

When Knowing is Believing, and When Believing Doesn't Need to Know

a sermon in the series
Life in the Son

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1 John 4:16

And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

What is the difference between eternal life and eternal death, besides the obvious? What is the distinction between being saved from sin and being enslaved to it? What is key to having much assurance of salvation versus little to no assurance?

The answer to all of these questions is the same answer found in our text—knowing and believing the love of God for you personally.

Many Christians are discouraged because they know with their heads God loves them, but they don't believe it. They doubt it personally. On the other hand, there are many who believe they are Christians and do not doubt it, but don't know Jesus and His love for them personally. There are those who lean too much on the know-side of the knowing and believing statement, for the word *know* here doesn't mean just to know information but to know by experience. Therefore, there are those who lean too much on the knowing side and are seeking every spiritual experience they can find. Many of them are led astray because of it. Then there are those who lean on the believing side and tend to be more formal and less passionate. They believe Christianity is more cerebral than experiential. Let me say this clearly—all Christians both know and believe the love of God for them personally. But, it is our responsibility to be balanced in both. The healthy and balanced Christian is one who both knows and believes and pursues both heartily.

When reading the Scriptures we must avoid reading things into them that are simply not there. We must also exercise caution about trying to read between the lines as if there is always a hidden meaning. I don't think the particular word order that John uses here is key to any major doctrine. John writes the word *known* followed by the word *believe*, however, in John 6, Peter reverses the word order and says, "We have come to believe and know that you are the Christ the Son of the Living God."

Both word orders are legitimate and there are reasons for both. There is a reason why John has the word *known* followed by the word *believe* and there is a reason why Peter has the word *believe* followed by the word *known*. The point is this: true and vibrant Christianity depends on

both words. One without the other is unacceptable and will minimize your Christian experience if not make it altogether false.

I. KNOWING IS BELIEVING

Seeing is not believing, *knowing* is believing. This is what John's testimony is; he is speaking of himself and the other apostles of Christ.

"We have known and believed the love that God has for us," (1 John 4:16)

They knew that love. John begins his epistle by saying "our hands have handled . . . the Word of life," they touched Him—Christ Jesus.

A. Salvation is First Experiential Then Believed

To be saved is an experience—an encounter with God—followed by faith in God. You say, *that can't be so because the Bible says you can't be saved without faith*. Well, let me make my case this morning before you jump to any conclusion. It is true that we cannot be saved without faith, but the question you and I must ask and tackle honestly is where does faith come from?

Are you the fountainhead of your faith? Are you the supplier, author and finisher of it? Of course not. So where does it come from? It comes from God.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." (Ephesians 2:8)

Unto every man God has given a measure of faith, it's one of the gifts of the Spirit. There is no question we agree faith is a gift given to us by God. So how does God give us this faith? John answers this question and he does so by stating that faith comes to us by a living, true encounter with God. Have you truly met the living God? I didn't ask if you are persuaded that God exists. I have not asked if you believe Jesus died and rose again. I am asking you what John is stating clearly—have you experienced and therefore believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ? If you have not experienced Him, I pray you will be honest with yourself because He is here to be experienced. He doesn't just give us blessings, He is the blessing. There is not one of us in this room this morning that can say they have not experienced God through His blessings; even then sinner can say this. Every one of you, saved or lost, can say God has blessed you tremendously. There are common graces that God pours upon all men and does so with mercy but I have not asked if you have experienced the blessings of God, I have asked if you have met with God, been encountered by God, been arrested and apprehended by the same? Do you know Him?

John is telling us one knows or experiences and then believes the God he has encountered or experienced. I think this is the reason for this particular word order—to show us the personalness of God. God is personal. What the Gospel holds out to us all today is what our brother ex-

horted us earlier this morning, there are no gatekeepers at the throne room of God. The blood of Jesus Christ has erased all doors, bars and locks. The blood of Jesus has blown away the door to the throne room of God. Jesus said, "I am the door. No man cometh to the Father but by Me." His side was opened, sir, that you might enter in and know Christ. Have you entered in?

This is the Gospel. God has opened up to you an encounter with Him if you will simply come, because God is personal. He meets you where you are and God reveals Himself to every sinner He saves. This is the exact word order of John.

