

Keeping His Commandment

By Paris Reidhead*

We're dealing, these days, and this hour, the evidences of eternal life, as found in this little first epistle of John. In John 17:3, our Lord declares, "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

Many people that you will meet, who carry the name "Christian", will not have had fellowship with God, merely fellowship with other people about God. Many of these are going to become concerned about the absence of spiritual reality. Some, in despair perhaps, are going to turn and go back into the world. John, speaking of such a company, said, "They have gone out from us, they went out from us because they were not of us."

There will be others whose hearts will be stirred for reality. They'll want to know Him, not just about Him, but Him, whom to know is life eternal. And so, I'm suggesting that you mark these various verses that we'll be using service by service. I would hope that you've already put "1" down to the left of 1 John 1:6. Just a small "1" so that you understand this is the first of eight different evidences in this little epistle, so that when you're taking someone into the word, it will not mean having to read it, but you can turn directly to it.

In that first evidence, we've read: "If we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." And so the first question you're going to ask the person that you're endeavoring to help is this: "Well, how do you walk? What is the purpose in your life? Is it to please God, to walk in the light? Or is it to, somehow, walk in as much darkness as you can and still escape the consequences?"

A good question, and it's going to start the thinking process, and the Spirit of God will use it like an x-ray to show what's within then. Now, we understand that walking in the light involves accepting God's gracious cleansing from sin, forgiveness and pardon. Obviously, anyone who's come this far has discovered that they were sinners - dead in their trespasses and sins. They have repented of their sin; they have received the Lord Jesus Christ, and have qualified for the first words of the second chapter when John, writing, says, "My little children..." This is a term of affection. This is a father speaking to his own, one who loves those that he addresses. And the apostle John is finding, or directing, this letter to those who qualify as God's little children. Born into the family of God, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, this means that they have already been awakened and convicted, brought to repentance. And repentance, as we've said, is a change of purpose and direction, governing principle, from pleasing oneself to pleasing God, and they've savingly received Christ as Lord and Savior.

And you'll notice the next words in this first verse of the second chapter: "I write unto you, that you sin not." Now, sin is a choice. You've got to remember that. A choice to please oneself in a way that God has forbidden. I think it's time for a definition. I think we think with definitions:

Temptation is the proposition presented to the intellect to gratify a good appetite in a bad way. Now, let me say that again, let me emphasize it: Temptation is the proposition presented to the mind, to the intellect, to gratify a good appetite in a bad way, a forbidden way.

Now, understand that, from that, the appetites are not bad. You know what they are - these urges or drives or propensities that we call appetite - appetite for food, for knowledge, for pleasure, for security, for sex, for status - all of these drives are urges God put into our first parents, and when he had completed making them in His image and likeness, of them and all else He said, "It is good."

So let us not deface and defile that which God has called good, by saying that the appetites are bad. The proposition that the enemy presented to our first parents was to gratify these good appetites in a way that God had prohibited. And that is temptation - they were tempted to do it. When Mother Eve decided to do it, and Father Adam concurred - for he was standing there at the time, we are told, and he consented to it, and did as she had done - they made a choice, and the choice was to

satisfy their appetite in a way that God had forbidden. That is the definition of sin. Sin is the decision of the will to gratify an appetite in a way that God has forbidden.

Now, understanding that, then, we know that sin is the decision to yield to temptation. The apostle's admonition is really translated like this: "Do not run into ruin. Do not promote your own misery. Don't make a choice that's going to bring you under the chastening judgement of God. My little children... Do not sin!" is what he is saying. Don't make such an unwise, unhappy choice.

Remember, he wrote in his epistle in the earlier part of this first chapter: "These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." To be happy, we must be holy. There isn't any escaping that. Holiness and happiness are absolutely inseparable. If you think that you can be happy by disobeying God, and by sin, and then you are, really, you are morally insane. There is no happiness in sin. There may be momentary gratification of an appetite, but it always carries with it misery, unhappiness and utter ruin. Sin and misery are as inseparable as happiness and holiness are, and we must remember it. We can understand something else. When the apostle says, "My little children, do not sin," there's a reason for it. He has said that these things are written that they might know that they have eternal life. Did you realize that there's absolutely no assurance of salvation when we're living in disobedience and in known sin?

