

UseFULL!
Philemon

(Read Philemon)

Intro: My two younger brothers and I brought up the tail end of the eight children of Irvin and Kathryn Tyson – we were 5, 7 and 8 years younger than our next older sibling, our brother Phil. We were rascals and we were especially rascally when we listened in on the phone conversations our older siblings had with their boyfriends and girlfriends when we ran away when our sisters attempted to put us in bed, and when we got into one of our legendary fights that caused my sister Sherry to predict that we would never survive to adulthood. One time, we found, and not by accident, our brother Phil’s stash of love letters he had received from his future wife, Judy. It was the mother-lode of juicy bribery material. It’s amazing we lived to tell the story. But oh, how fun it was use some of Judy’s terms of endearment on Phil and relate to our other siblings and friends how Judy’s pillow was soaked with tears for missing her beloved Phil and other much stuff. You can learn a lot by reading letters written to someone else.

We learn a lot from reading Paul’s letter to Philemon too. Paul wrote a lot of letters and the ones that survived and were authenticated as actually his, are preserved here in the New Testament. All but one of them are letters to churches intended to encourage, teach, admonish, and even sternly lecture the groups of people that were the receivers of the letters. That one that was not a letter to a church is the one I just read to you. It is a personal letter from the apostle to a leader in the Colossian church named Philemon. And while it’s not a love letter full of sweet nothings that make little boys grimace and say “EWWWW!” it is a glimpse into Paul the man, and how he taught even in his personal interactions with people.

Let’s do a quick unpacking of the letter’s content and then we’ll look at the big messages we can get from this little letter:

Paul is probably in prison in Rome when he writes the letter. He probably sent it along with the general letter to the Colossian church that we have in our New Testament right after the letter to the Philippians. As you can easily deduce from the letter, Onesimus is a runaway slave that Paul is sending back to his master. In fact, it would seem that Onesimus is the one who is the letter bearer. It would also seem that Onesimus has been transformed into a Christ Follower under Paul’s ministry and thus his relationship with his master should now necessarily be transformed as well. He is a new man and that should count for something.

Now let’s look at this letter and learn.

It’s good to appeal to the commonality we have in Christ

- Paul is a prisoner of Jesus Christ – for the sake of Christ.
- Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus (who may be Philemon’s wife and son) and fellow laborers. If Paul is a prisoner of Jesus, that makes them prisoners too. They have a partnership (koinonia) as prisoners for the sake of Christ.
- We have a common grace and a common peace. All this commonality is because of the equal footing we have in Jesus Christ. The ground is level at the foot of the Cross. No one has to do more and no one has to do less to experience the grace of Jesus Christ.
- Paul appeals to this partnership as he makes his case.
- And then he says something that, if all Christ Followers employed it, the Church would blossom. He shows that . . .

It’s a good habit to pray for people when God brings them to mind.

- In most of Paul’s letters, one of the first things he says is how he thanks God for them and they are always in his prayers. But in his letter to the Philippians and in this letter to Philemon he specifically says that he always thanks God as he remembers them in his prayers.
- My friend Marion, who passed away last June, had this wonderful habit. Anytime when she said the wrong name in a conversation, she would breathe a brief prayer for that person. (Explain)
- What would happen if you did that? Any time a name come to mind – you would pray for that person. That would be awesome. What if you’re upset with a person, instead of ruminating their faults, you lift them to the Lord? It’s hard to stay mad at a person you’re doing that for. What if you’re watching the news or reading the newspaper and you see that a politician or some other famous or infamous person has done or said something

that causes your blood pressure to rise – what if you prayed for God to reveal himself to them rather than getting mad? Just think how different our attitude would be, and because of our prayers, just think of what prayer can do.

- As for Paul’s thankful prayers for Philemon, I’m sure that the ground of Philemon’s heart was well prepared for what Paul was about to present to him in the letter Onesimus carried to him. In fact, it probably made it possible for Paul to appeal as a brother in Christ rather than an authoritative apostle. You see . . .

Just because we have authority in Christ, it’s no reason to throw it around

- Paul is bold. That’s not surprising. With Paul, what you see is what you get – he’s about as subtle as an A-bomb. So he doesn’t hold back from reminding Philemon that he could order him to handle the returning slave differently. But instead, since he knows that Philemon has *love for all God’s holy people* (verse 5) he will appeal in Christian love rather than Christian authority.
- It’s always better to do it that way anyway. And yet, we so often forget that. It’s no wonder Christians are often seen as hateful because, even though we have the truth, and respond with the truth, it’s not seasoned with love. Paul knew this full well – in Ephesians 4:15 he tells his readers to be “*speaking the truth in love*”, because love wins. Even if you’re right other the other person is wrong – love wins.
- As Christ Followers, we have the winning combination. We know the authority of the truth, but beating people down with it is not the best way to a solution.
- As Paul uses this appeal, he further points out through the new Onesimus that . . .