Let me give you some facts proving knowledge will fuel faith. Not just facts with the head but also facts perceived by the intellect then encountered by the Spirit are what fuels faith.

Fact 1. The necessity of the revelational power of God.

If you are to be a Christian it is necessary that God reveal Himself to you. For us who are saved this is not new, in fact some of you would ask me to study more in depth and speak of new things because you already know this. But why should I move on to something new? What can be more beautiful than this? God reveals Himself to us. If God is the storehouse of all wisdom, treasure and knowledge, why would I want to go any place else? How could I dig deeper, how could I climb higher? There is no deeper nor higher experience but in God Himself and in His revelation of Himself to you.

I'm not just preaching to those who are not Christians, but I am speaking to Christians for the Apostle John is writing to Christians, this is the key—do you know Him and are you experiencing Him? If you need renewal this morning dear saint of God, therein lies the answer. You need to be replenished in the personalness of God. Now, if you are not a Christian I'm telling you this is the beginning to new life. Let me base it on Scripture.

John 6:45,

"It is written in the prophets and it shall all be taught by God, therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me."

Now, the Apostle Paul in Romans 10 makes it clear that no one will ever become saved without hearing by a Gospel preacher, a human messenger as myself. But here Jesus bypasses the human messenger, He sets the preacher temporarily on the shelf to make a point and the point is this—everybody who comes to know Jesus Christ personally is taught by God Himself. Without that there is no coming to Christ. In Hebrews 8:10-11, the writer of Hebrews rehearses the promise of the New Covenant and one of the promises is that no brother will say to another, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me from the least of them to the greatest of them."

In other words, though I exhort you at this moment to know God, the truth is that without God's power the exhortation will fall meaningless to the ground. It may penetrate your ears but

it will never penetrate your heart until the supernatural power of God is released toward you so that my words now take on another dimension and quality and they have power and reality and meaning unlike before. Those very words become an encounter, an experience with Him.

Matthew 16:13,

“When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”

Notice what Peter says in verse 16,

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you.”

Why would Jesus say *blessed are you*?

“For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”

That’s the answer. A supernatural revelation came to the Apostle Peter there on the sea of Galilee. He threw himself at the feet of his Lord and said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” A revelation of God came—He knew Jesus. He was there at the wedding where Jesus turned the water into wine, but that did not reveal to his heart all he needed to know in order to be saved. But that day on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus told him to throw out his nets after fishing all night and catching nothing, the nets immediately filled with fish to the full, he knew he was standing before God in the flesh.

Has there been that moment in your life where Jesus became more than a story told in a Sunday School class or at Vacation Bible School? Has there come that moment where you feel naked standing before the living God, and you have to fall on your face and say, “Oh God, I am a sinner.” Those who have been saved have. They have known and therefore they have believed.

Fact 2. The inability of man to know God apart from the grace of God.

I am so thankful for all these children and young people here every Sunday. I commend parents for bringing your children to church; this is well and good. But children, please listen to me, I’m talking to you. Hearing me preach will not change you. You were born with an inability; you’re powerless. In other words, you don’t have the ability to know God Himself. It cannot be done by the mere intellect. It cannot be done in Sunday School or Alpha. It cannot be done, mom and dad, by your daily devotions with your family. I pray you continue to have devotions with them even though your children are incapable of knowing God apart from God’s revelatory power since we do not know when God will encounter them and take what you have taught them and convert them.

Romans 3:11,

“There is none who understands, there is none who seeks after God.”

This is the description of every one of us apart from the saving grace of God. So young people, here is my point. You can know a lot of things about God and your depth of knowledge amazes me. We have wonderful teachers who have taken their duties seriously and I commend them, but listen, that knowledge you store within your head will not save your heart by you merely agreeing with it. Salvation is not head knowledge. Can I tell you, when I was about 5 years of age my mother and dad were not Christians. But my grandparents, my mother's parents, were Christians and by the providence of God they asked my mom and dad if every Saturday night I could stay in their home and get up and go to Sunday School and church with them. So they took me to church as a small child.

However, my grandmother made a mistake. She would read and teach me the Sunday School lesson on Saturday night. Now, I'm only 5 years old, and every Sunday morning I would climb up on top of the table and would teach the entire class. My grandmother couldn't teach—I wouldn't let her. I taught the entire class at age 5. God had given me as a small child a propensity to learn the Bible.

