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Knowing Obedience

1 John 2.3-6

Series: Blessed Assurance (Communion Series)

The Village Church

April 7, 2024

I. Introduction

- A. One of the great American humorists, Samuel Clemens, aka, Mark Twain, had, it appears, the reputation for being able to turn a phrase
 - 1. In fact, there are a multitude of quips that have been attributed to Twain
 - a. So much so, that a whole cottage industry has developed in seeking to verify whether, he, in fact, said them
 - b. It's likely that he didn't say half the things he has been quoted as saying
 - c. Or, as Yogi Berra actually did say, "I never said most of the things I said."
- B. Anyway, one of the sayings often attributed to Mark Twain (who knows who really said it) is one that hits me pretty close to home
 - 1. It's about golf
 - 2. He is quoted as saying, "Golf is a good walk spoiled"
- C. Week before last we celebrated – ok, celebrated is probably too strong a word – we observed April Fools' Day
 - 1. And Twain is quoted as saying, "April Fools' Day is the day we remind ourselves what we are the other 364 days of the year"
 - 2. That hits pretty close to home as well
 - a. For the Bible calls preaching "foolishness" (**1 Corinthians 1.21, KJV**)
 - b. So evidently, every time I stand here on Sunday morning, I play the fool
 - 3. But of course, if I am a fool for Christ, I am not ashamed of the noises I make from this pulpit
 - a. **1 Corinthians 1:18** (NKJV) — 18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
 - b. **1 Corinthians 1:25** (NKJV) — 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.
 - 4. So, this morning, once again, I invite you to join me in my foolishness
- D. But one of my favorite quotes attributed to Mark Twain – again, who knows whether he said it or even stole it! – is this one
 - 1. **"What gets us into trouble is not what we don't know. It's what we know for sure that ain't so."**
- E. That statement gets to the heart of an important biblical issue

1. And not just a biblical theological issue – as if it were merely a matter of debate among theologians
 2. A faith issue; a Christian life issue
 - a. Indeed, a matter of spiritual life and death
 - b. Which, if we don't get this right, we could place ourselves in the position of an eternity very different from the one we imagine
- F. We live in a culture that practices a religion that sociologist Christian Smith has called **“therapeutic, moralistic deism”**
1. A religion in which a deity of some kind is acknowledged
 - a. Whose vague sense of right and wrong we all are supposed to somehow understand, apart from divine revelation – that's the moralistic part
 - b. And whose ultimate goal is to make us relatively happy – that's the therapeutic part
 2. That religion really has nothing to do with biblical Christianity
 - a. But it carries a corollary
 - b. Everybody goes to heaven when they die
 - c. It doesn't really matter what anyone does – with the obvious exception of Adolph Hitler, or maybe Joseph Stalin
 - d. God grades on a curve, and it's a really lenient curve!
 - e. That the only criteria of getting into heaven is you have to die
- G. This issue reminds me of one of the ways of understanding the possibilities inherent in the issue of **the assurance of salvation**
1. For those of you who love logical inference, you'll appreciate this
 - a. It is a form of what is called the “logical square” or the “square of opposition”
 - b. But I think all of you can understand it
 2. On one side of the square is the issue of salvation – one is either saved or not saved
 - a. On the other side of the square is the issue of assurance – one is either sure of salvation or not sure of salvation
 - 3.

	Assured of Salvation	Not Assured of Salvation
Saved	Saved and assured	Saved an not assured
Not Saved	Not saved and assured	Not saved and not assured

4. Four possibilities
 - a. You can be saved, and sure that you're saved
 - b. You can be saved, but not sure that you're saved
 - c. You can be not saved, but sure that you're saved
 - d. You can be not saved, and sure that you're not saved
- H. The worst possible category to be in is to be not saved, but sure that you're saved

1. That's where Mark Twain comes in (or whoever said it): "We don't get into trouble by what we don't know. We get into trouble by what we know for sure that ain't so."
2. The vast majority of people in our culture, whose religion is therapeutic moralistic deism, know for sure they're saved
 - a. But what they know for sure ain't so
- I. The Bible teaches that if you are in the lower right – not saved and are sure you're not saved – that's actually a pretty good position to be in
 1. Because then, if you have any sense, you will cry out to God – like those gathered in Jerusalem at Pentecost when Peter was preaching – "what must I do to be saved!"
 2. And when you hear the gospel, you have the opportunity to cast yourself on His mercy, trust in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation, and be saved
- J. The Bible also teaches that it's not the best to be in the upper right – to be saved, but not assured of salvation
 1. Always unsure of where you stand before God
 2. It's a state susceptible to anxiety and unfruitfulness
- K. But the Bible places a premium on the top left – to be saved and be assured of salvation
 1. In fact, an entire book of the NT is devoted to bringing believers in Jesus firmly into that category
 2. It's the book of 1 John
 - a. The book we are using on communion Sundays
 - b. Because, if there is ever a time to come into assurance of our salvation in Christ, it is when we gather together to partake of the Lord's Supper
 3. **1 John 5:13** (ESV) — 13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, **that you may know that you have eternal life.**

