

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 1)
Scripture: I John 1:1-4
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: March 9th, 2003

The Joy of Knowing Christ

I John 1:1 What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life-2 and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.4 And these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete. (NASB)

Introduction It is so fabulous to know Christ, I can hardly wait to see Him! Our simple creed is this: Jesus Christ is the most excellent quest possible in life. He is all and everything that the Bible promises and seeking to experience Him in life is the greatest, wisest and most rewarding pursuit a person can undertake. Receiving from Him is the most exquisite joy that can be known by man. He is wonderful. He is fascinating. He positions Himself close at hand. Once you truly know Him you can never be lost from Him. He is at the same time warm and life-giving but never tame. He is awesomely powerful. He is sufficient as a redeemer for the entire planet's population and for all time. He gives orders for a mission which involves the deployment of every soldier in His army-none are held in reserve because He guarantees that this mission will succeed. He offers a more sharply focused picture to people of how God is. He understands every experience you may have had or are having now. He is just excellent, and He is what we are about. That is our creed, pure and simple.

- The apostle John shows us that life has been exhibited to us in Christ-which since it is such an incredible thing-ought to rouse and inflame all our powers with a marvelous desire for it, and with the love of it...in Him there is something more magnificent than what can be expressed in any words. (John Calvin, *Commentary on 1st John*).

And there is nothing more exciting and wonderful than to be connected, in kinship, closely and happily fellowshiping and partnering with a whole group of people who are mutually sold-out for seeking the Savior, and where you sense that HE is the agenda, He is the motivation and He is the Boss! Together we love

and exult in the joy of knowing Christ! The apostles shared this joy among themselves and within the assemblies of believers that they began.

But how would you react if some pretty persuasive guys came along to the following suggestions:

- 1) It's good to be smart
- 2) The Bible is special and offers some good lessons
- 3) Jesus was real
- 4) Death is a natural part of life...

Then...

- 5) Character doesn't matter in society as much as the advance of science
- 6) The Bible should be interpreted symbolically and not taken literally and only a few spiritual leaders should be trusted to interpret the symbolic meanings of the Bible
- 7) The historical Jesus was not actually divine because God would never allow Himself to actually become a material being
- 8) In all probability there is no literal resurrection coming for anyone
- 9) You shouldn't believe naively the way you did when you were younger

Do those propositions sound like anyone you know today, or any churches? In fact, these are some of the basic ideas that were making inroads into the fellowship of churches in the Roman province of Asia in the last days of the first century. And it is to Christians who were living back then, hearing some slick teachers say the kind of things we just outlined and starting to buy into it, that the apostle John wrote his first letter. We are going to go through First John together in the coming weeks. John is an old man when he writes this letter. He is probably living in Ephesus and concerned with the things some younger men are going around teaching. In fact, he is distressed about what he is hearing. He is alarmed and he also is worried that many young Christians will be drawn away, mistaught and then misled. He writes to his people in language that every pastor understands-He loves them, he warns them, exhorts them, argues with them, instructs them. So in his last days (more than likely), John brings all guns to bear: "I was there," he says. "I knew Jesus. I was at the cross. I was around when He came back to life. I saw him lifted up into the sky. I heard the angel say, 'He will come back again.'"

First John is at the same time, a simple book and a complex book. As you read each verse you will often get the meaning fairly quickly. There are many verses that the meaning and the application are evident. But the book has defied many scholars over the years to figure out a central theme. Indeed, it is a book you have probably known isolated verses from, which are special: (1:9; 2:2; 2:15,16, etc.) But the theme I am going to suggest is really a five-part outline of purpose, which we will see in this little "toolbox." Now let me give you, as quickly as

possible, a little "**toolbox**" of quick facts about this wonderful and somewhat complex letter:

Author: the apostle John

Recipients: the circle of Asiatic churches [today=Eastern Turkey]

Date: late first century, A.D.

Purpose:

- A. John insists that true Christian faith requires knowing that Jesus the Christ came in human flesh, lived a human life, and died in the flesh.
- B. But the evidence of that faith is measured by the genuineness of one's Christian lifestyle, not so much by what one "knows."
- C. The knowledge that God is light is tested by whether one walks in that light and obeys God's commands. Do I choose to obey God's commands?
- D. The knowledge that God is righteous is tested by whether one lives righteously as befits one born of God. Do I choose to live righteously?
- E. The knowledge that God is love is tested by whether one loves fellow believers even as one loves God. Do I love my fellow believers?

Target: early "Gnostic" heretics

Big Issue: Who Jesus really was...

Later Developments: "Christological" controversies over several hundred years, driving several major Councils. Note: The thing which we almost take for granted (the "hypostatic union" of Christ), took the church more years to settle than our country is old!

i.e. **Council of Chalcedon** (451 A.D.):

Against Arius - the full deity of Christ is affirmed

Against Apollinarius - the full humanity of Christ is affirmed

Against Nestorius - affirmed that Christ was ONE PERSON

contra modern liberals who say Jesus was merely a man with a special relationship with God (not God incarnate)

Against Eutyches - affirmed that the deity and humanity of Christ remain distinct and

are not blurred together - contra some who pride themselves on holding a conservative view but thinking of Christ as having a single nature (the error of Apollinarius) or a blend of the human and the divine (the error of Eutyches).

There are 105 verses in the book. We have read the first four in the NASB this morning... The original Greek is very complicated and F.F. Bruce suggests it is easier to take the first few lines in a several English sentences, rather than the ONE sentence it is in Greek. Listen to 1:1-3a as F.F. Bruce translated it:

I John 1:1-3a Our theme is that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we beheld and our hands handled. Our theme, in short, concerns the word of Life-that Life which was made manifest. Yes, we have seen and we bear witness; we make known to you the Eternal Life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us. What we have seen and heard we make known to you also, in order that you in your turn may have fellowship with us...

(F.F. Bruce's translation in *The Gospels and Epistles of John*, Eerdmans, 1970)

The King James Version is good too: ***That which was from the beginning...*** a blunt beginning. Along with the Book of Hebrews this is the only N.T. book that has no direct "prologue" about who is writing it or to whom it is written. But that's OK because the style is so unmistakably like the Gospel of John that we have no doubt from whose pen it comes. His theme and creed and cause and joy and mission is what was from the beginning. Jesus Christ predates the beginning of time and all things created. In fact, He WAS the creator Himself. John means the beginning of man and earth, not that God Himself had a beginning for He did not. But the Father, the Son and the Spirit were all there when creation occurred.

John considers the Gospel of Jesus Christ ***the Word of life***. The two words, "word" and "life" are keywords in the Gospel of John. There is a word, a reason, for living. Life is not just here and now, scrabbling along with the animals, the survival of the fittest, dog eat dog, "you're born, you live and then you die." There is life after this life and there is eternal life by being attached, connected, joined with Him who was THERE in the beginning. John wants it clear that He knew Christ. He has a triplet of evidence. The apostles heard Jesus speak. They saw Him literally. And they touched Him. Indeed, John himself as a young man in a show of trust and affection-a gesture we cannot understand too easily in our culture-***leaned upon His breast***. "Don't tell ME He was a ghost." "Don't tell ME He was just a man." "Don't tell ME Jesus his body was somehow transparent because you think bodies are inherently evil. Man, I was THERE." At this stage in John's life, he was probably the last of the living disciples and you can feel his urgency to say it again. He was there. He knew Jesus. And he is telling his readers-bewitched by many an increasing number of clever teachers-it is vitally important to think correctly about who Jesus was. One can only imagine Jesus' own words ringing in John's ears still--

'blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see

what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it' (Matt. 13:16,17)

Jesus came as you have been taught. It was revealed and publicized. Again, we saw Him and we "bear witness" to it (KJV).

- Perhaps some of the brethren who are not acquainted with the Greek do not know what the word "witnesses" is in Greek: and yet it is a term much used by all, and had in religious reverence; for what in our tongue we call "witnesses," in Greek are "martyrs." Now where is the man that has not heard of martyrs, or where the Christian in whose mouth the name of martyrs dwelleth not every day? and would that it so dwelt in the heart also, that we should imitate the sufferings of the martyrs, not persecute them with our cups! Well then, "We have seen and are witnesses," is as much as to say, We have seen and are martyrs. For it was for bearing witness of that which they had seen, and bearing witness of that which they had heard from them who had seen, that, while their testimony itself displeased the men against whom it was delivered, the martyrs suffered all that they did suffer. The martyrs are God's witnesses. It pleased God to have men for His witnesses, that men also may have God to be their witness. (Augustine - *1st Homily on 1st John*)

Augustine had a good point. Except for John, all the other original apostles were dead-most killed for their telling people about Jesus and for refusing to compromise about who He was. Stephen was the first, then James, eventually Simon the Zealot, Peter, Paul and the others. They bore witness in the hope that this life is not all there is. They knew that from this life they went to eternal life a thing which comes down as a gift from God the Father Himself. And their only agenda, really, was always to share the news of that life with other people.

And once again there is the appeal to the plain, simple evidence of personal experience-we have seen and heard. Our faith rests, it is true, upon the word of a "few good men." Here we are, two thousand years later-a part of a great, global movement, vast, touching every nation on the earth, propagated in almost every tongue and language on the planet. And it all came down to a believing in the words of what the apostles said they saw. The Bible is important not as a object of worship but as a collection of written testimonies about something things about a man named Jesus of Nazareth, that are either true or they are not true. They are not selectively sort of true, as liberals maintain and poison the minds of their parishioners with. John wrote, that you may have fellowship with us. He wanted to broaden and strengthen the ties of fellowship. We have fellowship not because we like each other, are from the same background or have the same baseball team to root for. We are bound together by the word of life that was manifested. I remember a day when it was NOT yet manifested to me. I always believed Jesus existed. I always took for granted His resurrection. But a day came when it became manifested to me and what a wonderful day that was. It

brought me into fellowship with a bunch of people who had the same experience of real faith and trust in someone who has been gone from this planet, physically, for two millennia! But we knew He was among us. And we knew our faith rested on solid testimony. It all comes down to that. And ultimately, our joint-fellowship goes beyond the horizontal. It turns vertically-indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. In our English I love the word "**indeed**" here, or **truly** (KJV). "Fellowship is nothing vague or merely sentimental. It involves obedience to the commandments of Christ and faithfulness to His teaching communicated through the apostles. Note this, my friends, those who abandon the basic apostolic teaching and fellowship-according to John-actually sever themselves from fellowship with the Father and the Son" (Bruce), so important is a right understanding OF those teachings!

Remember this: **fellowship** is not a thing we offer lightly. When we offer or invite membership it is when we sense a kindred spirit in you. We are committed to the best of our ability, to the truth in Christ. That leaves a lot of other ideas out there which are untruths, which are false. We have no interest in fellowshiping with them-indeed we are not authorized to it. This is why we have no business marrying non-Christians. We have no business linking up with churches in any kind of spiritual way which deny the authority or water down the meaning of the apostles' teaching. We have no right to pretend that we share joy and light and fellowship with people who mingle wrong theology with right theology. But we have every right and JOY to fellowship with those who share the truth, regardless of the address of their church, the style of music they sing, or the language they speak. Thus, vs. 4

And these things we write, so that our (or your) joy may be made complete.

I hate to say it again (because it doesn't make for a good sermon-closing point), but the Greek here is hard to finalize-some translations say **our joy** some say **your joy**. Whatever, though, John certainly sought his readers' joy and at the same time their joy in Christ would be his too, as it is for every shepherd of the church of Christ when His sheep are huddled in close fellowship together around the hope of eternal life that is ours!

I John 1:1 ***What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed, and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life-- 2 that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us-- 3 what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may have fellowship along with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*** (Holman Christian Standard Bible)

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of First John (Lesson 2)
Scripture: I John 1:5
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: March 16th 2003

The Realities of Sin and Light

Introduction Our faith is a faith of words. The words, when embraced and owned and internalized and believed, transform us and change us. If they do not then the faith is not real. But for starters, we are a faith of ideas. We heard them from someone and either believed them or did not. It has always been that way. This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you... The apostles, in particular, John, heard the message of salvation and forgiveness and told it to others. They told others. They told others. Eventually we heard it. We announce it too, in coffee shop conversations, around the kitchen table, in e-mails and Instant Messages. We're passing on a message built on words, that originated with the Lord...

Daniel 2:22 (NASB)

22 "It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him.

John 1:4,5

4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it...7 He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but *came* that he might bear witness of the light. 9 There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

John 3:19-21

19 "And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. 20 "For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 "But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

John 8:12

12 Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life."

John 9:5

5 "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

John 12:35

35 Jesus therefore said to them, "For a little while longer the light is among you. Walk while you have the light, that darkness may not overtake you; he who walks

in the darkness does not know where he goes. 36 “While you have the light, believe in the light, in order that you may become sons of light”...46 “I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness.

1 Timothy 6:15,16

15 which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; 16 who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him *be* honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

Very seldom does God allow a noun to be substituted for His name. We do find it written that God is love and that God is spirit and in 1st John 1:5 we read God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. That is how the fifth verse of the first chapter of the apostle John’s first letter reads. Light is an interesting and a very positive thing for God to identify with. Dr. Richard Swenson notes that

- Light establishes the speed limit of the universe (c=186,000 miles/second).
- The speed of light is the only absolute constant in the universe.
- Light is outside of time.
- Light never ages.
- Light anchors the laws of relativity.
- Light is *both* a wave and a particle.
- Light allows us to see.
- Light comforts us with its presence and depresses us by its absence.
- Light conveys the energy and warmth that allow us to live.
- Light consumes darkness but itself is never consumed *by* darkness.
- Light is mentioned as the first thing God created after the heavens and the earth.
- Light is only exceeded as a signaling medium by one thing—prayer¹

We know that prayer originates somewhere in our brain-heart-spirit. But where is God’s ear? One possibility is that God is so close, so omnipresent, that prayer does not travel at all. God intercepts is precisely as I am thinking it. But if prayer has to travel, even an inch, it must travel at infinite speed. And if it is instantaneous then prayer must exceed even the speed of light...One other thing that travels faster than the speed of light is God’s sight. Our sight is dependent on photons, bound of course by the speed of light. But God is not bound by that. He sees all things at all times, simultaneously and darkness cannot hide anything from His awareness.²

God is light... The Greek word is **φως** *phos*, which simply means (here) **light** in contrast to darkness. You will notice that John did not say that God is like light. He said He IS light. Apparently there is a Godlike aspect to light’s very nature. Hymn-writers have picked up on this in some of our songs:

Immortal, invisible, God only wise—in light inaccessible, hid from our eyes
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days

¹ Richard A. Swenson, M.D., *More Than Meets the Eye*, NavPress, c. 2000, p. 174

² *Ibid*, p. 177

Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;
All praise we would render: O help us to see
'Tis only the splendor of light hideth Thee

John caught an awesome glimpse into the future—he tells us about it:

Rev. 21:23-25 And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it. 25 And in the daytime (for there shall be no night there) its gates shall never be closed.

We pretty much take it for granted that God is holy and that anything he thinks or does is always correct and righteous. We pretty much assume that all good comes from His hand and that all bad does not. But in the ancient world they did not take these things for granted. The ancient Greeks liked to toy in their mythologies with the notion of the gods becoming sometimes mischievous or worse. The Gnostics rose up and contradicted some of the things the early Asian churches had been taught by the apostles. So old apostle John writes this letter—and his plain assertion is that **God is light**. There are two aspects to this:

- 1) Intellectually, light is truth. God is the last word on every question and His “take” on a subject is always correct.
- 2) Morally, light is purity. Out from the Lord blazes the right way to live in any area of life. He is utterly pure and free from defect or blemish or bad motivation or paranoia or dark side.

I like what John Calvin wrote...

There is nothing in God but what is bright, pure and unalloyed—He makes all things visible by His brightness so that He experiences and tolerates nothing vicious or perverted, no spots or filth, no hypocrisy or fraud. *Commentary on 1 John*

In describing God as Light, which John frequently did (John 1:4-5, 7-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36, 46; Rev. 21:23), he was no doubt thinking of God as the Revealer of His holiness. Man does not become better by his own reason or by education. He would not know which way was the right path if God did not reveal Himself. Now, as we have said this is something we take for granted but many do *not* today and many did not in the ancient world.

Both aspects of the divine nature figure in the discussion of sin and fellowship in 1 John 1:6-10. As Light, God both exposes man’s sin and condemns it. If anyone walks in darkness, he is hiding from the truth which the Light

reveals (cf. John 3:19-20). Thus revelatory terms such as “the truth” and “His Word” are prominent in 1 John 1:6, 8, 10.³

The rest of the verse says and in Him there is no darkness at all. This is another of the doctrines that seems so obvious to us but is questioned more and more today in this post-Christian culture in which we live. It is the lie of the devil, as when He accused God of some kind of deceptive darkness to Eve. In Him there is nothing that is unholy, unrighteous, evil or false. I think this is a powerful comfort.

- When we go to the Lord we are going to an utterly safe Person. He is completely and perpetually trustworthy. He will never turn on you. He will not rip back His grace and blast you with judgment when you were expecting mercy. He will not disappoint you with any aspect of darkness at all, nor will He ever. Unlike some first century Gnostics who said that the sins they were committing were not sins at all, God will never redefine what He had once said was right or what He said was wrong. He is totally dependable.
- Because He dwells in a state of light and purity and all truth, we can be assured that when we announce His word we are on solid ground. You may have some opportunity to tell someone or to share about who God is, what He is like. You may be presented with a chance to pass on what you know God’s will to be on a certain subject. Fear not. If He has spoken to that subject, you are on the right side.

Verses 6-10 contain five Ifs, that are logical extensions of behavior for the person attached to the God of light. We will consider them next time. This faith is not words only. It is words which bring about decisions which reflect change. Always change for the better. In Christ you can do no better. I hope that you know Him today.

³Walvoord, J. F. 1983-c1985. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* Victor Books: Wheaton, IL

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 3)
Scripture: I John 1:6-10
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: March 23rd 2003

The Five Ifs of Real Christian Faith

Introduction It is a great blessing to be in the professional ministry. There are many special chances to see up close how God works and to experience the grace of God. It is a privilege to devote the best hours of the day to the study of God's word and to the shepherding of God's people. I remember feeling a great sense of excitement in the Fall of 1976 as I began to investigate whether the Lord was calling me to this kind of profession. And since then I have been reminded many times that it is a privilege to do this for pay. We deal in the soul. And ministry is also a unique calling because of the tricky work of trying to shepherd people in the most private and deep and secret parts of their lives—the domain of the soul. Down in that “mine” there are, for sure, “motherlodes” of pure gold, caches of treasure—the grace of God, spiritual gifts, those precious finds of the sanctifying work of the Spirit. A pastor gets to see those things up close, when someone shares perhaps confidentially how God has blessed them and worked in their lives. **But** there is also the occasional experience of running into a pocket of toxic gas. One of those gas traps in the mine of ministry is the person who seems to be a good Christian but who is really a masquerading apostate. They are the hypocritical false teachers that sometimes crop up in the work of ministry and the true church must always be on guard because they can sometimes be really nice people, respectable, articulate, congenial.

There are undoubtedly far more people in the world who say they are Christians than really are. I read this week that the latest Gallup poll revealed that 46% of Americans say they are comfortable with either the description “born again” or “evangelical Christian.” That means there are 126½ million of us around (assuming 275 million Americans from sea to shining sea); or, a little over 2½ million per state of the union, on average. Looking at it another way, at 46% that would mean that just a shade under every OTHER person you meet out there—on average—would say they are comfortable with the designation “born again” or “evangelical Christian.” The numbers of people in the Asian province of the Roman empire comfortable with being called “born again” or “evangelical” Christians would be a far lesser percentage (especially since they did not have those terms yet) but there was a fast growing population of Jesus-followers in the land and especially in cities like Ephesus, Colossae, Laodicea, Smyrna, Pergamum, Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonika etc. there were rapidly growing

assemblies and fellowships of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, reputed Messiah and “resurrectant” of Israel. And despite the fact that Rome cast a skeptical and sometimes dangerous eye towards the Jesus-followers, their assemblies *were* growing and becoming more and more diverse. Some were even altering and “upgrading” the doctrine that the original apostles had taught. The few apostles that were left by the 60’s, and then only John by the 90’s, called the teachers of these upgrades “false teachers.” Some of them said things like “The body is evil and the only way to combat it is to deny yourself every possible physical enjoyment. If you like it, don’t do it. Practice rigid discipline.” The other approach said that since the body was going to be destroyed anyway, people should *gratify* every lust. Obviously this second approach was more popular. But John, near the end of his life, wrote the words before us this morning in the attempt to correct the course in some of these wayward assemblies. The words turned out to be inspired and they became Scripture. Essentially, he said that we cannot court sin and love God at the same time. He uses five “IF” clauses in the passage, related to each other: vss. 6,8 and 10 are negative and vss. 7 and 9 are positive. The passage essentially says

Authentic Christian faith is marked by confession of sin (which means admitting it to God, primarily) and walking in the light on a general basis, which breeds good fellowship together.

6 **If we say** that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

It is an easy thing to say the right words in the church. A person can be trained to say the right things at the right time and to NOT say wrong things. It is a common enough thing when churches have a testimony time to hear from the same people, the same words multiple times with the same predictable clichés and little evangelical expressions, the lingo and jargon of our movement. And those are fine and we like to hear the good words of the faith. But if a person is saying one thing but secretly walking in darkness, John says that person is living a lie and not practicing truth. This is the first “IF” of this section of his letter. It is a blunt and unapologetic logic. We cannot court sin and love God at the same time.

On the positive side though he says,

7 **but if we walk** in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Since God is light and in Him there is **ABSOLUTELY** no darkness at all (which is a better translation of the Greek in vs. 5), if we have a general lifestyle of walking—the daily routine and normal habits—in His light then a converse logic is engaged: there is real Christian fellowship between us and we bask in the knowledge of the power of the blood of Christ. This is the second “IF” in John’s thinking.

There is nothing sweeter than a few hours of close and simple Christian fellowship. I think this is why we have become so fond of Christian conferences and seminars and retreats. Most days we are not on retreat. We are out there battling our old natures, trying to witness for Christ and make a living at the same time. We are dealing with family life and the sometimes hard work of beating down your own egos and fears and selfishness cheek to cheek with other people in your family with the same struggles. Parents of small children find getting good fellowship time with other Christians hard to schedule in. Older saints who have lost some mobility and ease of getting around find themselves having to work harder to access good fellowship. Depressed people just want to crawl into a hole. So when we get away for a day or two or three it can be real sweet. Our only mission then is to enjoy one another and share together the things of Christ. It is wonderful and recently some of us have been blessed with a number of retreats and conferences. It is a natural thing for us to enjoy close fellowship together where we ARE WALKING IN THE LIGHT. But our goal is not just to pack into the calendar a bunch of retreats and conferences. We want to walk in the light daily. We want to have a general lifestyle of walking in the light and keep close to the awareness that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

The key thing here is ALL SIN. That is a little phrase that we might gloss over if we're not careful. It is a distinctly evangelical doctrine to believe what the Scripture says that ALL sin has been wiped clean from our records. There is no pending trial and no "continuation" of my case for any of the many violations of God's law for which I am plainly guilty. I have sin—I admit it. I am a spiritual "loser." But I am part of a band of brothers, ALL of whom are equally spiritual losers. I do not say that I have no sin, that I am not guilty. Together, we admit it. And together then we are club co-members and we cherish the mutual experience of having been cleansed from ALL SIN and acquitted thereof through the blood of Christ. I am baffled at why this does not appeal to more people that we know. Perhaps we need to talk about it more aggressively "out there."

And then John brings in the third "IF:"

8 **If we say** that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

The false teachers in question would say that—that they had no sin. If it wasn't that they were essentially sinless it was that "what was once thought to be sin, we have determined is no longer sin, thus making us [who know the secrets] sinless."

If we never practice confession of sin then we are in danger of a kind of practical Gnosticism, I think. In the modern American church scene we are real good at being socially careful and stylish and polite and respectable. All of those are fine and lovely but if they MASK the truth that we are still struggling with sin then that is not good. If we *say* that we have no sin—in teaching or doctrine—or if we GIVE THE IMPRESSION (and this is our danger) that we have no sin, we are **deceiving ourselves**. Further, the truth—the thing that evangelicals and fundamentalists have worked so hard to take a stand for, **is not in us**. Woe unto us if we are doctrinally orthodox and yet spiritually bankrupt. We cannot love God and yet court sin at the same time.

The fourth “IF” is one which many of us have committed to memory:
9 **If we confess** our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The logic is that if we confess our sins—if we acknowledge our failures which God’s light would expose, and that is what **confession** means... that is the doorway to the grace of God. Any religious experience or gesture of a person or testimony which EXCLUDES this is ultimately dangerous and OUGHT to raise a red flag in our minds.

Though the NASB and NIV translation “our sins” (after the words “forgive us”) is quite admissible, “our” is not in the Greek text. The phrase (*tas hamartias*) contains only an article and noun and it is conceivable that the article is the type which grammarians call “the article of previous reference.” If so, there is a subtle contrast between this expression and the “all unrighteousness” which follows it. John’s thought might be paraphrased: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive the sins we confess and moreover will even cleanse us from *all* unrighteousness.” Naturally only God knows at any moment the full extent of a person’s unrighteousness. Each Christian, however, is responsible to acknowledge (the meaning of “confess,” homologomen; cf. 2:23; 4:3) whatever the light makes him aware of, and when he does so, a complete and perfect cleansing is granted him. There is thus no need to agonize over sins of which one is unaware.⁴

Although we do not believe in the sacrament of *auricular confession* per sé as practiced and made necessary in some churches, we certainly acknowledge that saying to God and even to one another “I have sinned” is a healthy thing. I think even the cliché “It has been two weeks since I last confessed my sins to anyone” has a certain healthy element in it. [Of course, I don’t want to be the person who hears that from everybody! A much healthier and real thing is if we are in close fellowship with SOMEONE who walks in the light, and we share it with one another.] I think the LACK of a confession experience at all in our lives makes for one of the reasons we might become tired of church life or even cynical about it. I wish I had someone whom I felt safe enough with to confess my sins to. And they to me.

But the focus of vs.9 is on GOD’S FAITHFULNESS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS in doing the absolution of sin. He forgives us, and He always responds to the penitent heart, as promised. And He is right to do so, although the devil would object and cry out in his foul voice, “Unjust.” The Father then unveils the cross and the devil shuts up. You and I proclaim our faith in the cross and our dependence upon it and he shuts up too. God is utterly **righteous** to forgive us and wipe away all unrighteousness because of the payment Jesus made with His own blood. That is evangelical Christianity! That is biblical and that is the only hope for people to be made right with God. Believe nothing from anyone who would minimize the reality of their own sin.

⁴Walvoord, J. F. (1983-c1985). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

There is another implication in verse 9 that I would bring before you today too. Once you claim this verse you need not be ashamed of sin. This verse and the truth of it is like an acquittal document from a court which means I am now eligible to be a normal member of society. I need not be ashamed. I need not *dwell* in shame or point the finger of shame at other people when they mess up. The Christian church is not supposed to be a place of shame or the fear of shame because the Christian church is supposed to be a place of loving light where the blood of Jesus is spotlighted and the cleansing of my past and guilt have been done away with. So also should be your personal relationships with people. I am fighting this myself and I wish you to fight it. Either 1st John 1:9 is correct or it is not. Either we have been forgiven for all our sins and cleansed from all unrighteousness or we have not. If we have, then finger pointing and watch-dogging one another is completely out of place for us.

If we avoid the pitfall of vs.10

10 **If we say** that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

And acknowledge that we have sinned we affirm God's truth, whose light exposes our sin. In vs. 8 denial of sin is self-deception. Here it is virtually Satanic: calling God a liar. But we do not need to go around shaming one another. If His word is in us, we're ready to admit that we sin. We do not lie about it, in stealth or in actual lying, and we frequently flee to the cross, together. We are working on a careful transparency. We do not need to "shame" one another because we have already and frequently ADMITTED that we are shameful. But then we quickly turn the focus to the cleansing that we have received. This is real Christian faith and it is real Christian community.

It isn't in the foyer that these conversations take place. It isn't even in a church service or testimony time so much. It is in the strategic relationships and on our church boards and teams and in our Bible studies and Sunday School classes that we practice these truths. May God bless us with *authenticity* and with a practical and weekly and daily outworking of the things John says accompany true Christian faith in 1st John.

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 4)
Scripture: I John 2:1,2
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: March 30th 2003

The Prime Directive of Christian Faith

Introduction *I John 2:1* My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not **sin**. And if anyone sins, we have an **Advocate** with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;² and He Himself is the **propitiation** for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world.

One time a little girl was left with another family by her parents while they were away. When her parents returned for her and she was on her way home the little girl said to her Daddy, “Daddy, there are four little boys at that house where I was staying.” “Yes, I knew that,” he said. “Daddy, they have family devotions there every night.” “I’m glad to hear that,” the Daddy said. “Daddy, every night their father prays for those four little boys.” “That is very nice,” the Daddy said. “He prays, Daddy, that God will make them good boys, and that they won’t do anything naughty,” said the little girl. “That is very nice,” said the Daddy. She was silent for a moment and then said, “But Daddy, He hasn’t done it yet.” There are a great many people like that. We are praying that God will make us good, that God will make us holy, that we may have victory in our lives but many of us have to confess that “God hasn’t done it yet.”⁵

In the original *Star Trek* series the starship crew always had this one big mandated ethical and moral instruction: do NOT interfere with the normal cultural development of any culture. It was called the “prime directive” and it was sort of this all-encompassing, grand edict for all space exploration. For Christians today there is also a prime directive. It is “do not sin.” Sin is rebellion against God’s law. God says we are supposed to do this, and we choose not to. That’s what sin is. He says *not* to do something else and we choose to do it. That is also sin. It is violating what God wants and crossing the boundaries He has set up. Sin is ancient and also timeless. It is specifically invasive and painfully modern but it knows no boundaries of culture or age or gender. Sin can seem harmless and yet it is so total that it required the very Son of God to come down and personally atone for it—no other sacrifice would be enough.

In vs.1 of chapter 2, John addresses his audience as my little children or *teknia* is Greek. It’s a neat word. Jesus used it in John 13:33, **Little children**,

⁵ H.A. Ironside, from lectures at Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, 1930. Published in his commentary on the Epistles of John and Jude. Loizeaux Brothers, 1931.