People change because God changes them

- Onesimus’s name, which translated means, Useful – is how Paul slam dunks his point. Onesimus, who is Useful in name, and he was useful as a slave – is now even more useful to the Kingdom because he is a new creation in Christ. Paul is promising that the new Onesimus will live up to his name.
- Onesimus is changed man. When we ask Jesus to become Lord, we don’t stay the same – we become more like him. In fact, if we stay the same, then he has NOT become our Lord – we are still firmly in the driver’s seat.
- God changes people. What we were before he changed us is old news. What you did before, you don’t do now. What you believed before, you don’t believe. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.
- So if God changes people, we Christ Followers need to accept them as changed. What God has made new is new indeed. There is no sin that God will not forgive and deliver from except the sin of refusing to allow God to deliver you. We need to offer the same grace as God. If we refuse to, we are in effect putting ourselves in God’s place which is blasphemy which is a pretty horrific sin in itself.
- Knowing how much of a changed man Onesimus is, Paul is willing to take the risk on the new man. It would seem that when Onesimus ran away from Philemon he may have stolen money or property. That’s what unredeemed people do. Also, as a slave he WAS property – so his leaving itself, by its very nature was theft. Whatever transpired, Paul volunteers to make it right with Philemon. He was willing to take that chance.
- But he is clearly implying that Philemon would be wise to take the risk too. Paul is not going against the culture and requiring Philemon to give up slave holding – but he is appealing to Philemon’s new life in Christ to surrender his legal rights as a slave owner. Those legal rights said that he could certainly take Onesimus back as a slave. He had the legal right to punish and/or prosecute Onesimus for running away and for theft. In fact, he had the legal right to kill Onesimus if he so desired. A slave was a slave and a slave was property and property can be handled in whatever way the owner saw fit. But Philemon wasn’t just any Roman citizen – his primary citizenship was in the Kingdom of God – that changes everything.
- Paul points this out very clearly. He appeals for obedience in verse 21.

Conclusion: You see, in Christ the barriers come down. In fact, in Paul’s own words, *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.* Galatians 3:28-29. For Philemon that was useful information. Onesimus was a changed man. He was really useful now. In fact, in 95 AD the Bishop of Ephesus was martyred for his faith. The bishop’s name was Onesimus. Many people think he was the one and the same Onesimus for whom Paul appealed to Philemon. I’d like to think that Philemon was everything Paul said he was. And that he did everything that Paul asked and that he freed Onesimus to become an even more

UseFULL prisoner of Christ Jesus like his mentor Paul and his former owner Philemon. And that he became a leader in the church and rose to the office of Bishop in the very city of Ephesus where Philemon is likely to have been converted. And that he was such a powerful witness for Christ that he was executed in order to silence him. But it was too late, because the Good News cannot be silenced. It gets carried on by other prisoners of Christ Jesus. That's what it is to be UseFULL. Amen.

FROM GLOOM TO GLORY**Jude****(Read Jude)**

Intro: Kathy's sister, Linda, who was here with us a couple weeks ago, is several years younger than Kathy. That meant that she was several grades behind Kathy in school. Now, I'm not bragging, just stating facts, when I say that my wife is smart. Don't think that just because she married me, she is not super intelligent. Linda had to deal with that all the way through school as teachers would regularly and tactlessly ask: "Why can't you be as smart as your sister Kathy?"

I wonder if the writer of Jude ever had to deal with similar questions. You see his brother was Jesus. Do you think people ever asked him, "Why can't you do miracles like your brother?" Or "Why can't you be free of sin like your brother?"

Well Jude did the kingdom a huge service by writing this little letter and he blessed us too so he didn't do too shabby. Let's look at his letter. First . . .

Some quick background and then we'll look at his message:

- As I said, the writer of the letter is generally accepted to be the brother of Jesus. His name is, in actuality, Judas or Judah. The name Jude probably came about so as to not confuse him with Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. There are at least 4 men in the New Testament with the name – but that's not unusual, because Judah was a very common name.
 - Jude was writing to Jewish Christians – you can tell that by the fact that the examples he's uses are from Jewish scriptures which his hearers would have been very familiar with.
 - We're not sure where these Christians were located, and it may have been a number of churches that received a circular letter that was passed from town to town.
 - They needed encouragement because of some heretical teaching that had started to infiltrate the church. Probably Gnostics (explain)
 - The way verse 17 refers to the apostles in the past tense, it would seem that most of them were dead; with this, and his references to what seems to be the Gnostic heresy—it's thought that Jude wrote this letter somewhere between 80 and 90 AD.
 - It is a short, but a brief warning. But it's better than a treatise on salvation that he may never have gotten to.
- Now, to the content: There is so much to learn from this letter. First, it begins with a . . .

A great and encouraging greeting

- The receivers are, as Christians:
 - Called by God – He has said whosoever will may come. The old song says "*We have heard the joyful sound: JESUS SAVES! JESUS SAVES!*" The joyful sound is the call on hearts who will surrender to him.
 - Beloved by God – Does he love us more than others? No! For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. He loved the world that much! And when we surrender to him – he bathes us in that love.
 - Kept by Christ – as we are faithful, he keeps us. Later Jude talks about a most holy faith – as we are in that faith, he is our keeper.
- Here's the point, the calling of God is the privilege, challenge, and inspiration of the Christian life – as we do that, we revel in that great salvation.
- But Jude was on a mission in this little letter – he has a gloomy message. He had plans for a great teaching on our great salvation, but that becomes . . .

A detoured dissertation

- Yes, we have a great salvation – and that is to be celebrated, but there are people who are polluting the church – and a detour is in order. His treatise on salvation needs to be put off in order to fight against that which threatens the very salvation of so many. So Jude isn't going to expound on the faith as much as to defend to defend it.

- You see, the problem is, the faith that has been entrusted to us is not a faith that changes with human impulse. We can't just decide to change what God has already set into place. To do that is not only heresy, its blasphemy.
- But that is exactly what was happening, there are . . .

