

SESSION THREE

Knowing That We Know Him

1 John 2:3-17

PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that John's tests of authentic knowledge of God are obedience and love, that the "new commandment" is ancient love made new by Christ's own measure, and that love of the world and love of the Father contend for the same heart.

Catholic Touchstone: Faith formed by charity (*fides caritate formata*). Assurance in John is real but present-tense and moral: walking as he walked, loving the brethren, doing the will of God. Knowledge of God that leaves life unchanged is, in John's blunt word, a lie.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

"And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments" (2:3). Here the Knowing thread flowers for the first time. Many scholars understand the secessionists to have claimed a superior gnōsis, a knowledge of God detached from moral obedience. John answers with the Hebrew grammar of knowing: in Scripture, to know God (*yada* in Hebrew) is covenantal and relational, like knowing a spouse, and it is proven in walking. "He who says 'I know him' but disobeys his commandments is a liar" (2:4) is as sharp as the apostle of love ever gets.

The old-and-new commandment (2:7-8) is a deliberate riddle. Old: love of neighbor is as old as Leviticus 19:18, and as old as his readers' first catechesis, "which you had from the beginning." New: at the Last Supper, Jesus changed the measure: "love one another; even as I have loved you" (John 13:34). Not love as self-love's mirror, but love as the cross defines it. The commandment is ancient; the standard is brand new, "because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining" (2:8).

2:9-11 makes hatred a form of blindness: the one who hates his brother "walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes." Hatred is self-inflicted night. This continues the light and darkness geography of Session Two and will matter again when the letter turns to Cain.

2:12-14 is a small poem of assurance: children, fathers, young men, addressed in two waves, with fathers and young men repeated and two different terms of endearment for the children. Notice that John assures before he warns. Forgiveness, knowledge of the Father, and victory over the evil one are stated as accomplished facts, and only then comes "do not love the world." John's imperatives grow out of

indicatives. The Christian moral life is a response to what has already been given, never an audition for it.

Kosmos in 2:15-17 carries John's double sense. God so loved the world (John 3:16), and yet "do not love the world." The same word names both the creation God loves and saves, and the organized system of desire in rebellion against him. John means the second: "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father" (2:16). The Church's moral tradition took this verse as the anatomy of concupiscence (CCC 2514), and paired the three lusts with the three classic remedies: fasting, almsgiving, and prayer.

The Genesis 3:6 parallel is tonight's live discovery showpiece; do not reveal it early. Eve saw that the tree was good for food, a delight to the eyes, and desired to make one wise: the three lusts, present at the Fall itself. Matthew 4:1-11, where the New Adam refuses all three in the wilderness, is the reversal; it lives in the Dig Deeper box.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Leviticus 19:18. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The commandment John calls old really is old; it sits in the heart of the Torah. What is new is not the verb but the measure: "as I have loved you."

Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The Shema binds love of God to commandments carried on the heart, taught to children, written on doorposts. John's test in 2:3-6 is the Shema's logic: love that does not shape conduct is not covenant love.

Genesis 3:6. Eve's three perceptions at the tree, good for food, a delight to the eyes, desired to make one wise, map onto John's lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life. The world's anatomy in 2:16 is the Fall's anatomy.

Ecclesiastes 1:2. "Vanity of vanities... all is vanity." Qoheleth's verdict on the passing world is John's premise in 2:17: "the world passes away, and the lust of it." John adds what Qoheleth longed for: "but he who does the will of God abides for ever."

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Gregory the Great *Homilies on the Gospels, Homily 30*

Gregory's maxim belongs over this whole passage: the proof of love is shown in deeds. The love of God is never idle, he preaches; where it exists it works great things, and if it refuses to work, it is not love. John's test in 2:3-6 is not a burden added to love but love's own signature.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Homily 2*

Preaching on "do not love the world," Augustine asks his hearers why they pour their love into what cannot last. The world passes away with its lusts, he says; what do you prefer, to love the

things that pass and pass away with them, or to love Christ and live forever? Hold instead to him who made all things and abides.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Francis de Sales *Introduction to the Devout Life, Part I*

De Sales insists that fleeing love of the world does not mean fleeing ordinary life. Devotion belongs to the soldier, the tradesman, the married; the same daily duties, done for love of God, become the very path to him. Detachment is a question of the heart's owner, not of the calendar's contents.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 2514 cites 1 John 2:16 by name: St. John distinguishes three kinds of covetousness, lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life, the triple concupiscence that catechetical tradition has mapped and remedied ever since.

CCC 2055 teaches that love is the fulfillment of the law: the commandments John invokes are unfolded charity, not its competitor.

CCC 1965-1972 on the New Law: the law of the Gospel is the grace of the Holy Spirit working through charity, which is why the old commandment can be genuinely new.