I am with you a little while longer . You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews , now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going , you cannot come.’ Paul used it in Gal.4:19, ***My children , with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you.*** Also see 1st John 2:12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21. It is a word of tender affection from an aged pastor and spiritual father, more like saying ***My own dear children***, that is, sons and daughters. ⁶ Only rarely have I personally felt this word in my 31 years in the faith: but I did nine years ago for a brief moment when I was standing in line at a Dallas Seminary post- graduate colloquium and alongside of me stepped one of the main speakers, Dr. Vernon Grounds, 80 at that time, a little man and pretty frail, and he placed his arm in mine as we stood at the lunch buffet line, and said to me, “So tell me young man, how are you?” (At 41 I loved to be called “young.”) I spent two or three sentences telling him who I was and what I did, and the moment passed. It was a tender moment and I think of *teknia* when I think of that moment. That is how John felt for the people to whom he was writing. He was an old man. He had devoted his life to the shepherding of these new congregations and he loved them immensely. A pastor needs to love his people and the sheep need a loving shepherd. And the “prime directive” is to help people to avoid sin.

This week I asked our AKX teens—11 of them—to think through the kind of things they care about. I asked them if they care about their appearance, their achievement in school or athletics, their future and their walk with God. And I threw in another obscure, little question that I did not at all dwell upon but I wanted them to think about, “Do you care about your pastor?” For pastors, the reverse-question should be asked—and men should be asked this hard and early in their careers—do you care about the sheep in your charge?” I sometimes feel I am part of a dying breed as people move into the last days, colder, less tender feelings between people in general. Even other pastors I know, good pastors in many respects, seem less in love with their people, more committed to ministry-style and growth agendas than to individual sheep...seminaries do not often train their students now to love the sheep in the old-school pastoral way. But this is the way of the apostle John, old man, scarred by many battles, waiting for His Savior.

In 1st John 2:1 we have the word “sin” as a verb: **hamartete** [2ndp.pl.2ndAorist active subj.) - **αμαρτητε** (from **αμαρτανω**; **αμαρτια, ας**) *f*: to act contrary to the will and law of God ⁷ Remember, the false teachers that John combated were big on minimalizing sin, even to the point of eliminating it from their vocabulary altogether. “Sin” is a word we rarely hear today, at least outside of fundamentalist circles. Even evangelicals seem to speak of it less and less

⁶Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997, 1871). *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁷Louw, J. P. (1989; *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains* (electronic edition of the 2nd ed.) (Page 772). New York: United Bible societies.

(perhaps I am imagining this.) But John speaks of it and says that the avoidance of it is a main reason for his writing his letter. IT REALLY SHOULD BE ONE OF THE MAIN THINGS THAT ANY GOOD PASTOR OR SHEPHERD SHOULD BE CONCERNED WITH. We're supposed to avoid acting contrary to the will and law of God. That means we're supposed to know what the will and law of God *are*. And that requires the process of instruction and study. Many people today are confused about what sin is, or rather, what IS sin. Just as we have said in 1st John 1 that the question "what IS the Gospel?" is critical, so also is an understanding of sin. And it isn't primarily so that we don't have to answer to each other or so that we can avoid *each other's* criticism. It is primarily so that we maintain our closeness to God. Sin is the great poison, the great plaguing epidemic disease. It is the darkness in human nature that everyone is born with and the ultimate cause of all disorder, destruction and deterioration in the world.

- When we sin, even as Christians, we place distance between us and God.
- We lose the joy of the Lord.
- We disable our effectiveness to announce the message around us to people who desperately need to hear it.
- We break our own hearts and those of our family.
- We scab over our hearts with a callous crustiness that dulls our feelings about more sin and lessens our ability to hear the voice of the Lord on a daily basis.

Sin is a bummer. It ought to be guarded against. There ought to be sentinel strategies in our daily lives that we bring on-line frequently, and which we carefully teach and re-teach to our children. Those might include

- daily Bible reading,
- Bible memorization,
- some kind of accountability to some other trusted Christian brother or sister,
- avoiding avenues of temptation,
- requesting personal prayer support,
- finding Christian music that appeals to you and listening to it, and
- simply learning the practice of repentance.

Sin triggers the loss of happy relationships, the forfeiture of fortune, the outbreak of wars, and the separation of people groups. I do not believe in human evolution but I think I believe in a kind of systematic de-evolution of the wonderful creature that God made in His own image...a thing caused by sin.

And yet, we still sin. Even though we have been ***blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ***, we will rebel and revert and mutate and go back and chose self. We justify and rationalize and even surrender to addictions. John knew this—and so he wrote what he wrote at the end of verse 1 and in verses 2. In essence he says, I hope you don't sin. But if you do, we have an ***advocate*** with God the Father. This word means a "powerful counsel for the defense. And he isn't the kind of defender who has to resort to shady strategies or arguments or trickery to get us off—He is a ***righteous*** advocate.

Jesus isn't simply statically righteous in His essential nature, He is righteous *in His defense of us*. This is a truth I never heard growing up in the Lutheran church, although Martin Luther himself would have hammered home this point! The devil is always and will always accuse us. He is there ready to bring up the past. He is vigilant to undo our joy and our confidence and our effectiveness. He violently denies that we are redeemed. But Jesus, as both defender and payment Himself, is totally righteous when He says, "This person's sin has been fully atoned for." The Father Himself fully honors that atonement. Do not miss this point! As Defender, Jesus offers HIMSELF as The Defense of us. No religion on the planet offers this except Christianity and only Christianity which takes the plain announcements of Scripture at face value!

and He Himself is the **propitiation** for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those* of the whole world (vs.2).

Propitiation is another cool and important word in this passage. In Greek it is the word *hilasmos* (ἱλασμος) and it is used only here in the N.T. and in I John 4:10 ***In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*** It means an *atonement* or a *satisfaction*. It is not something which *people* must do to placate God but something which God has provided in His grace to bring people into His presence with the assurance that they are accepted by Him.⁸

Harry Ironside comments powerfully:

John does not say, "If any man repent, we have an advocate; if any man confess his sins, we have an advocate; if any man weep over his sins, we have an advocate." What it does say is this: ***if anyone sins we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*** It is not merely when I am penitent that I have an advocate, but the very moment I fail, Christ takes up my case, yes, even long before I have been exercised about it. The moment that hasty word left my lips, the moment that I did that crooked thing...the devil was in the presence of God to accuse, but the same instant the Son of God was there to represent me, and as a result of His advocacy the Spirit takes the Word of God and applies it to my conscience, and then I begin to be exercised.⁹

The prime directive of the Christian life is to avoid sin and if we fail at the prime directive to be completely absorbed in the reality of our advocate, our propitiation. He substituted Himself and argues your case based on that. He is the arguer and the argument. And anyone who hears the Gospel CAN be saved. Jesus' atonement is universal. It is relevant to anyone at any time. His propitiation is ***not only for our sins but also for those of the whole world*** (vs.2b). Now this gets a little technical here-- I do not think that John is meaning here that Jesus' atonement literally pays—in the strictly judicial sense-- for every sin of all time, otherwise there would be no one in hell, not even the

⁸ F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel and Epistles of John*, 1983. p.50

⁹ Ironside, *Ibid*, p.45.

very worst. It kind of centers on what you think the word “FOR” means (*Greek*: “peri” περι) which can equally mean concerning or about. I interpret that here, John is meaning that Jesus made a full satisfaction that is ENOUGH to cover the whole world, all people for all time. This is not in any kind of way a lessening or minimalization of what Christ accomplished. In fact, this is a powerful thing coming from John’s pen and read by first century eyes. Jesus’ atonement—only sixty or so years in the past--did not just cover the sins of the apostles, their immediate converts or their immediate circle of churches or some other select group (and this was one of the snooty implications of the false teachers, lurking in the background of this letter.) No, it is enough of an atonement--nothing lacking—for all centuries, all nations, all cultures, every single last soul of anyone and EVERYone who would ever embrace the cross of Christ no matter how feeble or weak the faith. There is no one anywhere who can claim that Jesus’ atonement has “run out” or is now an insufficient satisfaction. So powerful and awesome is what He did on the cross!

Now, who WILL receive Christ? I do not know nor can we know until they do. Hence is the glory of missions. Hence is the glory of that personal sense of urgency that we feel to share Christ. Our prime directive is to NOT SIN, and it closely followed by the urgency to get the news to people that there is an advocate, Jesus the righteous, who offers Himself a propitiation for sins, for all of a person’s sins. And He makes this offer free of charge to anyone who will simply believe it. This may be old news for many of you but for many that you know it would be new news! May we share it. May we ward off sin and fight its lurings so that we can be effective and productive in sharing Christ and in supporting the work of sharing Christ!

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 5)
Scripture: I John 2:3-6
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: April 27th 2003

Knowing Is Obeying

1 John 2:3-6 (NASB⁹⁵)

³ *By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.* ⁴ *The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;* ⁵ *but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:* ⁶ *the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.*

Introduction I attended a conference a few years ago the theme of which was "authenticity." During that conference I heard Dr. Howard Hendricks and others speak about the importance—especially in the business community—of acting and portraying ourselves as being genuine and real, "authentic" about what we do.

- A major emphasis is happening these days in educational circles about the use of the Internet for research. Because you find something on "the 'net" does that necessarily mean that the information is true or reliable? (cf. <http://www.mlc-wels.edu/grunwald/website.htm>).
- In advertising, the delicate balance between authenticity and salability is a constant challenge to marketers. In auto sales, most people love to look at new car ads... Or trucks! The challenge in filtering all the advertising we are bombarded with, is to see through the glitz to the real nature of the product. If I wear a new Ferrari around town, does that make me cool?
- There are many window advertisements today for Christianity too, especially in this country. Being born-again, in some circles at least, is very hip. Churches advertise and even compete in their advertising in some parts of the country.

An ever-increasing market of Christian products from art to music to kitchenware to clothing constantly proclaims "See this thing I'm using? I am a Christian!?" A few years ago there was the "Stand in the Gap" Promise Keepers rally in Washington D.C. which gathered about a million men together for prayer and encouragement but also to make a statement to a watching world, which said, "Here we are—see? We are Christians and we love the Lord and we want to be *better* husbands, fathers and churchmen." It was the largest gathering of Christian men that I have ever heard of! Our movement is more advertised today than evangelical Christianity has ever been. Underlying it all, is the message we

hope to communicate to a dying world—“This is real. This holds water. This pans out. This is authentic.”

- Sometimes we are trying to get across to people from non-evangelical branches that *our* branch of the faith is the real one.
- Sometimes we are just trying to communicate the most basic facts about Jesus to entry-level seekers or skeptics. But all the while we are trying to say, “Our faith in Jesus Christ is real and we have truly come to know Him.”

If you have faith in Christ and you think you have come to know Him, what evidence is there? **This is the message that the apostle John had in mind for his readers.** Like today, in the first century there were more and more people around who were *saying* they knew God and they knew Christ. But saying it and living it are two different things. Talk is cheap. We have become good at saying it. But really making personal decisions for Christ on a daily basis, as you become more and more aware of what His will is, that is not cheap. It isn't easy either. John says that real Christians keep His commandments.

Now, John gives us three tests in this letter as to whether a person really knows the Lord or not. He does not mince his words and he is very blunt, as we shall see. The first test he gave was **the doctrinal test** and this probes what a person really believes about the nature of Christ Himself and about the nature of sin. You have to believe some basic truths about Jesus Christ in order to be a real Christian and you have to believe that you, yourself, are a *bona fide* sinner in order to become a real Christian. Second, is **the moral test**, John says. This is where we are at today. It probes whether a person is willing to be obedient or at least to seek an obedient lifestyle and then whether a person is committed to the principle of love or not. Third is a **subjective test** which checks if a person has the internal witness of the Spirit in his heart and mind, as John refers to in 5:10:

The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son.

So today we're considering the moral test of assurance of salvation. We are essentially saying that knowing Christ motivates obedience to Christ. John wrote, ***By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.*** Did you know Christians are supposed to use the word “commandments?” Sometimes we use the word “grace” so much that we stop thinking about “commandments.” Now, what “commandments” do you think John was thinking about? The Ten Commandments? The other 350 or so commandments in the Old Testament? I think He is talking about Jesus' commandments, which assume all of the Old Testament moral code. He Himself fulfilled the ceremonial aspects of the Old Testament code for worship and sacrifice. The civil aspects of the Old Testament law became largely irrelevant which Israel ceased to be a nation—and Christ's kingdom overwrites this

anyway. But all the expressions of God's will which target our hearts and our moral choices and decisions, following Jesus involves a heart-sensitivity to those now just as much as they did during the Old Testament period. There is this interesting passage in Matthew (22:36-40)...

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”³⁷ And He said to him, “ ‘ YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART , AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL , AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND [Deut.6:5].’³⁸ “ This is the great and foremost commandment .³⁹ “The second is like it, ‘ YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF [LEV.19:18] .’⁴⁰ “ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets .”

Jesus summarized it all in two statements, but He did not mean that this is all we know about what He expects. He gave many other specific commands to His disciples, ALL of which the genuine Christian will learn and study and value and seek to abide by in his or her life.

Remember that John is fighting some early heretics in this letter. When he says what he says in vs. 4 he is combating people who were saying we have the truth about Jesus and we believe in Him but we do not think it is important to live in compliance with anything Jesus taught about how to live. John, who knew Jesus, said, **The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.** Calling people liars is not the quickest route to making friends. It certainly does not make people feel good. But John did not hesitate to call it a lie to deny the necessity of obeying Christ.

Corpus Hermetica 10.5-6 is an example of Gnostic thought:

Not yet are we able to open the eyes of the mind and to behold the beauty the imperishable, inconceivable beauty, of the Good. For you will see it when you cannot say anything about it. For the knowledge of it is divine silence and annihilation of all senses.... Irradiating the whole mind, it shines upon the soul and draws it up from the body, and changes it all into divine essence (cited in Dodd *Johannine Epistles*, p. 30).

Such thinking is clearly devoid of interest in moral conduct and unconcerned about human behavior. For the Hebrew or Christian mind, however, knowledge of God is not separable from the experience of righteousness.¹ Today too there are antinomians, those who say there is no sense of obligation in a Christian to live according to any rules. Antinomianism says that only belief in Jesus is necessary and whether obedience to Christ follows a profession of faith or not is at most, secondary. John doesn't call it another interpretation. He calls it a lie. And he says that the **truth is not in that person.** In other words, a person cannot say they know the Lord and make a habit of breaking His commandments. He may *think* he is a Christian. He may like the idea of being a Christian. He may have other people who think he is a Christian and he may have other people who desperately *want* him to be a Christian.

But if the commandments of Christ are of little interest to him than the truth of the Gospel has NOT YET taken up residence in him.

Verse 5 is a wonderful verse: **but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:** A person who keeps His word is the person who can truly say that he is in Christ, that he has met the Lord Jesus and that his profession of faith is sound and authentic. It isn't in the advertising and it isn't in anything at all else, except in the keeping of His word.

Harry Ironside gave the illustration of the little girl whose Mom asked her to wash the dishes because they were having company that night. The little girl saw that her Mom was very tired and stressed from having to do so much to prepare for the evening, so the girl not only washed all the dishes and put them away, but she also cleaned the floors, dusted the furniture and told her Mom to go lie down for a bit and rest up, because she knew her Mom was so tired. That, Ironside wrote, is the difference between just keeping the commandments and **keeping His word**.

The authentic Christian LOOKS for ways to further righteousness in his heart. He explores ways to grow more deeply in his Christian walk and life. He is not content to just keep the law. He wants the law of God written on his heart. He does not view his Christian life as just a series of performing routine duties over and over again with no pleasure in them. He wants more. He believes that Jesus can really indwell him and he wants to get as close to Christ as possible. He launches on a dogged pursuit of Christ.

Trusting and obeying is not always an easy lifestyle. Neither Jesus nor John ever said it would be. Sometimes you may feel very alone in doing what you think the Lord wants you to do. Other times you can easily imagine that disobedience will feel a lot better in the short run. But in living for Christ, and learning to **keep His word** there is an intimacy with the **love of God** which is the main agenda in that person's life. When we are seeking Him we do not doubt if He loves us—we know He does. And seeking Him means living as Jesus lived. That occupies a fair amount of our thought. How would Jesus do this? What would Jesus say in this situation? What kind of a decision would Jesus make about this choice? Would Jesus stay or go? Would He initiate a new situation or stay in the old one? Many questions drive us to imagine how He would deal with them and drive us to pray about it. Just ask the Lord, "Lord, how would you do this?"

So the bottom line is this:

To claim a relationship to God necessitates a commitment to moral standards expressed positively (to love as God himself loves) and negatively (to obey commandments and not to sin)².

I know there are many questions you might have about all this? What about grace? What about the fact that no one can completely live an obedient life? What about those of His commandments that I don't understand? But let just John's simple words, for themselves, wash through you today. We will deal with the other questions as we go through this book.

¹ *Expositors' Bible Commentary*

² *Ibid*

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 6)
Scripture: I John 2:6-10
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: May 4th, 2003

The Old is the New Which is Love

1 John 2:6-10 (NASB)

6 the one who says he ^a abides in Him ^b ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. 7 ^a Beloved, I am ^b not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you ¹ have had ^c from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. 8 ¹ On the other hand, I am writing ^a a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because ^b the darkness is passing away, and ^c the true light is already shining. 9 The one who says he is in the light and *yet* ^a hates his ^b brother is in the darkness until now. 10 ^a The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 But the one who ^a hates his brother is in the darkness and ^b walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has ^c blinded his eyes.

Introduction I recently had a conversation with someone who said to me, “Jesus was a liberal.” I think the person intended to suggest that Jesus spoke to issues of social justice and the cause of the poor and downtrodden. Whether that made Him “liberal” I would dispute, and did with this person. On points of morality I would suggest that He was utterly conservative, as we would currently understand conservatism. On points of being lawbidingness He was utterly Mosaic which would tend to characterize Him as conservative. On points of aristocracy—economic, personal style or in terms of being deferential to the religious establishment, one could certainly say that He was radical, though not

a John 15:4

b John 13:15 ; 15:10 ; 1 Pet. 2:21

a Heb. 6:9 ; 1 John 3:2 , 21 ; 4:1 , 7 , 11

b John 13:34 ; 1 John 3:11 , 23 ; 4:21 ; 2 John 5

1 Lit., *were having*

c 1 John 2:24 ; 3:11 ; 2 John 5 , 6

1 Lit., *Again*

a John 13:34

b Rom. 13:12 ; Eph. 5:8 ; 1 Thess. 5:4 f.

c John 1:9

a 1 John 2:11 ; 3:15 ; 4:20

b Acts 1:15 ; 1 John 3:10 , 16 ; 4:20 f.

a John 11:9 ; 1 John 2:10 , 11

a 1 John 2:9 ; 3:15 ; 4:20

b John 12:35 ; 1 John 1:6

c 2 Cor. 4:4 ; 2 Pet. 1:9

insurrectional. Does that make Him “liberal?” Well, it was something of a ludicrous conversation because I believe Jesus is so far above “liberal” and “conservative,” He is both, and neither. He is Jesus and a better way to think of Him is as “the Alpha and Omega,” “the Chief Shepherd,” “the bright morning star,” and other designations from the Scripture.

I bring this up, because John tells us that following Christ is both an old thing—no innovation by the apostles—and a new thing: it was a great time of shift in God’s program, a new dispensation. The old ways, the righteous ones, were now expanding. It was not new to tell God’s people they should love one another. But following Jesus now made it more internal and more possible with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Let me ask you, “Do feel that the Christian faith is old or new?” Do you feel on the one hand, like you are part of something which is ancient and tried and true? And on the other hand do you feel like you are part of something fresh and life-changing?

We pick up where we left off last week in vs. 6 ***the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.*** The concept involved is derived especially from the Parable of the Vine and the Branches (John 15:1-8).

15:1 “I AM the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. 3 “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you, unless you abide in Me. 5 “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. 8 “By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

The vine-branch relationship is an image of the discipleship experience. Jesus said, ***“This is to My Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples”*** (John 15:8). The proof that a person is enjoying this kind of experience is to be found in a life modeled after that of Jesus in obedience to His Word.¹⁰ But to love as Jesus lived doesn’t mean choosing 12 disciples, performing great miracles, and being crucified. We cannot merely copy Jesus’ life much of what Jesus did had to do with His identity as God’s Son, the fulfillment of His special role of dying for sin, and the cultural context of the first-century Roman world. To walk today as Christ did is to obey His teachings, and

¹⁰Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. c1985. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* . Victor Books: Wheaton, IL

follow His example of complete obedience to God and loving service to people.¹¹ A real Christian is interested in learning how to do this.

In vs. 7 we read ***Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard.*** Do you remember the very first things you learned as a brand-new Christian? I bet you were not a Christian long before you actually heard someone say, or you read it in the Bible, or you just felt that, “Hey! Christians are supposed to really love each other!” This was one of the most attractive first things I learned as a new Christian because I was coming out of the *All You Need Is Love* generation! (Note lyrics...)

Love, Love, Love. Love, Love, Love. Love, Love, Love. There's nothing you can do that can't be done. Nothing you can sing that can't be sung. Nothing you can say but you can learn how to play the game. It's easy. Nothing you can make that can't be made. No one you can save that can't be saved. Nothing you can do but you can learn how to be you in time. It's easy. All you need is love. All you need is love. All you need is love, love. Love is all you need. All you need is love. All you need is love. All you need is love, love. Love is all you need. (Lennon & McCartney, 1967).

But the kind of loving that the Bible talks about is really something quite different from what the world talks about. Loving people biblically is an ancient mandate from the Lord. He has always wanted His people to look out for each other, to sacrifice for each other and to care about each other. He has always wanted them to put up with each other, to focus lovingkindness within our own Christian families. Sometimes that is the place where it is most exhausting! And here, John reminds his readers that what he is about to say is really nothing new.

But then he uses a little play on words--***On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining*** (vs. 8).

Verse 8 might seem a little strange and ethereal and hard to understand when John is talking about. He is talking about the new times that Jesus ushered in. Jesus launched a kingdom which is not of this world, which I think, began when He rose from the dead and which telescopes essentially from those times down through today, and right on up to the day in which He returns. We are part of something invisible but bigger than any previous economy of God. As for the ***new*** commandment, in 2 John 5,6 John later made this all real clear--***And now I ask you, lady, not as writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. 6 And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should***

¹¹ *Life Application Notes*

walk in it. The Beatles surely did not invent the idea of love as an important thing. It is fundamentally a Christian priority and mandate. We are supposed to shed light all around us by practicing a lifestyle of love. That is why selfishness, running out of patience, divorce, church splits, and all those other kinds of fractures between people—when they happen to Christians—are so completely contradictory to what Jesus abiding in people is all about. We diffuse light (*lucem diffundo* as the motto of New Bedford reads!). Jesus is the light of the world, was already shining as John says, and the age of darkness was and is passing away.

Let me comment here, that Christians should always be optimistic! For this reason—the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. As genuine Christians we are heartily and passionately interested in always looking for way to spread, practice and replicate the love of Christ. Especially with one another!

Then John gets real personal! He says, 9 ***The one who says he is in the light and yet ^a hates his ^b brother is in the darkness until now.*** MacArthur bluntly states: “Those who profess to be Christians, yet are characterized by hate, demonstrate by such action that they have never been born again. The false teachers made claims to enlightenment, transcendent knowledge of God, and salvation, but their actions, especially the lack of love, proved all such claims false.¹²” Hating means to loathe, detest, really dislike. Nothing is more contradictory for Christians than if they turn this feeling upon each other. You might like to say, “Oh that never happens for me.” And I must say that rarely have I ever heard Christians admit to this—by the almost complete LACK of confession of this problem, you would think it didn’t exist! But John identifies it as a dangerous *disqualifier* for people who like to say they walk with Jesus. We should work to eliminate it, after rooting it out in our own hearts. Let us not say we are immune to this. It was a big problem, apparently, among first century Christians.

Then John said, 10 ^a ***The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.*** When we are loving one another well, making others more important than ourselves, watching out for one another’s true needs—not just sentimentalities—we abide in His light, and we avoid making other people stumble. There is another thing we are supposed to give attention to—KEEPING EACH OTHER ON OUR FEET. We should not trip each other up, and then we will not stumble ourselves. I fear we do this sometimes; I fear I do this sometimes and I do not want to do it. Nothing is

a 1 John 2:11 ; 3:15 ; 4:20

b Acts 1:15 ; 1 John 3:10 , 16 ; 4:20 f.

¹²MacArthur, J. J. 1997, c1997. *The MacArthur Study Bible* (electronic ed.) . Word Pub.: Nashville

a John 11:9 ; 1 John 2:10 , 11

sadder than a Christian who is all bound up in holding a grudge. That is what we need to watch out for. Probably the most common *hating* is in holding grudges and holding things against some other Christian or group of Christians. Hurts happen, misunderstandings occur, harsh things are said or done and then people have strong feelings of dislike or even loathing for each other. It can happen in a marriage, between a parent and a child and between church people. It has happened all over the place between whole denominations. It should not be, John says. The one who makes love his main rule and priority is a person who avoids messing HIS OWN Christian walk up!

Finally today, John wrote, 11 ***But the one who ^a hates his brother is in the darkness and ^b walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has ^c blinded his eyes.*** I have known Christians who are full of cynicism about the church. They, although they would cling to their own claim of salvation, really have little to do with organized Christians. A decision to abandon the church is a decision to hate. And emotionally and spiritually, he has blinded himself.

We need to know how to forgive each other. We need to do the hard work of learning how to give each other room to grow and get over old weirdness we may have learned as kids. We need to be patient with each other. That is the old command which is the new commandment and which is love. Evidently among the first century Christians that John was sending this letter to, there were influential leaders who were all high and mighty and arrogant and full of themselves. They cared little about love and learning the hard work of forgiveness and laying down bitterness. Once again, if you are married your first workshop for this is in your home. Your second workshop is among your brethren. Your very right to call yourself a Christian is at stake here, according to the apostle John. Let us make love a real major emphasis in our church. It isn't sentimentality, I say again. It is the hard work of hanging in there with one another, ***giving preference to one another in honor*** as Paul said (Romans 12). It is the nametag of a real Christian!

a 1 John 2:9 ; 3:15 ; 4:20

b John 12:35 ; 1 John 1:6

c 2 Cor. 4:4 ; 2 Pet. 1:9

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 7)
Scripture: I John 2:12-14
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: May 18th, 2003

John's Categorizations of the Christian Life (or Where Am I on the Map?)

1st John 2:12-14 (NASB) I am writing to you, ^a little children , because ^b your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake . 13 I am writing to you, fathers , because you know Him ^a who has been from the beginning . I am writing to you, young men , because ^b you have overcome ^c the evil one . I have written to you, children, because ^d you know the Father . 14 I have written to you, fathers , because you know Him ^a who has been from the beginning . I have written to you, young men , because you are ^b strong , and the ^c word of God abides in you, and ^d you have overcome the evil one .

Introduction At the risk of seeming preoccupied with myself, I asked our elders last Sunday evening if they ever notice how I do things around here; if they ever notice my style or methods of doing ministry as a pastor. It's because, frankly, at times I drift over into self-reflection and trying to understand how I fit into the spectrum of pastoral identity. I know there are pastors around—I know several—who are far more godly and mature and faith-driven than I am. At the same time I am fairly deliberate and intentional in how I do things as a pastor and more deeply, as a Christian. There are pastors out there that are very susceptible to the latest trend in church growth thinking. There are pastors who care little about theological issues. There are pastors full of ego and personal agendas. There are lots of different kinds of pastors out there. A deeper question to ask beyond how do I work as a Christian, is about just being a Christian. Where am I on the map? Am I a young Christian, a mature Christian or a really mature Christian? What category of Christian are you?

Christians today are perceived, are viewable and observable in many different ways.

1. In some places the Christians are looked at as the formality people, who like to go to "high worship." (i.e. the Russian Orthodox Church).
2. And in other places we have the reputation of being very relational and informal and relaxed (i.e. The Association of Vineyard Churches.)
3. In some circles we are Pentecostal or charismatic, very supernaturally sensitive and spontaneous (i.e. the Church of the FourSquare and Five-fold Ministry of the Apostles) or, if not those things, boring (the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.)
4. With some Christians their denominational boundaries (i.e. the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches) or their ethnicity (the Church of God of Prophecy of Cleveland Tennessee) are important to them or "across the way," their independency

and non-affiliation might be a protected imperative (the Independent Fundamental Churches of America.)

5. Some Christians are known for their political activism, lobbying hard for morally conservative issues or social justice (like Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church in Selma, Alabama where Martin Luther King, Jr. preached about voting rights) or, conversely, so politically detached that they are irrelevant to political matters...
6. Some Christians look like they're really into their church and their whole lives are energized and animated by their church life . Other Christians focus only on Jesus and have little interest of love for the church.
7. Some Christians are really missions-minded while others are more into reflection, self-development and personal growth.
8. With some believers they love to work on "projects" because they need to see measurable progress and tangible forward movement in their Christian experience. Others could care less whether buildings get built, libraries founded, Christian schools opened or coffee houses are established. They are interested only in personal relationships, friends and family... kinship--and they feel fulfilled only when they "get time with people: on a personal level."

We Christians are distinguished by lots of **polarities** and characteristics. Some have just developed because of time, some are self-invented for whatever reason. Some have been necessary because of theological debate.

But then what about little ol' me? Many of us aren't so sophisticated and we don't know all the choices and we haven't had time to get into all that; we just say, "I love the Lord Jesus who died for me on the cross and I believe in that and I don't now much else..." And when we get back to the Scriptures and to the way the original apostles thought, we see a much simpler map--the distinctions are far fewer. John distinguished between four categories of disciples of Jesus Christ in his first letter. He saw that there were a few different kinds of Christians. We have met one of those categories previously: **false professors**—people who *say* they know the Lord but who belie that by walking in darkness, think they are sinless, who break Jesus' commandments, and who even hates other Christians.

In today's verses he addresses each of the other three categories of Christians in his mind: **children, young men, and fathers**.