Slippery serpents masquerading as servants of God

- The horrible thing is, instead of being attacked by Roman soldiers or angry religious leaders, the danger to the church is from within – troublemakers sneak in and they are wreaking havoc.
- It's still this way. In fact, people worry about what atheists say, but truthfully, atheists do less damage than "Christians" who distort the faith. Jude is talking about people who claim to be Christian, but live a life of dissipation and perversion.
- Jude quickly points out, there is a clear relationship between profession and practice and it's especially pronounced when you are talking about false belief and false living. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mounts to *Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them.* Matthew 7:15-16. Apparently Jude was dealing with a lot of rotten fruit and it stank to high heaven.
- The problem is these people thought of themselves as the spiritual elite. Their attitude was, "We have a special message and if we have to, we tell God what to think." This happens today. There are people who decide that God should or should not have done as he gave up his son to the cross. God didn't have to use violence to redeem the world! They presume to tell God what's up.
- And sometimes it is a personality who decides they have an exclusive line of communication with God – this is dangerous. The faith is not just for one person to decide (take for instance Jim Jones, Joseph Smith, Charles Taze Russel, Charles Manson)
- Jude was dealing with evil people who were immoral in life and heretical in belief, the even denied God his place and Jesus the same – they rejected the oneness of God and even went to far as to say, "We're all God!" Or, a common one these days, "There's more than one way to God."
- So Jude lays out some warnings. He says "Watch your pride – you're not too good to fall into the trap of wrong thinking." And he shows some characteristics of these wrong-headed heretics – especially in vv 17-19. They are
 - Selfish. Wicked people – are wrapped up in themselves.
 - They are scoffers. They belittle whatever they don't understand.
 - They denied the work of the angels of God.
 - They are grumblers – you can hear them whining a mile away.
 - True to their selfish ways they follow their own desires
 - And they are dividers. They revel in causing rifts.
- And worse yet, it they use the grace of God as . . .

A license for perversion

- These evil people pervert grace – they use grace as an excuse for flagrant immorality. This were the Gnostic teaching really shows up.
- This has happened down through the years. The Mormons, The Oneida Colony, the Branch Davidians – all began as Christian groups that fell into perversion – especially sexual perversion – as usual.
- So the truth is . . .

This is nothing new

- Jude gives a thorough treatment of history in a short synopsis. He goes back to the evil of Sodom and Gomorrah (explain). And the rebellion that happened in the Exodus (explain).
- He went to apocryphal writings to talk about Satan's Fall. (Explain apocrypha) And Jesus said he . . . *saw Satan fall like lightning . . .* (Luke 10:18)
- The rejection of authority – is nothing new either.
- And his description of the way the evil people had no conscience and were eating at the love feast with no qualms – sounds much like what Paul was dealing with in 1 Corinthians 11.
- And it happens today – the more things change, the more they stay the same. So he reminds us that . . .

Sin is ALWAYS punished

- Disobedience is punished PERIOD! So while Jude denounces the evil men, he doesn't argue or refute. He doesn't have to – he has the truth.
- The fate of wickedness – wild waves and wandering stars – they wander to and fro and never land.
- Barclay writes “*Every man can hear the voice of God; and every man has the animal instincts on which, indeed, the future existence of the race depends. But, if he consistently refuses to listen to God and makes his instincts the sole dynamic of his conduct, in the end he will be unable to hear the voice of God and will have nothing left to be his master but his brute desires. It is a terrible thing for a man to reach a stage where he is deaf to God and blind to goodness; and that is the stage which the men whom Jude attacks and reached.*”
- It's simple, if you walk in rebellion, punishment is sure. So he warns Christ followers, in so many words to .

WATCH OUT!

- Watch that you don't fall into the trap. Build up your faith. In verse 20, he tells Christ Followers to build on the foundation of the most holy faith, to pray in the Spirit and remember what it is to be faithful.
- In fact in vv. 20-21 he gives a bit of a list of the characteristics of goodness:
 - Goodness builds up in the most holy faith
 - Goodness prays in the Spirit
 - Goodness keeps one's self in the love of God
 - Goodness waits with expectation for the coming of the Lord
- And once you've built your spiritual muscles, you can get to . . .
- Reclaiming the lost – We have a Christian responsibility for others (vv. 22-23)
 - DON'T GIVE UP!
 - BE CAREFUL! – Don't be tainted by sin as you rescue people from the fiery pit.
 - Be ready to defend
 - Be ready to speak for the Lord – and three “Cs”
 - Provide council for the doubting
 - Provide compassion for the unsaved
 - Caution for the contaminated
- And then soak up the glory with . . .

Beautiful benediction

It's a glorious promise – let's finish out my talk with it. *To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore!* Jude 24-25.
Amen.

EYEWITNESS NEWS**1 John 1:1-2:2****(Read 1 John 1:1-2:2 in THE MESSAGE)**

Intro: My mother never talked about her childhood very much. She had a gentle and kind father and a mother who was depressing and domineering though many actually described her as downright mean. I never asked Mother about her childhood because I detected it was too painful for her. I didn't want her to have to go there. The picture that is up on the screen is from her wedding day on July 27, 1941. It was the happiest day of her life, but I think I see some sadness behind those eyes.

This much I knew: She had five older siblings and three younger brothers. By necessity, because of her mother's frequent spells of depression that were referred to as "sitting", where she would sit for days and even weeks staring into seeming nothingness, and by my mother's naturally caring nature, she mothered her younger brothers. One of those brothers fell into a tub of scalding bathwater and died as a result. I think Mother felt responsible for his death and perhaps felt her own mother's blame for it. She never spoke about, but I'm sure she never got over it. How do I know so much about my mom's childhood if she never told me? I listened in.