THREAD WATCH

The Knowing thread advances. "By this we may be sure that we know him" (2:3) and "he who loves his brother abides in the light" (2:10). Underline every *know* the group circled in their reading. The thread still resolves at Session Ten; keep 5:13 unspeakable.

The God Is thread stays sealed. Someone will try to reason from "God is light" to the second blank. Enjoy it, confirm nothing.

The love-of-the-brethren motif planted here returns as the letter's dominant theme in Sessions Six and Eight. Tonight it appears as a test; later it becomes the very definition of who God is. Plant lightly, resolve later.

SESSION GOALS

1.

Discover John's tests of knowing God: obedience (2:3-6) and love of the brethren (2:9-11).

2.

Steelman and answer the once-saved-always-saved reading of assurance with honesty about what Catholics affirm and what Trent actually says.

3.

Solve the old-and-new commandment riddle through live discovery of Leviticus 19:18 and John 13:34.

4.

Uncover the Genesis 3:6 anatomy of the three lusts as a live discovery, and send the group home with one concupiscence and one classical remedy.

TIME NOTE

75 to 90 minutes. This session is dense; if time runs short, compress Build 5 (the poem of assurance) to a read-and-one-comment moment and cut the Dig Deeper box. Protect Build 7; the Genesis discovery is the night's summit.

PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer:

Father, you have not left us guessing about how to know you. Your Son walked a path we can walk, loved with a love we can imitate, and gave us commandments that are light, not burden. Tonight, show us the difference between knowing about you and knowing you, and give us the honesty to want the second. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

1.

How can you tell the difference between knowing *about* a person and actually knowing them? What changes?

2.

What is one thing the world promised would satisfy you, and did not? Be as specific as you dare.

BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

1.

Read 1 John 2:3-6. What test does John give for being sure we know God? And why is that test surprising, maybe even uncomfortable, after five centuries of "faith versus works" arguments?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The test is obedience: "by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments," and

the negative is brutal: the one who claims to know him while disobeying "is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (2:4).

In Scripture, knowing God is covenantal, like the Hebrew *yada*: the knowledge of persons bound to each other, proven in fidelity. John's opponents appear to have claimed an elite spiritual knowledge that floated free of conduct. John answers that any knowledge of God that leaves the walk unchanged is counterfeit. "He who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" (2:6).

2.

Steelman time. A sincere Evangelical friend says: "I prayed the sinner's prayer at sixteen and I am saved forever. Salvation is by faith, not works; if my obedience could affect it, grace would not be grace." First make his case as strong as he would make it. What is he right about?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

He is right about a great deal. Salvation is grace from first to last; no one earns adoption, and the Catechism says our justification comes from the grace of God, his free and undeserved favor, and that no one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification (CCC 1996, 2010). He is right that morbid scrupulosity, endlessly doubting whether God has really forgiven, is spiritual poison. And he is right that God is more faithful to us than we are to him.

Now press with the text in front of us. John, the apostle of believing, writes to *believers* that claims of knowing God are falsified by disobedience (2:4) and by hatred of a brother (2:9-11). Assurance in John is real but present-tense: walking, abiding, loving, verbs that can stop. The Catholic position, shaped by Trent, is careful rather than gloomy. Trent teaches that no one can know with the infallible certitude of faith that he is presently in God's grace (Decree on Justification, ch. 9), and that no one can be certain of final perseverance apart from a special revelation (ch. 13). Yet the tradition affirms a real confident hope and a moral assurance built on the very signs John names, precisely because love can still be abandoned. John's letter is one long argument that assurance and vigilance are friends: "I write this to you so that you may not sin" (2:1) and "that you may know" both come from the same pen. Where exactly that knowing lands, keep reading; the letter has a destination.

3.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Read 2:7-8. John says he is writing no new commandment, and then immediately calls it new. Two readers, solve the riddle for us: find Leviticus 19:18, then John 13:34. What is old, and what exactly is new?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Old: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" sits in the heart of the Torah, and John's readers heard it "from the beginning" of their own catechesis. The commandment is ancient.

New: at the Last Supper, Jesus changed the measure. Not "as yourself" but "even as I have loved you." Self-love is no longer the yardstick; the cross is. And John adds a reason drenched in hope: "the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining" (2:8). The new commandment is new because a new age has dawned and a new love is actually possible in it.

4.

Read 2:9-11. What does John say hatred does, not to its target, but to the one doing the hating?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

It blinds him. The hater "is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (2:11). Hatred is self-inflicted night: it does not merely stain the soul, it disorients it.