First of all, he wrote to them because he loved them and cared about them. Love breeds communication. If you love your fellow Christian you notice him; you study him; you are interested in him. John was motivated to write this letter not in some automaton way, carried off mindlessly by the Spirit without regard for the particular Christians he knew. He was writing a real letter in order to communicate some real ideas and urgencies for them to think about and to practice. If I wrote YOU a personal letter, would it get your notice? John was thinking of real people as he was writing this letter. And there were basically three kinds of Christians who would read or hear this letter: **children, young men and fathers**. Probably these are three ways of talking about

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- a. novices in the faith
 - b. those whose faith is vigorous and who are responsible for the work of the Gospel, and
 - c. those whose knowledge and experience in the faith are the foundation on which the community exists.¹

There are some here who are new to the faith and they are not all young people. There is a spiritual time-line which is different from a person's chronological age. A person might be 60 and only a babe in Christ. Or, he may be 20 and be mature in his faith. Clearly there are some who are new Christians. When John thought of new Christians he thought first of all of their most significant characteristic: their ***sins have been forgiven for His name's sake***. In Acts 13:38 we read ***Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you*** And in 1 Cor. 6:11 we read ***And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.***

Notice back in I John 2:12 ultimately WHY people's sins are forgiven: ***for His (Jesus') name's sake***. You see, it isn't just about you or just about me. Jesus has attached His name and His reputation on the work He completed on the cross. If only *some* of our sins were paid for, His name could be insulted. The work He did could be minimalized. But in the work of forgiving us of our sins and making us guilt free, Jesus exalted His own name. His glory was at stake. If He had failed in His atonement to satisfy the wrath of God and our sins were still an issue, His name would somehow tragically become less, even if in a small way it would diminish His glory. And He and the Father will have none of that! No! John's readers—and all true Christians—have had ALL their sins done away with and it polishes and showcases the name of the Son of God.

The other benefit that John thinks of when he thinks of new Christians is what he says in vs. 14, ***you know the Father***. Nathan Hall said yesterday in his ordination exam that one thing that is often forgotten when we think of the born again experience is that in addition to the forgiveness of sins, when a person finds Christ, they are ADOPTED into a new family. They come into a whole new cosmic, incredible, beyond-time relationship with God. They now KNOW the Father Himself. They are brought into a wonderful relationship, as family members, with God and it is because they have entrusted themselves to the cross of His Son. Have you done so yet?

You know, sometimes I wish we could all stay young Christians for a long while. In one way I wish we never outgrew the pure love and awe and devotion to the Son of God. I wish we walked around with that newborn glow all the time. I wish we never *sophisticated* ourselves into doctrinal categories and fenced-in convictions. I wish we never got over that on-the-knees adoration at the foot of the cross when we glanced up into the bloody face of the man from Galilee... Saw so clearly that He was the Son of heaven and that as His blood dribbled down the cross into the Jerusalem dirt that my future was secured beyond this planet. NOTE: May we never get to the point in our church—which would be a mutation I believe—where we do NOT have novices in the faith.

To the middle category of Christians John had in mind he assigned a couple of descriptions: ***I am writing to you, young men , because you have overcome the evil one*** and in vs.14 ***you are strong , and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one*** . A maturing, growing Christian totally frustrates Satan. He loses the battle. The Christian wins the victory. Here is something I wish we could hear about publicly often. I wish there was some way to generate a “sharing time” or a “testimony time” and just HEAR about the victories that are happening. They ARE happening. As a pastor some days I get to hear about them and I think, “Man, I wish others could hear this because they would be strengthened.” Once in a while I hear about a Christian marriage that gets strengthened and Satan is frustrated and defeated. I might hear about how the evil plans to squelch out the Gospel on campus are stumped and people DO HEAR the Gospel from the young strong ones on campus! I might hear about a person who lays down an evil temptation to compromise themselves in some way and they choose FOR Christ and Satan slinks (or slithers) off in defeat. When our functioning Christians are feeling the strength of the Lord Jesus they are LIVING the Scriptures, they’re reading them and loving them, their Bibles are not on the shelf. We have a few like this and I know a few like this in our sister churches. They aren’t interested in the stupid gossip in churches or in fighting each other and they do not get distracted by churchy stuff. They are STRONG in their faith and they major on getting the Word of God to ABIDE inside of them. Is this you? I hope so. And I might add, that JOY comes from victory. There is a direct, one to one correspondence between feeling the joy of the Lord and notching up a few consecutive spiritual victories. This is a normal experience for the ***young men*** in John’s mind’s eye.

Then the third category is those who knowledge and experience in the faith are the foundation on which the community exists, the ***fathers***. John may have had a few leaders in the individual churches in mind or he may have thought of some of the regional leaders who were really strong and mature in the faith of Jesus Christ. There may have been some around fitting the description of vs.13 who had walked in faith since the early days of the Book of Acts. TWICE John

says they ***had known Him who was from the beginning***. You know, just because all the other apostles had been killed off didn't mean that all the original followers of Jesus were dead. There probably were still some of the other early disciples around. They had seen much and had held on to their faith all these years. John thinks of them affectionately, probably would love a reunion with a small circle of them to talk about when they saw Jesus feed the five thousand or when He appeared to the five hundred. He thought of how now they had successfully passed on the faith to the next generation. But this twice-mentioned description says the spiritual ***fathers*** had known JESUS who was from the beginning. It is an interesting way to describe Jesus. He was there in Creation and in fact is the one who DID the creating, according to the Book of Hebrews. Jesus was already THERE in the beginning of all things. His existence did not start in Bethlehem, just His arrival. But to know Christ as a really spiritually mature one does is to be in contact with an eternal being. It overshadows anything ELSE a person might know. I know a few that I would place in this category. Whatever else they have accomplished is small compared with their close walk with the eternal One. It is a place to get to in our faith, to pray towards and strive to get to. Do you hunger to be so close to Jesus Christ that you feel in touch with an eternal being?

So let me ask you? Regardless of OTHER distinctions between Christians that exist and seem so important sometimes... Where are you on the map? Do not miss that John's descriptions of each group are all positive. He loved the people of God. He could think of nothing he would rather do than to hang around God's people. Novices in the faith are exciting and fun! The strong ones who run all the ministries in a church are the superstructure of what makes the Christian ministry and the work of the Gospel go on from generation to generation and year to year. We love these workers and their strength. The old ones, the ones who have seen so much and who know that no one victory and no one defeat should ever be taken too seriously, they are precious to us and we esteem them highly!!!

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 8)
Scripture: I John 2:15-17
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: June 8th, 2003

This Old Passing-Away World

Matthew 6:32-34 (NASB)

³²“For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek ; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things . ³³“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness ; and all these things shall be added to you. ³⁴“ Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow ; for tomorrow will care for itself . *Each* day has enough trouble of its own.

1 John 2:15-17 (NASB)

¹⁵ Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.

Introduction I love music a whole lot. I love football and baseball. I really enjoy certain kinds of cars, trucks, airplanes, ships and trains. I get a big kick out of touring historical sites. I would love to visit Vicksburg, Normandy, the Ardennes Forest, Rome, Pompeii, Greece and eastern Turkey and I would love to go back to Israel. I must confess that I really enjoy a good movie—to me they are a powerful form of literature as well as entertainment. In the department of computers, I get an immense kick out of these silly beige or black boxes. And since turning 40 (for some inexplicable reason) I love flowers—which stands in DIRECT contradiction to my love for football and certain types of cars!

But I must say that I also love the Scriptures. I love the world-view and the system of truth revealed in the holy writings of our faith. I love the Lord Jesus and the older I get the more I am convinced that He is the only way to heaven. I love His people and they have never ceased to fascinate me--the Holy Spirit actually taking up residence inside of someone who is a most unlikely candidate for religion, gives me a serious charge! I love to see it over and over again. Like Tony Campolo describes the joy the Lord felt when He made the first 10 billion daffodils, “Do it again!” In this whole realm of interests, cars and trains and historical buildings and landscaping and even most music doesn’t make any difference at all and all of that other stuff cannot be compared to the thrill of a single soul truly meeting Jesus Christ and starting a genuine undergoing of sanctification.

But I John 2:15-17 is a difficult passage to preach.

- It is difficult because *I struggle with this* sometimes.

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- It is difficult because I am not completely confident you will delight to hear what John said and you might say to me, “Pastor, we need *uplifting* messages.”
 - It is difficult because it is very plain, very easy to understand and very convicting—there is little wiggle-room in its interpretation. The will of God, as evidenced by this passage, is CRYSTAL CLEAR.
 - And this is a difficult passage to meditate on because I think this is the modern American Christian’s *greatest and most frequent struggle*—at least most modern American Christians.
 - More than persecution, we struggle with loving this world.
 - More than doubts and intellectual assaults on the veracity of Christianity, we struggle with loving this world.
 - More than our illnesses and infirmities, bodily and psychological, and these are not small troubles, I believe we struggle with loving this world.

And the apostle John makes it clear what the mind of the Lord is on this.

But it’s not that God or His apostles are categorically *down* on the world,

- The world was made by God through the agency of His “Word” (John 1:10)
- The world is the object of God’s saving purpose (John 3:17)
- Christ is the Light of the world (John 1:9; 8:12; 9:5)
- He is the Savior of the world (John 4:42; I John 4:14)
- He is the propitiation for the whole world (I John 2:2)
- He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of this world (John 1:29)

But John also tells us that

- The world lies in the grip of the evil one (I John 5:19)
- When Jesus came into the world, the world did not recognize Him (Jn.1:10; I Jn.3:10) *nor*
- Did the world recognize Jesus’ followers.
- In fact, John says the world hates Jesus’ followers just as it hated Him (John 15:18; 17:14; I John 3:13; John 7:7; 15:18,23-25. John sounds a lot like Paul when Paul wrote to the Romans (8:21), Romans 8:21 **that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.**

So we are faced with a great tension. Unless Scotty’s going to beam us up, we are stuck on this planet and in this world. And John wrote

Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (I John 2:15)

Right off we’re in trouble. It isn’t only “the world” (whatever that means) that we’re not supposed to love but it is also “the things in the world.” By “the world” he means **the invisible spiritual system of evil dominated by Satan** (see *MacArthur’s Notes on 2 Cor. 10:3–5*) **and all that it offers in opposition to God, His Word, and His people** (cf. 5:19 ; John 12:31 ; 1 Cor. 1:21 ; 2 Cor. 4:4 ; James 4:4 ; 2 Pet. 1:4).¹

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, ⁴ for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful

for the destruction of fortresses. ⁵ We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ 2 Cor. 10:3-5

What was John targeting with “the world” (kosmon)? Here’s some definitions...

- The system in competition with God – Keener, *Bible Background Comm.*
- That organized system which acts as a rival to God—that which finds its proper sphere and fulfillment in a finite order without God—*Wycliffe Bible Commentary*
- The life of human society as organized under the power of evil –Dodd, in Stott’s Commentary

We are not to love the system of anti-God or un-God that permeates our whole society, indeed EVERY society, nor the things that are in it. This is hard. It requires focus and attention and spiritual sobriety and alertness. THAT is hard. We like to get distracted and to place our energies in other things. You do; I do. But the Scripture calls us to a battle that a true Christian will enter. It is the battle to hold the influences of the world at bay. James has the same call to battle:

4 You adulteresses , do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God ? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God . James 4:4

In vs.16 John summarizes in three phrases what the world’s influences are all about:

1. **The lust of the flesh...** which are sinful desire and cravings which arise from our fallen nature. Do you have those? Yes, you do. We do not like to talk about them let alone pray about them but they are there because even after we become Christians we still have the old man with us. You and I need to simply recognize that we are not to be LOYAL to the lust of the flesh. That is the first decision in doing battle with it.
2. **The lust of the eyes...** Satan uses the avenue of vision to get to people. It is amazing how important “media” has become to us, don’t you think? Television, movies, cell phones with video, PDA’s, computers everywhere, DVDs, MPGs, AVIs, etc. We love to LOOK. We love to look more than we love to think. God made out eyes but the evil in the world corrupts our use of our visual sense. John says the world incorporates vision to tap into our baser nature and our lust, our desire to HAVE what is not ours. It might be things, power, money, people. We crave what God has roped us off FROM. Because we see it.
3. **The boastful pride of life...** This is the boasting and arrogance and self-focus that John says is HERE, all around us, tempting us, intriguing us. It is in direct competition and opposition to what knowing Jesus Christ is all about. If there is on thing that annoys me a lot is when I meet or hear or see a preacher who has been caught up in this trap of the “world.” Of all people the leaders of God’s people should be humble, focused on others, yielding and selfless.

John says these aspects of the world are not from the Father. Make no mistake about it, if the thing you are dealing with possesses one or more of these characteristics it is not Christian, it is not Spirit-filled, it is not of the Lord. It is of the world no matter how nice it smells to you...

In vs. 17 he says ***And the world is passing away , and also its lusts ; but the one who does the will of God abides forever .*** This is a thing the world, the devil and our old natures do not want to admit and face up to. The things of this world are passing away. They are temporary. They do not last. No matter how wonderful a thing of this world is or seems, it is even now rotting away. As is Satan.

I love what Peter wrote:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ , who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ,4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away , reserved in heaven for you, 1 Peter 1:3,4

An absence of love for the world must habitually characterize the love life of those to be considered genuinely born again.

Dr. John MacArthur

The Christian is to love God, and his brother but he is not to love the world. Love is not an uncontrollable emotion but the steady devotion of the will. **John R. W. Stott**

The habitable earth, the world in which men live; this is not to be loved by saints, as if it were their habitation, where they are always to be, and so loath to removed from it, seeing they are but sojourners, and pilgrims and strangers here; that this is not their rest, nor dwelling place, their continuing city or proper country—that is heaven. **John Gill**

Worldliness, *contra* much superficial thought and language on the subject, does not lie in the things we do or in places we frequent; it lies in the human heart, in the seat of human affections and attitudes... If our affections, instead of being set on what is of permanent importance, are set on passing things that the heart desires and the eye delights in, or things that encourage us to have a good conceit of ourselves, we are fearfully impoverished...

F.F. Bruce

Indeed if we consider the unblushing promise of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

C.S. Lewis

Until our minds are cleansed from the love of the world, the idea of loving God may be repeated a hundred times, but we won't get it. It would be like pouring water on a ball; you can gather up not a drop!

John Calvin

Do you love the will of God? John says if you do, you will abide forever (vs. 17). Do you love the world? John says you will pass away. Our task is to fight this fight and to never give up. It is a formidable foe. It does not sleep. It does not go away but victory can be ours if we “stay awake” and work to minimize the effects of lust and pride. He has not left us alone. We have many tools and weapons at our disposal, most of all the promises of God and the Holy Spirit inside of every Christian.

I think the presence of the Spirit is most significantly shown not by public demonstrations of supernatural power but by subtle and private and secret victories over lust and pride. May we escape this old passing-away world, even before the end. May we have thankfulness and gratitude for a perspective of life which helps us see past whether we have a neat car or truck or vacation or lots and lots of friends and influence.

Lastly, someone may say “there’s not much about Jesus in this sermon.” Let me say, Jesus Christ is the King and He is worthy of our enlisting in a daily battle over the world. He has already defeated the world. He has already won and we are in His army, by His goodness and grace and sacrifice on the cross.

Keeping the Faith

1 John 2:18-25 (NASB)

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour.

¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.

²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know.

²¹ I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth.

²² Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.

²³ Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.

²⁴ As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.

²⁵ And this is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.

Introduction Sometimes the Christian life is about warding off temptation and sin, finding and using spiritual gifts, or missions. But sometimes the issue is even more basic, and even more fundamental. The passage before us today has to do with the Christian's simple need to just *keep the faith*. That's a common enough expression in our culture. What does it mean for the Christian? Yes, "keeping the faith" means reading your Bible every day. It means going to church every Sunday and deliberately exercising focus off of yourself and on to the God of the universe. It means loving your brother in Christ and practicing loyalty to him. But it also means the most basic doggedness and unyieldingness about your belief system itself. As an illustration, do you know the Apostles' Creed? It goes like this:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. AMEN

In many churches that is recited Sunday after Sunday. It may sound dry and robotic to do that, but it has the effect of constantly reminding the church members what is central to their faith. It has the effect of keeping clear what the most basic doctrines of Christianity are.

Sometimes keeping the faith is about being determined to stand by what is true, without regard for the price to make that stand. For the apostle John, already battling deviant forms of Christianity even before the calendar turned over to AD 100, the issue was Christology. **Cerinthus** was a popular man in what is now Eastern Turkey in the time of John. He had a significant following and taught a number of half-truths about Jesus, for instance, that He was a man, and a holy one at that. But that at His baptism, the Christ or the Holy Ghost (its not clear which) settled on Jesus the man, and taught Him about the unknown God. In His suffering, Cerinthus taught, Jesus the man suffered alone as the Christ returned to heaven. A lot of people bought into the teaching of Cerinthus and very possibly John had him, and others, specifically in mind as he wrote 1st John.

Now

Increasingevil (time) d(time) = LOTS OF EVIL

John

By ***the last hour*** he almost certainly is referring to the last era of time before Jesus returns. (1 Tim. 4:1 ; James 5:3 ; 1 Pet. 4:7 ; 2 Pet. 3:3 ; Jude 18) and it is characterized by a time of the term ***antichrist***—and he is the only New Testament writer to use the word. This doesn't merely mean "one who opposes Christ," but something more deeply evil: "one who seeks to replace Christ, that is, a counterfeit Christ.² It's like what Jesus warned His followers about in Mark 13:22

for false Christs and false prophets will arise , and will show signs and wonders ,in order, if possible, to lead the elect astray.

And what John sees as an innovative but false christology when he later wrote (2 John 7 and 1st John 2:26):

7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world , those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh . This is the deceiver and the antichrist .

26 These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.

This is the time we live in now and if I am right, evil is accelerating in the world. Antichrists and the spirit of antichrist and perhaps even THE Antichrist are on the scene. Understand that the spirit of antichrist is not a stupid spirit. It is an intelligent spirit and movement. It seeks to REPLACE the genuine Jesus Christ with a substitute.

It is hard to imagine anything more evil and the days we live in now, though they are often bright and beautiful, and even in an economically downswung time we are all pretty comfortable, and even with so much wonderful music and art and great sports heroes, and even living in the most powerful nation on earth, and even blessed with a great many Christian friends and ministries to keep us encouraged, we are living in an excessively evil era. John could not have said, **Children it is the last hour** if he had lived just one century previous. But he knew that he was living in the final era before Christ would return. He could not say when that would be but he knew it would happen at the conclusion of this era.

In vs. 19 he addresses a problem that I am sure he knew troubled many of his friends in Ephesus or in other places where there were Christians. Some of their own friends had defected into new variations of Christianity. These were people with names and families and perhaps some history of being good church members for a time, perhaps for years. And now they had departed and proclaimed a new form of Christianity. To look them in the eye, you might have seen great sincerity. To hear their voices and to hear them sing, they may have been impressive. But John states, bluntly, that they were never really true members of the church. They departed because they were never really of the true body of Christ. This is a sobering indictment, even today. Some may leave us—we are not immune—who would say, AFTER we have fallen in love with them— I do not believe the way you believe. I do not believe Jesus is all you say He is. And oh, how painful that is to hear. But it was heard among church members at the end of the first century and it can be heard today. We may not tend to measure our Christianity by doctrinal clarity so much. We tend today to measure it by numbers and by how many people we send to a conference, and by how well versed we are in the latest trend. But the first measure is by how many of our people can articulate true Christology? How we instructed are our children and how careful are we to instruct them to think theologically, especially about the things of Christ?

In vs.20 we read **But you have an anointing from the Holy One , and you all know** . Two characteristics mark genuine Christians in contrast to the antichrists. FIRST, the Holy Spirit (“an anointing,” v. 27) **guards** them from error (cf. Acts 10:38 ; 2 Cor. 1:21). Christ as the Holy One (Luke 4:34 ; Acts 3:14)

imparts the Holy Spirit as their illuminating guardian from deception. SECOND, the Holy Spirit **guides** the believer into knowing “all things” (John 14:26 ; 16:13). True Christians have a built in lie detector and persevere in the truth. Those who remain in heresy and apostasy manifest the fact that they were never genuinely born again ²

Notice the simple statement in vs. 21. **No lie is of the truth**. You cannot mix and blend some truth and some error, particularly where the matter of who exactly Christ is, is at stake. Jesus is not partially man and partially God. He is not co-redeemer with Mary or anyone else. He is not reincarnated in this or that charismatic personality who speaks well and has an impressive following of people and maybe quotes Bible verses. Anyone who is messed up in their Christology needs to be carefully challenged and then perhaps rebuked. If someone does not fully embrace that **Jesus is the Christ** is “tipping their hand” that they are not Christian and even more are not connected to the Father Himself. You see, this is a serious matter. The reality of enjoying a connection with God AT ALL is at stake. I am always nervous when people suggest to me that they are in fellowship with someone who “believes in God.” The implication is that this is enough. Never mind what they know or believe about Jesus, they are God-believers. No. That is not enough. John tells us that just believing in a “supreme being” without Christ is the same thing as NOT knowing the Father. Jesus is the one and only “bridge” to the Father. He needs no help and there is no other bridge needed. **God so loved the world that He sent His ONLY begotten Son that whosoever believes IN HIM shall not perish but shall have everlasting life**. In vs. 25 we read, **And this is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life**.

Practical Issues About Why It Matters Whether We Keep the Faith:

1. What we depend on Jesus to do for us, depends on the facts of who Jesus is...
2. Connection to God the Father depends on connection to Jesus.
3. The spirit of “antichrist” will eventually absorb everyone who does not think clearly about who Jesus is.
4. Who we perceive to be our brothers and sisters and with whom we share close fellowship

The benefit of understanding who Jesus is, and then embracing Him as He is, is **eternal life**. This is what He promised. This is what we have staked everything on, that what He promised is true and validated by His resurrection, and that what He promised is OURS who trust in it. Without Christ, there is no eternal life. There is only the terror of dying when you are not ready, with no Christ in your heart. To keep the faith, means to hold on to the Christ you held on to that first day you believed in Him. It means to keep the faith against challenges against it. It means to keep your Christology pure even when

something seems to come along which might be better, or a better “upgrade.” As Fernando Ortega sang,

*In the morning when I rise, in the morning when I rise, in the morning when I rise,
give me Jesus...*

*And when I come to die, and when I come to die, and when I come to die, give me
Jesus...*

Cerinthus

(Greek *Kerinthos*).

A Gnostic-Ebionite heretic, contemporary with St. John; against whose errors on the divinity of Christ the Apostle is said to have written the Fourth Gospel. We possess no information concerning this early sectary which reaches back to his own times. The first mention of his name and description of his doctrines occur in St. Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.*, I, c. xxvi; III, c. iii, c. xi), written about 170. Further information is gathered from Presbyter Caius (c. 210) as quoted by Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.*, III, xxviii, 2). Hippolytus, in *"Philosophoumena"*, VII, 33 (c. 230), practically transcribes Irenaeus. Cerinthus is referred to by Pseudo-Tertullian in *"Adv. Omnes Haeres"*, written about 240. A fragment of Dionysius of Alexandria, taken from *"De Promissionibus"*, written about 250, is given by Eusebius after his quotation from Caius. The most detailed account is given by St. Epiphanius (*Adv. Haeres"*, xxviii, written about 390), which, however, on account of its date and character must be used with some caution. A good summary is given by Theodoret (*"Haer. Fab."*, II, 3, written about 450). Cerinthus was an Egyptian, and if not by race a Jew, at least he was circumcised. The exact date of his birth and his death are unknown. In Asia he founded a school and gathered disciples. No writings of any kind have come down to us. Cerinthus's doctrines were a strange mixture of Gnosticism, Judaism, Chiliasm, and Ebionitism. He admitted one Supreme Being; but the world was produced by a distinct and far inferior power. He does not identify this Creator or Demiurgos with the Jehovah of the Old Testament. Not Jehovah but the angels have both made the world and given the law. These creator-angels were ignorant of the existence of the Supreme God. The Jewish law was most sacred, and salvation to be obtained by obedience to its precepts. Cerinthus distinguished between Jesus and Christ. Jesus was mere man, though eminent in holiness. He suffered and died and was raised from the dead, or, as some say Cerinthus taught, He will be raised from the dead at the Last Day and all men will rise with Him. At the moment of baptism, Christ or the Holy Ghost was sent by the Highest God, and dwelt in Jesus teaching Him, what not even the angels knew, the Unknown God. This union between Jesus and Christ continues till the Passion, when Jesus suffers alone and Christ returns to heaven. Cerinthus believed in a happy millenium which would be realized here on earth previous to the resurrection and the spiritual kingdom of God in heaven.

Scarcely anything is known of Cerinthus's disciples; they seem soon to have fused with the Nazareans and Ebionites and exercised little influence on the bulk of Christendom, except perhaps through the Pseudo-Clementines, the product of Cerinthian and Ebionite circles. They flourished most in Asia and Galatia.

Bareille, in *Dict. de Theol. Cath.*, s.v.; Duchesne, *Hist. ancienne de L'Eglise* (Paris, 1907); *Dict. of Christ. Biogr.*; Mansel, *The Gnostic Heresies of the First and Second Cent.* (1875); Davidson, *Introductions to N. Test.* (1894), I, 345; II, 245-6; Kunze, *De Hist. Gnosticismi Fontibus* (Leipzig, 1894).

J.P. ARENDZEN

Transcribed by William D. Neville

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Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 10)
Scripture: I John 2:26 – 3:3
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: June 29th, 2003

The Incredibly Radical Fate of the Born-Again Christian

1 John 2:25-3:3 (NASB)

25 And this is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life. 26 These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. 27 And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. 28 And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. 29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him. 3:1 SEE how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and *such* we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Introduction If I told you I had won a contest and now owned a small Caribbean island with a full staff, thirteen Lamborghini's (three of which are equipped to "swim" underwater), four Hum V's complete with LOSAT antitank apparatuses, three Lear jets, my own personal communications satellite, an i.d. card which would give me immediate and unlimited entry to the White House, Congress and the Supreme Court, John Lennon's personal white grand piano, possession of the U.S. Mint \$10 and \$20 minting plates, ownership of the world's first phaser cannon, the formula for a new secret drug which doubles life span (and which they found out could be made from a simple compound of Krispy Kreme donuts and Dr. Pepper), and finally a Harley, what would you think? If it were true, I think you would be fairly impressed. I think some of you would say at the door today, "Hey Pastor Neil, you're a pretty lucky guy."

I know I have trumpeted this a lot over the past few years: **the claims that we make as Christians are equally incredible**. They are more so, in fact. They are, in fact, so fantastic that to anyone really paying attention on the outside of the body of Christ and anyone who really is listening to the Gospel, they must seem hard to believe. Here is one of those claims—taken from 1st John 2:25: we say that

- 1) not only is Jesus the only way to heaven but that He has specifically promised **life which does not end** to people who follow Him in faith and that was not just in the first century.
- 2) His immediate followers went on to **offer this promise to people everywhere**, down through the ages.

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- 3) In addition, these apostles stated that the people who embraced this promise for a life which does not end, would have **a kind of internal mechanism**, a special presence of Christ Himself which in itself would be ageless and dimensionless.

Doesn't that seem pretty incredible? Can a reasonable person really believe that fantastic matrix of claims?

As Christians we are not just positing a feasible hope for getting to heaven. We are not just arguing for the possibility of Jesus' vicarious atonement and resurrection paving one among many roads to heaven. We are positing that faith in Him is the *only* way to heaven and that Christians—true Christians—orthodox Christians—Christians who remain faithful to that simple set of truths offered by the network of apostles in the first century—enjoy a unique status in God's economy, a status called **children of God** (3:1b). From one standpoint it seems fantastically unfair since it is not predicated at all on performance. But that seeming unfairness is countered by the fact that this status as a child of God is universally offered and it is obtainable free of charge. It really IS unfair because pure fairness and justice would have every human who ever was, paying exactly his or her own debt to a holy God, because of sin. If there is any unfairness it really is nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ.

Now the point of the whole passage today is really in the final verse of our text (1st John 3:3): **everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.** The hope of the Christian is the thing which cleanses us and gradually washes this world off our hearts and thinking and memories and preferences. We have this great hope about the future. It is incredible! Our FATE is so incredibly radical! And when we ponder it and fix our thinking on it it helps in the process of sanctification.

I must say that I cannot think of many contemporary Christian songs which really focus on the future. We are very "now" oriented. I would like to hear some songs written which take my attention to the future. Those songs would be played in the truck! And I would draw some strength from them to help purify myself.

In 1st John 2:26 John says **These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.** What things? He has been laying out the importance of thinking clearly about who Christ really was and that real Christians need to not get sucked into the world system of feeling and lifestyles. He is quite concerned. There were active, real false teachers around whose agenda was to deceive and fool the Christians about what the truth was. That is the reason for John writing this letter, even as an old man. I'm sure he could have appeal to his retirement and think to himself, "I have done enough." But he picks up his pen and writes an important communiqué!

Then in vs. 27 we have, ***And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.*** This is a lot like what we read in vs.. 20 and 21 and frankly I think it requires some concentration to follow what he is saying—Christians understand stuff that non-Christians do not. We have the Holy Spirit inside of us and if we are paying attention, He will guide you and lead you in the truth. That may translate into getting a good feeling about some teacher you are listening to, about who to date and not date or marry or not marry, about whether to take a job with a certain company or not, about how broadly to fellowship with other people and so forth.

There's a lot of "abiding" talk in these verses and there is in other places in John's writing. The concept of enjoying uninterrupted fellowship with Jesus Christ is real important to John. He sees the Christian life as a continuum of fellowship, between Jesus and His Father, between Jesus Christ and His followers, between those followers and the Spirit and between believers themselves. Do you scan your Christian life that way? Do you think of it as a never-ending series of meetings and obligations, or as the Quest for the Perfect Therapy, or as the Answer to All Questions? John sees the life of Christian faith like moving in with God and with other people who know God. It is an intimacy thing. And inside our hearts and heads we know what is right and what is not right... The Christian life is about fellowshiping with Jesus. You, and Him. Daily, or not. If you are out of fellowship with Him, He is sad. He is like the parent whose child has wandered. The parent still loves the child just as much as ever but is heart-broken for the child's lack of interest in being close to the parent, at the moment. For a Christian to be disinterested in the Lord or in the things of the Lord is a great sadness to the Lord. But when we are IN fellowship with Him and we are probing His presence daily, and we are hearing His voice daily, it is exciting to walk with Him. It is LIFE!