When Sheila was in college she needed to interview Mother for a class she was taking. I remember listening in on the interview from my mother's living room as she and Sheila talked in the kitchen. I was amazed as she talked about her childhood and her emotions on remembering what she was doing and what she was wearing as she heard the news of Pearl Harbor. She and Daddy had been married a little over three months on the day of the attack. That and many other things made for a fascinating window into her soul.

And after Mother died two years ago I received a recording, made about 11 years before by my nephew Aaron. The picture on the screen now is from Aaron's wedding in 2002. It was of an entire visit with her, lasting several hours. He made it as she prepared a meal and as they sat and ate. I don't know if she knew she was being recorded, but knowing her, if she did, she quickly forgot about it. Their conversation was easy and sweet with the kind of intimacy you would expect of a grandmother and grandson. Aaron's questions were great as he asked about her life and about her family. I learned so much I never knew as I listened in. I was there with her as she walked through her life.

First John is like that as it begins. I think you could hear it as I read from THE MESSAGE. As it was with Jude – this letter was written late in the apostolic period. John, at this point may very well be the only surviving apostle. This and the other two letters that bear John's name may have been written as late as 100 AD. There has been a lot of water over the dam since Jesus commissioned John and his fellow apostles and returned to the Father.

And how do we know it's John that wrote it? Well we don't with complete certainty because John doesn't introduce himself as the writer in this letter or the two that follow. But it seems pretty obvious that the same person that wrote the Gospel of John wrote this. For instance, the expression "born from above" which Jesus used in John 3 in his nighttime conversation with Nicodemus, is used 6 times in 1 John. And since most people believe that the beloved disciple John wrote the Gospel that bears his name, it is the same man that also wrote all three letters that bear his name here as well. Does all this really matter? Sure! Knowing that one of the very men who spent three years with Jesus, saw him die, saw him resurrected and ascending to heaven helps with providing validity to his teaching. It helps when we have a connection to a first-hand experience. That's why Sheila's interview with Grandma and Aaron's clandestine recording were so helpful in providing a picture into Mother's past.

In John's case, it's been almost 70 years since Jesus returned to the Father, the excitement of the early church may have been wearing off. John refers to this in his Revelation, where he records Jesus's words to the Church in Ephesus. Jesus begins with some praise for what they're doing right, but then he says, *Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.* Revelation 2:4. That cold and old faith needed some rekindling and John is hoping to do that here for his readers with some EYEWITNESS NEWS. John had REALLY seen Jesus and he was going to encourage jaded Christ Followers with that witness.

Like Jude he was dealing with false teachers. Where, in Jude it seems that it was agitators who were destroying from within, John was dealing with people who were trying to improve the message and failing miserably. They were trying to make it intellectually acceptable and they were espousing a Gnostic teaching. The problem is, any message that brings division is a false message – they were forgetting just who Jesus was.

John was teaching the Jesus he knew and heard and felt. The Jesus who was God incarnate. The Jesus who is God revealed. Because if you mess up on who Jesus is you really mess up. Warren Weirsbe wrote, “*If a person is wrong about Jesus Christ, he is wrong about God, because Jesus Christ is the final and complete revelation of God to men.*”

First John points out that . . .

Christianity is the Word of Life

- The first four verses of 1 John 1 are one entire sentence in the original Greek. As he does in his Gospel, John refers to Jesus as the Word – and the Word is the Gospel – which by very definition is GOOD NEWS!
- In this long sentence we see that the Good News is not an afterthought – it came from the very beginning. I remember an ARCHIE comic strip when I was a kid, where Jughead came to Archie with a tooth pick he had made in shop class. He said that he intended to make a baseball bat but went too far with the lathe and decided to settle for a toothpick. The Gospel plan to provide abundant life for humanity wasn’t a toothpick that came from baseball bat. It was not some concoction that God came up with after Adam and Eve failed, it was the plan from the beginning and Jesus Christ, God the Son, was in on from the planning.
- And it wasn’t just physical knowledge – it was spiritual. Yes, John and his friends had seen Jesus, heard him, walked with him, and hugged him. They had obvious physical interaction with him – but that was just the beginning of the spiritual knowledge they had of him. When you are full of Jesus like John was, it just spills over.
- And it was this, the Christian message, at its heart is love of men and love of God. They had fellowship with God and that fellowship makes for fellowship with one another. We saw this word last time with our study of Jude. The word we have here for fellowship is the Greek word Koinonia which means fellowship or partnership. False teachers were preaching a dividing message. One thing that shows them to be false is the truism that no belief is Christian if it separates people. The Good News unites – it does not divide.
- And in this sentence we see that joy is the essence of Christianity. It provides light for life. So, since . . .

