# 1 John "We know…"

## 1. Introduction

a. The first letter of John contains many verses that say either "we know" or "you know." They are verses that we should all become familiar with because they are foundational verses on assurance. As well as countering false teaching, John's purpose in this letter is to bring us solid teaching leading to full assurance.

b. Have you ever though how we get to know things? Most of your life has been spent accumulating knowledge, getting to know things. There is conscious knowledge that comes from structured learning. But also there are times when knowledge comes in an instant of realisation. There are two ways in which we get to know something.

c. Firstly, through observation or study which is how most scientific knowledge is gained. We see or read about something and add it to our store of knowledge. This kind of knowing is primarily concerned with information and the gathering of facts, which leads to understanding. It's what we often refer to as head knowledge.

   i The best way to understand this kind of knowing is to know ***about*** something. It's knowledge that is not necessarily personal in any way.

d. Secondly, by personal experience. We gain knowledge through something that impacts upon us personally, the kind of things that we know based on our own life experience. There are many things we know because we have personally encountered them.

e. Sometimes what we know starts off one way but then over time changes to the other. It's important to understand these two applications because in our English language we use the same word – to know – for both ways of knowing. But in NT Greek there are two different words for "to know.".

   i "**oida**" – this is the word used to describe the head-knowledge kind of knowing.

   ii "**ginosko**" – what we know through personal experience.

   iii In this letter, John uses both words when looking at these 18 things that he says we know – he uses ***oida*** 7 times and ***ginosko*** 11 times – and knowing which word he uses in each case helps us to understand the basis of this knowledge.

f. In John 13 we have the account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. When he came to Simon Peter, he asked Jesus *"Why do you want to wash my feet?"* In verse 7 we have Jesus' reply:

**John 13:7** *"You don't know [**oida**] what I'm doing now, but you will know/understand [**ginosko**] later."*

   i Jesus is saying to Peter *"You don't have a grid for what I'm teaching you about servanthood right now, but in time you will fully understand because it will become part of who you are."*

g. When we read passages in the New Testament that speak of us knowing God, it is not the **oida** kind of knowledge – we aren't called to understand God –we are called to know him in the **ginosko** sense, knowing him and experiencing him in a personal and intimate way.

h. Every time John says **"we know that…."** he is grounding us in truth. Think of these statements as being like anchors that serve to keep us grounded so that we don't drift or get wrecked in the storms of life.

## 2. We know God

**1 John 2:3-6** *And by this **<u>we know</u>** that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.*
*4 Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,*
*5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this **<u>we may know</u>** that we are*
*in him: 6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*

a. The first thing that John tells us here is that we know God and that we are in him. That's a big statement – can anyone really say that they know God. No-one can possibly know everything there is to know about God, the Bible says he is unsearchable. What John is talking about here is that **ginosko** knowledge, the intimate knowledge of relationship with God.

b. John outlines three stages to help us understand what it means to know God.

   i We know God because we know Jesus

   ii Knowing Jesus gives rise to our obedience

   iii Our response is to walk in a Christ-like manner

c. The context for all this is that God wants us to know him. In the OT we see God progressively reveal himself to Israel, through covenants, law, feasts and the prophets. The greatest and fullest revelation is through Jesus. God can even be known through his creation (Romans 1:18-32)

d. John is saying here God not only wants us to know him, he wants us to know that we know him – v2: "by this we know that we have come to know him…" In John's mind there's a difference between knowing and knowing that you know.

   i We know that we have truly come to know God when we walk in obedience to his word. That doesn't mean following the letter of the law, it means living in the freedom of the Spirit, loving God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, dying to sin and taking up our cross daily in our pursuit of Jesus.

   ii Keeping God's commandments is the evidence that we have come to know him. We are not save by keeping his commandments, we're saved by faith through the grace of God – genuine saving faith will always result in a lifestyle of obedience.

e. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says: *"If you have the life, it is bound to show itself, and if it does not, then you have not the life…. You cannot be receiving the life of Christ without becoming like Him. You cannot walk with God without keeping His commandments. You cannot know God without immediately, automatically loving Him. Love always manifests itself by doing what the object of its love desires."*

f. To walk as Jesus walked means our lives will be characterized by daily dependence on God, submission to Him, and obedience to His will. Our overall aim in life will be to seek first His kingdom and righteousness.