In vs. 28 he wrote, ***And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.*** John simply says, ABIDE IN HIM. I really want you to let that sink in. Only you can grow your faith. Only you can make Jesus Christ the most important aspect of your life. And developing your daily walk has another important aspect. We do not just accept Christ and then forget about developing the walk. Walking with Christ consistently thing has *future* implications. Jesus is GOING TO appear. He is coming again. It will be a literal coming-again. There will be a date on the calendar and a time of day when all of a sudden we will see Him face to face. You and I will be there. We do not want to be ashamed when He looks us in the eye for the first time. People who have been deceived and fooled and who have abandoned their first love of Christ WILL be ashamed apparently. (cf. 1 Cor.4:5 ; 2 Cor. 5:9 ,10). It is something to be

avoided, apparently! John may have remembered Jesus' words in the upper room (John 15:1-6),

John 15:1-6 (NASB)

I AM the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

In vs. 29 there is a direct connection between walking in Him and in how your life works... ***If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.*** Being born again will generate some righteousness and not just passive righteousness but the PRACTICE of righteousness. Now, I want to say something about this. What IS “practicing righteousness?” Is that being holier than the next guy? Is that making sure someone KNOWS you did a good thing or didn’t do a bad thing? The practice of righteousness, a thing which happens in truly born-again people, is REPRODUCING HIS CHARACTER.² It is to “bear the family likeness,” to look like the Lord. Righteousness, not knowledge, is the mark of the regenerate, the new birth.² That means a few things; it means a *thousand* things and applications. It means that when faced with choices, we choose deliberately for Christ.

But notice the *first* phrase in the verse: ***If you know that He is righteous...*** I think that is in doubt in some people’s heads today. They imagine a God—because they’ve been brainwashed, deceived or just uninstructed—that might be Unrighteous sometimes. But goodness is always the nature of the Lord and that nature WILL, John predicts, come forth in the life of the person who has truly been born again. There are some in churches who GO to church, who are not born again. And that is one reason why we should always be making the Gospel clear and easily accessible in this church!

SEE how great [lit. “of what country”] a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him (3:1). The love of the Father is so unearthly and so foreign to this world that John wonders what country it comes from??!! We, even we, can be and ARE called ***children of God.*** Called by whom? I think probably by God Himself and by all the other inhabitants of heaven. Before Christ, we were merely children of men. We were earth-dwellers, blobs of protoplasm, yes, still vaguely looking like the Maker, but generally ruined. Then the love of God exploded into our lives and

transferred all our identity to HIS family. The world does not understand nor approve. To them our Father is a legend at best. They **did not know Him**.

In 3:2 we have a really cool verse! **Beloved , now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.** He called them “beloved,” once again because he cares about them deeply. It is the prime directive for all pastors—to care and love the flock! And he says that right now we are **children of God** but coming up we’re not sure WHAT coolness will be the situation! We will still be children of God of course but we will not be *incognito*! EVERY aspect of our lives will be ablaze with the glory of the Lamb who was slain and is now alive. When He comes back—and I like to think about this, if only speculatively—we SHALL BE LIKE HIM. I wonder what that means? It can’t be anything but wonderful. I will still be me, I think, but I will be like Him. You will still be you, I think, but now (or I should say then) you will be like Jesus Christ. That means, I think, that all the bad stuff about you being you will be no more. It will be replaced by what HE is like. Can you imagine us all going out for coffee and we’re enjoying one another, but we’re all like Jesus? No fear, no sarcasm, no insults, no misunderstanding, no distrust, just listening, laughing, sharing good thoughts and edification and encouragement. What a session THAT will be!

I also wonder what John had in mind to say **we shall see Him just as He is**. John saw that as we read in Revelation 1. It terrified him but I think he probably got used to it once he got over the shock. There will be nothing veiled about Jesus Christ when He comes back... Listen to just a bit of what John DOES describe as Jesus’ appearance...

Revelation 19:11-16

11 And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war. 12 And His eyes are a flame of fire, and upon His head are many diadems; and He has a name written upon Him which no one knows except Himself. 13 And He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. 15 And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. 16 And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”

Finally, we get back to the real point of thinking about our FATE in the future—to purify ourselves in light of what is coming. You can live here and place most of your energy here and now but you forfeit one of the greatest tools for getting closer to Christ—the “purity elixir!” I mean the effect that really embracing your future can have on your daily battles. May we focus and fixate

on the future, on being the children of God, on what we shall be when He appears! I love the words to our last song today...

You are the sovereign I am **Your name is Holy**
You are the pure, spotless Lamb Your name is holy
You are the Almighty One Your name is holy
You are the Christ, God's own son Your name is holy
In Your name, there is mercy for sin There is safety within,
in Your holy name In Your name, there is strength to remain
To stand in spite of pain, in Your holy name

Added Note from Pastor Neil to the Body:

In a time of growth in a church, a pastor must re-evaluate what his role is supposed to be. He cannot do everything, go to everything or even know everybody as well as he might like. His role changes as the body grows. I have been thinking about this of late and one of the challenges is the need for the pastor to *not* micromanage or feel the need to control everything or every ministry in the church. He has to trust good leaders to do more and more of the ministry, and in fact, this is what Paul implies in Ephesians 4. But I am thinking about one aspect of pastoral ministry that does not change and that is the ministry I have in the pulpit. This is a very important one in the church and I want you to know that I think perhaps my greatest responsibility is the one I bear, which you entrust me with, to talk to you every week for 30 to 40 minutes. For that time, each week, I have your undivided attention. That is a great responsibility that I have and treasure and respect. You grant me the privilege each and every week to talk to you and to bring you an exposition of Scripture about how to think as a Christian, and how to live. You do not grant this to many people in your life and I want you to know that the Lord has impressed on me that it is a privilege to me—as it is to every pastor. Thank you for your patience with me and your encouragement. I would ask again that you make this pulpit a regular part of your prayer time.

- Ask God to give me the sense and the discipline to not just air out my pet peeves up here, no matter how “right” they may seem to me.
- Ask Him to give me HIS message each week.
- Ask Him to build the principles I *talk about* into my own life and to make them a quiet and consistent reality.
- Ask Him to help me be interesting and wise in my presentation so that I do not give the misimpression—especially to our young people—that the Christian life and the Word of God are somehow boring.
- Ask Him to help me know the right interpretation of the Word of God and to always emphasize what the Word emphasizes and not to overemphasize what is minimally treated in Scripture.

I appreciate your participation in the ministry of this pulpit very much!

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 11)
Scripture: I John 3:4 – 6
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: July 20th, 2003

Blunt Spiritual Realities

1 John 3:1-10 (NASB)

3:1 SEE how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and *such* we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. 4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. 5 And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; 8 the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. 10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

Introduction Sometimes it just comes back to the basics. We can get all absorbed in the complexities of living—all these complicated relationships, my psyche/your psyche, this church and that church, politics, legal issues and so forth. But sometimes we hit a stretch where you are forced to just consider basics; or you are reduced to the basics. These days I have been visiting a man who is in a nursing home and he is fighting cancer and his life is reduced to things like how can I reach that cup of water? How can I make sure my electric bill at home gets paid? Will my plant get enough water? He lies in bed all day and all night and thinks. He is a retired attorney and a fairly smart man with many interesting stories to tell. But he is reduced to the basics, at least for the moment. It is a stark difference from the hurried and busy lives most of us live. Sometimes though there is something beneficial in being forced to think about the basics of living. In a sense, this is how John had taken to viewing the Christian life, near the end of his life. It was back to basics. This epistle is dominated by a few basic Christian propositions, which for most of us almost seem boring. Until you get out there and see what people are really thinking today...

But I fear that if you read this passage with your normal 20th century American evangelical eyes you something inside of you might go, “Yadayayada...” This is because these basic concepts are so familiar to us. **Rather I want you to try to read these verses, and look at these concepts with first century eyes.** Try to imagine being one of those first Christians—first

generation Christians, there have been NONE before you—who reads this epistle and try to imagine the meaning in that context. Then these concepts are terribly important and you feel the power of what John was writing. **Blunt and simple, they are also much needed food and fuel for us.**

For instance in 1st John 3:4 we read ***Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.*** To first century readers (or hearers) their reaction to the word ***everyone*** (or ***whosoever*** KJV) would have been, “Whoa! We’ve been hearing that some of the new *elite* teachers and leaders are exempt from worrying about whether they sin or not—that’s what they TELL us anyway, John.” As Harry Ironside put it, “A dual standard of morality is quite foreign to the [real] Christian religion.”² But the **blunt spiritual reality** is that leadership and the rank and file believers are all held to the same standard of holiness. That might seem so obvious to us here in this church, in this century. But when it was first read, it raised eyebrows.

Then there is a simple definition of ***sin***. Sin is breaking God’s holy law. Sinners are lawbreakers. But I don’t think John has in mind all of God’s or Moses’ law—I think he has in mind one particular sin, THE ONLY SIN WHICH THE OPPONENTS ARE SPECIFICALLY CHARGED WITH in this letter. It is the command to love one’s brother (or sister). The broken law is the law of love which Jesus spoke about so importantly John 13:34,35 ***A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*** It may be that John was aware that these so-called leaders were withdrawing from the regular troops and just refusing to love the brethren. He blasts *elitism* and we should always be careful to not segregate ourselves into “spiritual cliques.” NOT loving the brethren is a real serious thing, my friends. My personal opinion is that it is way too easy for us today to not love each other. But John calls it lawlessness. For a moment, let the Holy Spirit speak to you about this. Where have you ceased loving your brother? Repent of that and let the love of Christ refill you with concern and affection and patience and care for that person.

In verse 5 there are a couple more blunt spiritual realities. First, the most basic reason Jesus came to this planet was to **take away sins**. Again, I say that you might go, “I’ve heard that before so many times...” But understand that this is “Job One.” This was for Jesus the “prime directive.” This is the “fundamentalist of the fundamental truths.” While we yawn at this, demons are scheming to get people to not get it. They are concocting ideas in people’s heads that Christ came for other reasons. He did not come to be a good example as liberal teachers often say, thinking they are granting Him *some* limited esteem by saying that. He did not come to be just another prophet or mouthpiece for God.

He did not come to deliver Israel from Roman oppression. He came primarily to **take away sins**. Do you know that if you know Him and have received Him as Savior, and have truly been born again, all your sins have been **taken away**. That means they're not here. They are not in front of you nor will they ever be. The judgment seat of Christ, which is indeed coming in our future, is not to indict, try, convict and sentence us for sins. I believe it is a powerfully serious coming event but I also believe it is for the evaluation of our lives for the purpose of giving rewards. Because our sins have been taken away by our clinging to the cross of Christ. Have you done that yet? Have you walked to the cross, fell on your knees, asked Him to take away your sins and wrapped your arms around the old rugged cross. I'm not asking if your Dad or Mom have done it, or has your spouse done it. Have you? When we do, at that very moment, our sins are taken away. That's why Christ showed up (**appeared**).

And then, in support of how Christ can do this for people (take away their sins) John says ***in Him there is no sin***, Blunt Spiritual Reality #3, a thing that is so obvious to you and me, and which I think our kids pick up by osmosis more than by ever even hearing it taught...

But I do not think my friend in the nursing home knows this. I am not sure the Governor or the mayor or the Congressman or the Chancellor or the managing editor or Nomar know this thing that you and I know so well we almost doze off if we hear it too often.

But John adds it to give weight to the notion of why Jesus Christ came to the planet. There is a logic here. Anyone who can take away sins, I mean really accomplish that, would have to be free of sin himself. And indeed, Jesus never sinned. He never broke God's law, not even once.

He never DIDN'T love Peter and John and Peter's Mom and Mary and Thomas and Judas... Not once did He slip into selfishness or an elitist mindset—you know, "See my secretary for an appointment..." Not once did He lust after one of the women. Not once did He steal a fiver from the money box for Himself. Not once did He say something mean-spirited or cruel. What an amazing Being Jesus Christ was (and IS!)

In Him there is no sin and this is the kind of thing somehow, we should SING about. It is a wonderful thing!

Mohammed and Mary and Martin Luther King (Jr. and Sr.) and Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson and Ghandi and Lennon & McCartney and Yaz and Ted Williams and the Tuna and Eisenhower and Clara Barton and Florence Nightingale and Myles Standish ALL SINNED. The "best" people you can think of are full of sin, ruined by sin.

Then in verse 6 we have ***No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him***. This is a challenging verse to interpret because it sounds like he's saying that real Christians do not sin. But plainly he cannot have meant that for then no one would qualify to call themselves a Christian. The oldest and wisest saints I have known would still call themselves

“sinners.” I think the key lies in the word **abides**. To “abide” means to live with someone or to live consistently in one place. To “live in sin” habitually; to be dominated by sin and to not really care much about it, this is the condition which John says is completely consistent with calling one’s self a Christian at the same time.

Not seeing Jesus or knowing Him is a little easier to understand what John means. It is a **blunt reality (#4)** that the person who loves sin their more than Jesus has never really met Jesus, regardless of what he *says*. John is making a distinction between his opponents (who have been influencing many young Christians), who say Hey my “sins” are no big deal, and his readers who as true Christians recognize the significance of sin because Jesus came to take it away!²

This is a hard point for us because we so desperately want to believe everyone who tells us that they are a Christian. We are terrified at the prospect of questioning someone’s sincerity. Nonetheless, John does. He has already called his opponents “antichrist.” He says you live in sin do not call yourself a Christian. You hate your brother and still call yourself a Christian, you are a liar. Drop the profession of faith, then and stay in love with your sin.

It is the grace of God working in the soul that makes the believer delight in holiness, in righteousness, in obedience to the will of God, for real joy is found in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. One time there was a man who lived a life of gross sin. After his conversion, one of his old friends said to him, “Bill, I pity you—a man who was such a high flier [partier] as you. And now you’ve settled down; you go to church, or stay at home and read the Bible and pray; you never have good times anymore.” Bill responded, “But Bob, you don’t understand. I get drunk every time I want to. I go to the theatre [dirty films] every time I want to. I go to the clubs and I gamble and I get into fights every time I want to.” “But Bill,” said Bob, “I don’t understand—I thought you had to give up those things to become a Christian?” “No Bob,” said Bill, “the Lord took the ‘want to’ out when He saved my soul, and He made me a new creature in Christ Jesus.”²

When we are born of God we receive a new life and that life has its own new nature, a nature that hates sin and impurity and delights in holiness and goodness more than it delights in the flesh. That is the final **blunt spiritual reality (#5)** ! New believers will be pretty obvious usually. They love the things of the Lord and they just can’t get over how wonderful He is. May the rest of us never get over Him either!

² Hall Harris, *Commentary on 1st/2nd/3rd John* from www.NetBible.org/docs/nt/books/1jo/harris

² from Harry Ironside in *10,000 Illustrations*

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 12)
Scripture: I John 3:7-10
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: July 27th, 2003

The Dark Side of the Force

1 John 3:1-10 (NASB)

3:1 SEE how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and *such* we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. 4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. 5 And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; 8 the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. 10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

Introduction There are lots of issues that Christians can waver off the path on. Sometimes they are doctrinal things and sometimes they are more practically related. Sometimes they are basic lifestyle rights and wrongs that we compromise on and say, “Hey it really doesn’t matter that much how someone lives as long as they’re not hurting anybody.”

In *Star Wars* Darth Vader tries to convince Luke Skywalker that he should give in to his feelings of revenge and anger. The implication is that he will feel good if he does and therefore will then “fulfill his destiny” as a major agent for the “dark side” of the force. The controlling ethic, I think, is to feel good. People today trade allegiance to Christ all the time—even when they know better and were raised under the sound of the Gospel—for something which they have been told will make them feel better.

I have heard Dr. James Dobson suggest on more than one occasion that the only really happy life, is the straight life. By “straight life” he means ordering our lives as God has said to do so. This, he thinks, will ultimately lead to far greater and deeper happiness. God’s will is not meant to minimize happiness, quite the opposite!

Let me ask you, have you seen Jesus? John wrote in 1st John 3:6b that **no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him**. An interesting assertion to ponder: apparently there is something about “seeing Jesus” that changes a person’s loyalties, priorities and choices, at least in a major way. I think John meant

“seen Him” by meeting Him in salvation. I don’t know what Jesus looks like. But I know *what* He is like and as such, have seen Him. We also use the expression “to know Him.” It doesn’t just mean to know *about* Him. It means to come to know Him in a personal and saving way.

Again today we encounter the apostle John’s blunt way of looking at life and how to live. His main point is that everyone sooner or later shows his cards—he reveals that he really is true to Christ and a true disciple of His, or he is not and ultimately he is a follower of Satan. You eventually become like the one you follow. If you hang out with Jesus Christ, you will develop more and more of His character in your life. You will say “Yes” more and more when He says “Yes” and you will say “No” more and more when He says, “No.”

Robert Law wrote, “Doing is the test of being.” The one who dwells in sin and loves sin, will more and more develop the mindset of Satan. It may take years but it will happen. Sin is to say to God’s revealed Law, “No.” You have that choice. If there is any meaning at all to the expression “free will” it applies to the decision to say “No” to God. I think all people are born with “free will” to sin, or more technically, with a “bondage to the will.” They do it all the time. Those who do it as a lifestyle and who love it, are ultimately children of the devil. That is harsh sounding, I know, but it is what John the apostle says.

I know it is not universally agreed with that there is such a thing as a devil. But John says, as a starting place on this, that there is a **devil**. While those who are truly born again reflect the habit of righteousness, Satan’s children practice sin. **from the beginning**. Since Satan was originally created as perfect and only later rebelled against God (Is. 14:12–14 ; Ezek. 24:12–17), John probably means the moment of his rebellion against God, the beginning of his rebellious career. He is after one thing—your painful, hopeless, irreversible and total destruction. The devil is still operating, but he has been defeated and in Christ we escape his tyranny. The day will come when all of Satan’s activity will cease in the universe and he will be sent to hell forever (Rev. 20:10). **works of the devil**. This summarizes a variety of the devil’s activities: sin, rebellion, temptation, ruling the world, persecution and accusation of saints, instigation of false teachers, power of death (e.g., Luke 8:12 ; John 8:44 ; Acts 5:3 ; 1 Cor. 7:5 ; 2 Cor. 4:4 ; Eph. 6:11 , 12 ; 1 Thess. 2:18 ; Heb. 2:14 ; Rev. 12:10).²

The first reason Jesus Christ came to the planet was to **take away sins**. The other reason, tied to the first, was to **destroy** or **put an end** to the things the devil is doing. One commentary notes that even the smallest sins run counter to the work of Christ and reminds us that we should have nothing to do of Satan’s devices. We tend to think that if we avoid the really big sins, we’ll be alright. The little ones, who notices? And sometimes we can even be fooled into thinking

that to sin a little sin is actually OK if it nets a good result elsewhere... But John says that ***the one who practices righteousness is righteous.*** The tone is, “Period.”

I have entitled this message *The Dark Side of the Force* because I think that the dark things in this world can LOOK LIKE light things. We are not battling a two-sided energy field, with two diametrically opposed and impersonal aspects: light and anti-light. We are battling the devil and his program. I am sorry. He is not fun to think about and some find the concept so contemptible that they actually would rather believe that he doesn't even exist—just as he hopes!

Peter wrote this: 1 Peter 5:8-10 (NASB) ***8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. 10 And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.***

James 4:7 ***Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.***

Understand these things about Satan:

- He is a real being
- He is a personal being
- He has plans, strategies, goals and targets
- He is completely devoid of good or love or benevolence
- He has troops and followers
- He is completely defeated already by Jesus Christ
- He will flee from the strong and faith-driven Christian and fellowships of Christians

1st John 3:9 is an interesting verse and way of wording things, ***No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.*** For the apostle John, there is something basic and almost “biological” in a real Christian—a birthmark almost. When we are born again our whole identity is changed. We change spiritual families. We are given a basic loyalty to Christ. We may still sin but we do not really *want* to sin. Our affections are changed. Now I care about Him who bore MY sins on the tree. Now meeting and “seeing” Jesus has become the most important thing in my life. This somehow, in John's mind, burns out the passion to keep on sinning in whatever temptations I face.

I ask you, can you feel these words that John has written? He has drawn a line in the sand and said being devoted to sin “i.d.’s” you as a child of Satan. No

matter how nicely you may speak or how respectfully you may engineer your appearance, if you do not practice righteousness you are not of God. More, John says the distinctions are **obvious**. It isn't anything to even argue or debate about. Doing is the test of being.

You and I need to examine our lives. We need to do this often and with a brutally honest eye to see how we really are. Where are your deepest affections and loyalties? What is most important to you and in any given day or week where have most of your choices been? To **practice righteousness** or to say to the Ten Commandments, "No." For John, any lifestyle behavior or choice which is not according to righteousness ultimately serves the purposes of Satan.

And John seems to focus on one basic aspect of Law—whether we love each other or not. That seems to be the "litmus test" for him. The Christian Church should be the most loving organization on earth because it is NOT just an organization, it is a family. It is a bunch of people, it almost looks randomly thrown together, who all share the same seed of regeneration. They come together because they have met, trusted and been infused with Jesus Christ. Everyone around is not in that family. Do not be surprised if many people are not interested in following Christ. There are many children of Satan—whether they acknowledge that or even fully realize it or not.

Isn't it wonderful to know that Christ is the king and He has already defeated the enemy? He did all the work. He came, He lived and collected His disciples. He ministered for that brief three years or so and then died and rose. They He was around for a little while and then ascended back to heaven, thus ushering in the time of His People. It is the time of His People until He comes again, which may be soon. The Dark Side of the Force, so to speak, will be fried when His blazing holiness illumines it. There will be little debate, even with all the armies of Satan arrayed against Him. It will be over in a minute! I hope you are one of the children of God and that you know it. It can happen, if it has not yet for you, in a moment. You simply turn to Him and agree with Him that you need Him. You ask Him with open heart and with believing mind, to come into your life and become YOUR Savior and Lord. And He will, dear ones, He will!

Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 13)
Scripture: I John 3:11-17
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: Aug 3rd, 2003

Love and Hate

1 John 3:11-24 (NASB)

¹¹ For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; ¹² not as Cain, *who* was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous. ¹³ Do not marvel, brethren, if the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. ¹⁵ Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. ¹⁶ We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. ¹⁹ We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him, ²⁰ in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²² and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. ²³ And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. ²⁴ And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

Introduction These days it is kind of popular to accuse Christians of being less than loving, even hateful because we disapprove of certain *en vogue* lifestyles. And I don't know, maybe we come across harshly sometimes. But if it is true that we do, or can, become hateful of people, it should not be. On the other hand I cannot remember the last time any Christian I know confessed to hating someone. It seems more like WE are the ones that get hated more than we actually hate... The subject of "love and hate" gets me thinking because Christians themselves have been loved so excellently by the Lord, and have been grafted into His people completely by God's grace, and of ALL people know that we do not deserve any kindness from God, we ought to be the most loving people on the planet, don't you think? The man who has been pulled from the sea from a sinking ship is very grateful for the rescue!

But before we get too mushy here (and indeed the passage before us has lots of love-talk in it) we need to see the specific kind of love that is being talked about by the apostle John. For he does say in 1st John 3: 11 that ***this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.*** But notice please—and this is important—who the “we” is that John has in mind... Before he said, (1 John 2:7) Beloved, ***I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have***

heard. It has always been “God’s #1 Rule” for His people—they are to be governed by love. They are to seek to *learn* how to love (for it is an ongoing learning process). They are to subordinate other priorities to the principle of placing other people in front and watching out for their best interests. They are to practice love by **Be[ing] devoted to one another in brotherly love, giving preference to one another in honor** (Romans 12: 10). Love was supposed to characterize Israel in the Old Testament and the church in the New Testament and that does not change. But the “we” of verse 11 limits the focus a little.

Most importantly ancient and timeless, is that WE should love one another. Christians, between themselves, should really insist on love. Now, that is a tall order. I would rather insist on my own preferences and needs being met, and not get too energized about meeting OTHER people’s needs... But John says we are not to be like ancient Cain. The account of Cain and Able is found in Genesis 4:3-8.

So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. ⁴ And Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; ⁵ but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. ⁶ Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? ⁷ “If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.” ⁸ And Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

Now Cain was a God-worshipper and he did bring a sacrifice. We can perhaps say that in and of itself, it had a kind of intentionality and sincerity. But his murderous actions revealed that inwardly he was actually a child of the Devil (like what Jesus talked about in John 8:44). Cain’s offering was not acceptable because he was sinful and jealousy was behind his hate and murder, as in the case of the religious leaders who had Christ executed.² And again in verse 12 of 1 John 3, he matches up the devil and evil and the works that Cain did as also being evil. Simple, right?

Then he tells his readers to not be surprised ***if the world hates you.*** Hatred among believers is abnormal. But out there in the world, that is the domain of Satan and he loves to breed anger, wrath, malice, slander and abusive speech and lying (Col. 3:8,9) and bitterness and clamor too are mentioned in Eph. 4:31.

By the way, when I think of how we sometimes revel in *tales* of anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive speech, lying and bitterness, I wonder if we really think those things are marks of hatred and the devil? We seem to enjoy movies and books and stage productions and songs which promote these things, as long as they are accompanied by good music, good acting or as long as they meet a just conclusion at the end of the song, story, film...

But once again, John is really focusing on that special mutant pathology, when Christians slip into hatred of one another. This, he says, ought to be avoided, targeted when it starts, confronted, trained against, and completely disallowed in the Christian assembly.

To some of us, I need to give encouragement not to get too discouraged if you find yourself out of step with the world. To young people, if you find that you are somehow shunned, even in little subtle ways, because you do not particularly want to wear the badges of anger and resentment and slow-burn cynicism, that is OK! Have courage. If you are a Christian teen or college-age person who really WANTS to look like Jesus, then do not be too surprised if you find yourself on the receiving end of “you’re not cool”-looks or even criticism. If you do not endorse abortion, because it is the ultimate selfishness and opposite of love, and other people think you’re out of step, so what? Where’s the big surprise? Older people—do not be surprised if someone criticizes or ostracizes you a little because you choose to sacrifice a little, out of love, for your brothers and sisters in Christ. They will never understand. And that is what John wants his readers to know (and he calls them **brothers** only here (vs.13) in 1st John.

Two things seem to happen to a new Christian, and they are in vs. 14.

1. He passes out of death into life, and
2. He starts to really love the brethren.

Becoming a Christian is a resurrection from death to life, and a turning of hate to love (cf. Gal. 5:6,22). A lack of love indicates that one is spiritually dead. Love is the sure test of whether someone has experienced the new birth or is still in the darkness of spiritual death (2:9,11). **abides in death**. Someone who is characterized by hate has never experienced the new birth.²

I do not know where the love-hate line is with you these days, nor with whom you are dealing with it. If you just love everybody in the body of Christ and you have had no run-ins, no misunderstandings, have never suffered any gossip or DONE any gossip, have no jealousy over someone’s gifts or the recognition they get in the church, never say an unkind word or cut someone off, have never schemed to get yourself in front in line or plotted to get the best seats, or withheld kindness or worse, basic needs from someone when it was in your power to help them, I commend you and very much want to hang out with you. You are a model of what John said we are supposed to be—full of love for one another. Perhaps one of our greatest laboratories for this is **in the home**, today. It seems that Christian divorce rates today are little better than non-Christian. If love comes hard for you in the home, dig down deep, pray more fervently and GET some love for your spouse that is supernatural, or for your child or for your parent. For if you are a Christian and he or she is a Christian then they are your brother and sister in Christ too.

In verse 15 we have, ***Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*** If we know this, as a movement, why are there so many church splits? Why is there so much strife between denominations? Why are volumes written about how to guard church identity and sovereignty and independency? No one will *officially* endorse hatred, but why are people of one color excluded from some churches? And why do others nurse a grudge backwards against people Not of Your Color, because of the way your color was treated hundreds of years ago? Sometimes I think so called Christians do more murdering than we realize, even though most of us will never appear before a human judge for that crime.

No, our example is supposed to be Christ who ***laid down His life for us.*** My primary example should be Him, not my ancestors, not even my parents, not my pastor, not my hero whose books I love to read. It is Christ, who because of His sacrifice, I ought to duplicate by laying down our lives for the brethren. Now let me encourage you:

I have no doubt that if “push came to shove” and we fell under significant persecution (as did the early church), or if we started to see some very attractive people start to teach shady stuff in our own church, or if there was some kind of economic disaster and many of our church members started to live on the edge of starvation, that we would lay down our lives for each other. I think in a crisis we would rise to the occasion. Short of those things happening, though, how do we stand in the love department? The logic of verse 17 is really quite inescapable for us... ***But whoever has the world’s goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?***

Let me step aside for a moment and confess to you that sometimes I feel worn out by the constant call on my conscience to love those who are my brothers and sisters in Christ. I do not do this all the time, nor perfectly even when I AM trying. Every day I am held accountable to do and say loving things to my wife, my children, my associates here in DBC and the people I see around the church, at the athletic club I attend, in the car, in line at the store, on-line via e-mail and Internet Messenger, in this pulpit, and more deeply, in my thoughts and private meditations about people. Sometimes it is exhausting. Sometimes you don’t get love in return. But to this weariness with the cause of love I must return to the cross. There, I remember how much I needed His free grace. There I see injustice in its full fury. There, I remember His gaze upon Peter who betrayed Him three times in one night. There, I am reminded that without the personal and patient love of Jesus Christ I would go to hell with no hope. It rejuvenates my willingness to love the people around me. It refuels my determination to forgive, laugh things off, to let things go, and to move on. The cross and my recalibration to it, making me more loving, is my real “I.D. card” as a Christian!

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 14)
Scripture: I John 3:17-24
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: August 10th, 2003

Commands to the Christian

1 John 3:17-24 (NASB)

¹⁷ But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. ¹⁹ We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him, ²⁰ in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²² and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. ²³ And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. ²⁴ And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

Introduction Do you look at the life of a Christian as a life of rules? Many times I have told you that it is *more than* a life of rules and obligations. We have tried to have our church be a laboratory of grace and not legalism. But it's easy to fall out of balance on this one way or the other, though we have tried to feature grace and we have given great effort to exploring how the grace-life makes us more like Jesus Christ—mainly because many of us were in one way or another raised in some kind of religiously legalistic atmosphere. So, we have “majored” in grace. But there IS a side of the Christian life that involves rules—biblical rules; rules that come to bear on our lives each day and which give us real guidance when we face decisions. Do you know the rules of the Christian life?