You can see in the light, why not walk in the light

- Because God is light!
 - His light which is self-revealing, so that you can truly see him, shows his splendor, glory, purity, and holiness.
 - That light also provides guidance. Psalm 119:105 says *Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.* We see our way by his light.
 - And, what can be a little scary is the fact that his light reveals us too. The light of his holiness lights us up so that what we are and who we truly are is clear for us to see – he already knows but we need to know too. Nothing is hidden from him. The spotlight of his holiness reveals, convicts and then cleanses the Christ Follower.
- In him is no darkness at all. The Gnostic teaching that John was combatting taught that while the soul was God’s and therefore holy, the body was not. So while Jesus had the soul, the body could be used for whatever unholy use it desired. This, John says, is dark talk. It is false and has no place in the child of light. Darkness is completely incompatible with the Christian life, because God has called Christ Followers out of darkness and into the light (1 Peter 2:9)
- The truth is, darkness is life separated from God. John dealt with it 2000 years ago and it’s the same today – we live in a dark world that twists the truth so that what is false is said to be true and what was true is said to be false. This kind of thinking has permeated even the church. What was once seen as horribly immoral is now accepted as commonplace and to not accept it is now considered immoral. Confusion reigns even in the church. John Stott said, “Religion without morality is an illusion.” That confusion renders fellowship with God and with others impossible. Moral darkness causes much injury as blinded believers stumble around in their lostness.
- But here is the promise, the Bible clears it up. Verse 5 tells us that the message is from God – we didn’t make it up. It clearly says – *This is the message we have heard from HIM!* And that truth brings people together. His light brings us together in his truth. The Christ Follower is God’s servant and we take our standards from him – this is not a human reconfiguring.

- And it's ongoing. The word that Peterson rendered as "purges" and what the NIV calls "purifies" as John says *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, PURIFIES us from all sin.* 1 John 1:7 that word, has a continuous tense. The Christ Follower enjoys continuous cleansing from sin as he walks with God in the light. As we walk with him! It's light and dark and there is no middle ground – Christ Followers walk in the bright light of Christ – we don't stumble around in the twilight of lukewarmness or the cold darkness of rebellion.
- Let's remember to make sure that our walk and talk are the same. To help with that John goes on and talks about . . .

Sin, Truth, & Lies

- As we have just seen, sin and vital Christianity are incompatible. But what is sin? Well, Paul wrote, . . . *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* Romans 3:23. By its very definition sin is missing the target.
- The essence of the Christian life is to first realize our sin – that is, how and where we have missed the target and then go to God for forgiveness. But you need to be sincere and really mean it. As we saw before, we can't be in both worlds. John clearly points out, if you profess to love Christ and deliberately disobey him you are guilty of a lie. And you can't blame sin on anything or anyone else – you are responsible. Adam said, "The woman, **you gave** me, made me sin." And Eve said "The snake that **you made**, made me sin." Flip Wilson said "The devil made me do it." But God's revealing light shines on the fact that we are the ones who are responsible for our sin.
- So CONFESS! God is righteous – he does not lie. He does not break his word. He WILL forgive our sin (1:9) Because . . .

We have a friend

- Let me wrap this up with really good news. We are not alone! Our last two verses (2:1-2) tell us this. John's word for it is an "advocate". It's a legal term. We have one who will represent us. He is a lawyer who is not running up billable hours – he just wants us home. And not just us, but the entire world. *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the **whole world**.* 1 John 2:2. Some have mistakenly said that this teaches that everyone will be saved. But the truth is, it says that whoever wants to be saved will be saved. And he's pulling for everyone.
- In fact, the two words *atoning sacrifice* are what the King James calls *propitiation*. Jesus stepped into our place – he took our place and through Jesus, our sin is removed. The hymn says, "My sin is all pardoned, my guilt is all gone!" He took our place. We don't have to walk in darkness. We don't have to wallow in sin. We don't have to make excuses for unholy behavior. We can be forgiven and made new. We can have life the way God intended. We can be the eyewitnesses to really GOOD NEWS! I'm going to stop there. More next week. Amen.

DARKNESS AND LIGHT**1 John 2:3-11****(Read 1 John 2:3-11)**

Intro: When Clint Black married Lisa Hartman 26 years ago, their pastor told them in their premarital counseling that love is a lot more than the average country song gives it credit for. Clint sang about that teaching in a song a few years later. He ends the song with these words.

*Love is wide, love is long
 Love is deep and love is strong
 Love is why I love this song
 And I hope you love it too
 I remember well the day we wed
 I can see that picture in my head
 Love isn't just those words we said
 It's something that we do
 There's no request too big or small
 We give ourselves, we give our all
 Love isn't someplace that we fall
 It's something that we do*

That is John's point that he makes over and over again in his first letter. When we interact with others, in marriage and in all relationships AND with God, love is something we do. We'll look more at this today.

We are continuing our study of the big message we find in the little letters that we find at the end of the New Testament. You have probably noticed that 1 John isn't that terribly short in comparison to Philemon and Jude, or even 2nd and 3rd John and 2nd Peter. But it is still small but mighty.

We will spend a good part of two months nestled into this little letter and as we do, we will see recurring themes of love, light, and life. That is because they are inseparable in 1 John because they are inseparable in the life of the Christ Follower. This is timely teaching for American Christians. A lot of rhetoric by people who consider themselves Christian has not been very Christlike, and continues to be more hateful than loving. We have gotten too caught up in the things of this world and have responded to hatefulness with hatefulness when, as John points out in verse 6, we must live as Jesus did. Jesus's response was always out of love and likewise with us.

Then it's rather obvious that the truth that we are to love one another is not an add-on. Jesus didn't say "Go and make disciples, and, Oh, yeah, love one another." Indeed to love one another is fulfilling Jesus's command and it is the Christ Follower's identifying mark. Jesus said it this way, *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.* John 13:35.

One more important fact before we dig into our text is that love is used 18 times in 1 John which is the most the word is used in the New Testament. The second book that even come close is 1 Corinthians which has the famous "Love Chapter" which I will refer to later, at 13 times. But 1 Corinthians is much longer at 16 chapters to 1 John's five. So, is this important to the beloved apostle who refers to his readers, repeatedly as "Beloved"? You bet! And that is because it is infinitely important to being the children of God.