## 3. We know it is the last hour

**1 John 2:18, 24** *Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore **we know** that it is the last hour…[24] Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.*

a. In this passage John is speaking about the false teachers who had been part of this church but had now left. He is addressing the subject of spiritual deception. Both Jesus and Peter give us clear warnings that in the last days there will be a significant increase in spiritual deception:

**Matthew 24:4-5** *And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. [5] For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray.*

**1 Peter 3:3-4** *…knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. [4] They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming?*

b. A clear distinguishing feature of the end of the age is that not only is the Antichrist coming, but before that happens there will be many who operate in an antichrist spirit.

   i The same evil spirit that will characterise that final Antichrist is already working through false teachers and false prophets, some within the church and others stirring up lies and confusion on the world stage.

c. The antichrist spirit denies that Jesus was the Christ, or that the Christ was fully incarnate in Jesus. The spirit of antichrist aims to diminish Jesus and substitute other views or other persons for the true incarnate Son of God. We live in a period of time where God in his sovereignty allows deception to spread. In another of his "we knows" John says this:

**1 John 5:19** *We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*

d. We must be aware of the days in which we live, and the trends that the world is wanting us to accept and become part of. We must be vigilant and discerning of what we allow to influence us and shape our everyday lives. John gives us a solution that will keep us from being contaminated by the ways of the world.

   i Let the word of God abide in you, because that word not only comes from God, but it will also lead you to God and keep you abiding, in Him. John's message to us in the light of many who carry an antichrist spirit is this: Guard yourselves from the deceiver and the antichrist. Love the Word, live in the Word, pray the Word, memorize the Word.

## 4. We know we will be like Jesus

**1 John 3:2-3** *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but **we know** that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.[3] And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*

a. In this verse John employs "**oida**," the knowing that is based on factual knowledge. John is telling us here about something that will happen in the future, but we have no direct experience of it yet. John is comparing our present condition with that which lies ahead for us. Living as God's children now is a glorious present reality, but what is to come is even more glorious.

b. As children, in our present state we are immature and still have much to learn. John isn't belittling us, he's simply confronting us with a spiritual reality. We don't know it all, and the older we get and the more we grow in our walk with God, the more we know we don't know.

c. John uncovers a stark contrast between the present and the future, the known and the unknown. Although our present status as children of God is wonderful, our future state will be even more extraordinary. "What we shall be" remains veiled from our sight until His coming. Then, at the sound of the trumpet of God we will undergo a sudden and instantaneous transformation into the very likeness of Jesus:

**1 Corinthians 15:51-52** *Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, [52] in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.*

d. There are three distinct elements of truth that we can take away from these verses.

   i Our future state is <u>not yet completely revealed or known</u>. There is still an element of mystery involved – even with the known there are unknowns. In this life we will never be completely sanctified – we are on a journey and in time we do become more Christ-like in many ways.

   ii Our future transformation is <u>linked to seeing Jesus as he is</u>. When Jesus returns in the fullness of his glory, we will see him face to face and instantly we will be changed into his likeness.

   iii Our <u>future transformation is certain</u> and will be instantaneous. John is adamant – it's not "we think" or "we hope" – it's an emphatic "we know." No matter what happens to us in this life, there is a glorious future guaranteed, awaiting us at the end of the age when Jesus returns.

e. John's exhortation to us is that knowing this will motivate us to grow in holiness now. If we have our hope fixed on this future reality, it will lead us to pursue purity and holiness all the days of our life. This life of holiness is a frequently recurring theme in this letter.

f. How do we pursue holiness? Paul tells us (Ephesians 5:26) that we are clean through the washing of water with the word. So God's Word and the Holy Spirit are like the soap and the water. But we have to apply it to the dirt of our sin.

g. Holiness is not something we "do" in this life, and that has no connection with the life to come. True holiness is a thing of rare beauty, and we must not look upon it as an optional extra to the Christian life, but as imitators of Christ it is something that we should pursue with every ounce of spiritual strength that we possess.

## 5. We know we have eternal life

**1 John 5:6-13** *This is he who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. [7] For there are three that testify: [8] the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. [9] If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. [10] Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave 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. [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.*

a. This is probably the most vital "we know" verse to get hold of. John states it simply and succinctly – you who believe in the name of the Son of God may know that you have eternal life. What John is saying here is what you need to hold on to. You can know for sure that you have eternal life.

b. Throughout this letter John has been speaking about authentic Christianity, laying out some of the foundational truths of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Truly following Jesus will result in us obeying God's commandments and loving one another. In the process John speaks from his own objective experience of having personally walked with Jesus in the flesh.

    i John appeals to this apostolic witness in his argument leading up to this statement that we can have confidence in knowing we have eternal life.

c. God has given us a trustworthy 3-fold witness to the authenticity of Jesus. Believing God's witness to Jesus is a sure foundation to our faith, with the ultimate conclusion of assurance of our eternal life. The three who bear witness are the Spirit, the water and the blood, and these three agree. What does John mean by that? It is clear that John is establishing the historical fact of the incarnation and ministry of Jesus, and confirming God's testimony to substantiate it.

    i In Jewish culture, evidence is confirmed by the testimony of two or more witnesses – John is outlining the evidence of three witnesses who agree that Jesus is the Son of God.