II. **Crucial Assurance**

- A. Let's see where we've been in our study of 1 John – we've been interrupted in this series several times
 1. And in doing so we'll begin to get a sense of how important the assurance of salvation is to God
- B. **Genuine Fellowship**
 1. First, assurance of salvation is the basis of having genuine fellowship with God and with one another in the body of Christ
 - a. One of the reasons why, as we gather together in communion, that assurance is so important
 2. **1 John 1:2–3** (ESV) — 2 ... the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, **so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.**

3. Christianity is not so much a religion as it is a relationship
 - a. A relationship with God
 - b. Which He makes possible through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ
 - c. A fellowship, which by the work of the Spirit of Christ dwelling within us, we can know the Father and the Son
 4. And without assurance, that fellowship is broken
 5. **1 John 1:4** (ESV) — 4 And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.
 - a. Genuine fellowship leads to joy in Jesus Christ
 - b. To be saved, without assurance, is to be bereft of joy
 - c. But to be saved, is to have fellowship with the Father and the Son
 - d. And fellowship with one another
 - e. And experience the joy of the Lord
- C. **Rooted in the Blood**
1. Assurance is also rooted in the blood of Jesus
 - a. In other words, Jesus died so that we who trust in Him would be assured of our salvation
 2. **1 John 1:7** (ESV) — 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and **the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.**
 3. When we gather around the Lord's table we remember His death
 - a. And as we remember His death, our sense of assurance grows
 - b. Because our assurance is rooted in the blood of Jesus
- D. **Through Jesus Christ**
1. Of course, all of this – our salvation and our assurance of it – is through Jesus Christ
 2. **1 John 2:1–2** (ESV) — 1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, **we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.** 2 **He is the propitiation for our sins,** and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.
- E. So assurance of our salvation is crucial to God
1. It matters to Him
 - a. It should matter to us!
 2. Because
 - a. Our fellowship with Him and with Jesus and with one another depends on it
 - b. The blood of Jesus provided for it
 - c. And our advocate Jesus Christ stands in for us!

III. **The Objective Evidence**

- A. When we study the issue of the assurance of salvation, we find two main dimensions of assurance
 1. There is a **Subjective** sense of assurance
 - a. But there is also an **Objective** dimension of assurance

2. By subjective assurance we mean that the Spirit of God, who dwells within each believer, gives us an inward sense that we belong to Him
3. **Romans 8:14–16** (ESV) —
 - a. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.
 - b. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”
 - c. 16 **The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...**
4. This is a spiritual communion between the Spirit of Christ, dwelling in us, and our own spirits
 - a. That type of communion with Christ is precious
 - b. And perhaps you’ve experienced it
 - c. In the context of prayer, or in the midst of a worship experience
 - d. You sense the affirmation of the Spirit of God
5. The trouble with subjective assurance is that it can be fleeting
 - a. And can be overshadowed by the voices of the world
 - b. Or by negative emotions when circumstances are challenging
 - c. Or even by the voice of the enemy as he seeks to disrupt our fellowship with God
6. And for many of us, we have a hard time trusting our inner impulses
 - a. We know that the heart of human beings is deceitful and wicked by nature
 - b. So how do we confirm that the inner voice of the Spirit of God is really the One speaking to us?
7. Well, that’s where the **Objective** dimension of assurance comes in
 - a. And the Bible teaches that both dimensions of assurance are necessary for a full and confidence sense of the experience
8. The objective dimension is the observable, behavioral aspect of our lives that confirms in our experience that the inward testimony of the Spirit of God is genuine
 - a. And the objective dimension of assurance is what our text is about this morning
 - b. And it comes down to a **Knowing Obedience**
9. **1 John 2:3–6** (ESV) —
 - a. 3 And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.
 - b. 4 Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,
 - c. 5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.
 - d. By this we may know that we are in him:
 - e. 6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

B. **Keep the Commandments**

1. “By this we know that we have come to know him...”
 - a. Here it is – the essence of assurance
 - b. Knowing that we have come to know Him
 - c. Keeping the commandments is objective
 - d. We can see and hear, as we examine our own lives, whether we keep them
2. Now, you might ask – which commandments?
 - a. The rich young man in the gospels essentially asked the same question: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10.17)
 - b. Jesus listed a number of the Ten Commandments: murder, adultery, stealing, false witness, honoring father and mother
 - c. The man claimed to have done all these since his youth
 - d. But Jesus said, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” (Mark 10.21)
 - e. The young man went away sorrowful – he had great possessions
 - f. Evidently, he failed at just one of the commandments – the one about coveting
3. The disciples were stunned!
 - a. “Who then can be saved?”
 - b. Jesus: “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” (Mark 10.27)
4. So now we starting to get some clarity
 - a. If you want to work your way into heaven – have at it!
 - b. Just follow all of the Ten Commandments!
 - c. Which, of course, human beings cannot do
5. And James confirms this
 - a. **James 2:10** (ESV) — 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.
 - b. That’s because the Law of God is an expression of the character of God Himself
 - c. And to break the Law of God is to violate God Himself
6. So we cannot be saved by observing the Law
 - a. **Galatians 2:16** (ESV) — 16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.
7. But even though we are not saved by fulfilling the Law (only Christ has fulfilled the Law)
 - a. The Law still has purpose
 - b. Paul says in Romans that by the Law we become knowledgeable of sin
 - c. He says that the Law is a schoolmaster leading us to Christ
 - d. Christ – through whom alone we can be justified