It's a matter of . . .

Obedience!

- Obedience is the basis for all Christian service. And obedience = love. You can do everything right, but if you don't love you've missed the boat. To obey God is to love like God.
- Obedience is the natural response to God's work in our hearts. In fact, that is the gist of v 3, or in the words on one commentator, is "*The forgiven heart is ready to do the will of him who forgave.*" And then we progress to the realization that to love God we must keep his word, and if we don't, John tells us in verse 4 we are liars. It's tough talk, but it's right here – in print; if you claim to know God and do not do his commands you are a liar.
- That's because it is simply impossible to know God and not have it affect our daily lives. To become a Christ Follower means we live like Jesus. Every time John uses the word "know", or "knowledge" he is speaking out against the heretical Gnostics who claimed they had special knowledge of what God wanted for them.

And also that as long as their soul was in God's care, they could do whatever they wanted with their bodies. It was a selfish belief system, clearly designed to satisfy earthly and selfish desires. But John's response is, there will be no self-seeking for those who are in Christ, instead we take up our cross.

- This is not legalism, it is the transformation that comes with the arrival of Christ into our lives. Warren Weirsbe, in his book on 1 John entitled *BE REAL*, says "A new believer discovers he now hates what he used to love, and that he loves what he used to hate!"
- So love delights in God's will. And our love is brought to completion by obedience. To keep God's word is to find God's love perfected within our hearts. (v 5) In other words, pure lives are lives of love. We give up our natural inclination and instead follow God's command, *Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.* Leviticus 19:18.
- Living as Jesus did, requires loving like Jesus did. How did Jesus live? He made obedience to the Father a habit (which is the meaning of the word "Obey" which is used here in verse 5). So, if we know Jesus, we walk like Jesus.
- And having just used a text from Leviticus, we know that this command to love...

Is nothing new

- The commandment is not new but it is always fresh. And Jesus added this to it, *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.* John 15:12. John talks about a new command in verse 8 and he says the truth is in Christ and as a result it is in his followers. So, to love one another is the highest truth. And further, the truth isn't something to be grasped by the mind as the Gnostics would have us believe, it is something to be done and lived out.
- Our love for God and love for others motivates a person to obey God's commandments without even thinking about them. We need to make obedience a habit. Paul wrote, *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.* Romans 13:8-10.
- It's like this, we don't have to be Clint Black, in fact any person who has been married for any length of time, knows that love is an action word more than it is a feeling. Love is something you do, rather than what you feel. The world, and certainly Hollywood, have missed this. Just think of what we do for love, as spouses and as parents at the very least. In fact let me use this almost humorous observation from Warren Weirsbe, he writes: (Quote)

"Parents must care for their children according to the law. Child neglect is a serious crime. But how many parents have a conversation like this when the alarm goes off in the morning?"

***She:** "Honey, you'd better get up and go to work. We don't want to get arrested."*

***He:** "Yeah, and you'd better get up and get breakfast for the kids, and get their clothes ready. The cops might show up and put us both in jail."*

***She:** "You're right. Boy, it's a good thing they have the law, or we'd stay in bed all day!"*

It's doubtful that the fear of the law is often the motive behind earning a living or caring for one's children. Parents fulfill their responsibilities (even if grudgingly on occasion) because they love each other and their children. To them, doing the right thing is not a matter of law—it's a matter of love." (End Quote)

- And finally, love lights the way . . .

From Darkness to light

- It's a matter of love vs hate, which is actually light vs darkness. For the Christ Follower, the light of love wins. We need to be light to the world with the love of Christ. The problem is, far too often, the darkness of anger and frustration at worldly issues colors our words and our attitudes and Christians can sound pretty hateful. This is not lost on those who want to catch us up short. This is the darkness of hate that nips at the heels of our witness.
- You've heard the expression "Blinded by hatred", well it really happens. F. B. Meyer wrote "*Indulge the hatred of ill-will and you begin groping in the darkness.*"

- So it's important that we don't miss the connection between hatred and darkness. Hatred leaves us in the dark, but John points out that love enables us to walk in the light.
- John points out that Christian love is a matter of the will. Clint Black's love song that pretty much gets it, shows that real love is not shallow or sentimental. And Paul shows us in 1 Corinthians 13 that the Christian life without love is NOTHING! That love chapter begins with, *If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.* 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. Saying must be accompanied with doing.
- And here is a sermon in itself, love is in community, it does not live alone. Love means we will be doing a lot of "one anothering". Just a sampling of over 20 different "one anothers" in the New Testament would read like this:
 - Wash one another's feet (John 13:14)
 - Prefer one another (Romans 12:10)
 - Be of the same mind to one another (Romans 12:16)
 - Do not judge one another (Romans 14:13)
 - Receive one another (Romans 15:7)
 - Admonish one another (Romans 15:14)
 - Edify (that is build up) one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
 - Bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2)
 - Confess your faults to one another (James 5:16)
 - Use hospitality one to another (1 Peter 4:9)
- In Weirsbe's words, *"In short, to love other Christians means to treat them the way God treats them—and the way God treats us. Christian love that does not show itself in action and attitude (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7) is spurious."*
- To love is a witness. To hate is a stumbling block. Why do we use headlights in the rain, or in the morning or evening twilight, when we can see perfectly well? True, we can see just fine, but can others see us? Likely not! We need to let the light of love, which is the love of God, shine brightly through us. No darkness for us, only the light of love.
- That's as far as we get in 1 John today. A quick review:
 - To love is to obey. To obey God is to love like God. That's difficult in this world, but Christ Followers love anyway.
 - This is not a new message. The law God sent down from the mountain with Moses said we are to *love our neighbor as ourselves*, and Jesus told us to *"Love each other as I have loved you"*.
 - And we must move from the darkness of hate to the light of love. From darkness to light – that's what it's all about. Amen.