Anyone who has nursed a grudge knows the phenomenology: resentment narrows vision until the whole world organizes itself around the offense. Meanwhile, "he who loves his brother abides in the light, and in it there is no cause for stumbling" (2:10). Love is not just warmer; it sees better.

5.

Read 2:12-14 aloud like the poem it is. John addresses children, fathers, and young men in two waves, repeating fathers and young men and using a second term of endearment for the children. Before he warns anyone about anything, what does he tell each group is *already true* of them? Why does that order matter?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Sins forgiven. The Father known. The evil one overcome. All stated as accomplished facts, in the perfect tense of grace, before a single warning is issued.

The order is the whole Catholic moral life in miniature: imperatives grow from indicatives. We are not auditioning for God's favor by our obedience; we are responding to a favor already given. A group that hears "do not love the world" before it hears "your sins are forgiven" will hear moralism. John refuses to let that happen.

6.

Read 2:15-17. John's own Gospel says "God so loved the world" (John 3:16). Now John commands: "Do not love the world." Is the apostle contradicting himself? What are the two senses of *kosmos*?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Same word, two senses. *Kosmos* can name the creation and humanity that God loves and sustains, and that Christ died to save. It can also name the organized system of disordered desire in rebellion against God: the world as regime rather than the world as gift.

John defines which one he means in the very next verse: "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father" (2:16). We are commanded to love the world God loves and to refuse allegiance to the world that refuses him, and wisdom is knowing which one is asking for your heart at any given moment.

7.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Someone find and read Genesis 3:6, slowly. Line it up against 1 John 2:16. What do you notice?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Eve "saw that the tree was good for food": the lust of the flesh. It was "a delight to the eyes": the lust of the eyes. It was "to be desired to make one wise": the pride of life. The three lusts of 2:16 trace the anatomy of the first temptation, a correspondence Christian tradition has long observed. John is not inventing categories; he is describing the machinery of the Fall, still running.

This is why the tradition treats these three as the master keys of temptation (CCC 2514 cites this verse). Every glossy ad, every doomscroll, every ladder-climbing fantasy is one of the three wearing new clothes. Name the lust and it loses half its power.

DIG DEEPER · The New Adam in the wilderness

Matthew 4:1-11 shows the reversal: stones to bread (lust of the flesh), all the kingdoms and their glory shown to the eyes (lust of the eyes), throw yourself down and be spectacular (pride of life). Where the first Adam fell in a garden with a full stomach, the New Adam stood in a desert while fasting. And the Church's three classical remedies map the same anatomy: fasting against the flesh, almsgiving against the eyes, prayer against pride (Matthew 6:1-18; Tobit 12:8).

8.

Read 2:17 one more time: "the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever." Our generation runs on fear of missing out. What does this verse do to FOMO?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

It inverts it. The things we fear missing are the things that are themselves passing away, and the desire for them passes too; even the wanting does not last. The only non-passing thing on offer is doing the will of God, which "abides for ever," John's great verb again.

Qoheleth diagnosed the vapor (Ecclesiastes 1:2); John supplies what Qoheleth could only ache for. The real FOMO, the only rational one, is missing what abides.

SEND · TAKING IT WITH US

1.

Of the three loves, lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life, which one most quietly runs your week? What is its favorite disguise?

2.

"Walk in the same way in which he walked" (2:6). In one specific relationship you will be in this week, what would walking as he walked actually look like?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

Choose your dominant concupiscence and take up its classical remedy for seven days: flesh, fast from one comfort; eyes, give alms that pinch; pride, pray hidden prayer no one will ever know about. Tell one person in this group which you chose, for accountability.

2.

Memorize 1 John 2:17 and pray it every time you reach for your phone out of boredom this week. Count how often that turns out to be.

3.

Do one hidden act of love for someone this week that only God will see, and tell no one, ever.

Closing Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you walked the way you ask us to walk, and you loved with the love you now command. Forgive our comfortable knowledge that changes nothing. Make our knowing the kind that walks. The world is passing away; teach our hearts to want what abides. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse: "And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever." (1 John 2:17, RSV2CE)

PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in Session Three, in order of use. All references RSV2CE.

PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED

Main text, read in sections through the Build

Leviticus 19:18

Live discovery, Build 3: the old commandment

John 13:34

Live discovery, Build 3: the new measure

Genesis 3:6

Live discovery, Build 7: the anatomy of the three lusts

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Leader background: the Shema's logic of love and command

John 3:16

Build 6: the world God loves

Ecclesiastes 1:2

Build 8 and leader background: the passing world

Matthew 4:1-11; Matthew 6:1-18; Tobit 12:8

Dig Deeper: the New Adam and the three remedies

CCC 2514; 2055; 1965-1972; 1996; 2010

Catechism Connection and Build 2 steelman