edge of Mindanao, Philippines. One day I took a boat to a nearby island to deliver health magazines to students at a parochial high school. I visit schools, talk about the dangers of drugs, how to stop smoking, and other health-related topics; then I take orders for magazines that talk about these topics.

My visit to the school completed, I rushed to catch the last boat of the day. I hailed a tricycle taxi for the 10-minute ride to the dock, praying that the boat would not leave without me. But we arrived at the pier only to watch the boat sail away. The porters were sympathetic, but they suggested I find a place to stay overnight.

I can't stay overnight, I thought. I promised some money to another colporteur who must leave tonight for a distant island. He can't go without the money, and his next boat doesn't leave for a week. How will I get the money to him? And where will I stay tonight? As I stood on the pier and prayed fervently for a solution to my problems, I felt a calm assurance.

I opened my eyes to see the boat veer from its course. It made a huge U-turn and returned to the pier. The crew threw a rope down and called to me to grab onto the old tire tied to the end. I clutched the rope in one hand and my case in the other while the sailors pulled me onto the boat. Safely aboard, I realized that God had turned the boat around—for me. The engine roared, and we started out into the open sea just as another tricycle taxi loaded with passengers arrived at the pier. The occupants jumped out shouting and waving for the boat to stop. But the boat kept going.

As we sped toward the mainland, I thanked God for helping me keep my promise to my friend and for allowing me to be a part of His army, bringing truth to searching hearts.

I told my friend what had happened, and we rejoiced together in God's providence. Then I saw him off for his trip to the distant island to take God's word to another needy part of His kingdom.

Your mission offerings help support the literature work, bringing God's message of love to every corner of the world. Thank you for giving so that others can find Jesus.

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