d. The water is a reference to Jesus' baptism – God gave testimony to Jesus' son-ship with his audible voice from heaven. The blood is a reference to Jesus' death on the cross which points us to the shedding of blood as the acceptable sacrificial offering for the atonement for the penalty of sin.

    i These are the two historical events that bear witness to Jesus' nature as both God and Man, emphasising the historical nature of our faith.

e. The Holy Spirit completes this trio of witnesses. At Jesus' baptism the Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove. Throughout Jesus' life the Spirit bore witness through Jesus' miracles, his teaching and his obedience to his Father. And then at the cross, the Spirit bore witness through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. He again bore witness in fulfilment of Jesus' promise when he descended upon the church on the Day of Pentecost.

f. John goes to great lengths to point us to the credentials for Jesus' power and authority as the Son of God to be our source of salvation leading to eternal life. He says that the three witnesses all agree, and they are not just the testimony of men, but of God himself. If we do receive this testimony, we will have a sure foundation to our faith.

g. In these verses, John is very cleverly introducing us to a third way in which we can know things – we can know things through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. When we are born again, the Holy Spirit comes and awakens our spirit, and makes his dwelling place within us. The Holy Spirit now has full access to our spirit-man and is able to teach us and show us things. Now when we read the Bible we begin to see things that we've never seen before. Sometimes the revelation or understanding that he brings is sudden and immediate; at other times he brings his light over a period of time.

h. The Holy Spirit takes the external witness, the objective testimony of the scriptures, and points us to the Living Word who came and lived and died and was raised again to bring us to a place where relationship with God is restored. This results in an inner conviction in our innermost being that sometimes we just can't explain. The confirming that the Holy Spirit brings is so strong that all doubt is eliminated and we know that what God has said is true. And we come to that place where we can say, "If God has said it, I believe it. I know it's true."

   i The glorious conclusion of all this is summed up by John in verse 11 – "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."

i. "He who has the Son has life." Jesus is the key – if you have him, you have everything, you have eternal life. If you have something, it means it does its things for you. For instance, if you have a £5 note it means that it buys you £5 worth of something. What does it mean to "have" the Son of God?

   i It means you have made the decision to put all your trust and faith in Jesus. Not just at some point in your past, but as an ongoing, everyday reality..

   ii Eternal life is not just something to be enjoyed in the future – it starts now. Eternal life is not just the culmination of the process, it IS the process – we have eternal life now.

**Hebrews 6:4-5** *…those…who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, [5] and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come…*

   iii Jesus' promise to us is that he came to bring life and that we should have it abundantly.

j. We can have absolute assurance that we have eternal life. There is no question, there is no doubt. John has written these things so that you may **know** that you have eternal life. Not might have. Not will have. You HAVE – present tense indicating an already existing and infinitely ongoing reality – eternal life.

## 6. Conclusion

a. Although one of John's reasons for writing this letter was to counter the false teaching in the church, it is apparent from the way this letter is written that John has a huge pastoral heart for his people. That is why he is so keen for us to grasp these basics of the faith and own them for ourselves, so that we are not tossed about on the waves of uncertainty and confusion.

   i It is especially relevant for us today when there are so many voices speaking to us that don't come from God, each wanting to persuade us that they have the truth. Most of them can only offer a false hope at best leading to ultimate spiritual and moral bankruptcy in the end. Others offer half-truths that lead followers down a dead-end trail of overemphasis and excess.

b. Let us remain true to the Word, and to the Apostles' teaching, grounding ourselves in truth, and allowing the Holy Spirit to line us up with the plumb-line of the scriptures. And then we will be able to say with John, "We know…"

## "We know…" in 1 John

2:3 we know that we have **come to know him**, if we keep his commandments

2:5 By this we may know that **we are in him**: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked

2:13 I am writing to you, fathers, because **you know him** who is from the beginning

2:18 we know that **it is the last hour**

3:2 we know that **when he appears we shall be like him**, because we shall see him as he is

3:14 We know that **we have passed out of death into life**, because we love the brothers

3:16 we **know love**, that he laid down his life for us

3:19 we shall know that **we are of the truth** and reassure our heart before him

3:24 by this we know that **he abides in us**, by the Spirit whom he has given us

4:6 By this we know the **Spirit of truth and the spirit of error**

4:13 we know that **we abide in him and he in us**, because he has given us of his Spirit.

4:16 we have come to know and to believe **the love that God has for us**

5:2 we know that **we love the children of God**

5:13 that you may know that **you have eternal life**

5:15 we know that **we have the requests that we have asked of him**.

5:18 We know **that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning**

5:19 We know that **we are from God**, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

5:20 we know that **the Son of God has come** and has given us understanding