Do you know how I began to really learn to read? Before I even started school I hated naps. To this very day I hate them. I don't even like going to bed at night. I convinced my mother that if she wouldn't make me take a nap I would read the Bible. So I learned to read by reading the Scriptures, the old King James, the Authorized Version. God gave me a propensity to learn, to know, to understand a lot of theological things, biblical things. But do you know, even though I preached my first sermon the day after I turned 15, I didn't know Jesus and had never experienced Him? I was lost, and had I died before the age of 26 I would be in hell.

The Bible says you and I are dead in our trespasses and sins, that doesn't mean physically of course, we're alive and breathing, but spiritually, because God is a spirit, and the way you relate to God is through the Spiritual realm. You are a spirit.

The Bible says in Ephesians 2:1 we were dead before grace, before God quickens our hearts, before He does whatever He does, we're dead in our sins and our trespasses. That simply means your spirit cannot hear God or relate to Him or understand Him and most importantly cannot want Him or love Him. I thought I loved God when I was a kid, but to me Jesus was like Superman but just a wee bit better. I simply didn't know God.

Your spirit is like a radio receiver or the iPod that has the ability to pick up radio stations. A receiver takes audio frequencies out of the air and translates them, changes them, so you can now hear the sound of the music and words spoken. That's what your spirit is like. It's able to hear God spiritually. But the problem is the Bible says you are born with a spirit that is dead and unable to hear. In other words, it's broken, it won't get God's station. You can get the world's

station, you can get the devil's station, but you cannot tune into God's station. Your spirit needs to be fixed, remedied, mended and that's what God and God alone can do. Cry out to Him this morning! Cry out to Him right now and ask Him to heal your spirit. He will make it alive. I am assured of that fact. Why would He die for you if He would not save you if you call upon Him?

Fact 3. This knowledge is an understanding and an awareness of spiritual reality.

It's not just knowing facts and information. When God reveals Himself, what is that like? Does He just come and say, "I am God"? Not generally. He did to Moses but that is an exception. He did to Paul, but again, I don't know many people who saw bright lights and heard a voice when they were saved. So how does God fix the spirit and allow you to hear what He has to say? He grants you an understanding and awareness first of all of God's rightness.

God is right. Everything He has said is right. You know that in your head but you don't have a reality of that because if you did you would be scared to death this morning. That's one of the problems of the unsaved person. That was my problem before I was 26. I didn't really fear God, I feared His hell, but I didn't fear Him. But the day He gave me a reality of who He was I knew He was holy and not only was He holy, He was right.

Which secondly means it is an understanding and awareness of your separation from God. In other words, we're wrong. You hear me say if you are not a Christian today you are separated from God. You hear that and you can even agree. Many of you young people, when asked if you are a Christian will be honest and say, "No, I'm not saved yet." You know you're not saved yet, but we're not talking if you know you are lost. Are you aware of the reality of your lostness and separation from God?

This is the kind of knowledge John is talking about. This is the kind of experience John is talking about. You have an encounter with God, where you don't see Him or necessarily hear words, but are overwhelmed by an awareness and reality that you are separated from Him.

Thirdly it is an understanding and awareness of God's help in Christ. You are suddenly aware with a reality unknown before that your only hope is in Jesus Christ. With that understanding and reality comes faith.

Let me warn us that this experience varies from person to person. One brother told me he was suddenly aware and understood that his life wasn't lived under the Lordship of Christ. That's how God encountered him and in that moment he acknowledged and turned his path, which is what repentance is, and started following God. That's all it was for him. He simply became aware of this one fact: he wasn't under the Lordship of Jesus Christ even though he professed to be a Christian.

A sister relayed that she was simply aware that God no longer seemed to be against her but for her. She had come, even with tears, wanting to be saved and we counseled her but all she could

see that day was that God was against her. Her sins had separated her and there was a reality like never before gripping her heart that she stood apart from Christ, not with Him and not in union with Him. All of the sudden a day or two later another reality came to her, that God was no longer against her but for her and that's all it was. That was the beginning of her Christian life.

Nothing dramatic in those two experiences. Sometimes an encounter with God can be very powerful and dramatic, but my point is this: it is not the intensity, drama or emotion of the experience that matters, what matters is the encounter with Christ. Have you encountered Christ?