It is sometimes said that the game of football can be reduced to five fundamentals...blocking, tackling, running, throwing and kicking. You can make football a lot more complicated but in the end, it is really those five fundamental skills that need to be mastered...

In the passage in front of us, there is sort of “a fundamentals of the Christian life” formula for Christians to commit to memory and live by. I have gathered them together in five fundamental rules which John wrote down for his readers to follow... These really are rules, or perhaps better—*principles* by which

to live. They are certainly not the only rules by which we should make daily decisions, but they are five important ones and and they are not hard to remember. They are fundamental to living for Christ.

Learn the logic of real help (I John 3:17,18)

¹⁷ But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

Well, one can hardly look at this verse without at least reviewing the previous one... **And we know love by this that He laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.** Laying down our lives for one another in the body of Christ translates into the practical, real-life task of giving basic life needs to each other. Now what are **the world's goods?** It means basic life-needs: food, shelter, clothing, useful tools and health care. It does not mean cable-TV, cigarettes or concert tickets. Now, we do this in corporate ways here in our church—our Diaconate Fund, the food pantry, the Salvation Army feeding ministry, and so forth. But John is saying it to us individually, that there is a logic for a Christian to love when he sees a need *individually* to meet it on the spot. If you have **the world's goods**, see someone who has a need and say to yourself, “No,” I’m going to keep what I have for myself, John says where is the love? You might slap them on the back, give them a hug, say something “brotherly” to them but if you let them go away empty handed (and we’re talking about needs here), how is that a help? There is a logic to really helping people! It is this:

If A = you see a need
 B = you can meet it

Then A + B = C where C = give them some of what you have.

That is a command for all Christians. It is a RULE, if you will, for the authentic Christian life. The *exact opposite* of sacrificial love for your fellow Christians, which is the prime demonstration that Christ is in you, is to have no compassion and to turn a deaf ear to your brother or sister if they have a need and you can meet it, and you choose not to. In vs. 18 he drives the point home: **Little children let us not love with word or with tongue but in deed and truth** (or, we could say **truly** or **sincerely**.) So one command for Christians is to learn the logic of giving real help—not just nice talk--when it is needed by your brother or sister in Christ. Remember: NOT loving and having inter-Body love is the only specific moral fault John ever charges the secessionist opponents with in the entire letter!² Of all scenarios you face, this is most incumbent on you in the home. If you see that your *spouse* needs something, and you can give it, you

must do so. You must not withhold from them. Not if you want to be abiding in Christ.

Live with a clear conscience (I John 3:19,20)

¹⁹ We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him, ²⁰ in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.

A second rule for authentic Christian living is to live with a clear conscience. Sometimes I speak with believers who doubt whether they really *are* believers. They say, “I’m not sure if I am really a Christian. I go to church, I do the Lord’s Supper, I was baptized but I am not sure if I am saved.” John says our **hearts are assured** and **we know we’re of the truth** if we practice love for our brothers and sisters. In other words, “conduct is the clue to paternity.”² Sometimes our own consciences condemn us and we get the “guilts.” We might even doubt whether the work of Christ on the cross was really *enough* to stave off those guilts. But in vs.20 we get encouragement because God is greater than our heart—our conscience—and we position ourselves in HIS love and grace not in the doing of good works. We know we could *never* do enough good works, even loving our brethren, to earn His love. He knows your heart, my friends, and He knows when you are doing your best to be loving and sacrificial. It may not always be everything the other guy WANTS from you, but the Lord knows our hearts. When we feel conviction, we need to learn compassion for each other. But when we are trying, and prayerfully asking the Lord to MAKE us more and more compassionate, the Lord knows our heart.

Let the Lord bless you (I John 3:21,22)

²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²² and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

There are some days when we really ARE walking with the Lord. Have you had one of those days lately? I hope so. I hope you had a day or two or three this week when you kept “His commandments and did things that were pleasing in His sight.” And when we have good days we can sit back and relax in a peaceful confidence that we can let the Lord bless us. He wants to bless us, not, I do not think, in the prosperity gospel way of claiming wealth and health, but in the sense of knowing that if I ask things from Him that I KNOW are His will, I will be given them! In fact, it is a Rule of the Christian Life to dwell and abide in such a state. Or another way to put this is to say, we are intended and supposed to “dwell in the beauty of holiness.” That is a good state to enjoy and to be in. He wants to bless us and if we are walking with Him, He WILL bless us. I think He waits for us to ask things from Him, not carnal or anxiety-driven cravings, but the good things that He has already promised to give us. I don’t know where we got the false idea that it is somehow spiritual to only pray for

other people. I have heard Christians, more than once, say, “Well, when I pray, I only ask God to give things to other people, I never ask for anything for myself,” as though that is somehow holy. The key is asking the Lord to give you things that are in His will. What might THAT be? Consider first, Jesus’ words:

Matthew 7:7-12 (NASB)

⁷“ Ask , and it shall be given to you; seek , and you shall find ; knock , and it shall be opened to you. ⁸“For everyone who asks receives , and he who seeks finds , and to him who knocks it shall be opened . ⁹“ Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf , will give him a stone ? ¹⁰“ Or if he shall ask for a fish , he will not give him a snake , will he? ¹¹“ If you then , being evil , know how to give good gifts to your children , how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! ¹²“ Therefore , however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets .

Luke 11:5-13

⁵ And He said to them, “ Suppose one of you shall have a friend , and shall go to him at midnight , and say to him, ‘ Friend , lend me three loaves ; ⁶ for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey , and I have nothing to set before him’; ⁷ and from inside he shall answer and say, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed ; I cannot get up and give you *anything* .’ ⁸“I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him *anything* because he is his friend , yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs . ⁹“And I say to you, ask , and it shall be given to you; seek , and you shall find ; knock , and it shall be opened to you. ¹⁰“For everyone who asks , receives ; and he who seeks , finds ; and to him who knocks , it shall be opened . ¹¹“ Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish ; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish , will he? ¹²“ Or *if* he is asked for an egg , he will not give him a scorpion , will he? ¹³“ If you then , being evil , know how to give good gifts to your children , how much more shall *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”

Concerning specific promises that He has given to us that we can claim, there are many. They fall in the area of the fruits of the Spirit, opportunity to be used of Him, a sense of His love for you, daily “bread,” renewal and forgiveness, and so forth. They are not trivial provisions. They are the things we need to live in His will.

Love one another, while clinging to Christ (I John 3:23)

²³ And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.

Another “rule” is simply to love one another while clinging to Jesus on a daily basis. One could say the Christian life is that simple, and that complicated and it will occupy your efforts and your labor for the rest of your life to do that. But don’t do one without the other! You must love those around you, your spouse, your children, your fellow church members. And at the same time—and you will need this to KEEP loving those people—you believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ. Saying, “I believe in God” isn’t quite enough, for John. It is the very name of Jesus Christ which we cling to until we breathe our last and in the hard times of loving the people around us.

If I may comment on this society and town we are living in one more time as regards the family. Everything is working, it seems to me, to get us to be self-focused and to give up on loving when it gets difficult. We are abandonment-crazy. We give up on each other way too easily. Our loyalties need to be energized by the Spirit of God and that means to stand by each other. That is where love really deepens and authenticates that we know Jesus Christ. He never tells us to abandon people and leave them alone. He always strengthens His people to be faithful.

Locate yourself in His will (I John 3:24)

²⁴ And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

Finally, a fifth “rule” for authentic Christian living is to locate yourself in His will. If we live by the ways to live that Jesus taught, we locate ourselves close to Him. If we make our choices according to what we know to be right, John says we have this deep confidence that He is close at hand.

Dear ones, if Jesus is close at hand, what can hurt you? Do you think Jesus will let you perish by doing His will? Do you think He will take a vacation and go to some other galaxy leaving you alone, while you’re trying to live by His word? He will not. ***By the Spirit whom He has given us*** we know that He abides in us. Scoffers say to us, “No He doesn’t...” You just THINK he does. But the Bible tells us that by fostering a close walk with Christ through the Spirit we sense His closeness. Can there be anything better, more precious, more valuable, more cool than that? I pray we all get a thirst for His presence. And therefore, in order to facilitate His presence, I pray we all deepen our commitment to keep His commandments. This is not legalism. This is how to live happily and authentically as a genuine follower of Jesus Christ.

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 15)
Scripture: I John 4:1-6
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: September 7th, 2003

Not Believing Every Spirit

1 John 4:1-6 (NASB)

¹ BELOVED, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. ⁴ You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Introduction For something like 20 years or so I have been interested in an area of thinking called “epistemology.” Epistemology is the area of philosophy that studies the basis of experience, belief and knowledge. It asks the question, “What do we know and how do we KNOW it.”

- 1) Most often, when I have given thought to this area it has been in thinking through the claims of our charismatic Christian brethren who have challenged my thinking greatly in the area of epistemology. They say, “We KNOW that the charismatic sign gifts are authentic and true, because we see them happening.” The basis of *knowing* that they are true isn’t usually validated by real clear and solid Bible study; it is usually validated by saying, “We know it is true because we experience it.” That is, in essence, an *epistemological* decision. It is a decision about truth based on some kind of observation.
- 2) Another example of an “epistemological decision” would be determining whether “you’ve found the right one” or not... Young people often ask, “How do I know if I’ve found the right person to covenant with for the remainder of my life?” They are asking how do you KNOW? How do you decide, epistemologically, what is right?

But more basic for Christians than issues of sign gifts with charismatic brothers or sisters, or knowing who the right mate should be, is the thing that the apostle John says in verse 6 of his first epistle: ***By this we know the spirit of truth and error...*** Key words: ***WE KNOW...*** He says that by applying certain tests, we can know the difference between truth and error, specifically the truth or error of what our faith is all about and what Jesus Christ is all about. By

WHAT do we know this? That is our message for today. DO not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit, but test them.

The outline of our section basically looks like this:

- 1 There are many spiritual influences at work (1 John 4:1).
- 2 The test of spirits lies in the witness to the incarnation (vv. 2, 3).
- 3 The test of men lies in the recognition of the Truth (vv. 4-6).

Now, how important is this? How important is it to really be a discerning person about real Christianity and false Christianity? Is it all that important? Does it really rank high on my “Chart of Things to Know”, to be good at distinguishing phony Christianity and authentic, genuine Christianity? Is thinking about our faith all that important, or is just *feeling* right about a thing the important thing?

During my first summer as a Christian (1972) I went to a coffee house that was run by a guy I only knew as “Brother Charlie.” This was a real popular coffee house and it was twenty miles away from where I lived. The music was good, the community between attendees was real warm and Brother Charlie could really *teach*. I felt right about it. But I was not equipped yet to think through all the things Brother Charlie taught. And when he started teaching some weird things, I was fortunate to have a couple of friends a little older in the faith than I was and their eyebrows starting rising on Saturday nights. Soon, we were no longer heading over to hear Brother Charlie. His teachings about Jesus were strange. He said Jesus was talking to him and revealing things that, well, just didn’t match up too well with the Bible. And I was having my first experience with “the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

Now our passage really begins with verse 1 of 1st John 4:

¹ BELOVED, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Again now for the third time in this letter (he says it 7 times overall) he calls them **beloved**. When he thinks of the folks he was writing to, he feels love. He also repeatedly calls them **little children** or **children**. He really feels deeply about whom he is writing to. Repeatedly coming back to the commitment of love Christians should have, is a healthy thing. You and I NEED to be reminded to treat each other lovingly, even in how we address each other. I know a preacher in Virginia who often addresses his congregation as beloved. J. Vernon McGee used to do that too, in his radio broadcasts. It may sound strange to us but there is something warm in it. It is good to tell people that you love them. And those who are most important to you, probably enjoy hearing it often.

Now he says, **do not believe every spirit**. There are lots of voices in the world around us and even in the religious world. There are philosophies, political rhetoric, propaganda, cheerleading, sales pitches and...theologies.

Theologies are viewpoints about how God is and how He works. John calls them **spirits** and that is interesting. One could say that behind every human theology or philosophy there is a spiritual presence, maybe even spiritual personalities at work. In Adolph Hitler and in Joseph Stalin and with Mao Tse Tung there was powerful political rhetoric with each. Do you think there was any spiritual activity going on in the background? Undoubtedly there was. I am sure they were each influenced by spiritual forces if not outright possessed by demons. When entertainers wander over into the spiritual world and make statements about the after-life or about morality or about reaching into the spirit world, do you think they are saying what they say independent from spiritual influence? They are not. John wrote that Christians should test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. We are not to believe every teacher just because they seem believable. We are to be smarter than that, if I may say, in our epistemology.

All theology and all philosophy ultimately has been influenced from some source, either from Satan or from the Lord, ultimately. Some will say, “I am not religious and I form all my philosophy and thinking rationally and apart from spiritual influence. That IN ITSELF is a theological decision—deity-free thinking IS a distinct form of atheism.

In John’s day, he was gravely concerned about certain **spirits** who were leading some of the early Christians astray. They were the teachers, false prophets, who would shortly after John’s day come to be known as the Gnostics. The Gnostics taught among other things, that the world of matter is essentially bad and evil and the spiritual realm is inherently good. They said that the purpose of life is to learn how to rise above the evil of our bodies and release the good spirit from it, and to achieve a form of nirvana or heaven or spiritual perfection. Are there false prophets today, or is that an archaic thing in this world of enlightenment and rational thinking? You bet there are! There are probably more now than there have ever been. I would say that the nearest thing to Gnosticism today is Christian Science, which is almost pure Gnosticism.² By their thinking since anything which is *composed* of matter is inherently evil, then how could Jesus could not have really been human? His appearance AS a man must have been illusory or like a phantom. They might say “Christ is the ideal truth,” or “Jesus is the name of the man who more than all other men has presented Christ, the true idea of God,” or that “Jesus is the human man and Christ is the divine idea.”² None of these are true but people back in the first century and today as well listened to those pre-Gnostic teachers and many false prophets today and say, “Hey, it sounds good.” We know we struggle in this material world and it would be nice to just dismiss it all as evil. And when we fall into physical sin, we can just wave it off as, “part of this world.” John says now what he says in verse 2 **By this you know the Spirit of God:**

every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; It is basic to Christianity to understand and believe that Jesus was a man. He was God too but He also was a man. He came in the flesh. He was like you and I in every respect except sin. He was 100% human and any teaching or teacher who lessens that, even a little, is a heretic. And John says this is one of the criteria for BEING a Christian (***we know the Spirit of God***) or, identifying the Spirit in another person. The Spirit of God within a person, testifies that Jesus really came as a person. So fundamentally, the starting place to understand whether a teacher or an organization is “Christian” or not is to ask them to tell you “who is Jesus?” If they “punt” on the humanity of Christ, it is not Christian. Now where I find this important is in the area of friendships and relationships. Most of the people we get close to, would hold to the truth of this without question. But it is easy to become close to people for other reasons and motivations without discrimination to their basic beliefs about Jesus Christ. But this is very important and it is foundational to whether someone is even close to being a Christian. John goes further (verse 3):

and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

Denying Jesus Christ can only be sourced in one place—“antiChrist,” which should really be read more logically than with a spooky feeling. If you are not for Him you are against Him. Anti-Christ. That is because He was who He said He was and who He was, was none other than God’s only begotten Son.

I was greatly encouraged this past Friday evening as Dr. James Dobson was interviewed again by Larry King on national television. Millions of people were watching I am sure. At one point a caller asked Dobson if he agreed with a well-known Baptist preacher who said a few years ago that God does not hear the prayers of the Jews. Dobson said he didn’t think that was the best way to talk about how God hears prayer, but then Larry King said to Dobson, “But there *are* some fundamentalist preachers who say that if you do not believe in Jesus you can’t go to heaven.” Dobson replied, “I am one of those because I only have the Scripture to go by in knowing what we know.” (That’s epistemology, by the way). The all sufficiency of Christ starting with His absolute humanity and ending with His atoning death on the cross and resurrection, make Him the only eligible and qualified savior for the world. This is deep within John’s heart, and, I am always warmed and encouraged to see, still deep within Dobson’s heart! We proclaim what we proclaim. Some will believe it and some will not.

It’s interesting that verse 3 ends with the fact that the spirit of antichrist was ***already in the world*** in his day. The church age was barely off the runway and already Satan was hard at work undermining true Christology (the doctrine of Christ.) John already said this and Paul had indicated it too:

1 John 2:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-7 (NASB)

³ Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. ⁵ Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? ⁶ And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.

In verse 4 he encouraged them (calling them **little children** again) and announces that their victory has already been accomplished (**You are from God...and have overcome them**). Why? Why can we feel like we've already won the match and we're in the clubhouse? Because **greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world**. That is a great verse to memorize! Satan, in the world all around us, sniping, setting little brush fires, confusing, distracting, frustrating, is only so great. But he is not INSIDE of us as Christ, through His Spirit is inside of all genuine Christians. This verse is one of the reasons I do not believe a true Christian can be demon possessed, by the way. Satan is in the world. The Spirit is IN YOU. Greater is the Spirit than Satan. Satan is not going to barge into a house where the Lord Jesus is standing! And that is why we've already won this whole conflict with false teaching.

It is heart-breaking when people we care about are deluded by some cool teacher or cool movement. It's even of grave concern to us just to see the great successes of some cults and weird anti-Christian movements. People will and have listened to them, as John indicates in verse 5. That's what **the** world is all about. Shouldn't surprise us. It has all been foreseen and was even starting to unfold in John's own day.

But we always rejoice when people cling to the true teachings about Christ and what He accomplished for us! And as John wrote (verse 6), folks who listen to the apostles' teaching and embrace it as it, know the Lord. By that we discern the **spirit of truth and error**. We KNOW what is right and what is not right. Did the apostles' teach it? It's reliable. Did they NOT teach it? You had better steer clear or look at it very, very carefully. In the history of the church, apostolic doctrine has always been the means by which **the Holy Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood** can be effectively distinguished. True Christianity is apostolic Christianity.² May the Lord Jesus give us strong wisdom in every area of theology and deciding what we say we know to be true...

²Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (c.1985). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 16)
Scripture: I John 4:7-11
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: September 14th, 2003

What We Cannot Hear Too Much

Introduction TV shows about love: “I Love Lucy,” “Love, American Style,” “For Love or Money,” “Looking for Love,” “Cooking for Love,” “Loving Spoonfuls,” “Love Cruise,” “Love Handles,” “The Love Letter,” “Bullets, Love and Beer,” “Everybody Loves Raymond,” “Joanie Loves Chachi,” and “The Love Boat: The Next Wave.” But one of the most absurd television shows of all time had to have been “Love Boat.” As the Captain and the tour guide and the bartender and the ship’s physician weaved in and out of all these people’s lives on the Love Boat, people fell in love, fell out of love, fell into love again, visited tropical paradises, fell in love (did I say that?), and then got off the boat with the crew waving to them from the deck.

One of the most overused words today is “love.” We hear it all the time. From just about every other song on the radio to advertising campaigns all the time, to television shows and movies to the enormous greeting card industry. Politicians and news media gurus say over and over that our social problems can be solved because “all we need is love.” For all the talk you might think we have this down. Especially Christians. But in fact, I think we really *do* have this down if you compare us to the world around us. I am very bullish on the body of Christ and I think we understand more about love than anyone else does. Christians know the love that God has for the world and for us.

In where we are in **1st John** the context has been the differences between real Christians and false Christians. There was an environment of confusion. Convincing new teachers were carrying off whole Christian assemblies by deceiving them about who Jesus Christ was, and what it took to really be His disciple. And assemblies which stayed true to the basic things the apostles taught felt under siege. So He tells them in this letter that there are really two basic issues to test to see if a group is genuinely Christian: 1) How do they teach about Jesus Himself? 2) Do they practice real love between themselves, as Jesus taught?

On this second point, do you think we can hear too much about love? Do you get tired of the constant expectation that you place other people's best interests before your own? Do you get confused about what love *even* IS by the many voices out there telling you that love is this and that, none of which you suspect is really of the Lord?

Boy says to girl (or vice versa): "If you love me, you'll let me." Or he says, "I love you," and then he leaves her. She tells her friend or parent, in tears, "but he said he loved me..."

- Husbands: do you tire of being told to love your wives as Christ loved the church?
- Wives: Do you tire of being told that you should love your husband with a selfless kind of devotion?
- Singles: Do you get all used up by the demands your friends or family place on you?
- Parents: Do you weary of being told to continue in patience with your kid or grandkid?
- Kids: Do you get tired of obeying your parents because you know that is love?
- Church members: Don't you just wish you could really say, just for once, what you feel about someone without feeling guilty?

In 1st John 4:7 we read, ***Beloved, let us love one another...*** In the original text it's kind of neat—just three words: αγαπητοι, αγαπωμεν αλληλους ***agapetoi agapomen allelous***. It is the almost *sighing* plea of the old apostle. From the day that he first saw Jesus in Galilee to this day as an old man, he has known that the Christian life is driven by a continual stream of decisions to love. "Let us love one another." We're dealing with heretics. Let us love one another. We're battling a world that hates us, let us love one another. We're not fighting against enemies of flesh and blood but against spirits in high places, let us love one another. Loving one another is the solution to help us deal with a great host of problems. You can never go wrong by making a decision born out of godly love. It is the seminal theme in our whole faith, the core program.

For love is from God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. But I think there's great confusion, in part by overuse of the word, about what love IS. And about what a truly loving decision might be? I really do think we are more controlled by the guilts sometimes, than by genuine love. It would be good to review what Paul says about love...1 Corinthians 13:4-13 (NASB)
⁴Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, ⁵does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, ⁶does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. ⁹For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; ¹⁰but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. ¹¹When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. ¹²For now we see in a

mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known. ¹³ *But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

In that description, with which I am sure the apostle John would concur, there are a lot of “the other person,” and very little about love *feelings*. Love is more the decision that you make, and who benefits from it, and whose interests it serves, than it is about feeling a certain way. It is a lifestyle of giving and sacrificing and placing someone else in front of you.

I don't know why I Cor.13 gets all the attention because Paul also wrote to the Romans (12:9-21)

⁹ *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.* ¹⁰ *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;* ¹¹ *not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;* ¹² *rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,* ¹³ *contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.* ¹⁴ *Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not.* ¹⁵ *Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.* ¹⁶ *Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.* ¹⁷ *Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.* ¹⁸ *If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.* ¹⁹ *Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord.* ²⁰ *“BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS UPON HIS HEAD.”* ²¹ *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

John said, **let us love ONE ANOTHER**. There is a two-way street here, between Christians. The practice of watching out for one another's best interests and making personal choices toward that end, is supposed to work both directions. **ONE ANOTHER** means mutually; *both directions*. In the body of Christ you get loved and you love. You make choices that help other people out, and you receive similar choices, maybe at other times, which help YOU out. Now that IS going on in the body, and that is heart-warming. Especially with a cold world out there. There is an interesting verse, something Jesus said, about the end times. He said that in those times, as false teachers abound that because **lawlessness is increased , most people's love will grow cold** (Matthew 24:12). Specifically, people's love for God but a logical result of growing cold toward God is growing cold toward people. We must take the fact that the word **love** comes from John's pen 19 times in this chapter alone, as a signal that we can never hear this command too often. It is too easy to grow cold. We need to practice the work of love together. That means we forgive. It means we do not abandon each other. It means we factor in OFTEN that we are just as susceptible to sin and sliding as the next person. It means we practice loyalty to each other even if we are inconvenienced a little.

In verse 8 he says that **the one who does not love does not know God, for God is love**. It's interesting how often the second half of that verse is quoted and how rarely the first half is quoted! The second half of the verse is

interesting enough. It does NOT say that ALL GOD IS, is love. But that His essence is love. He never made a decision, a decree, a plan or a covenant that was inconsistent with His love. Some aspect of His love is always satisfied or fulfilled. But the essential nature of God being love, is prefaced by this other phrase—***the one who does not love does not know God***. Whoa! Those are hard words but they are true words. I have met professing Christians who are so full of theology but seem so devoid of love.

It isn't always easy to love, but my very reputation as a genuine Christian or not depends on whether I am motivated primarily by the love of God. Verse 9 reminds us that WE are the first recipients of God's love—***by this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him***. When God loved, it wasn't just something He said. It was action. He willingly surrendered His only Son—never before and never again separated from Him—to go ***into the world***. There is a whole library of exposition to say about that! The Son became a man, lived as a man, condescended to become such and then unjustly and horribly died as a man. He did that because His Father loved this world, and specifically all of us who embrace it. The love of God is our message! THIS VERSE!

Then we see in verse 10 that there is a certain order to things. It isn't that WE loved Him and then He saved us because we loved Him. I never say to a non-Christian, "If you love God, you will believe in the Gospel." I know they CANNOT believe in the Gospel until a loving God opens their heart and shows them how much He already has loved them. It is the person who SEES how much he has already been loved by God, who then responds by clinging to the cross and is humbled by how much love was already shown!

I am not sure who I love so much that I would dispatch, send, invite a family member to go and step in front of a truck for that person. I'm not sure there is anybody I love that much. I can imagine giving my own life for someone, MAYBE. But I can't imagine dispatching someone I love to become a substitute for perishing, or worse, a substitute for a criminal punishment. That's how the love of God worked though. The Father, looked at us, saw that we would be pronounced utterly guilty and sentenced to a completely JUST judgment of eternal death. And sent His Son to be the substitute. Is there anything like that in any other world religion. A skeptic might add, "IF it is true." Indeed. IF it is true. The person of faith believes it is true, trusts it is true and lives each day DEPENDING on the fact that it is true.

In verse 11 the marvelous logical argument is concluded by John. Since we go around as the beneficiaries of this kind of love—each and every day; it does not fade or become obsolete—how can we NOT love each other with the relatively small sacrifices that that would entail? We can NOT NOT love each other, with the love of God right in front of our faces. So how can we divorce? How can we withhold

kindness? How can we not give the shirt when the jacket is asked for? How can we NOT go a second mile when we're asked to accompany someone for one mile? If we risk all that we have—health, money, state of mind, dwelling, convenience—what have we lost? We have eternal life! We have complete forgiveness of sins because the Father sent the Son for us. We have an incredible future coming up? What matches up against that? Nothing... nothing.

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 17)
Scripture: I John 4:12-14
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: September 21st,2003

More Love Logic

1 John 4:12-21 (NASB)

¹²No one has beheld God at any time; if we *love* one another, God abides in us, and His *love* is perfected in us. ¹³By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. ¹⁴And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son *to be* the Savior of the world. ¹⁵Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶And we have come to know and have believed the *love* which God has for us. God is *love*, and the one who abides in *love* abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷By this, *love* is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in *love*; but perfect *love* casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in *love*. ¹⁹We *love*, because He first *loved* us. ²⁰If someone says, “I *love* God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not *love* his brother whom he has seen, cannot *love* God whom he has not seen. ²¹And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who *loves* God should *love* his brother also.

Introduction Is there anyone in your life that you know because you are a Christian, that you do not like? For a few of us, we just like *everybody* and no one ever really gets on our nerves. But for the rest of us, there’s probably *someone* in the church that if we are honest, we just don’t like. And sometimes we struggle to admit that because we think that loving people means we have to like all of them.

□It happens that I know a lot of pastors around. Most I really love and enjoy but there was this one real prominent one, one time, that I distinctly did NOT like. When we were introduced, I said, “Hello, Jim (not his real name)” and he replied, quite seriously, with, “That would be Dr. Jim.” At that moment I decided that I didn’t like Dr. Jim.

□Years ago, when I first entered the ministry, I was given, by a banker friend, two cars: a ’68 Chevy Biscayne station wagon and a ’69 Pontiac Catalina. I did not actually *need* two cars at that moment and I was going to sell the Pontiac. There was a low-life kind of guy in the church whose name was Grover, and he came up to me and said, “Neil I want to buy the Pontiac from you, but I don’t have the \$500 you want, all at once. Can I pay you \$50/week for ten weeks?” Grudgingly, I said “OK,” and let Grover begin to use the Pontiac. Within three days, he called me and said he had taken it to a friend’s service station “to work on it” and had decided to remove the engine. Left sitting on the pavement, the engine was gone when he came back the next morning. I decided that I didn’t like Grover, either.

In 1st John 4:12-21 the word “love” is used 16 times. It’s a big theme for Christians and there is, in this fourth chapter, a **high logic** for Christians to ponder—John says to his readers and to us, ❶you want to say you’re a follower of Jesus Christ? Show it by believing, and keeping

believing, that Jesus is who He said He was, and ②second, show it by loving your brothers and sisters in Christ more than you love yourselves. It is a screaming logic! There's another way of looking at the logic John is thinking, in verse 12:

¹² No one has beheld God at any time; if we **love** one another, God abides in us, and His **love** is perfected in us.

• The loving God is invisible to us. John has said it before, too

No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. John 1:18

• But He powerfully showed us Himself and His love in Jesus Christ

• Today, He demonstrates it in the world through Christians' love

This is the "love logic" from St. John! It is important because to some extent whether people see the Lord, see evidence of His reality, and are attracted to seek Him, depends on how we treat each other. That is John's burden. Today he is saying to us, no one can actually see God. Yes, there were appearances of the Lord in the Bible but those were veiled appearances. No one really saw God in all His glory, anymore than anyone has ever really seen the sun in all its brilliance. You are separated by 93 million miles of distance, the earth's atmosphere and the limited spectrum of visible light that your eyeball, optic nerve and brain can process. You have never *really* seen the sun. Nor has any person ever really seen God.

No one can actually see God, except in you. That's the way God has ordained that it will be in this era. To the extent that Christians love one another, God will be visible. Sometimes, through believers, He is very visible. At other times you have to wonder, "why do those Christians even *bother* gathering?"

Around 1930 the President of China was considering Christianity and apparently, eventually came to faith in Jesus Christ (just before China was taken over by Mao.) His wife had been a Christian for many years, and while he was searching, the President asked her, "I can't understand these Christians—they have been treated most abominably here; they have been robbed, many of them killed, they have been persecuted fearfully, and yet I never find one of them retaliating, and any time they can do anything for China, for our people, they are ready to do it; [and in the midst, they treat each other so well]; I do not understand them." "Well," said his wife, "that, you see, is the very essence of Christianity. They do that because they are Christians."²

Here's a little rap,
You are writing a Gospel, a chapter a day
By deeds that you do, by words that you say,
Men read what you write, whether faithless or true,
Yo, what is the Gospel, *according to you?*²

John MacArthur puts it this way:

"love is the heart of Christian witness. Nobody can see God loving since His is invisible. Jesus no longer is in the world to manifest the love of God. The only demonstration of God's love in this age is the church."²

Now let's consider some things about love, because I do not think that it's enough to just say "we need to love each other." Why isn't it easy to really love people? It IS easy to love people if they do not inconvenience you, drain you, insult you, abuse you, neglect you, ignore you, misunderstand you, defraud you or hurt you in any way. If a person is always cordial around you, pleasant, nice, gives to you and expects nothing in return, thinks your kid is

wonderful, maintains good boundaries and doesn't press into your space but IS at least semi-interested in you and is careful with how they talk in your presence, how hard is *that* to love them? Not hard at all! Um, but what if they're *not*?