Let me explain it to you. I get it from II Timothy 2:19 - "The Lord knoweth them that are His, and let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." Anyone who names the name of Christ living in known disobedience to the will of God has no assurance of eternal life. The Lord knows who are His; let everyone that names His name depart from iniquity. That's so important.

Now, in the following verse, he says, "And if any sin..." Understand this, that there is always the possibility of a child of God being overtaken in a fault, and falling into temptation, and yielding to sin. We've explained that, and dealt with that yesterday. There's all the difference in the world in the way a child of God, truly born into God's family, would fall into temptation and yield to sin; he hates it - what he did, he hates and his whole heart cries out to have it rectified and made right. He's going to deal with it the way God has prescribed - he's going to judge it, and forsake it, and confess it, and know the cleansing of the blood.

But John gives to us his marvelous encouragement, "And if any man sin, we have an advocate..." That word is not used that way very often. We're accustomed to seeing this Greek word in another form. You know what the word is? It's "parakletos" - used of the Holy Spirit - comforter. Here it's translated "advocate".

You know there's a verse in the Psalms where it says, "My name is written on His hands." We have One in the glory, a man there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who loved not His life unto death, who died that He might vindicate the holiness of God and make it possible for God to be just, and the justifier of him that would receive Jesus. And He's there, able to save unto the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. And our names are written on His hands, and He is advocate; He is parakletos, He's the One to go alongside to help, He's the One who pleads our cause before the Judge. The word "advocate", in this sense, as it's used, "parakletos", has to do with the counsel for the defense, the legal assistant, the pleader, an intercessor. And our Lord Jesus Christ, in His exaltation to the Father's right hand, pleading for us, representing us. Oh, how marvelous it is, that we should have that at this point. And then that beautiful statement, "And He is the propitiation for our sins." He's the covering.

The atonement of Christ was intended as a satisfaction of public justice. God can't repeal the moral law, nor can He set aside the spirit of its sanctions. To dispense with the sanctions for breaking the law would be a virtual repeal of the precepts. God can only set aside the execution of the penalty when something shall be done that meets the demands of the true spirit of the law.

In Romans 3:24-26 we read that there are reasons, and the plan and purpose of the atonement is to justify God in the pardon of sin and the releasing of sinners from the full execution of the penalty of the law. Our Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, having

satisfied the law, and having publicly vindicated the holiness of God, so that God can be just, and the justifier of him who repents and believes, we have therefore, in Him, this One who is our advocate, and our covering.

What must we do, as a child of God, when we fall into sin, our first works, again? Judge ourselves, forsake our sin and confess it, and know the cleansing of the precious blood. So John is talking to children whom he wants to have joy. To children; but are all who might read this children? He does give that second evidence now, in this third verse, and it's so important for you to write a "2" next to verse 3: "Hereby we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments" or "that we keep His commandments".

I mentioned yesterday that there was a gnostic heresy that John [glitch]. The Gnostics pretended that they had much knowledge, superior knowledge, special illumination that set them apart from others. Their understanding was (or what their propaganda was) that because they had this higher insight, they could continue to live in sin, they could continue to indulge their evil passions, and they could continue to practice their unholy habits and God would be just as pleased with them, as if they were living ascetic and pure and holy lives.

They denied orthodox teaching, they denied the Word of God, so John is dealing with that, and he is saying here in this verse: "Anyone who claims to know God, but does not keep His commandments, well, is the same as the one who says he knows God and he walks in darkness. He's a liar, and truth isn't in him."