Listen to what the Samaritans said to the woman at the well in John 4:42, they said to the woman,

“Now we believe, not because of what you said for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.”

What did they say? *Yes, you told us, but we experienced Him and now we believe.*

Christianity is not embracing religion—dos and don'ts—it is to be confronted with God Himself. An encounter with God followed by an ongoing experience of His transforming love.

“He who abides in love, abides in God and God in him.” It's that kind of knowledge that faith is born from and that's how the believer has faith in God. Faith is the result of an spiritual understanding of this God of love, which He grants to you.

II. FAITH FUELS KNOWLEDGE

There is a knowledge of God and His love that only comes by faith. Don't be confused; saving knowledge is to encounter the living God. But after you are saved, to grow in the knowledge of God requires faith in Him. The Apostle Paul, after hearing about the Colossians' faith in God, prays that they may “walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” How is that so? Because they had faith, and as they exercised faith in God they began to grow in their knowledge of Him. This is why sometimes you have this word *knowing* before *believing* and then sometimes *believing* before *knowing*.

III. WHEN BELIEVING DOESN'T NEED TO KNOW

Sometimes we must believe without knowing. I'm talking to Christians now. There are times in your walk with God when you don't know His comfort, all you know is His rod. I am not in any shape, form or fashion trying to make any unbeliever here think the Christian life is rosy and always wonderful. There are difficult times and I have a Father who promised, because He loves me, that He will discipline me. That's wonderful to think about—that He would love me so much He wouldn't let me get by with sin. But that doesn't make it always easy or pleasant.

In fact, the Bible says, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; never-

theless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11). There are days when you walk in darkness and have no light to guide your way. You do not know what God is doing or where He is taking you, yet you believe. I want to say to you, this is much nobler than knowing and believing.

It's easy to walk with God when you know where He is taking you and how it's going to turn out. That's kindergarten, spiritually speaking. But if you are going to go on to post-graduate studies with God and be more intimate in your relationship with Him, He has to graduate you beyond the elementary principles of faith and challenge your faith. He must take you places and do things in your life without you knowing the why or the reason. It's faith at its noblest.

To walk with God in sunlight and praise Him is like giving Him pennies. To walk with God during the storm and still worship Him is to give Him millions. It's much more honoring to God that you rest in Him realizing He is trustworthy and faithful even when you do not know what He is doing. I suggest to you this is the heart of Christianity.

Peter says it this way in his first epistle,

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.” (1 Peter 1:6-8)

There are many times in the Christian life where you have to believe without knowing. I'll never forget Victoria's birth, probably the most dramatic experience in Karen's life and mine. We had no clue, other than a premonition I had all during the pregnancy, that Victoria would be born with Down's syndrome. I feared that from the day Karen told me she was pregnant. That was the only thing. No doctor warned us. Karen had gone through all the battery of tests, did all the right things. A month before she was born the doctor said she was a normal healthy little baby girl with nothing to worry about. But the moment she was born, immediately it was obvious that she was not a normal healthy little girl. Immediately the doctor whisked her away from us, barely from her mother's womb and immediately began to work on her, revive and resuscitate her—she was not breathing. For the next several hours we did not know whether she would live or die. There was no way to know what God was doing. We had no understanding of what His intent was, but I can tell you the peace of God that passes all understanding kept our hearts in that hour. We didn't know but we had to believe and it was that which maintained our bearing.

There have been many setbacks in my ministry here. There are a lot of unanswerable questions. I can't explain a lot of what has happened over these 19 years, but I think God is moving and His promises are about to come to pass. It seems like Satan is given the freedom to test us yet again another season. I don't understand what God is doing in these days but I can tell you He is faithful.

I've seen you go through many heartaches, there is hardly a family here I don't know well enough to say I know some of the difficulties you've gone through because we've gone through them with you and we didn't know what God was up to. We didn't know how it was going to turn out, but we knew one thing—we knew we could trust Him. We do know in whom we have believed and we are persuaded and know Him to be nothing but good to us, even through the valley of the shadow of death. He has never done us evil. When He has taken loved ones from us we can proclaim it is good. "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord." We don't always know what God is up to but we know in whom we have believed and we believe that His love for us works in all storms to our benefit and that's all we need to know. Amen.