In the body of Christ it isn't always going to be easy to love everybody. Sure, if you just come to church—and if only occasionally—and do not get close at all to anyone, church people will rarely disappoint you. But if you plug into any kind of normal body-life in a church, or in a smaller piece of the body like a fellowship group or a team, you will surely find it a little difficult to love everybody. They *will* disappoint you. Because, they are still sinners, just like you. And that is just how it is, even in the best of churches. So loving each other is not dependent on everyone always being lovable, then, is it? And so, we need to PRACTICE love, deliberately, intentionally. We need to make the decision to love, to not cut others off. Self protection notwithstanding, Jesus said, **Greater love hath no man but that He lay down his life for his friends.** There is risk in loving your brother or sister in Christ. But it is important. God being seen, depends on it in this age in which we live.

I believe it is OK to not like everybody you meet. It is our *reaction* and the decisions we make WHEN we feel dislike someone that is the test. We always need to be kind and patient. We always should choose our words with care and manage our tongue. That applies when you are face to face with the person and when you are speaking to someone else about that person. Your ability to have victory over dislike for someone—their style, background, habits or personal treatment of you—evidences the real presence of the Spirit in your life. That can be a great personal encouragement to you when you see yourself *choosing* to demonstrate the love of Christ.

Now in verse 13:

By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

This is like what John said back in 3:24, **And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.** Abiding in Christ means to walk with Him in obedience to what He has said to do. The Holy Spirit is not given to *some* Christians to provide a side-show for other Christians to watch. He is given to us to confirm in us that Jesus is abiding with us, living inside of us. That is tested any time a sacrifice presents itself to you, on behalf of one of your brothers or sisters in Christ.

Now let me admit to you that I do not like being exploited or taken advantage of any more than anyone else does. And frankly, people—even Christians—will do so sometimes. Any time I am asked to do something by someone and I distrust their motive, it is a hard decision to make. Sometimes I default back to my old nature and self-protection and sometimes, I choose to do what I am asked, open-endedly. Those are not easy decisions, when I distrust the person. But they are decisions which *enhance* my awareness that Christ is in me, because my old nature would just never give in to a situation like that.

We learn over and over and over again, through the daily experiences we have with the living Christ, working inside of us, that **the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world** (verse 14.) John and the other apostles could say they had **beheld Him and bear witness.** We have not seen Him yet, but because He abides with us, and builds this process of love, and learning to love inside of us, that we have beheld Him too. And we bear witness to people that He is real. We have not imagined Him. We have not just bought into some religio-

fantasy. He is real. Some days His presence is so *electric* in our lives we can really relate to what writer Os Guinness tells about a young, searching Christian who exclaimed, "I always knew the Christian faith was true, but I never realized it was *this* true!"²

Let me close by encouraging you with some simple evidences of love, thereby suggesting to us that Jesus is among us.

- 1) When you hold back with sarcasm, and just let the opportunity slide, Jesus is there.
- 2) When one of our adults spends time ministering to one of our young people, with no personal gain or without his or her own kids here, Jesus is there.
- 3) When one of us begins to ponder—secretly at first—if the Lord is extending a call to short-term missionary work—Jesus is there.
- 4) When someone comes by the spruce up the church yard or to pick up garbage or to decorate something in the church, and no one else is here, Jesus is there.
- 5) When someone refuses to gossip or to pass along conjecture about someone else when they don't really know the facts, or even if they DO know the facts and prefers to protect the person's reputation, Jesus is right there.
- 6) When one of us gives a ride to someone who otherwise could not get here, Jesus is there.
- 7) When someone gives an anonymous envelope with money in it, to one of the leaders in the church and asks to have it delivered anonymously to someone in the body less fortunate, Jesus is there.
- 8) When one of us freely offers a skill, that will help another of us, Jesus is there.
- 9) When a person in DBC has received a criticism from someone else, and they do NOT lash back or privately plot a vengeful reaction, Jesus is there.
- 10) When someone offers to teach a Bible class because not only do they love to be up front, but they love to impart the Scriptures to willing hearts and watch what it does for them, Jesus is there!
- 11) When one of us moves over, to let someone sit down, or parks in a less convenient place to allow someone else the better place, Jesus is there.
- 12) When someone listens to a hurting church member, doesn't jump quick to impart wisdom or advice, but just listens, and then *remembers* the thing later and secretly really starts to pray for the hurting brother or sister, my friends, the Lord Jesus Christ is right there in the middle of that person's life. His fingerprints, His voice print, His retinal scan, His profile, His presence is inescapable.

All of these are things I have witnessed here in DBC in the past year. It is these kinds of things which evidence real love, not only the little predictable "official" things that churches are so good at—that mean we have beheld Jesus Christ and bear witness that the Father has indeed sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. There is no doubt about it, from within the vault of our own experiences. We love, because He first loved us.

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 18)
Scripture: I John 4:15ff
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: September 28th, 2003

Lost and Hidden in His Love

1 John 4:15-21 (NASB)

¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God **abides** in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who **abides** in love **abides** in God, and God **abides** in him. ¹⁷ By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. ¹⁹ We love, because He first loved us. ²⁰ If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

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Lost and Hidden in His Love

1 John 4:15-21 (NASB)

¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God **abides** in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who **abides** in love **abides** in God, and God **abides** in him. ¹⁷ By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. ¹⁹ We love, because He first loved us. ²⁰ If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

Introduction We understand the Bible to be the overall written revelation to man, by God, about what is what. The last third of the Bible is the New Testament. Within the NT there are five individual writings by the apostle John. One of those is the first of three letters he wrote, I John. Within that letter, are the two recurring themes, 1) Who Jesus Christ really is, and 2) Who His true followers really are...

Some of the earliest church fathers wrote that the apostle John ended his life in the city of Ephesus and was buried there. A church was built over the spot where it was thought John was buried—as was often done in those days with famous places—and it came to be known as the Basilica of St. John. It's impossible to really know of course if this was the exact spot of John's burial and ultimately it really doesn't matter. John will be resurrected on the last day just as I will be and you will be if you are a Christian. And there is no simpler statement of the Gospel than what John very simply wrote in the fourth chapter of his first letter, and what we call verse 14 where he said ***And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.*** This is the only place in all three of his extant letters where he used the word "savior" (*sotera*, σωτηρα). God the Father, *dispatched* the Son to be the Rescuer of this planet. None other than God the Son Himself could do it. God wanted the planet saved, rescued, a representative portion of all people ever to be salvaged and more—to become the bride of His Son! I THINK THIS IS INCREDIBLY PROFOUND in this increasingly uncertain sure and confused and pluralistic culture that we're living in. There is no more powerful and cutting edge statement to make about life, philosophy and truth than these few words John wrote, from Ephesus, so long ago...

But today, I want to think about how the love of God in Jesus is a refuge and really a hiding place for us. I am calling this message *Lost and Hidden in His Love*. In about 1890 Fanny Crosby wrote a hymn, playing on Exodus 33:22, and applying something Moses experienced with how a Christian feels about Jesus:

- A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord, a wonderful Savior to me;
He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock, where rivers of pleasure I see.
He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock that shadows a dry, thirsty land;
He hideth my life with the depths of His love, and covers me there with His hand,
and covers me there with His hand.
2. A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord, He taketh my burden away; He holdeth me up, and I shall not be moved, He giveth me strength as my day.
 3. With numberless blessings each moment He crowns, and filled with His fullness divine, I sing in my rapture, oh, glory to God for such a Redeemer as mine!
 4. When clothed in His brightness, transported I rise to meet Him in clouds of the sky, His perfect salvation, His wonderful love I'll shout with the millions on high.

The first truth to see today is the intimate *living-with* relationship with God that Christians enjoy by our having decided to believe in Jesus. **4:15 *Whoever***

confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

But notice that merely a silent, acquiescent belief is NOT how he states it—he says whoever **confesses** who Jesus is... That is interesting. It is similar to what he said back in 4:2. **By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.**

MacArthur commented there:

4:2 By this you know the Spirit of God. John gives a measuring stick to determine whether the propagator of the message is a demon spirit or the Holy Spirit. **Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.** This is the first test of a true teacher: they acknowledge and proclaim that Jesus is God incarnate in human flesh. The Gr. construction does not mean that they confess Christ as having come to earth, but that they confess that He came in the flesh to the earth, i.e., his human body was physically real. Both the full humanity and full deity of Jesus must be equally maintained by the teacher who is to be considered genuinely of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit testifies to the true nature of the Son, while Satan and his forces distort and deny that true nature. John accentuates the crucial importance of sound doctrine expressed in God's Word as the only absolute and trustworthy standard (cf. Is. 8:20).²

And **2:23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.**

Now this is hard for us to grasp because *our* Christianity has become so “business-as-usual.” We take it for granted, in our circles at least, that Jesus really did come in the flesh and that He had a real physical body. I can imagine you young people who have grown up with these truths week in and week out your whole lives... But this truth is very important. It is the gateway to having God *abide* in us and us in Him. It isn't enough to just be a mystically-minded person, or to look up and acknowledge there is more out there than just us advanced primates! It isn't enough even to simply acknowledge that there are, or might be deities out there. It isn't even enough to acknowledge that there is only one God. No, the old apostle said that **Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.**

His abiding presence is something I fear we take for granted too, just as Israel had come to do around the Temple. You really see this in the last book of the Bible, Malachi. God says (in essence), “You're going about the business of worship routinely never seeing that your hearts have grown cold.” His presence is something we *sing* about all the time and it seems to me that about every other generation lags into complacency about it, and then they lose it somehow, and then the next generation revives and gets it back. Around us though, a great many other people who have no or little confidence at all about God's love. Even in some so-called Christian churches I think many church-goers live with a great feeling of *tentativeness* about God's love. And I have a great fear about the minimalizing of differences that happens today, by evangelical people, and get involved with people in relationships that do not breed confidence in Christ. We

hook up in intimate partnerships, we make a great contribution of our time to other people because we think we need them, and yet they do NOT abide in Christ. They might abide in tradition. They might abide in integrity but those are not qualities that John says breeds intimacy with God. It is only through a clear focus on the all-sufficiency of the person and work of Jesus Christ that an abiding relationship with God comes.

But the person who really focuses well on Christ and Christ alone has a sense of His love to flee into and to take refuge in. We can sing an old hymn like Fanny Crosby's song or a new chorus like so many that we sing, and really sense that we can be hidden and lost in His love. But the world has no such confidence, or often even any interest.

But let me ask you: did you ever verbally state that this is what you believe? The word **confess**², in that day, meant more than just nodding when a membership class was through. It often had an *emphatic* flavor, also meaning to declare or to pledge allegiance to something. This is the original reason behind why some churches recite a creed each week right in their service. For instance, the one most commonly recited is probably the very old Apostle's Creed (the earliest version goes back to the second century), MOST OF WHICH IS ABOUT JESUS CHRIST:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
the Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:

**Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell.**

The third day He arose again from the dead.

**He ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,
whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.**

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy *catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.

Probably the classic cross-reference for this would be Romans 10:9,10 where Paul wrote, ***that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.***

So what do we do with this, other than to know that a real Christian is clear about who Jesus is? We need to be ready to confess, to tell people, to stand up for the full humanity of Jesus Christ. That is the first evidence that you are *abiding in Christ*. Opportunities might come up for that more often than you think. People are talking spiritual things these days more and more. The subject of Jesus is coming up more and more. In the Spring when Mel Gibson's film *The Passion* is released, I suspect the idea of who Jesus really was will be much on people's minds. The people that we support, going to the mission field, confront this matter on a daily basis! Religious art and even the traditions of some churches have often portrayed our Savior as something less than completely human. You and I probably have more chances than we think to confess what is true, other than in the safety of a religious service.

In verse 16 ***And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.*** I like this expression "we have come to know and have believed..." There was a time when we didn't KNOW nor really believe that God loves us. We might have believed IN GOD, but how much did we really comprehend and appreciate His love for us? John remembered a time in his life, *before* he came into that realization. But now he says, ***we have come to know...His love.*** Then there is this great statement: ***God is love...***

He said it back in verse 8 and he says it again here in verse 16. Any real love which is out there, began in the heart of the one, living God. Any love which we might accomplish and enjoy between us comes from the Lord. None of it comes from anywhere else. Love radiates from Him. It is what he is like.

What are we like? Some people say, "well, I'm naturally quiet." Others, "I just love to be outside—it's my nature." Other people say, "I love people—I have *always been that way.*" What is God like? He is loving. He loves to watch out for His people, to provide for them, to sacrifice for them and to stay faithful to the covenants He has made with them. There is nothing good that He withholds from His people. He loves to see them truly happy and to stay happy. That's what He is like. He is love. And therefore, it is natural for us to gradually grow to be more LIKE our God and Savior.

The more you spend time with the Lord, walk with Him day in and day out, the more you will gradually adopt His nature. You'll start to think like Jesus thought about people. You will start to want what is in their best interest. ...***the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.*** You will start to feel about other people the way Jesus felt about them. That made things like *winning* arguments, getting your own way, over-talking the other guy, getting even and even guarding rights and boundaries less important... If you and I

desire a close walk with Him who IS love, we will become more loving. It goes hand in hand. Walking closely with God, infuses us with more and more of His nature, which is to love people with the love of Christ.

In verse 17 he says, ***By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.*** The more you *abide* in Christ and really grow your daily walk, the more confidence you will feel about what is coming in the future. As Christians, we know a fair amount about the future. And one thing we know is coming is the ***day of judgment***. Evidently, confidence is a thing that will be very valuable to have on that day. There will be no uncertainty on that day about who Jesus really was. But we will be able to say (or at least remember), “Lord, I sought to know you and to abide with you back in 2003.” I really wanted more and more of your daily presence in my life—NOW I appeal to that time. We do not impress God of course, with good works or sincerity. But His love is happening in our lives, and we will think back to how His love motivated us sometimes here, sustained us, kept us going. There is no logic or reason for Him to abandon us THEN when He did not do so NOW. He called God His Father. So can we. He spoke openly with the Father about the issues confronting Him. So can we.

One more little observation on the text: in this vs. 17 he says God’s love is perfected WITH us. Back in vs. 12 he said that if we love each other His love is perfected IN us. “When it reaches perfection *in* us, a proper relationship to other people exists, namely, no hate. When it reaches perfection *with* us, a proper relationship to God exists, namely no fear...

I do not live with tentativeness about whether I will make it to heaven.

I do not pray to an intermediary because Jesus is too fearsome.

I do not go to church because NOT to do so will result in judgment.

I do not dread seeing my brothers or sisters in Christ because I might not be as far along in the battle against sin as they are.

As Jesus abode in His Father and consequently had confidence in the face of trials and death, so we can abide in Christ and have confidence in spite of the world’s hostility. Abiding in God gave Jesus confidence and it gives us confidence too.²

We are not evangelicals because our parents were. We are not evangelicals because we are politically conservative. We are not evangelicals because our personalities are naturally rambunctious or rebellious and thus we love to just break from the prevailing local traditions. We are evangelicals and we sing, “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” In Jesus Christ and in Him alone, we are lost and hidden in His love. What a great place to be!

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 19)
Scripture: I John 4:18-21
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: October 12th, 2003

Safe and Safety in Christ

1 John 4:18-21 (NASB)

¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. ¹⁹ We love, because He first loved us. ²⁰ If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

Introduction If I were really and truly a Boston Red Sox fan, and all of you could say to yourselves, "Yes, whatever *else* he is, he is a devoted and loyal fan of the Sox," and you really had confidence in my commitment to the team from Fenway... You know, you see me go to games, wear a Sox hat, discuss their history and statistics and just *love my Sox*--How would you feel if somehow one day, one of you caught me down at Yankee Stadium mid-season let's say, wearing a jersey with an NY on it, wildly rooting for the Big Apple boys? And if that one of you who caught me there confronted me and said, "What are you doing?" and I replied, "Heyyyy—it's just in fun. I didn't really mean it," what would you think?

We have before us some thoughts from the apostle John which mirror that inconsistency only in the spiritual realm. You can be a devoted follower of fear or you can be a devoted follower of God's love. That is basically the contrast. As Christians we are not driven by fear and we do not live in dreadful fear of the future. Fear is a strong emotion. It is used to motivate, intimidate, educate, control and to entertain. In our world there is fear of terror; fear of breaking the law and getting into trouble with the government; fear of failure; fear of personal tragedy, etc. But as Christians we do not have to fall prey to fear. We focus on a powerful and loving God who is SO characterized by love that this is the primary part of godliness that He infuses into His children. Because He is love, He imparts a great sense of love to us. That leaves no room for fear. You're either a Red Sox fan or a Yankees fan!

Fear is a natural human feeling but one which strongly implies our fallen nature. God does not terrorize us. There IS a real terror at the prospect of going to your grave without a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. That is terrifying.

But once we have received Jesus Christ as our savior we do not need to fear. We are now in a kingdom of love. Fear and love are mutually exclusive things. From a practical standpoint, since I have been a Christian, I have never enjoyed any activities which focus on fear. I have never understood, with verses like these in front of us, how a Christian can buy into anything which is fear-based or promotes the emotion of fear. Fear is the wreckage of *this* world. It is the slimy “grease” of Satan. It is the emotion which dominates where the love of God is not talked about or understood. Fear is often used to manipulate, to intimidate, to control or just to injure others. I believe that any activity which promotes fear, even as a joke, is fleshly and carnal. Believers have no business engaging in anything which the Scripture states so plainly is in combat with the love of God and John says, without getting specific, that **perfect love casts out fear**. And he says why... Love casts out fear because **fear involves punishment...** or literally “fear has punishment”—fear carries with it torment that is its own punishment. Fear is not a blast of adrenaline to enjoy. It is a dread and terror of what is coming in the future, near or far.

The other side of confidence is fear. If we truly abide in the Father’s love, it follows that we will be without fear. “Perfect love drives out fear.” The statement probably should be taken almost as a Christian truism as well as an allusion to the fear of God in judgment. Love and fear are incompatible. They cannot coexist. For the Christian love is first an experience of the Father’s love for us. That “love” is so powerful and life changing that when we know it we are forever removed from the “fear” of God. The fear spoken of here is not to be confused with reverence for God. Reverence will only deepen through the experience of God’s love. The experience of the holiness of God’s love makes us desire to be even more obedient to his commands. But it also removes us from the power of fear. Whatever may take place in this world cannot nullify the power of his love nor separate us from it. Similarly, if we experience fear in any portion of our life, to that extent we deny God’s love and fail to trust him.²

Now this phrase **perfect love** is interesting. Is John referring to God’s love for believers, believers’ love for God or believers’ love for one another? It is kind of unspecified and as such I think it refers to the whole *continuum* of love that flows from God through the cross to individual people who embrace the cross and then through them to each other and ultimately from them OUT TO unbelievers. It is the whole experience and lifestyle and even we could say, the *culture* of love which besieges the culture of fear. And, wonderfully, it casts out fear. Fear is exiled from places where the love of God is valued. What about between us? Are we a loving collection of people? Some churches TALK about love a lot but area actually places of fear. I am saddened at this but it is true. In some churches, even some evangelical ones, there is *teaching* about love and songs about love but what is really going on is control, or the law and people spend as much time watching one another as they do loving one another.

I heard Chuck Swindoll suggest recently (on his radio show) that most of the passages in the Bible which speak to the subject of wisdom, relate to how people deal with people, to human relationships. He said that wisdom is not so much a function of intelligence or giftedness wise investment of money or how best to build a building or deploy armies, but when we're talking about BIBLICAL wisdom, it is usually in how well we deal with each other. Do we love each other or do we watchdog each other? Do we deal with each other wisely? Do we forgive each other? Do we care for one another or do we compete with one another? The truly wise person, who has achieved a good level of biblical wisdom, is a loving person, the kind of person you like to be around...

Because of how we started out in this Christian life—hearing about the love of God, embracing it in faith and trusting in the cross of Jesus Christ, which is essentially receiving the loving sacrifice of God—we know that we have been loved supremely by God. We know that this influences our whole Christian life then, and that we have become love-driven people. Real Christians, at least (John has said). And if love is supposed to be the main thing between us, then fear is NOT the controlling motivation. Where the love of God is really reigning, fear is driven out.

You would think that Christians would be drawn to each other. We would hope that Christians would sense in each other a kinship and a warmth and that we would find together a sense of refuge from a culture and a society which is becoming increasingly skeptical if not hostile to the message of Christ. I would like to believe that we find our best friends, our dating relationships, our spouses, our fellow soldiers against evil, and indeed people we even feel like brother and sister to, within the boundaries of the body of Christ. And some of us do. I get joy to see some of our number *prefer* to spend time with one another. But for many, this is not the case. There are many church-goers whose sense of connection to the body of Christ ends at the end of the service each Sunday. They do not view the community of Christians as “safe.” They do not flee to the body of Christ for *safety*. There might be many reasons for this but mainly too many do not sense the real love of Christ, for some reason, in too many churches.

The main point that I am getting to today is that since we are safe in Christ, there should be safety among Christians. In verse 19 we read ***We love because He first loved us.*** (ἡμεῖς ἀγαπῶμεν, ὅτι αὐτὸς πρῶτος ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς)

The antecedent of us loving each other is that we have BEEN loved first. We can never expect someone to be loving, truly, if they have not yet first met Christ and tasted of God's love. He loved us before the foundation of the world. At some point in time every believer *believed* in Christ but before it all, the Lord loved us by planning to send His Son in the counsels of eternity and then by actually SENDING Him, and then by

applying that in real-time to our hearts when we woke up one morning and found, “I believe! How can God love me so much?!!! It is wonderful!” You see, Christians should never think that love comes from our own dredging it up by will power or digging down deep and finding a previously untapped love-reservoir some place deep in our hearts. No. I would be the most totally self-focused and selfish person around if it were not for the fact that God loved me first. Since He loves me, I find an interest in my heart to love others. But HE is the initiator of the ability to love and the desire to love. But John goes further in verse 20.

If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

All this love-talk is pretty important. Our very right to call ourselves Christians is pretty tied into how interested we are in loving each other. You cannot, John says, SAY you love God and then hate your brother. You’re lying, he says. The logic is plain. How can you think you love God, who is invisible, if you don’t love your brother who IS visible?

I know, I know... Loving someone else isn’t always easy. Teens—do you love your parents? How? What evidences are there that you do? Husbands and wives—do you love your spouse? How would they know? Church members—do you love your brother or sister in Christ? Would they know that? What signals do they have that you love them?

I think we need to do better at this than little seasonal gestures. I think we need to forgive each other if you have been badly treated or spoken about. I think we need to sacrifice for one another and be devoted to one another and ***give preference to one another in honor*** (Romans 12). I think we need to do the work of getting to know each other and not make self-preservation or staying guarded and protected and cautious or preserving our convenience the main thing. We need to open up and RISK getting to know each other so that not one person might say, “I have no good friends in this church.” Those are signs of love. Let’s not just say we love each other.

Hate is an interesting word. It means animosity, disregard, hostility. Rarely do I find people admitting to this sin. But John accuses some of it here, as he did in I John 2:9,11 ***The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now... But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.*** It must be a possible thing if John saw it so much. I think we’re far more capable of this than we believe. And we need to actively value and insist, somehow, on love as the main feature of our church.

There is safety in a loving church. I envision a loving church as being careful and watchful for giving and helping more than showy kinds of affection. Affection is cool, but love must not stop there. It must not be shallow and of a window-dressing kind of thing only.

So, if you have a disagreement with someone in the church, what's the really Christlike, loving way to deal with it?

If you decide you can't deal with someone in your family any more, what's the really Christlike, loving way to deal with it?

If you are disappointed by some way you were slighted or ignored or worse, misunderstood or worse, gossiped about, what's the really Christlike, loving way to respond?

Finally, John concludes this section in verse 20

And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

Loving God means loving your brother. It is not an option for us, John says it is a commandment. If we really want to love God, and create a safe place for others, to which others might be attracted, then we need to love each other. A place, an organization, a family, where love is the rule is the kind of place many people want to be. They NEED a place like that. They need to walk in and feel acceptance and patience and the security of a crowd where THEY ALL have already learned how much God loves them, and so it is no problem to share that love. More and more people are, I believe, looking for such a family. May we be that family and therefore really reveal ourselves as being God's people...

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 20)
Scripture: I John 5:1-4
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: October 19th, 2003

The *Conditio Sine Qua Non* of Christianity

1 John 5:1-4 (NASB)

¹ WHOEVER believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the *child* born of Him. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. ³ For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. ⁴ For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

Introduction On the one hand Christianity can seem very complex. Lots of doctrines and theological details; lots of denominations and historical names; two thousand years of time to develop, mutate, re-develop, mutate again, reinvent itself and struggle to find its way back to its roots. Many cults along the way. Even a fair amount of social injustice in its own name to explain or answer for... A complete novice and outsider might have a real point if he said, "I find your religion hard to understand." On the other hand, Christianity is really very simple, according to one of its first adherents, a guy who was there for all the critical events in the beginning: the apostle John. Fortunately it was this "founding father," this "original framer" who wrote five of the 27 books of the New Testament. He says, "I was there. I saw Jesus, touched Him, heard Him, saw Him transfigured, watched Him die. Saw Him alive—a bunch of times, including the last time as He ascended back to heaven—*saw Him with my own eyes* do that. Then I heard Him and saw Him years later when I was on the Isle of Patmos, too. I know what I'm talking about—am not making it up. Didn't imagine it."

And despite the complexities and undulating history of our faith from our perspective today, this apostle looked at Christianity really as a relatively simple thing. He says ***whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God...***(I John 5:1). In these verses he kind of gives us the *conditio sine qua non* for the whole faith of Christianity. That is, the "condition without which, not" meaning the bottom line--what you *have* to have to still be Christianity. What you cannot do without. And there's a few things, John says.

Now understand that these things were once pretty much assumed by everyone around Massachusetts—but now, the *conditio sine qua non* of Christianity are not assumed any more in this society in which we live. Each of the basics of Christianity is being discarded by our culture. That is what makes this passage so profound today...

The first *conditio sine qua non* is the belief that Jesus is Israel's Messiah, the **Christ**. It is becoming increasingly unpopular even despicable to suggest that Jesus is the only way to heaven. But that is a direct effect of saying that you believe that He was and is the Christ. Did you know that? You cannot say out of one side of your mouth, "I believe that Jesus is the Christ," but out of the other side, "I think there's other ways too." Actually, part of the ordinance of believer's baptism is the person's wonderful, personal, deliberate and public statement, "I believe that Jesus is the Christ." And when a person embraces Jesus Christ as the Messiah—the Chosen One, the Savior, the one designated, predestined and appointed to come to earth to save and redeem all who will simply believe that and trust in it—he or she is **fathered by God**, which is what the Greek term literally means. Being born-again is not something we made up. God made it up. He is the one who gives spiritual birth to people.

Second, if you love God the Father, which is the same as saying "I love God," [and people like to say, and especially sing, this all the time] you're going to love His Son, **...whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him (5:1b)**. It might seem a little obscure to understand who John is talking about here but I do not think it is like, "Hey man, you're really gonna looooooove born-again people!" It probably means that the person who finds that he loves the Father is going to love the Father's child, who is Jesus Christ. The child is the extension of the father. Since Jesus is God's Son, you have to love Him if you're going to love God. That's what in John's mind. That leaves out millions of people who think they love God, but leave Jesus out of their beliefs or affections. They might be sincere. They might be devout. But they do not truly love God in the way God expects and wants to be loved. It's like what Jesus Himself said to some Jews who were asking about spiritual stuff,

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me; for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. John 8:42 (NASB)

But Christians are born of God too and it is so big in John's thinking, so terribly important, that Christians love one another and not separate themselves in a proud sort of way from one another. So the end of verse 1 probably applies to Christians too. And one might ask, "If I am to love other Christians, how do I know if I really *am* loving them?" And the way is to just obey His commands. So the third *condition sine qua non*, the third essential of Christianity, is that the

way to be sure about loving born-again people is to focus on keeping His commands, so many of which relate to HOW we treat each other.

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. (verse 2)

I believe evangelical Christianity has mutated somewhat on this point. We have emphasized liberty and autonomy so much, that we have in essence, licensed people to NOT love each other when it becomes hard to do so. I feel we have so many churches that, under the guise of remaining orthodox and faithful to the Fundamentals of the Faith as defined by 1920's American "fundamentalists," have essentially violated this third *sine qua non* of the faith! It is easy to say to some other evangelical Christian or church, "You are not orthodox enough for me. I'm going to separate from you now. You are not worthy of my fellowship." This, in fact, was one of the practices of John's opponents all the way back at the end of the first century. They did not match their theology—itsself defective—up with their lifestyle. God wants us to love each other. We need to think long and hard about separating from one another—perhaps when core doctrinal discussion is unsolvable. But in general I do not believe that He wants us very often to separate from one another. That is way to easy and way too carnal.

The fourth is a summarizing *conditio*; "Remember: loving God means keeping His commandments." ***For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments*** (5:3a). This is always the test for whether we love God or not. It isn't so much the outward expressions of public worship, the amount of time at the church that you can log in, the number of sermons you've heard, books you've read or CD's that you've purchased. It isn't in whether you only listen to this kind of music or that kind of music or that you are sure to always go to Christmas Eve service. WE NEED TO NOT BE CONFUSED ABOUT THIS. The person that loves the Lord loves His will; *wants* His will more than anything even if it is challenging sometimes to find out what it is. Right now my Sunday School class is looking at the Ten Commandments. None of them is irrelevant for us today. All of them echo the heartbeat of God for His people, even New Testament, grace-infused Christians! How much do you love the command to keep God Number One in your life? How committed to it are you? How much do you love the command not to steal? How committed to it are you? How much do you love the Sabbath command? How committed to it are you? And taking a lifetime to study His will, as revealed in Scripture, and experimenting, seeking how to build His will into your character is a major activity of the Christian's walk with the Savior. Jesus certainly kept the Law. He loved God's commands.