There are many today you're going to meet in the course of your ministries who are the products of a cheap, sometimes extremely shallow evangelism. With their mouths they can recite orthodox theology, and many of them have denied the necessity of repentance. If you'd have met me as short a time ago as in the sixties, you would've... (no, pardon me, in the fifties - late fifties or early fifties), you'd have found somebody that would fight you to the ground in denying that repentance had any place in the preaching of the Gospel today. I remember when a preacher colleague said, "You know, I think it's time for us to look again at this thing of repentance." And I took my finger and wagged it under his nose and I said, "Now, I want you to know that I've got this thing settled. Repentance is Jewish! And it has nothing to do with the preaching of the Gospel today. And I'm not going to get mixed up in that."

He said, "All I said was, 'I think we ought to look at it again.'" I said, "No! I've made up my mind!"

Well, I made up my mind, but a book came to my hand, that Bethany published (it's out of print now, I'd like to see it - in fact it got printed, then out of print and I didn't even know it - I'd been urging Ten Hegre for a long time to put out H A Ironside's "Except You Repent" - and I understand you did, and a whole edition's gone, and I never got the copies I was hoping for... well, that's my fault - it's still a great book). Here was a Dispensationalist who took umbrage with all of his Dispensational friends, saying, "I think they're making a terrible mistake when they say that repentance is not for today."

All right, we have a great many people that we're going to meet, many of whom are going to come to us as basket cases, and they're going to need help, and we're going to discover that they know the plan of salvation, they've got it all up here, but if they die, they're going to miss heaven by eighteen inches because it never migrated down here. They know it all here, but they don't - you see, salvation isn't a scheme. Salvation isn't a plan. Salvation isn't a decision. Salvation isn't a system of doctrine. Salvation isn't a list of Scripture verses. Salvation is a person! David knew it when he said, "Jehovah is my light and my salvation." Paul knew it when he wrote to that church in Corinth, in II Corinthians 13:5. He said, "Examine yourself, whether you be in the faith. Prove your own self. Know you not, your own self, how that Christ be in you, except you be reprobate?"

This man that challenged me on the subject of repentance had a radio program in one of the towns where I and my family were living, and a man from another church in the same city came to call him up, and said, "Pastor, you know I go to such-and-such a church (big church), and I'm one of the personal workers. Last Sunday something happened. I was listening to your program on the air and I wanted to talk with you about it. The pastor gave the invitation, and a lot of folks came, and I went to a man, nice looking businessman type, and I got his name and his address, and I asked him what he came for, and he said he came to be saved. And so I had a Scripture verse there, and I opened to it, and it was 'He that hath the Son hath life'. And I said, 'Do you believe that?' And he said 'Yes, I do.' So I wrote down 'Saved'. And I said, 'Do you want to be baptized?' And he

said, 'I don't know - should I?' I said, 'Yes.' So in that church they baptize the same day you made a profession of faith. 'Have you got any questions?' 'You know, that verse you've got - says "He that hath the Son hath life"? 'Yes... we just read it.' 'The question I have is this: I believe it. You asked me if I believe it, and I believe that he that hath the Son hath life. But the question is this: How do you get the Son?' And you know what I told him?"

The pastor said, "No. What'd you tell him?"

"Well, I told him that the pastor would take care of that, in his church membership classes later on. So with that, he went off, and he was baptized. Did I do right?"

And the pastor on the phone, my friend, said, "Do you think you did right?" He said, "No, no, I did wrong. I should have known how to explain to him." He said (the man making the inquiry), "Pastor, how do you get the Son?" And the personal worker was just as ignorant as the person who'd asked the question. And you're going to find a great many people, that have a great many very deep and very real needs.

Now, what is the sinner's attitude toward the commandments? Is there anything in the Scripture that tells us what the sinner thinks about the law? What the sinner knows about the law? In Romans 2:14-15, we find that it says, "When the pagans, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves, which show the work of the law written on their hearts."