ENCOURAGING WORDS**1 John 2:12-17****(Read 1 John 2:12-17)**

Intro: Last weekend we enjoyed several days at our family's cabin in the northern Pennsylvania Mountains. It's a very familiar place to us now, but 26 years ago it was just a dream. In late 1990 and '91 my parents and their children and spouses began formulating a plan to purchase a mountain getaway that would also serve as a hunting cabin. Three of my brothers did most of the searching, and, it being years before Al Gore had invented the internet, searching meant scanning newspapers and real-estate flyers from the mountain towns that had such things, looking for properties. When they found a few likely possibilities they would send our parents off to check the places out. Finally they found THE place. It was situated in a mountain cove. It was an incomplete block structure less than 7 years old, on 12 acres along the pristine Young Woman's Creek. Mother and Daddy went to investigate. They found the mountain cove and found a cabin along Young Woman's Creek, but when Daddy walked up and checked the front door he found it unlocked. So, he opened it and went in and found that there were hunting boots at the door and the smell of cooking. It was then that he realized that he had barged into someone else's cabin. He quickly backed out, quickly went back to the car and beat a hasty retreat out to the road where he drove on a little bit farther and found the place that has become affectionately known to our family as THE CABIN.

Daddy knew he was in the wrong place. I know I'm in the wrong place when I walk into the ladies restroom. We just know when we aren't supposed to be where we are.

John is teaching us about this in our text for today. When he tells us in verse 15, *Do not love the world or anything in the world.*, he isn't telling us to hop in a rocket and head to the moon, he is saying don't get wrapped up in that which is contrary to his will and teaching. How do we know what that is? Well, if we know the Word, we know what is not of God. And we are in a place that is not of God, we will know it as clearly as my dad did when he thought he was walking into an empty and unfinished cabin but found it very much occupied. You just know.

John begins with some encouraging words in verses 12-14 and then he moves on in verses 15-17 to real teaching of what to avoid in order to be God's holy people.

First the encouraging words – and notice how John gives his words emphasis by repeating them. . .

We are forgiven because of the Name

- John's term of endearment for his readers is "children" and he calls us dear children here. Here he refers to the forgiveness we receive as children. Elsewhere John tells us *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.* John 1:12. We are to come to him as little children with their trusting faith. In fact in Jesus's words, *Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* Matthew 18:3
- And we have that forgiveness on account of his name. This is another one of those things that we need an entire sermon on – the meaning of the word NAME in biblical thought. But for today, it means the character of God in his entirety. All God is, is wrapped up in his name. And so the name of Jesus, through whom we receive forgiveness is all Jesus is and does. And with our childlike faith, our sins are forgiven. And then, he repeats the little children teaching with the truth that we know forgiveness because we know the Father. . .

We've known from the beginning

- And then he jumps to the mature faith of the fathers. Now this is not saying that mothers do not have mature faith, he is merely pointing out the deep knowledge of God that comes from long-term faith in God.
- And that deep knowledge is in very biblical terms. It is a deep intimacy – the kind of intimacy that only a married couple truly experience and they **KNOW** one another in the marriage bed. This is deep and this is breathtaking – it is possible to know God as intimately as can be known. And this is as we have walked in the Lord in faithfulness with the settled conviction that the Jesus who saved us, will sustain us.

We're overcoming the evil one

- And then John moves to the virility of young men. Really its anyone who has had victory over the power of the evil one. Through Jesus we have all the power of youth. We have the victorious strength to overcome.
- With that strength we conquer the evil one. And in Christ we have power to meet and defeat the attack of the evil. And all through the word of God which abides in us. We'll talk more about this in a little bit.

- Let's move into the major teaching of this passage – it's a discussion of . . .

The love God hates

- John addresses the problem of THE WORLD and he says don't love the world It's the love God hates. Let's look at just what is meant by that as we talk about it as children of God.
- The world is Godless society with its false values and false goals. To succumb to the world has often been referred to as "worldliness". Throughout the history of God's people worldliness has been combatted by trying to look different. Not to single out the Amish, but they are a good example. They have not taken after the world's transportation, dress or comforts but have set themselves apart by riding in buggies, dressing the same way they have dressed for 200+ years and staying away from electric and modern conveniences. This is all well and good if what is here in your heart matches what is exhibited by your life. Warren Wiersbe very accurately points out that "*Worldliness is not so much activity as an attitude.*"
- And then he says "*A Christian cannot help being in the world but when the world is in the Christian, trouble starts.*" (Wiersbe). The trouble is when you let the world rule you. Perhaps you remember our study of James 4 from last Fall where James warns pretty strongly against friendship with the world with, *You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.* James 4:4.
- It comes down to this: The world is not the natural habitat of the believer. The true Christ Follower is at home in the world as a polar bear is at home in the Sahara. We are as out of place as my dad was when he walked into the wrong cabin.
- You see, God so loved the world (as in all people), but the world (as in Godless values and goals) has forsaken God. So we have a choice to make, either we love the world or we love God. We cannot love both. Jesus said "*No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.* Matthew 6:24. Just because the NIV uses money there does not mean the concept fits the world. Money is a master that can quickly take over. So the ultimate choice remains the same: are we to accept the world's standards or the standards of God?
- This is a difficult choice. I don't have to tell you. The world looks down on people who don't accept it. And abuse begins with as little as an occasional snide remark to outright physical torture. The pressure to conform to the world is strong. With persecution comes the temptation to compromise. It is always difficult to be different, but we must be different from the world. It's a matter of surrender – or in Paul's words, *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.* Romans 12:2.