The fifth *conditio sine qua non* is that His commandments are not a bummer. ***and His commandments are not burdensome.*** (5:3b) It is basic to Christianity that in running our lives by the rules for God's will that we see in Scripture, we are not *laboring under a heavy burden*. Jesus said, ***For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.*** Matthew 11:30. UNLIKE what Jesus said about the

Pharisees in Matthew 23:4, ***And they tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.*** There are few things so sad as a Christian who isn't enjoying the Christian life. In fact, God's will is not a burden. He wants us to be happy and He knows how a person should live to see that happen. Sometimes His commandments relate to us in ways that have to do with our own private walk. Other times His commandments relate to how we treat and deal with each other.

Now as a personal note, I must ask you to be patient with me on this basic essential of Christianity. I do know it and I do believe it. And I do get discouraged when people don't always meet up to my expectations. It is easy for pastors to lose focus on what's REALLY the *sine qua non*'s of the faith because we are running an almost 100% volunteer organization and yet we have such lofty goals. We get frustrated when we do not have enough manpower available to take the church to the next step. We get frustrated when so many people are not here on Sundays much. And if we are not careful we start to confuse people about what the commandments of God are... We begin to lay in a few of our own commandments.

The sixth *sine qua non* of Christianity is that born-again people have victory over the world by means by the exercise of trusting in the Lord (their faith). ***For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.*** (5:4) Be encouraged, John says. WE WILL MAKE IT. The world works to unravel our faith but ultimately the child of God will have victory over the world. Continuing to trust the Lord, that He is in control and that His way of doing things is the best way of doing things, is the victory. Do we still trust Him, even when the "chips are down?" Do we continue to cling to His promises even when things grow inconvenient?

When ever I start to whine (and hear myself doing it) I try to remind myself of Corrie ten Boom. I am afraid this next generation will not even know who she was. She and her family were arrested in Holland for harboring Jews during World War II. She and her sister were carted off to a terrible concentration camp, where her sister died. But Corrie AND her sister clung to the Lord. They watched God provide many things. I remember her testimony that they thanked the Lord for lice because the lice-infected prisoners were less likely to receive the unwanted affections of the prison guards. Their faith overcame the worst this world has to throw at us.

Putting it all in different words, sort of at the bottom-line, Christianity is about relationships and that is drawn out in this passage.

A real Christian is about a relationship with Jesus.

A real Christian is about relationships with other believers.

A real Christian is about a personal relationship with God in which the Christian either seeks and honors God's will for him, or he doesn't.

A real Christian does not mind the commandments, especially the one about loving other Christians.

A real Christian experiences gradual victory over the world by TRUST and by entrusting issues to the Lord, one by one!

So, if you were to sit down with the apostle John and really take his message to heart you would realize that at core, Christianity is NOT so much about denominational distinctives, cocooning *just* with people you like in a nice little church clique, maintaining a Me-First, its all about MY preferences perspective. I do not mean to insult any of us and suggest that we might be susceptible to any of that but frankly too many churches *are* shackled with those priorities. John would have none of that. He would ask, “Do you want to know what being a real Christian is all about? Here’s what it’s all about...”

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: An Exposition of the First Epistle of John (Lesson 21)
Scripture: I John 5:5-10
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: October 26th, 2003

Is Christianity Hard to Believe?

I John 5:5-10

5 And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 6 This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. 7 And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth. 8 For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. 9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for the witness of God is this, that He has borne witness concerning His Son. 10 The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son.

Introduction When we pray for Jews or for Israel, what exactly do we wish God to do? What help or assistance to them are we praying might happen? Jews have been a target of world disdain and hatred, and periodically victims of severe persecution, for many centuries--most notably in the twentieth century, so one thing *they might* appreciate prayer about, is for victory against persecution. But as horrible as persecution in this life would be, there is a greater need to pray for, and that is that more and more Jewish people might see that Jesus was and is the Messiah. The apostle Paul (no stranger to persecution, by the way) wrote to the Roman Christians—many of whom were Jews—that *BRETHREN, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation (Romans 10:1)*. We should pray often and faithfully for Jews here and abroad to awaken and believe in Jesus as Messiah. I think that for the most part though, Jews are blinded to this now. I have three Jewish friends that I very much want to just *get* a chance to talk about Jesus with. But I am finding it so hard to breach the barrier that is there. There seems to me to be such a wall. I am fond of these three men. But they seem spiritually blocked out to me. And I ask myself, "Wouldn't they be thrilled to

learn that Jesus overcame the worst that this world could throw at Him? Wouldn't they love to discover that He was a wonderful Jew, faithful to Torah, full of Jehovah's Spirit, the very focal point of every Hebrew prophet? Why is it so hard to believe that Jesus was Messiah?

John wrote, *Who is the one who overcomes the world but He who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?* (I John 5:5). There is great victory for a person who embraces the belief that Jesus is God's Son. Think about it from John's perspective—

- 1) the movement is young.
- 2) He's the last original apostle alive and he surely knew his days were numbered.
- 3) Like never before in his life did he feel an urgency to set things down straight and simple for the Christians to come after him.

He had no way of knowing, but there would be more than two hundred more years of wave after wave of persecution of Christians. They would possess no buildings, no political power, little enough unity and cohesiveness as a movement. At many moments, they keenly felt, "Our only asset is our complete confidence that Jesus was God's Son and as such, will keep His promises." Sometimes that's all we have to go on too. When we each reach the death bed, we will have nothing more than that to go on. No doctor, no pastor, no spouse, no child, no amount of money or power or reputation will go with you past that last breath. Only your belief that Jesus is the Son of God and your own confidence that you have doggedly clung to that. That is what overcomes this world, and the worst torpedo this world can plunge into our hull—death. But Jesus defeated death by His resurrection and promises the same to all who cling to Him now.

Then there are these interesting words John wrote (verse 6)—again focusing on Jesus Christ-- *This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood.* It is absolutely critical whether Jesus was God or not. If He was not, then our whole faith is a deception. If He is, then everything we read about Him in the NT must be true. John indicates that by *water* (His baptism Matt. 3:13-17 ; Mark 1:9-11 ; Luke 3:21-22) and by *blood* (His death) Jesus is authenticated. You will remember that at His baptism, both the Father and

the Spirit were present and evident. They affirmed Jesus of Nazareth fully. Or, the Gospels lie. But we are persuaded that they are correct.

John MacArthur comments: The term “witness” is the theme of this section. The passage concerns the witness or testimony of God and the Spirit to the world regarding the great truth of the deity of Jesus Christ. The previous passage (5:1–5) described overcomers as those who believed in Jesus as Lord and Savior, and here John presents God’s own testimony to confirm that Jesus is the Christ (John 5:31–37 ; 8:13–18). He gives two kinds of testimony: external (vv. 6–9) and internal (vv. 10–12).

5:6 water and blood. Water and the blood constitute external, objective witnesses to who Jesus Christ is. They refer to Jesus’ baptism (water) and death (blood). John combats the dualism of false teachers who asserted that “Christ-spirit” departed from the man Jesus just prior to His death on the cross (see Introduction: Background and Setting). John writes to show that God has given testimony to the deity of Jesus through both His baptism and death. **bears witness.** Both the verb “bear witness” and the noun “testimony” come from the same Gr. word and are used a total of 9 times in this section. The basic meaning is “someone who has personal and immediate knowledge of something.” **the Spirit is truth.** John no longer stresses apostolic testimony (1:1–4 ; 4:14) but writes of the testimony of God that comes through the Holy Spirit. Since the Spirit of God cannot lie, His testimony is sure.²

Zane Hodges comments: ...he was refuting a false notion of the type held by Cerinthus. Cerinthus taught that the divine Christ descended on the man Jesus at His baptism and left Him before His crucifixion. Thus he denied that one Person, Jesus Christ, came by both water and blood. Cerinthus was doubtless not alone in such views, which John regarded as utterly false and contrary to the true testimony of the Holy **Spirit**. Indeed, **there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and the three are in agreement.** The Spirit’s witness may be thought of as coming through the prophets (including John the Baptist). The Spirit’s witness, then, was augmented by the historical realities involved in “the water” and “the blood.” Both the baptism and the crucifixion of Jesus are strongly attested historical facts (cf. John 1:32-34 ; 19:33-37). All three witnesses (“water” and “blood” are personified) “are in agreement” that a single divine Person, Jesus Christ, was involved in these events.²

The blood refers to His death. His death also testifies to His being God’s Son. How? If you read the Gospel accounts of His death, it was a death like none before or since. The sky was darkened. Tombs around Jerusalem opened up and dead people came out, alive! The veil in the Temple was split from top to bottom. Even a Roman centurion, standing right there, was stunned and blurted out *Truly this man was the Son of God* (Matthew 27:54).

And it is the Spirit who bears witness because the Spirit is the truth. (5:7). I think it’s gutsy for John to say this. He appeals to the very Spirit of God, Himself. Could you ask for a plainer statement? If God’s Spirit says, “Jesus is the Son of God,” who can argue? If one is going to object, one must simply state that John was wrong. And then in verse 8 *For there are*

three that bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. So Jesus' deity is attested by the Holy Spirit, by Jesus' own baptism and by His remarkable death. Why do you think John goes to all this length to make a simple point? We have to remember that he watched the early Christians being placed under intellectual assault. There were teachers doing much to dispute the apostles' assertion about whom Jesus was...

Again, MacArthur notes: ***For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one*** (verse 7, King James Version)... These words are a direct reference to the Trinity and what they say is accurate. External manuscript evidence, however, is against them being in the original epistle. They do not appear in any Gr. mss. dated before ca. tenth century A.D. Only 8 very late Gr. mss. contain the reading, and these contain the passage in what appears to be a translation from a late recension of the Latin Vulgate. Furthermore, 4 of those 8 mss. contain the passage as a variant reading written in the margin as a later addition to the manuscript. No Greek or Latin Father, even those involved in Trinitarian controversies, quote them; no ancient version except the Latin records them (not the Old Latin in its early form or the Vulgate). Internal evidence also militates against their presence, since they disrupt the sense of the writer's thoughts. Most likely, the words were added much later to the text. There is no verse in Scripture which so explicitly states the obvious reality of the Trinity, although many passages imply it strongly. See 2 Cor. 13:14.² ***The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.***

Now why is Christianity so hard to believe for some people? What is it that is so much more comfortable to live with in UNBELIEF about Jesus, than to see the evidences and believe?

You know, if you have ever had occasion to talk with someone who has given their own unbelief some thought, you don't really come away very intimidated. You don't really come away saying, "Hey, they have some serious points." You can tell that they just simply do not believe Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. They do not believe Paul or Peter either. There could be the Gospels of Barnabas, Philip, James, Andrew, Bartholomew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot and Jude, son of James and STILL the person would say, "No No No, they are all wrong." Not because the evidence for Christ is sketchy or thin or merely legendary. But just because they do not want to believe in Christ. But verse 9 is even plainer yet...

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for the witness of God is this, that He has borne witness concerning His Son. The Gospels are one thing. They are the witness of men who knew the facts. They wrote them down. In John's case, he was there for all of the events. He knew Jesus. He heard Him, touched Him, saw Him. But John appeals to more than human witness. He says that God Himself says, "***This is My beloved Son...***" Man, if you don't believe God Himself, John is reasoning, it is nothing less than saying God is lying (verse 10). Unbelief, assuming the person has been presented with the evidence, is basically just calling God a liar. (Don't you love the apostle John? He pulls no punches.)

This is the heavy artillery of our confidence that believing in Jesus Christ and following Him is the way to go. John wrote that GOD's witness is that Christ is the answer. Out there among many people, I hear—and I know you do too—they say, that this person says this and that person says that. So many millions of people hang on what the Pope might say or not say, or this Cardinal or that Archbishop. Many more millions—in fact I heard this week that it is ONE IN FIVE PEOPLE IN THE WORLD—hang on what Mohammed said or didn't say in the seventh century. People like to quote all kinds of philosophers. People love to quote social reformers like Marx or Ghandi or Martin Luther King. People even seriously deliberate over the statements of entertainers and sports heroes. There are all kinds of human prognostications and emanations that people listen to, and sift and weigh in deciding what their own personal creed and code of conduct is going to be. Other people follow their wives' pronouncements or their husbands' statements about what is what. And others listen slavishly to their parents or to their ancestors. All of this is human. And it is sometimes good and helpful and sometimes unhelpful and stupid but one thing is clear—they are all human sources. John says the testimony about Jesus Christ is attested by God Himself. ***The witness of God is this, that He has borne witness concerning His Son*** (verse 9b).

And then in verse 10 he says, ***The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne***

concerning His Son. Believing in Christ is really a simple thing. Either you do or you do not. The human spirit and mind and will and Satan's moves to confuse and complicate things, make believing seem hard. But it is not. And when a person DOES believe in Christ and trust Him, there is something internal that happens in their spirits. They just KNOW.

So we have essentially two and only two kinds of people around us, in John's view: people who have believed in Jesus Christ and own a quiet, internal, almost secret confidence in their hearts about Jesus—a thing provided by the Holy Spirit, and people who do believe in Jesus and have essentially said, "The Lord is lying to us."

There is an element of mystery in how people believe. It is intellectual but it is not only intellectual. There are some emotions involved but true saving faith is not only emotional. There are definite changes that occur when a person decides for Christ but it is hard to chart or schedule those changes for someone else. But beyond mystery there is wonder in when a person finds their way to Christ, whether Jew or Greek. Paul wrote

Romans 1:16 (NASB)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Do you think we are taking too much time with these things? I sometimes wonder if this seems practical and useful for you... But I believe it is a good thing to *dwell* on the subject of the Gospel sometimes and to *dwell* on some of the detail things the Bible says about faith. Is it hard to believe in Christianity? I do not believe that it is. Jesus Himself said, John 3:14,15 ***And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.***

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Exposition of First John (Supplementary message)
Scripture: Various
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: November 2nd, 2003

How Christians Care for “One Another”

Introduction If there is one real obvious lesson in John’s First Epistle, it is that genuine Christians are supposed to be marked by their love for one another, a thing which Jesus Himself, on His last night, said would take place, ***By this all men will know that you are My disciples , if you have love for one another*** (John 13:35). Some six decades later, John, still alive, echoes Jesus’ words in his first epistle, repeatedly.

So let me ask you today, do you feel loved by the body of Christ, and conversely, do you give effort to the task of *loving* the body of Christ? [I probably give myself about a C- on this!] I would like to help you think about this today by looking at this expression, **one another**, as it occurs all over the New Testament. It is a uniquely New Testament concept and as we shall see it is used by John, Paul, Peter and James, pretty much the brain-trust of the early church. When a person becomes a Christian, whether they are fully aware of it or not in the beginning they become connected, part of something bigger than themselves. At conversion they are baptized into the body of Christ and as such they become *engrafted* into a mystical, wonderful organism that is indwelt by God’s Spirit, and commissioned powerfully to invite others into the organism. But how can you TELL if you are really being cared for by the body, and whether you are contributing TO the body? How can you tell if you are really experiencing the *one another* aspect of God’s program? Well there are about twenty ways to care for one another as illustrated by twenty New Testament verses that we are going to briefly consider. There are more, too but we shall only consider twenty today.

1. We love one another

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. John 13:34 (NASB)

Sometimes we love one another just by loving one another. Sometimes there is no other word than that—I make a decision because the bottom-line is that I really do care about my brother in Christ

and I find no other motivation than that. I really do want what is best for him and so I either, do something for him, say something good to him, or maybe just be quiet “at” him, for no more complicated reason than that I love him.

2. We serve one another

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only *do not turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. Galatians 5:13

This means I do things for my brother or sister in Christ which benefits him or her. It might not always be convenient for me. I may have to put something that I want to do on hold for a bit. It may involve some humility on my part. But caring for one another means a servant-heart attitude.

I was a brand new Christian and I went to a Navigator retreat at Massanetta Springs, Virginia. I was impressed when the team leaders (they had a team structure) were the table waiters for the weekend, at meals. It was expected of team leaders and they willingly modeled cheerful servanthood for the rest of us. I never forgot it.

3. We are affectionate with one another

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. Romans 16:16

This is something I have noticed with great joy between Christians. It is not only a physical touch, but a card in the mail when you least expect it (I received two this week!). It is a kind word of affirmation where someone actually SAYS to you, I need you, I love you, I appreciate you. It marks Spirit-filled Christians. It is not the *only* evidence of who Jesus’ disciples are, but it is a happy one when you see it!

4. We are hospitable with one another

Be hospitable to one another without complaint. 1 Peter 4:9

New Testament hospitality was a little different than what we think of today. We think of the gracious hostess or host, for a home Bible study, or an evening of entertaining. These are needed and important but in New Testament times hospitality was much more life-and-death. When Christians traveled they needed “safe houses” to stay in. They often had little food or drink and there were many bandits on the roads. Hospitality was a safety need. Christians needed help in this way from one another often, and we are told that caring for one another sometimes involves the free giving of hospitality.

5. We care for one another

Bear one another’s burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2

It is interesting to me that Paul wrote this to the Galatian churches. They were a collection of Christian assemblies who had troubled Paul greatly because they were slipping BACK into a kind of legalism and confusion of the Gospel of grace. To them Paul reaffirmed that if you want to be a real Law-keeper you will sign on to the Law of Christ, *beyond* the Law of Moses. This will make you a person who helps other people with *their* burdens. You might say, “I have enough of my own burdens.” But the Christian surrenders to a higher law than just watching out for himself. He helps

other believers bear their burdens. This takes shape in lots of ways, physical needs, emotional needs, being WITH someone so they will not be alone, helping financially troubled brothers and sisters, and so forth.

- Recently I am aware of one of you who really came alongside of another of you in a time of great trial.
- Recently I am aware of another of you who helped one of you move.
- Another time recently I know that one of you helped another of you build something at home.
- Another time just recently, I am aware that one of you went out of your way to befriend another of you, who has very few friends and has to go it alone through much of life.

6. We are honest with one another

Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH, EACH ONE *of you*, WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another. Ephesians 4:25

Sometimes it is a real demonstration of love and care to honor each other by simply speaking truthfully. This does not mean being tactless or unkind or cold in what we say. But it means that when the opportunity presents itself we honor the other person by speaking honestly. More so, we deal honestly with each other where money or time come into play. Paul again appeals to the basic REALITY that we are *members of one another*. And so we ought to treat each other that way. Put simply, your left arm never takes precedence over your right arm. Your right leg never says to you, “forget about your left leg—it’s not important.” Each is a member of the other and so they work in tandem and together.

7. We pray for one another

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. James 5:16

One of the most basic ways there is, to care for and love your brother or sister in Christ is to pray for them. It is to pray routinely—everyone in this church should pray through the “Phone List” regularly. And it is to pray for healing and recovery when those are needed. The Lord promises that the person who himself is walking close to Him, can accomplish much by maintaining an intercessory prayer ministry on behalf of each other. Do you pray for your fellow church members here? That is a powerful and substantial way to care for one another.

8. We stimulate one another to do good

and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, Hebrews 10:24

Notice that we are told to ponder, consider, calculate HOW to stimulate one other to the end that love and good deeds comes out of our lives. My job is to think, “Now, what would motivate ___ to be more loving? What would motivate ___ to do some good things for other people?” It isn’t just loving and doing of good things for each other—it is the ministry of encouragement and challenge that we bring to each other too.

9. We are in harmony with one another

Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Romans 12:16

Some of us here in our church are very smart. Others of us are not too swift. Some of us have a fair amount of money, and others have almost no money at all. Some of us here are blessed with lots of discretionary time and others of us are so busy we have time for little other than work, sleep and the basics. But despite the great variation and diversity that we are as a body, if there is an equalization in how we treat each other then we are really caring for each other. The person with much treats the person with little humbly. We do not split up into *classes* and *castes*. We are “of the same mind” toward *ONE ANOTHER*. The smart person is content to hang out with the not-too-swift. The rich is fine with sitting at supper with, and listening to the woes, of the poor person. The church that is caring for itself, is the church that is in harmony with itself.

10. We confess to one another

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. James 5:16

Here is an interesting thing from the apostle James—personal confession goes hand in hand with healing. But it must be voluntary and individual and the fruit of admitting our faults should be immediate prayer for one other. The caring church sets to work at the ministry of prayer for healing. We tend to emphasize prayer for healing from physical illness or injury. The Bible promotes the quest for healing which goes deeper than that. And it is tied, at times, to personal confession. A church which is SAFE enough to provide that, is a caring church, indeed!

Francis Schaeffer said that of all people, Christians do not need to pretend. Grace, is big enough for any problem.

11. We forgive one another

And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Ephesians 4:32

Sometimes, caring for each other means to forgive one another. How often is this true in our church? When someone offends someone else, do they get forgiven? Or is the offence remembered? The power in this verse is the *just-as-God-in-Christ-also-has-forgiven-you* part. How much did Jesus need to put some forgiveness points into YOUR account? How many of your sins did He die for on the cross?

And sometimes... we THINK it is forgiveness, when it is forbearance.

12. We forbear with one another

bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Colossians 3:13

To forbear means to hang in there with one another. Man, sometimes I think we are way too easily offended. Someone says something wrong, or doesn't say it just the right way, or misses a meeting

or forgets to do something they said they would do, or doesn't do a job quite up to standard, and we get offended. They didn't MEAN to personally offend us, but we make it look that way. They don't need forgiveness but they DO need forbearance.

13. We don't judge one another

Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. Romans 14:13

Just yesterday I was talking with my wife, and I was telling her about a decision I had heard that another church had made. I was telling it in such a way, that it sounded like I was saying the other church was being stupidly unfair in their decision—a thing I had only heard about by hearsay myself. I am ashamed to admit, as I felt the Lord whispering to me, that I was judging them. We do this of course more hurtfully with *one another*. But a caring church is a church which INSISTS on the prohibition of a judging spirit within its walls.

14. We don't consume one another

But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another. Galatians 5:15

Once again, O those Galatian Christians. I am not sure I would join one of their churches, lest I get eaten! But Christians are not perfect, just forgiven (as the saying goes). And sometimes we can be like a pack of hungry dogs. It is no wonder when a wounded, bitten, sawed off Christian comes stumbling into our body that they are almost in tears for the peace they (hopefully) find. They do not need to be bitten. They need to be healed.

15. We don't challenge or envy one another

Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. Galatians 5:26

Here is a neat feature of a loving, Christlike church: They surrender to each other more often than they challenge each other. Peace is worth more to the members of a caring church than “winning” an argument. And they do not envy each other's position, assets, or accomplishments. They are humble, looking for ways to promote each other, not compete with each other.

16. We don't go to court with one another

Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? 1 Corinthians 6:7

A caring church, Paul says, has people in it who are willing to actually be wronged and even defrauded by each other rather than go to litigious war with one another to make sure “my rights are maintained.” If someone in this body does you wrong, are you going to choose to respond the way Jesus responded? Is your personal contribution to the reputation of Christ important enough to you that you will absorb the injury? A church where most of the people are like that, is a church I WOULD want to join...

17. We encourage and edify (build up) one another

Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11

I call these the two “E Words.” We cannot have too much encouragement and the Christian life is never happier than when you have just received an edifying thing from another brother or sister. It might be a song someone sings, or it might be a testimony. It might be a word of encouragement where the person predicts future SUCCESS for you in some endeavor—confidence that you are valuable and are in fact growing. A caring church MAJORS in the two “E words.”

18. We share our gifts with one another

As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 1 Peter 4:10

There is no aspect of Christian ministry which we have talked about MORE in the last twenty years in this church, than the aspect of spiritual gifts. But talk is one thing. Is there the USE of our gifts? We are *stewards* of these gifts. God wants us to care for one another by discovering our gifts (and going to the trouble to do that), and then by USING them faithfully over many years. When I can access my brother’s gift in some way, I am cared for, in the body of Christ.

19. We instruct and admonish one another

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Colossians 3:16

We all don’t know all of what we need to know! That is a profound revelation for some churches... But let me assure you that I need the ministry of instruction and admonition that OTHERS of you can give me. Paul tells us specifically in this verse to use a music ministry as part of the process. I am very sensitive in this area. I do not like someone singing at me if I think they are doing it in an unwise way. But if done carefully, humbly, the word of Christ comes through and I am cared for in this way. This, by the way, is a unique kind of ministry FORFEITED by Christians who choose to go to church rarely. They miss out on the personal ministry of this kind by their fellow Christians.

20. We are members of one another

so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Romans 12:5

Finally, and once again, we care for one another by living in realization, and by making personal decisions based upon the reality that I cannot live this Christian life alone, or in isolation. God has not DESIGNED the Christian to live that way. A hand cannot live, detached from its arm, defrauded of its blood supply, unused for its work because it has stopped receiving signals from its brain. It NEEDS the body. Christians, connected in the body of Christ, care for each other by NEEDING each other. That old American, or Irish or Portuguese or Japanese or Scottish or Norwegian or German self-reliance and commitment to autonomy is fine for national pride. It has little place though in the organism that God is at work building, His people, His bride, His church. If you are a genuine Christian, you are *ipso facto*, connected to other Christians. May He be praised for the privilege we have to be part of something, which will be our eternal future, which is assured to us, which comes at no cost to us, but at terrible cost to our Heavenly Father. May He be praised for His work at changing us and building us into a caring community of redeemed sinners!

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of First John (Lesson 23)

Scripture: I John 5:11-13

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: November 9th, 2003

A Plain Distinction

I John 5:11-13

11 And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.

Introduction Christianity is a good thing; in fact, Christianity is an excellent thing. Christianity is a fascinating system of thinking and viewpoints on a great range of subjects. Christianity is exciting—it changes lives, from the inside out, not by compelling people from the outside, in. Christianity wonderfully transforms a person's outlook for the future—we look *forward* to the future with great confidence about how things are going to unfold. Christianity infuses us with a quiet peace, here and now because we understand that we are no longer at odds with God. Jesus Christ has settled all that. He has taken care of what we owe God. Christianity gives a great sense of purpose—even if we're not always sconscious of it amidst the day-to-day pressures and responsibilities: IT'S ALWAYS THERE! In Jesus Christ, how we sense the desire to share with *others* about Him and second, the inner need and longing to feel Jesus at work in my own heart and the hunger to become more like Him. And then, there is personal His commission to His disciples to MAKE disciples, to teach and communicate, to baptize (which is to help people identify with Him) and help more and more new people make a commitment to Him. What greater and more meaningful cause is there?

On that point, my friend Sandy wrote me this, this week (while thinking about the new Matrix movie):

Do you ever think how the Bible is far more "out there" in terms of the stuff of science fiction, than science fiction itself? I mean, an eternal Being who creates galaxies; a race of creatures made from scooped-up dust; a powerful malevolent being and evil spiritual entities bent on destruction; all history being guided by an Ultimate Higher Intelligence; the Creator coming to the planet disguised as a Jewish carpenter; a coming planetary cataclism; and the most powerful person on earth today is probably some little lady who prays while baking cookies in her kitchen.

Chuck Colson was probably the fourth most powerful man in the country in 1972. A former Marine, attorney and crafty politician, he was Special Counsel to President Nixon.

During the Watergate experience though, he found himself empty. He went to his friend, Tom Phillips, who happened to be the President of Raytheon. Phillips told him that he had found Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. He recommended that Colson read a book by a man named C.S. Lewis called *Mere Christianity*. Phillips' testimony completely shocked Colson—he knew Tom Phillips to be a successful, aggressive businessman. And in his empty and searching state, Colson ended up inviting Christ into his life too, in Phillips' driveway after one intense evening of discussion and questions and answers. Today, Colson is one of the most powerful and outspoken advocates of the cause of Christ that we have. It was real. It was authentic.² Colson came to the realization of what the apostle John says in I John 5:11,12, which is where we are today...

You will remember that John is battling, in this letter, for a certain concept of how to get to heaven, the concept that all the apostles taught, and would die for; a thing that was coming under assault by *other* semi-Christian thinkers. John told them, “Look, I was there; I heard what Jesus said and more, I saw the things He did and that happened around Him.” It was his own “testimony” that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life. He, is the way to go. He is the Son of God. At His baptism and at His death and of course with the authentication of His rising from the dead, Jesus is really who He said He was. And following Him, is the only way to go. But then in recent verse that we have looked at he pulls off the gloves and says, “Don't take my word for it. God Himself has testified that Jesus was not only real, but that He was the Messiah of Israel.”

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for the witness of God is this, that He has borne witness concerning His Son. 1 John 5:9

This emboldens me and gives me great confidence. John does not apologize for his utter belief that Jesus is the only way to heaven. He does not say, “Let's convene a theological conference at the University of Athens or at Cairo Theological Seminary and discuss the possibility that maybe Jesus' claims should be considered...” He says, ***the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life. He who does NOT have the Son of God does not have the life*** (vss.11,12). It remained for people then, to either accept that or to reject it. It was true in the tenth century. It confronted people in the sixteenth century and more stridently in the eighteenth century with the rise of the Enlightenment. It remains the choice that people are confronted with today. He makes a plain distinction (and that is what I have entitled this message). There are those who WANT eternal life and believe that Jesus is the source of it, and they seek Christ. And there are those who do not seek Christ, and they do not have eternal life.

Today, I can imagine nothing more politically incorrect. To say that he who has the Son of God, has the life, and he who does not have Him, does not, is outrageous. It violates the principle today of sincerity (you know, that sincerity alone validates a belief). It violates the principle of pluralism which is so

overwhelmingly popular in mainline Protestant denominations today—everyone is a little bit right, and the “big pot of soup” into which everyone throws their own *little* can of soup, makes a wonderful religious stew. John would not have understood this. He would have said, “that’s fine for Mars Hill and the Aeropagus, but it is not what me and Peter and Paul and James have taught. It is not what Jesus taught at all... No. There is a plain distinction about eternal life, and who receives it and who does not.

But this probably all sounds so hard and intolerant. Notice please what it IS that John makes plain: ***the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life.*** (5:11). It is like he’s saying, “It comes down to this, my readers—there IS life after death and in the next life there is no end to it. And it is God’s gift.”

Can you think of better news?

Is there anything more positive and uplifting?