When God made man, He took great care to put in - now, I guess, if you were to use computer terms - He had a hard disk already programmed inside that person. And on that disk, on that inner knowledge, is written the law of God. Every person that breathes the breath of human life - I'm convinced, according to this Scripture and my experience with people in Africa who never heard the name of Jesus - I'm convinced that the law is written on their hearts. They were given by God, not only this law that's there inscribed, but they were given the power to choose good or evil. It isn't written (this law) upon tables of stone; it's written in their conscience, in that inner knowledge that God has as standard equipment for the human family.

He did that so that the law would never be very far from them, nor would it be hard to be understood. Every person - and I'm going to go so far as to say even those who have never heard the name of Jesus, because I found it so - every person is a moral agent, and every moral agent knows what is right and can never mistake his real duty. He knows it. And he knows that his duty is to will and to choose that which he knows to be right. But at the age of accountability - some point there, I don't know what it was - the Word says, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Every one that breathes the breath of human life has made the decision to not do what is right, but to do what they wish to do, that will gratify their appetites in the way they choose to gratify them, and that's why the Word says all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

I say, I don't know what that time is, and I don't know why, and I don't think anybody else does. And I think the church has gotten into a terrible problem and amount of bondage because certain people in the past thought they had to answer questions that God's Word doesn't answer. The Scripture tells us that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; but it doesn't tell us why all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Oh, I know, there have been theories that have been put together by those that thought they had answers, but if you examine their theories carefully, generally they're found not to hold up very well. I don't think that Scripture does tell us why all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. But it tells us that they have. That every person breathing the breath of human life made a sovereign choice (that is, sovereign in the kingdom of their own heart) to please themselves as the end of their being, as the reason for their being, and self-pleasing became the governmental principle by which they live, and therefore, every sinner has already made a choice that he's going to do what he wants to do, irrespective of the will of God, and irrespective of the rights of others. That's sin.

Now, the essence of it is this: "I am going to decide how to satisfy my appetites, I'm going to do what I want to do, I'm going to please myself, I'm not going to let parents, or God, or even government tell me how to be happy. I'm going to take charge of my life. Or, as it's put into poetry: "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul." That's the essence of sin. That's the attitude of the sinner toward the commandments.

Now, in contrast to that, what is the attitude of the person that's been born into the family of God, whom John can say, "My little children..." First, we've seen that repentance precedes forgiveness and pardon. Repentance, as we've noticed, and you'll notice again, how it occurs throughout this book, there is that change of purpose, from pleasing oneself to pleasing God. The renunciation of this principle: "I'm going to decide how to be happy." It consists "in the turning of the soul from selfishness to benevolence, and from disobedience to obedience" - said Charles Finney¹.

Now, obedience to the commands is really all that God requires. A believer is a person who has committed his will to seek the highest good of God and the entire universe. Now, if you're a child of God, have been born into God's family, and can accept the address of the Spirit of God through John: "My little children...", then one thing is clear: you have purposed, in repentance, preceding faith and forgiveness, to please God in everything. That is the essence of keeping the commandments. A believer is someone who has determined to love God and his neighbor. Let's explore that for a moment.

First and great commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." You know, and I know, and we saw last night in the illustration, that love, the "love" of the Scripture is not emotion. When God says "Though shalt love", it's a commandment, and commandments are that which have to do with the will. And therefore, the person that loves God is the purposed person who has made a purpose and a decision and a commitment to seek the highest good and happiness and joy and satisfaction and blessing of God. And, by the same token, to seek the highest good and blessing and joy and satisfaction and fulfillment and well-being of neighbor. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart; and love thy neighbour." And this love therefore, is to will good, to will the highest good, for all persons, whether for its own sake. And this includes the consecration, an entire consecration of the entire being - every part of our being - to this end of seeking the highest good and blessedness and happiness and well-being of others.

I'm going to read to you something from Finney. In his "Systematic Theology" on page 99, he wrote: "The Bible everywhere assumes that sincerity, or honest intention, is moral perfection, that it is obedience to the law. The terms 'sincerity' and 'perfection' in Scriptural language are synonymous. 'Uprightness', 'sincerity', 'holiness', 'honesty', 'perfections' are words of the same meaning in Bible language."

