

KNOWING THAT WE KNOW HIM

GOD'S TESTIMONY | JOHN 5:1-12

Whoever said, "When all is said and done, there is usually a lot more said than done," may have been describing our experience with the local church. We spend far more time discussing and analyzing the gospel than we do living in light of the gospel. While we certainly encourage lively gospel conversations, no gospel conversation is complete until it changes the way we live.

Francis Chan illustrates the point.

When I tell my daughter, "Go clean your room." She's not going to come back a couple of hours later, and say to me, "Hey dad, I memorized what you said." And she's not going to tell me, "Dad, I looked up 'go clean your room,' in Greek." And she's not going to say, "My friends and I, we're going to get together every week, and talk about what it would look like if I went and cleaned my room (Basic Series: Follow Jesus)."

Jesus bluntly asks, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and don't do the things I say (Luke 6:46)?"

James echoes our Lord's sentiments when he writes, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says (James 1:22)."

We are not surprised that John feels the same way. John wants our knowledge of God to lead us into a more profound love for God and each other—a love that is characterized by obedience to God's commands and deep heart transformation.

John concludes his letter by encouraging us to love God by obeying his commands and by embracing his testimony about his Son.

BELIEVING JESUS, LOVING GOD, KEEPING GOD'S COMMANDS (vv. 1-5)

¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. ² This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³ In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

1. According to John, what happens when we believe in Jesus?
2. What does it mean to be "born of God?"
3. According to this passage, what are some results we might expect if we are "born of God?"
4. Describe the connection between loving God's children and keeping God's commands?
5. Describe the connection between loving God and keeping his commands?
6. Why are God's commands, "not burdensome?"
7. How have we overcome the world?
8. How do we continue to overcome the world?

BELIEVING GOD'S TESTIMONY ABOUT HIS SON (vv. 6-12)

⁶ This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. ⁷ For there are three that testify: ⁸ the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. ⁹ We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. ¹⁰ Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. ¹¹ And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

We might as well admit from the outset that we have no idea what John meant by "This is the one who came by water and blood." Commentators offer us no fewer than five different interpretations, and there are probably many more. The main three are: (1) "water and blood" refer to Jesus' birth and death, with water referring to the amniotic fluid present at birth; (2) "water and blood" refer to the outpouring of water and blood when the spear pierced Jesus' side on the cross; and (3) water and blood refer to Jesus' baptism and crucifixion.

I like the third option best. The overall context is God's testimony about his Son. There are two places in Scripture where God offers us his definitive statement about his Son. At his baptism the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus and a voice from heaven announces, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased (Matthew 3:17)" And Paul tells us that Jesus "through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:3)." Additionally, the only other place we see the phrase "by water" in John's writings is in his descriptions of baptism, and John frequently offers "water" as a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

1. John's opponents might have agreed that Jesus was a spirit-anointed teacher, but would have hedged their bets on Jesus' humanity and sacrificial death. Why are Jesus' humanity and sacrificial death critical to our understanding of who he is, what he has done, and what it means to know him?
2. How did the Holy Spirit testify about Jesus during his earthly ministry?
3. How does the Holy Spirit testify about Jesus today?
4. What happens when we embrace God's testimony about Jesus?
5. What happens when we reject God's testimony about Jesus?
6. What do you think it means "to have life?"
7. What is your most significant takeaway from this passage?
8. What are some ways you can act on the truths of this passage in the coming week?