If you’re in Christ, and you have received and believed the witness of the apostles, you don’t really die. What DOES happen when your body dies and your eyes close for the last time and your lungs breathe air for the last breath and your heart pumps its last squirt of blood? I don’t know. Is there a tunnel with light at the end of it? Are there angels waiting with cool chariots to cart you upward and inward? Is Peter standing at some desk? I don’t know. But all that matters NOT! Paul said that to be absent from the body (and he meant believers in Christ) was to be present with the Lord. That’s pretty much all I need to know. That is fine. ***God has given us eternal life.*** That’s enough. I’ll worry about the “User’s Manual” when I get there. I’ll check out the particulars when I wake up, THERE.

Eternal life is the promise to people who receive Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. John MacArthur says, “Assurance of eternal life constitutes the first Christian certainty.”² But you do not receive it because you went to church all your life. It is not transferable from having lived a sincere Buddhist lifestyle or a sincere Muslim or Hindu lifestyle. But for those millions and millions of people, in ANY century, in ANY country, who simply learn just a little about Jesus, and entrust themselves to Him, there is eternal life.

Note carefully that John says Eternal life is ***given.*** ἔδωκεν (δίδωμι) verb, third person, singular, aorist, active, indicative “to give (in various senses lit. or fig.)” It is a free gift. It is not earned or deserved. Paul wrote that ***the wages of sin is death but the FREE GIFT of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*** (Romans 6:23).

This is, I think, the most wonderful part of the Gospel. Eternal life, and forgiveness and all the benefits of knowing Christ, as FREE! They are a gift from God. I like gifts, don’t you? If someone gives you a nice birthday present, let’s say, and you open it up and it is a fabulous combination of something you

needed and something you wanted and something that was really cool, wouldn't that make you happy?

But what if you came over to me and gave me such a wrapped up present, a thing which you KNEW I needed. I unwrapped it and looked at it and you could see I was pleased by the look in my eyes, and after a moment, I reached around and took out my wallet and pulled out a twenty dollar bill and handed it to you... How would you feel? You would feel bad, I am sure, if not insulted. You could see that I was trying to change something that you wanted just to freely GIVE me, into a purchase. That is the way eternal life is, from the hand of God, to us and to ANYONE who will hear of it and simply hold out their hands... It is a free gift. That is the most wonderful part of the Gospel!

In vs. 13 we read, ***These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.*** Here is the very reason for why this letter was written by the aged apostle- he wanted his readers and ANYONE who would believe in the name of the Son of God, to KNOW that they have eternal life. It is the reason, in a general sense, for the writing of the whole New Testament.

What John had just written about God's testimony (5:9-12) aims to assure his readers that, despite anything the antichrists have said, believers do indeed possess eternal life. It may be pointed out, in fact, that the assurance of one's salvation always rests fundamentally and sufficiently on the direct promises that God makes to that believer. In other words, one's assurance rests on the testimony of God.²

John wrote the epistle to give believers confidence that they possessed eternal life. The false brethren's departure left John's congregations shaken (2:19). He assured those who remained that since they adhered to the fundamentals of the faith (a proper view of Christ, obedience, love), their salvation was sure. **eternal life.** This does not refer primarily to a period of time but a person (v. 20; John 17:3). Eternal life is a relationship with the person of Jesus Christ and possessing His nature (as in vv. 11,12).²

My friends, I want you to have assurance that you have eternal life. The Bible promises it and says there is a plain distinction between those who have it and those who do not. It comes down to Christ. It is through your faith in Him, and only in that faith, the Bible says, that you can claim Him. John also says that people who claim Him, will have a changed lifestyle, flowing from Christ Himself. You will experience love for your brethren in Christ. You will not, NOT care about them. But in Him you can know that you have eternal life. You do not need to doubt it.

Sometimes you will fail in the Christian life. Despite that, you can know that you have eternal life. ***If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*** (1:9)

Some of us have dark stuff in our backgrounds and we wonder if the promise of eternal life can really extend to someone with darkness like we have. ***For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.*** (5:4)

Sometimes we get depressed about getting older, weakened or disabled. We wonder, “was eternal life a pipedream?” ***Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.*** (3:2)

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of First John (Lesson 24)

Scripture: I John 5:13-15

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: November 16th, 2003

Our Confidence Before Him

1 John 5:13-15 (NASB)

¹³ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life. ¹⁴ And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

Introduction Prayer is probably the most important personal exercise of Christian faith, that we do. It seems to me, that the success of so many other things we do as Christians, stands or falls with **whether** we pray about it, **how much** we pray about it and **how** we pray about it... The practice of prayer is *always* associated with how close we feel to God.

Those who know God the best are the richest and most powerful in prayer. Little acquaintance with God, and strangeness and coldness to Him, make prayer a rare and feeble thing. --E.M. Bounds

In Ephesians 6:10-20, Paul challenges us to take up our spiritual armor and weapons before we go into spiritual battle. A good example of having sufficient physical weapons to do physical battle would be the scene in "The Matrix" when Neo and Trinity prepare to go into the building to rescue Morpheus. The person on their ship asks what they need and Neo responds something like, "Weapons, lots of weapons." Immediately an incredible arsenal of row after row of weapons appears for them to choose from. You could stop the clip when Neo walks through security, the guard asks to look under his coat, and he astounds the guard by opening his coat to reveal all his weapons. In the same way, God wants us to be well-equipped before we go into battle.

Well, we could survey a million illustrations on prayer... Sufficient to say it is a vital part of the Christian life. But it is real important to understand prayer and the things the Lord has said about it. John tells us some real important things in the short couple of verses we're considering today... But consider, first, I John 5:13 once again, because verse 14 begins with **and**, tying it to verse 13. Verse 13 said

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.

God wants us to know that we already have eternal life. He wants us to depend on that and be certain of it. That is why the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles to write the books which, together, became the New Testament. We do not need to doubt, and we should not doubt that life after death is a sure thing and it will be a wonderful life for the Christian. It will be a thing which does not end. I cannot imagine that. Everything seems to end sooner or later.

I wish I could preach knowledgably about ***eternal life***. I wish I could tell you all that we will be doing and seeing, and with whom we will do it and see it all, and what we will look and feel like and all the cool stuff we will know. But all I can say is that ***it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. (3:2)*** Paul adds a blip, I Cor.13:12 ***For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known.***

But we can say at least this plainly and without hesitation--The promise of eternal life is for those who keep believing in the Son of God.

- When you're in your teens and if you believe in the Son of God, your faith in Him is pretty pure. For most believing teens they simply trust that Jesus is real and will make good on His promises. Prayer is a thing you do at times of crisis.
- When you're in your twenties, you start to feel some strain on your faith. You're more intellectually alive, questioning, testing, exploring and you start to feel some pressure on your faith because now you have some responsibilities in life, in which to somehow meld your theology of Christ. Your prayer life focuses mostly on yourself.
- In your thirties, your belief in Christ starts to have an impact on some new people in your life: a spouse, small children. You are working hard in your occupation and it is harder to get to church, to read your Bible, and to witness for Christ. At the same time though, your mind has learned that there is a thing in the Bible called "doctrine" and you make some decisions about where you are on the doctrinal map, how you fit into the spectrum of biblical interpretations. You start to develop prayer *lists* in your prayer life and you start to think of prayer as a tool.
- When you get to your forties, is that faith in the Son of God still there? If it is, it's now tested perhaps by the fact that you have been around Christians for quite a while. You're part of "church life," and maybe even have gotten to the point where you have some church duties. Your kids are teenagers now and you spend more and more prayer time praying for their safety and choices. Church life isn't always fun and games and blissful worship

experiences. Do you still, as Paul talks about, “love His appearing.” Are you just as excited about Him as you were when you found Him in your teens? When you pray, are you praying biblically and praying about the things that the Bible illustrates God will respond to? But you are getting hungry for more prayer now. You want to hear His voice, and you want to see this practice full in your life.

- By your fifties you notice something profoundly upsetting: you’re not twenty any more. You are aging. Your perspective on life has matured and you have little naivety left. You struggle to hold cynicism at bay and you have to work hard to feel fresh about church life and other Christians. Sometimes you feel quite alone in your Christian walk. You have probably read through the Bible now, more than once. It isn’t new any more. You have your theological convictions pretty much set in place and you yawn more and more during preaching times. More than ever, you are concerned about minimizing risk in your life. You are concerned about safety of investment and you do not want to waste anything. Is your love for the Lord Jesus still vibrant and alive? When you talk to the Lord, you can see that He HAS answered your prayers along the way and you can see that He has to some extent, give you the “**desires of your heart.**” (cf. Psalm 37).
- When you pass through sixty years old, you start to notice friends and maybe family dying. You wonder, “Is the Lord Jesus there?” Sometimes you feel like more and more of your big prayer requests have not yet been answered. You might re-evaluate your sense of what doctrinal convictions are really critical and important and you start to think more and more about **eternal life** and that you are closer to the reality of that than you have ever been.
- By seventy, you look back on the day you first trusted Christ and you think, “Man, I was so young. What did I know?” Most of the people in the church around you are younger than you. They like different music, indeed, music seems like an end in itself to many people, almost irrespective of what is being taught. You aren’t moved so much by the things that once moved you. You think, “Is Jesus here?” You look deep into your heart and you say, “I WILL cling to Jesus’ promises until I draw my last breath.” You wait for Him.
- If you make your eightieth birthday, you notice your mind isn’t as quick as it once was. Reading comes harder now—TV is so much easier. Going to church and worshipping and being warm or cool enough and the seating situation, make it more of a deliberate discipline. People sometimes seem to patronize you and you say to yourself, “Its still the same ME in here, I am not a child.” The songs the kids sing with joy in *the music*, and which they seem all anxious to play musically so exactly, simply speak truths that you for which you wait daily. You remember Christian songs you loved in your twenties and you wonder why no one seems to like them any more, and you think, “Well, whatever...” You relax; you whisper to the Savior, “I love you,” you think maybe you hear the Savior whispering to you. You know all too

well that you could find yourself in the arms of the Savior at any moment now.

- The Christian who reaches ninety understands prayer fully now, most probably. They are not learning new doctrine about prayer and they are not correcting their thinking about it. They are not confused about how to pray or what to pray about. And prayer is the thing for which they now engage their mind the most. They long for heaven and they almost do not feel part of this world any more. The things that seemed so urgent fifty years before, are now a fading memory. They hear the Word preached and they love it. If they can get to church, and if they can hear, they would rather be there than most anywhere. They tell the Lord Jesus, “I still love you, and any time now, will be just fine.”

The promise of eternal life is for those who keep believing in the Son of God.

With the promise of eternal life given to us, John says we have assurance of answered prayer. **And...**

Let's look at verse 14 carefully:

And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

Based on what the Bible says, Christians have another great confidence, or assurance. God hears us when we ask according to His will. Notice first of all what the verse does NOT say:

- 1) It does not say that if we ask anything at all, He hears us.
- 2) It does not say that if we ask anything at all we automatically can expect it to be granted.
- 3) Neither does it say that He will probably say “No” to what we ask.
- 4) It does not say we should never ask for anything for ourselves.

It DOES say that conditioned upon asking for something that we know pleases Him, He hears us. And it DOES say that Our request for ANYTHING that we know pleases Him will result in Him hearing us. Now I can imagine the honest among us saying, “well big deal!” I don't want Him to just *hear me*. I mean, I already think He hears me all the time anyway, and knows my every thought.” But go on to verse 15,

And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

Him hearing us results in receiving the requests that we have asked for, things from the great catalog of blessings and gifts and enablements that ARE according to His will.

It is like that great promise that Jesus Himself made to His disciples (no doubt, John remembering that night): John 15:7 ***If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.***

It also ties in with something that the apostle James wrote,

WHAT is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? ² You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. James 4:1-3

So look at it closely:

1. We have a great assurance, as Christians, relating to prayer
2. Asking according to His will—for things we already know He wants for us—results in a guaranteed audience with God Himself (nothing is said of intermediaries—we are authorized to request things from God directly)
3. We shall receive the requests that we ask for.

Now is this promise of use to us? I am not sure. We seem to spend much of our time asking for things that we cannot be SURE are within His sovereign will and not too much of our time asking for all the things He has already promised us. What do I mean? We spend much time praying for healing. We spend much time praying for success in bettering ourselves. We spend a lot of time praying for family members to find the Lord and to love Him. We spend much time in praying for the salvation of specific people. We spend much time praying for relief from discomfort, inconvenience, danger and risk. All of these things might please us and they are not bad things by any means. But none of these are things which the Bible says are *necessarily* guaranteed to us, simply because we are Christians. You say, “Well what else IS there other than those important things? What’s LEFT?” What IS according to His will?

Let me give you a short list...

1. His glory.
2. Your filling with the Holy Spirit, and to manifest the fruits of the Spirit, which would include:
 - a. Love
 - b. Joy
 - c. Peace
 - d. Longsuffering (patience)
 - e. Gentleness
 - f. Goodness
 - g. Faith
 - h. Meekness
 - i. Temperance (self-control)
3. His use of you in the kingdom.

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4. Your ability to do His will in all the roles He has said so much about in the Scripture: i.e. being a good spouse, being a good parent, being a good servant among your brethren, being a good citizen.
 5. Understanding from the Word of God.
 6. Spirit-enabled impact on your community for the testimony of Jesus Christ.
 7. Your daily bread.
 8. Forgiveness from your sins.
 9. The ability to forgive other people when they offend or injure you.
 10. Holiness.

Christians enjoy a great privilege in this world. We already know that we are going to heaven and the assurance is as sure as the writings of St. John can make it. And we know that we are assured answered prayer frequently and bountifully. But we need to calibrate our prayer lives according to His will. We need to pray more for the things that He has already revealed are ours for the asking. Then we need to watch Him provide, carefully catalog and testify to those answered prayers and share that in praise and testimony times. I LOVE it and I am thoroughly edified on those occasions when someone says, "You know I was praying for a thing that the Word has told me He wants me to have, and HE GRANTED IT! And I praise His name for His goodness!" That makes ME praise His name for His goodness.

Our prayer lives are not supposed to be dominated by uncertainty and tentativeness. We need to pray more and to pray confidently. We know that many of the ten things I listed we cannot make happen ourselves. When they DO happen we are living supernaturally and our joy of the Lord is energized tremendously by living from answered prayer to answered prayer. John tells us he wrote all this letter to give us confidence. 1 John 3:1 **SEE how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.**

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of First John (Lesson 25)

Scripture: I John 5:16,17

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: November 23rd, 2003

Praying About the Power of Sin

1 John 5:16-20 (NASB)

¹⁶If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not *leading* to death, he shall ask and *God* will for him give life to those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is a sin *leading* to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. ¹⁷All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not *leading* to death. ¹⁸We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him and the evil one does not touch him. ¹⁹We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one. ²⁰And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

Introduction Do you think we are supposed to be close, as Christians? I mean, does it seem like Christians being real close is a reasonable thing, either in the same church or between churches? Does it seem reasonable to you that one believer should be kind of cozy with another Christian? Are we supposed to know each other pretty well, have some transparency with each other, be able to talk to each other openly and enjoy a measure of authenticity with each other that is somehow, better than what is shared between two non-Christians? I think maybe we are. In theory... After all, we read verses like

Acts 2:44 (NASB)

And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common;

Romans 12:10 (KJV)

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another

Colossians 3:15,16 (The Message)

And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment.

Never be without it. Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step

with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate

thankfulness

And yet, sometimes, pretty often actually, I detect a distance, a guardedness between Christians. Even when we are closest, we are on guard. Now, I believe there is a reason for this; and it isn't that we are not appreciative of one another. It isn't that we are all psychologically dysfunctional and messed up and therefore just don't trust anybody, even our brethren in Christ. It isn't that we think we're better than each other. It is that we are still broken, sinners. We are still susceptible to sin. Even though Christians are redeemed children of

God, we still have a shadow of the old sin nature around. In fact, even now, there is probably no sin that we have become INCAPABLE of sinning.

Here is a reality of being close to other Christians. We enjoy all the blessings and ministries which we have for each other—I want to dwell there for just a moment. One of the things I thank the Lord for the most is the fellowship I share with my fellow Christians. But then there is the reality of seeing the harder side of my brother’s lingering sin nature maybe, too. And what do we do with one another? You will remember (from verse 15) that we were invited to really ask powerful things from the Lord in prayer, as long as we are praying according to His will. Now in verse 16 we see one of those things which we CAN and SHOULD often pray for...

John says (I John 5:16):

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this.

There are times when real Christian love involves a closeness that isn’t necessarily comfortable. There are times when we become aware that our brother or sister is sinning and for the moment, at least, living in rebellion. Please observe some specifics of this verse:

a. John says if **anyone** sees his brother committing a sin. This means someone other than an elder or a pastor or a leader. Every believer is responsible, to some degree, for his brethren.

b. If anyone **sees**... Not hears about, imagines or suspects. This verse is for that time when you actually see someone sin. This is when you are close to someone, and you witness their sin yourself. I think this is a little uncomfortable to think about. I think some of us find it SO distasteful to get this “real,” that we would do anything to avoid getting this close—sort of a “see no evil” approach. It IS uncomfortable and it is important how we deal with sin in each other’s lives. If we deal with it wrongly or poorly then more damage and distraction can be done. This reminds us of Galatians 6 where we read

Galatians 6:1 (NASB)

BRETHREN, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² Bear one another’s burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ. “Restore” meaning “to mend” or “repair,” and was used of setting a broken bone or repairing a dislocated limb.

²

c. He is talking about seeing someone sinning **a sin not leading to death**... Now one naturally wonders, “what is that?” Did John have in mind one particular sin which would bring capital divine punishment? Did he mean some really grisly or gross sin? I do not think so. It is true that the New Testament teaches there are individual sins which bring God to the limit of His tolerance of

that Christian's determination to remain in that sin. In one case, the Lord took Ananias and Saphira home in Acts 5. Paul mentions that some who partook of the Lord's Table in an unprepared or selfish way were taken home prematurely (I Cor. 11). It was divine discipline. God disciplines His children. There CAN be a sin, which we so love, that our Lord is grieved to the point of bringing us in. That is the one that John is talking about. It can really be ANY sin, but it is the one we might love so much that we simply refuse to repent of it. No amount of prayer support from loved ones or fellow church members can prevent the justice and sovereignty of God. John knew that—so he says, ***There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this.*** Why? Because God would be mad at us for doing so? No, but because it's a waste of time. The Christian that refuses to change their mind about one particular "pet" sin, can expect their lives to reflect the discipline of the Lord. It might be the lack of joy, the lack of a sense of blessing, a sense of isolation from the warmth of body life or it might even come to the point where the Lord takes them home.

Now, one might be tempted to say, "God can't do that! Who does He think He is anyway, God?" Yes indeed. He can do whatsoever He decrees to do, and what He decrees to do is ALWAYS, ALWAYS right and fair.

I believe the Lord is very patient with us. We are His children, after all. He cares immensely for and about us. I think He is far more patient with us than we understand. I think our sin grieves Him more than we understand too. We tend to be choosy about which sins (which He has already laid out as bad things) WE really endorse and ratify as sin. But John tells us that ***all unrighteousness is sin*** (I John 5:17). There is not "unrighteousness," which we might classify as unfortunate, inconvenient or even tragic, but we don't REALLY think it's sin..., and "Sin," which we would all vote, "Yes, that one is always a sin." In the first case we might say things like cheating on income tax by being paid under the table, or living together without benefit of marriage as long as we only live with one person at a time, filching office supplies that we think we deserve or which the company really bought too much of, viewing carnality on the movie screen, etc. We might be able to accept the term "unrighteousness" but we don't *really* think it is sin. Then we might turn around and say that child molestation, or rape or murder or mutual fund fraud or genocide are clearly sinful. But John says all unrighteousness is sin. We know what things lack righteousness by the Word of God. This is one reason why your Bible reading is so crucial for you--so you can know what is righteous and what is not, and so that you can nurture your sensitivity to the differences.

However, all sin doesn't necessary immediately warrant the severe discipline of being called home because I sinned a specific sin. It depends on how my heart is and how long I've been nurturing a "pet" sin. Still, staying IN a

particular sin takes a toll. It might not be being called home early, but all lingering sin still has a practical detraction and damage to our joy in the Lord, to our effectiveness for Him.

Verse 18 reads We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him and the evil one does not touch him. Again here is John's idea that the truly born-again person is not *characterized* by sin. He isn't defined by a dogged and uncaring self-focus such that he sins and sins and sins and doesn't fight it. That's not a born-again person, John says.

Victory over sin and Satan is the third Christian certainty (3:9; Rom. 6:15–22). **himself.** This word is not in the best manuscripts. The better reading in the original language is “keeps him,” referring to the fact that God protects the believer. **wicked one.** This is a reference to Satan. **does not touch him.** John uses this word only here and in John 20:17. The word suggests “to lay hold of” or “to grasp” in order to harm. Because the believer belongs to God, Satan must operate within God's sovereignty and cannot function beyond what God allows, as in the example of Job (Job 2:5; Rom. 16:20). While Satan may persecute, tempt, test, and accuse the believer, God protects His children and places definite limits on Satan's influence or power (2:13; John 10:28; 17:12–15).²

We so often access the prayer privileges we own for our betterment. We seek the Lord's face for healing, success, safety and church growth. But here is a thing we should seek the Lord about too—the acquisition of spiritual power by becoming more truly righteous. We need to pray for holiness and not only sing about it. We need to pray for each other when we see sin. We need *at least* as much prayer for each other to deal with the power of sin as we have talk and confrontation about it. It is easier to confront than it is to really make each other secret prayer projects. We need each other's help in prayer and the promise is that GOD WILL GIVE LIFE.

We are a special people, bound together by our mutual clinging to the cross of Jesus Christ. We are growing closer, by the work of the Spirit, and the ministry of prayer, STRENGTH brought to bear by the healthy among us, is one of our greatest assets and one of the most beautiful things about the body of Christ. May we be a seriously praying community!

Dartmouth

Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Exposition of First John (Lesson 26)

Scripture: I John 5:18-21

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: January 4th, 2004

New Year's Newness from Basic Old Principles

1 John 5:18-21 (NASB)

¹⁸ We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him and the evil one does not touch him. ¹⁹ We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one.

²⁰ And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. ²¹ Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

Introduction Does the Christian faith ever get old for you? Do you ever sort of secretly wish someone would come along with something new? In your mind, living day in and day out with the same basic spiritual “program running in the background”—the doctrines you have believed, the church life you’ve become used to, the rights and wrongs you’re familiar with—does it get old for you? Personally, I find great comfort and a never-ending fascination with the set of truths I have come to believe.

I recently read the novel *The DaVinci Code* which is a fictional assault on traditional Christian beliefs about Jesus—the idea is that Jesus actually married Mary Magdalene and they had a child and that after Jesus died, Mary and the kid moved to France, and for like, their own sinister reasons, for centuries the Church covered this up. Interestingly, this novel has seduced a great many people who might be prone to believe in conspiracy theories and willing to consider yet another corrupt story of the Church and all its far-reaching power.

That’s why its always great to just get back to the realization that our faith is not based on the Church’s pronouncements. Our faith is based upon the plain statements of the Bible. We believe that the Bible is reliable and correct in all that it teaches about the important stuff in life. We’re completely comfortable with the fact that the Bible was written by men, living in real situations, but that *within* those situations they were moved upon by the Holy Spirit to produce a set of writings which is different from all other human writings. And as such, we believe the things—the ideas, the morals, the “way”—that are taught therein.

And so we come finally, to the last few words that John the apostle wrote, at the end of his first epistle.

So let's go through some Basic Old Principles, some of these last thoughts that were on John's mind at the end of First John. They are simple and straightforward and they crystallize what it means to be an authentic Christian.

1. **We know...** I like how this begins. Not, we think, and not maybe we speculate. John is certain about some things. It is *good* to know. It is good to be certain. All of us are surrounded by many people who are unsure. They will tell you they would *like* to believe that the born-again thing is real. They will tell you that they would *like* to believe with certainty in life after death and in complete forgiveness of their sins. But they're not sure... John is sure. He says, **We know...** Well, what do we know?

2. We know that **no one who is born of God sins** and we learned that this doesn't mean *never* sins but is not captivated by sin or does not possess a general day-in and day-out nature or lifestyle of saying "No" to God and "Yes" to rebellion.

My friends, I still sin. And every Christian I know—even the oldest and most spiritual—still sin. But we do not sin without conscience. We do not casually break the law of God and they lightheartedly flit back to "grace." We still sin and we are still often tempted but we do not walk in sin.

3. We are **kept** by the Son of God (who was also "born of God" in that He was born of Mary) from Satan who would, if he could, not let one single person go to heaven and be redeemed of sin. He would love to hold captive the entire human race. His iron tyranny has indeed captured many but no Christian is in his grasp. What a great truth, especially in a world today where dark things and Satanic things and the macabre are minimalized and foolishly treated as fun and harmless.

We are kept from being **touch**ed by the evil one. It is a clear word-picture. What would it be like to be touched by Satan? Would his touch be gentle, soothing, a caress of love and kindness? No, when Satan touches someone and gets involved in their life it is brutal and vicious. It is the S.S. It is the torturers of the Iraqi high command. It is the rape of the secret police. It is the sneering laugh of an execution-style murder. It is the prison guards of the Bataan death march. That is how Satan treats people, ultimately, when they come under his influence and there are many around us who are in his kingdom. But Christians are not. No one who has been **born of God** is eligible for incarceration by him.

4. Another thing we just *know* is that we are **of God**. I am glad I am of God. I may not be the hippest and most attractive and most well-spoken dude around. I may not drive a fancy automobile or go on fancy trips. I may not have friends in the State House or in the Congress or in the Pentagon and I may not *be* the Mayor. I may not be the smartest of crispest thinker in the Town of Dartmouth.

I may not be the life of the party and be able to put together a “kickin” party such that everyone would love to be invited. I may not have the biggest church around. I may not get invited to speak at big events. I may not have lots and lots of friends and I may not have a perfectly tweaked “body mass index.” But in Christ, I am **of God**. I know this. I have been touched by His grace and redeemed in His plan and authorized as His child in Christ. Satan cannot lay a hand on the believer (v. 18) but the world lies in his arms!²

5. We also know that Christ is alive and at work in our lives because of the **understanding** we have. **The Son of God has come**. I wonder if you ever get frustrated with those around you who don’t “get it” like you “get it?” You know its not because you’re smarter than they are, you know that and you cringe if they think you’re *saying* that. But it comes down to the fact that non-Christians, no matter how sincere they may be, no matter what nice guys they may be, just don’t “get it.” They do not see what is really going on in the world with all kinds of issues. They don’t get how we think Jesus is the only way. They don’t see the big deal with living for Christ even if it hurts and even if it involves sacrifice. They don’t know why we like praise music now when we used to like Jethro Tull. They don’t see why we go to conferences and seminars all the time. They don’t know why we don’t work on Sundays or why we stay away from casinos, strip joints, bars and racey movies. They can’t figure why we get all upset about abortion or about gay marriage. They don’t get why we carry Bibles around and they don’t see the big deal with why we don’t want to marry people who DON’T believe as we do. None of this makes much sense to them. They don’t have the **understanding** that happens when the Son of God comes into your life. He came. He lived. He died. He rose. He is like no other! He deserves our whole lives to be devoted to Him and *for* our whole life!

What Jesus said is **true**. It isn’t up for debate. It isn’t to be taken along side of what Mohammed said or Ghandi said or what Confucious said. He is true and we are IN Him who is true? Who is that? John said, near the end of his life probably, that that is Jesus Christ. He is what we are about. He makes the new year a new year every year! He is the most exciting pursuit a person can have and He never gets old. If we are filled with His Spirit you will never get bored though the truths about Him are the same basic principles you have heard a hundred or a thousand times.

You will never find out there a creed that is better. You will never find a way of life and a system of theology which is superior or which holds up better under pressure. You can never find a philosophy of life which is fairer or which creates better adherents than those who are **in Him who is true**. You can never find a better community of brethren and comrades and fellow soldiers than the community of people who are bound together by the blood of Him who bought them and who would give their lives freely for each other if called upon to do so.

6. Then John reminded them that ***this is the true God and eternal life***. That is an interesting juxtaposition of ideas. The true God, and eternal life... The implication is that there are lots of Untrue gods out there and there isn't any eternal life in them. There's other religions. There is no eternal life in them. There's even other gods—they have other names. There is no eternal life in them. Their followers “wake up” after death and go “uh oh...” There is only death in them. When you decide to trust in the true God, you get eternal life. Your body will die but YOU will not die. Ever. You will be with the ***true God*** and serving Him and full of occupation and never bored and praising Him forever. You will never get to the end of studying Him. You will never lose your joy in Him. You will never again fall into depression or dark thinking or doubts. It is eternal ***life***. Is there anything better than this basic old principle for living?

7. Finally, to end on an abrupt and blunt exhortation, ***Little children, guard yourselves from idols***. My friends, I want you to remember this little strange trivial point. If I ask you a year from now, how does First John end? May you quickly be able to reply, “he told me to guard myself from idols.” Yes, he ends with no postscript or final greetings. He doesn't do, as Paul so often did, end with a note of affection or by mentioning loved one's names. He doesn't even say, “I am John, pray for me.” He just ends with, bluntly, ***guard yourselves from idols***. Why? Because he knew how susceptible his readers WERE to things which might dethrone Christ from their hearts. He knew they might let pleasure, or hobbies or profit-making or other loyalties or ego or pride or lust or prejudice become MORE important to them than serving Jesus Christ. He knew they were capable of lagging into *part-time*, casual pursuit of the things of God. He knew that if they started to go to sleep, and dropped their guard and took for granted the grace of God, other things would INEVITABLY replace Christ on the thrones of their hearts. John knew this, and so since he loves them—one more time, he refers to them as ***little children***, he warns them with one final great old, basic principle—never let anything else become MORE IMPORTANT than the Lord to you. Always keep the Son of God as the most important priority you have. Always make Him first in line with your time, and your money, and your loyalties, and your love.

I hope you will read this book again. I hope you will love how John sees things in black and white and that the things he taught those people up in Ephesus and that he saw were being lost by the early church—and how some were so easily led astray by false teachers—are just as important for us to dwell on today. We are little different from the earliest Christians, in many ways. We need the Scriptures, Scriptures like First John. We need to read the Scriptures and pour over them and meditate on them and DISALLOW our hearts to drift and become confused because we are people of the Book. I find it very sad if we

teach the Bible to our kids but neglect to read it and memorize it ourselves. May we love the things that Jesus said and that His apostles said, and may we make meditating on the Word of God our greatest priority.