Now, the intention, the intention - setting of the will, a fixing of the purpose - again, in page 104 in his "Systematic Theology": "The love of God requires us to will, or intend, the promotion of every interest in the universe, according to the perceived relative value for its own sake. In other words, that all our powers be supremely and disinterestedly devoted to the glory of God, and the good of the universe."

You say, "Well, that's pretty hard, that's pretty heavy." Well, perhaps it is, but this second evidence of eternal life isn't so light either. And it's important for us to understand it. "Hereby we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." Is he talking about the 613 Acts of Righteousness, to do or not to do, that our Jewish neighbors subscribe to? Or is he talking about something that is the intention and the purpose of the heart to seek the highest good and blessing of God, and all and the entire universe? I believe it's the latter. And when the heart is set, and the heart is fixed to please God, then the other things are going to fall into line.

"He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

"Did you say... wait a minute... this is... this is very difficult. I don't know. I'm not sure that the purpose of my heart is to please God in everything."

Every person, every one hearing my voice knows the state of his own intentions. You know what you intend to do. Now, if you don't you're out of touch with reality. You have a very serious mental problem. And that's a possibility and there might be someone here or someone listening, that is in that condition, and that's one that requires another kind of assistance and help and ministry. But every person that is in touch with reality knows what his intention is. Is it your intention to please God or to

¹ Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) An American Presbyterian minister and leader in the Second Great Awakening in the United States.

please yourself? That isn't that difficult. Such states of consciousness are part of our awareness of being. Not to know that you exist or to know the purpose for your existence implies insanity. You're here. You're you. And you know, just as much as you're here and you're you, you know whether or not your purpose is to please God or to please yourself - it's that simple.

For a person to say, "I do not know whether or not I truly purpose to please God in everything" has to be construed to mean: "I have not yet made the choice to please God in everything." To say, "I don't know whether I have" means: "I haven't made that choice yet." Because when you've made the choice to please God and seek His glory, and to seek the highest good and blessedness of your neighbor and yourself, you'll know it because it is a commitment of the will - it's a choice. And if you say, "I do not know it yet, I'm not sure" - it just means you haven't made the choice yet to please God in everything. And that means you haven't repented, and that means you're not keeping the law, and that means that you don't know Him. "We know that we know Him - we keep His commandments." And his commandment is that we should seek the highest good and blessedness of God and our neighbors, and that becomes the ruling passion and the governing, controlling principle of our lives.

Well, now, you can find at this point the explanation why there's so much religious profession and so little practice of true religious faith and life in our day and in our time. Because we've had - as I mentioned to you in my own state ministry for many years - no place for repentance. Accept the plan of salvation; assume that you're a child of God. And repentance was something that I considered to be absolutely apart from any place or importance in the preaching of the Gospel. Oh, I'd give anything to go back over those years, and find the products of my evangelistic zeal, and warn them to flee from the wrath to come, because I misled them on the most important subject in all the world. And there are multitudes like that.

There's only one basis on which God can forgive and pardon sin, and that is on the basis of the repentance on the part of the sinner, and his full acceptance of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, where He satisfied the holiness of God - vindicated His holiness - and made it possible for God to pardon sinners. So that repentant heart, coming thus, at the foot of the cross, so to receive Christ - that one is the one that's been born of God.

Oh, these texts and this Scripture is a severe blow to false teachers of our day and time, and it's a severe blow to all pretenders of religious knowledge. Anyone who continues to live in known sin, thinking that all they will lose is their reward, is in for a sad, sad awakening. And all false boasters, who consider the righteousness of Christ to be a covering for their continued personal unholiness -ah, what a warning this Scripture is to them.