- e. But we also see in 1 John that keeping the Law builds our assurance
- 8. Our desire, our inclination, our ability to keep the Law is the result, the natural outflow, of our salvation
 - a. And the more we find our lives growing in obedience to the commandments of God, the more we can be assured that we are saved
 - b. And the more the internal testimony of the Spirit of God resonates with our spirit that we are His children

C. **Without Deception**

- 1. The other side of keeping the commandments is that if we are not keeping the commandments, we are subject to deception
 - a. Deceiving others
 - b. But even more critical, deceiving even ourselves
- 2. **1 John 2:4** (ESV) — 4 Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him...”
- 3. So you think you are a Christian? You believe that you are actually a follower of Christ?
 - a. Be careful – lots of people claim to follow Jesus, but are self deceived
- 4. That’s who Jesus had in mind in the Sermon on the Mount
- 5. **Matthew 7:21–23** (ESV) —
 - a. 21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.
 - b. 22 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’
 - c. 23 And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”
- 6. You can even be in ministry, and not be known by Christ!
 - a. But if you are growing in your obedience to Christ, to His commands, the commands of God in the Ten Commandments, that’s an assurance builder

D. **Perfecting the Love of God**

- 1. **1 John 2:5** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected....
- 2. By keeping the word of God – keeping the commandments of Christ – the love of God is perfected
 - a. Perfected – made complete
- 3. In our obedience to the commands of God, God builds His love into us
 - a. The love of God – the same love that sent His Son to live a life that you and I could never live, and to die a death on our behalf

- b. The love of God that forgives us of our sins as we confess them to Him
 - c. The love of God that is poured out in our hearts and overflows to other people
 - 4. If by the Spirit of God we find ourselves loving the Law of God (as it repeatedly refers to in the Psalms)
 - a. And more and more inclined to obey the commands of God
 - b. And with greater capacity to fulfill the Law of God
 - 5. We become a more loving people
 - a. Loving God
 - b. And loving our neighbor
 - 6. Which is what Jesus said encapsulates the whole Law
- E. **Abiding in Him**
 - 1. **1 John 2:5-6** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 ... By this we may know that we are in him: 6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.
 - 2. As we abide in Him – which we are able to do by the Spirit of God dwelling within us
 - a. We are enabled to walk in the way Jesus walked
 - b. He becomes our example
 - 3. Paul says, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (**1 Corinthians 11.1**)
 - 4. He says to the Thessalonians: “And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit...” (**1 Thessalonians 1.6**)
 - 5. All of this echoes what John said in his gospel
 - a. **John 15:9-11** (ESV) — 9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.
 - 6. “That my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full”
 - a. In other words, that you may be assured of your salvation!
 - 7. Our assurance is rooted in our abiding in Christ, living in relationship with Him
 - a. And by the indwelling Spirit, allowing the life of Christ to live in us
 - b. That’s the key to obedience – “God working in us both to will and to do” (**Philippians 2.13**)
 - c. And the key to assurance
- F. So the objective dimension of our assurance of salvation is rooted in
 - 1. Keeping the commandments of God
 - 2. Without deception
 - 3. So the love of God is perfected in us
 - 4. As we abide in Him

IV. **Building Confidence**

- A. Now, some of you may find this lesson on assurance rather daunting!
 - 1. When we use the Law of God, the commandments of God, as a mirror to see whether we measure up, we find that we fail
 - a. Fail with frequency
 - b. Even fail gloriously!
 - 2. But the issue is not perfection
 - a. The issue is direction
 - b. The issue is growing in our desire, inclination, capacity and success in keeping the commands of God
- B. John has already established that in this epistle
 - 1. **1 John 1:8** (ESV) —
 - a. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
 - 2. There is no such thing as sinless perfection in this life
 - 3. But John goes on to say:
 - 4. **1 John 1:9** (ESV) —
 - a. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- C. This is a matter of confidence in who we are in Christ
 - 1. And success breeds more and more confidence
 - a. If you watch sports – basketball, let’s say, since this is the season for March Madness
 - b. Once you see a player hit a few shots, the commentators always say, “He (or she) has great confidence now”
 - 2. So the more we find ourselves succeeding in walking the way Jesus walked, the greater confidence we have in our relationship with Christ
- D. **2 Peter 1:5–11** (ESV) —
 - 1. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge,
 - 2. 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness,
 - 3. 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.
 - 4. 8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - 5. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.
 - 6. 10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.
 - 7. 11 For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- E. In other words, as you grow in these virtues – all rooted in the Law of God – your confidence, your assurance will bring you into the eternal kingdom with glorious expectations of life in the presence of the loving Christ.