

1 John 2:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

Analysis

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

John introduces the first of several tests of genuine saving knowledge. "Hereby we do know" (en toutō ginōskomen, ἐν τούτῳ γινώσκομεν) provides assurance based on evidence, not feelings. The verb "know" (ginōskō) indicates experiential, relational knowledge—not mere intellectual awareness but intimate acquaintance with God. The test is simple: "if we keep his commandments" (ean tas entolas autou tērōmen).

"Keep" (tēreō, τηρέω) means to guard, observe, and obey carefully—implying devoted attention and protective custody of God's word. The present subjunctive "keep" indicates habitual, ongoing obedience as lifestyle, not sinless perfection or occasional compliance. This isn't legalism (earning salvation by rule-keeping) but evidence of regeneration. Those who genuinely know God demonstrate that knowledge by obeying His revealed will.

The phrase "know that we know him" emphasizes assurance. Believers can have confidence they truly know God—not based on mystical experiences or emotional states but on objective evidence: transformed lives marked by obedience. This test refutes Gnostic claims of superior knowledge divorced from ethics. True knowledge of God necessarily produces holy living. Those who claim to know God while habitually disobeying His commands deceive themselves—their profession is false.

Historical Context

In the Greco-Roman world, religious knowledge was often separated from ethical behavior. Greek philosophy pursued truth through reason; mystery religions offered ecstatic experiences. Neither necessarily demanded moral transformation. Gnostic teachers explicitly divorced spiritual knowledge from bodily conduct, arguing that enlightened souls weren't affected by physical actions.

John's emphasis on commandment-keeping would resonate with Jewish Christians familiar with covenant obedience. Deuteronomy 6:1-9 commands love for God expressed through keeping His statutes. Yet John transcends mere external compliance—he speaks of new covenant obedience empowered by the indwelling Spirit (1 John 3:24). This is heart transformation, not mechanical rule-following.

The early church faced antinomian threats repeatedly. Some distorted Paul's gospel of grace into license to sin (Romans 6:1). Others, like the later Marcionites, rejected the Old Testament's moral law. John's test provided crucial balance: salvation is by grace through faith alone, yet genuine faith necessarily produces obedience. James would make the same point: faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 26).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How can you distinguish between legalistic commandment-keeping (to earn favor) and evidence-based obedience (proving regeneration)?
2. What specific areas of your life reveal whether you truly know God through obedience or merely know about Him intellectually?

3. How does this verse guard against both presumption (claiming salvation without transformation) and despair (demanding perfect obedience for assurance)?

Interlinear Text

Καὶ	ἐν	τούτῳ	ἐγνώκαμεν	ὅτι	ἐγνώκαμεν	αὐτοῦ	ἐὰν
And	hereby	G5129	we do know	that	we do know	him	if
G2532	G1722		G1097	G3754	G1097	G846	G1437
τὰς	ἐντολὰς	αὐτοῦ	τηρῶμεν				
G3588	commandments	him	we keep				
	G1785	G846	G5083				

Additional Cross-References

John 14:15 (Word): If ye love me, keep my commandments.

John 15:10 (Word): If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

1 John 5:3 (Word): For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

Luke 6:46 (Parallel theme): And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

John 15:14 (Parallel theme): Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

1 John 4:13 (Parallel theme): Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

Psalms 119:32 (Word): I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.

Hebrews 5:9 (Parallel theme): And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;

1 John 3:19 (Parallel theme): And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

John 17:3 (Parallel theme): And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

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