God's Word declares that such are all liars, and there is no truth of God in them. Hard words, but you see, I didn't write the Scripture; all I'm trying to do is bring our attention to focus on what God said. And He said, "He that saith I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." I didn't write it. God, by the Holy Ghost, through the most loving, tender-hearted of the apostles, the apostle John, is the One who wrote that.

And so, the apostle lovingly entreats all the readers, and us, so to live as to assure our hearts before Him. "Whoso keepeth His Word, in him is the love of God perfected." My dear friend, let it be perfected in you, and in me, that hereby we may know that we are in Him.

Let me close with something that came from the pen of John Wesley². When I started preaching, I was the pastor of a little country church out at Lake Osakis, between Osakis, Minnesota and Long Prairie, Minnesota. A little, long-abandoned country church the neighbors had kept up and kept painted, and pews varnished so they'd have a place to bury their friends, and they asked me to come in and be pastor. I'd reached the ripe old age of 18. I'd started Bible school when I was, just turned 16. I'd been there two years, I'd had to leave in the middle of that year and Mr. Markwards, who was pastor up at Long Prairie, called down to the Bible school, and said, "We need someone to have services out here for summer," and the lot fell on me. It was propinquity. I happened to be in Frank Bass' office the day that Mr. Markward's telephone call came, and he said, "Paris, what are you doing this summer?" And I said, "Well, I don't know yet." And he said, "You're going up to Lesley near Long Prairie, to be their pastor for this summer."

² John Wesley (1703-1791) Anglican cleric, Christian theologian, and founding the Methodist movement

So I say I've never been with young people. I started out right then. First week I was there, I remember they had "Ladies Aid". And I went, and, all these ladies around, I learned how to balance a cup of coffee and a plate of salad on my knee, and shake hands and talk at the same time. I was - oh, it was terrible. I spilled.. And worst of it all, a lady got behind me, she said: "Reverend Reidhead..." and I looked around to see where the preacher was. And then I realized it was me. And she said, "I've got a problem." And I said, "Oh, have you?" I had a problem, too - I didn't know what to do! And "I got a problem..." I said, "Well, I'll try to help. What is it?" She said, "My daughter - she's just in that dating age. What should I do?" And, you know, I had some cake and coffee in my mouth, and I thought I was going to strangle. I thought I was going to choke. I was sure I was going to die right there. Because the only thing I could think of was: "Well, I guess maybe I should date her." But that wasn't the answer! That wasn't the right answer. And so I choked back and muttered - you know, when in doubt, mutter - so I muttered.

Well, the only books I had with me when I went up to be pastor for the summer was a Scofield Bible, a Prudence Concordance, and two volumes of Wesley's sermons. And friend, if you've got to start out with the bare minimum, you couldn't do better than that. And I want to tell you that I've never been out of reach of Wesley's sermons in the 51 years since I went up there. Because that man knew God, and he walked with God, and God spoke through him. And I want to just say a little bit to you right now, "Can you say, 'Thou art merciful to my unrighteousness; my sins thou rememberest no more?' Then for the time to come, see that you fly from sin, as from the face of the serpent! For how exceeding sinful does it appear to you now? On the other hand, in how amiable a light do you now see the holy and perfect will of God? Now, therefore, labor that it may be fulfilled, both in you, and by you, and upon you. Now watch and pray that you may sin no more, that you may see and shun the least transgression of His law. Do all diligence to walk according to the light you have received! Be zealous to receive more light daily. Use all the knowledge, and love, and life, and power. So shall you daily go on from faith to faith, and daily increase in holy love."

Shall we pray?

Father of Jesus, we thank and praise Thee that Thou hast given to us this Thy holy Word. Oh, how we rejoice, our Father, in this revelation Thou hast given to us of Christ. Might it be that Thy Spirit shall speak to every heart, and we'll glorify the Lord Jesus, Whose we are and Whom we serve. In His worthy Name, Amen.

* Reference such as, Delivered at Bethany Fellowship, Minneapolis, MN on Monday, June 6, 1988 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

©PRBTMI 1988