Here's the problem

- It's the problem of the flesh's desire: In fact its a picture of the world today. The flesh, out of control ambitions and selfish aims—it's pure material gratification. John lists three things that have been around, literally, since the dawn of time. He talks about . . .
- The lust of the flesh – which, by the way, not just sex – it's anything contrary to the commandments of God (Gluttony, drunkenness, hate, ignoring the plight of others, etc. etc. etc.)
- The eye's desire – "*The tendency to be captivated by the outward show.*" C. H. Dodd. (That is being a slave to prosperity, coveting, flaunting, what money can buy, and what the eye can see, etc. etc. etc.)
- Life's empty pride – The person who gives himself to that which has no future. Braggadocio, Look at me! Look at what I have!
- And as I just said, it's been around since the dawn of time – there is a powerful connection between Genesis 3:6 and 1 John 2:16. Weirsbe makes this great observation, "[The] same devices trapped Eve back in the Garden: "*And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food [the lust of the flesh]. And that it was pleasant to the eyes [the lust of the eyes], and a tree to be desired to make on wise [the pride of life], she took of the fruit. (Genesis 3:6)*"
- The evil one takes all these things that God made for good at creation and twists them around. Weirsbe again, "*God has given man certain desires, and these desires are good. Hunger, thirst, weariness, and sex are not at all evil in themselves. There is nothing wrong about eating, drinking, sleeping, or begetting children. But when the flesh nature controls them, they become sinful "lusts."* Hunger is not evil, but gluttony is sinful.

Thirst is not evil, but drunkenness is a sin. Sleep is a precious gift of God, but laziness is shameful. Sex is God's precious gift when used rightly, but when used wrongly it becomes immorality."

- So we can see that the world is treacherous. The world discourages maturity. When we wallow in the world we stay in the soiled diapers of ignorance.
- The world is tempting – in fact it's extremely seductive. But we can overcome the world. In fact the same temptations that Eve fell for in the Garden, Jesus overcame in the Wilderness Temptations. Satan tempted him with the lust of the flesh when he said *"If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."* Luke 4:3, but Jesus answered with scripture Jesus answered, *"It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"* Luke 4:4, Satan tempted him with the lust of the eyes when . . . *he showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours."* Luke 4:5-7 and Jesus answered with scripture when he said *"It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"* Luke 4:8. And Satan tried to turn that scripture on Jesus when he tempted with the pride of life had him stand on the highest point of the temple and said. *"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"* Luke 4:9-11. But Jesus trumped the evil one with scripture when he said *"It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"* Luke 4:12. Remember what John wrote back in verse 14 of our text? Listen to it again, *I write to you, young men, **BECAUSE YOU ARE STRONG, AND THE WORD OF GOD LIVES IN YOU, AND YOU HAVE OVERCOME THE EVIL ONE.*** Scripture overcomes the world and it overcomes the evil one. We can do exactly what Jesus did.
- John ends with *The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.* (v. 17) As we know the word we know the will of God. I love how Wiersbe puts this, *"The will of God is not something we consult occasionally like an encyclopedia. It is something that completely controls our lives."* So as we look at the world and it's temptations, we find that its not *"Is it right or wrong or good or bad?"* it's *"Is it God's will will for me?"*. God's will is to resist the world.

Conclusion: John says be careful, be very careful. If you love this world, with it's things, and it's philosophy, and it's ideals . . . *"the love of the Father is not in you."* That is a scary thought. Worldliness destroys fidelity – we belong to God so don't give affection to the world.

Let me finish this out with my devotional reading from John Piper this past Thursday – I think it fits perfectly here. He writes, *"The human heart hates a vacuum. We never merely leave God because we value him little; we always exchange God for what we value more. We see this in Romans 1:22-23: "Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images." They became fools. This is the ultimate foolishness.*

This is the most foundational meaning of sin: exchanging the glory of the immortal God for substitutes—anything we value more than God. If you have ears to hear, this should sound like the ultimate stupidity and the ultimate outrage—that we consider God, reject him as our supreme treasure, and trade him away. We look at the Creator and then exchange him for something he created.

Underneath all the misuses of money, sex, and power is this sinful heart-condition—this depravity. My definition of sin, based on this passage in Romans 1, is this: sin is any feeling or thought or action that comes from a heart that does not treasure God over all other things. The bottom of sin, the root of all sins, is such a heart—a heart that prefers anything above God; a heart that does not treasure God over everything else, and everyone else.

Money, sex and power are ways of displaying God's supreme worth in your life, or they are ways of displaying what you think is the supreme worth of something else. The way you think and feel and act about money, sex, and power puts your heart's treasure on display—either God, or something he made.

Power is a capacity to pursue what you value.

Money is a cultural symbol that can be exchanged in pursuit of what you value.

Sex is one of the pleasures that people value, and the pursuit of it.

Therefore power, money and sex are all God-given means of showing what you value. They are given by God as means of worship. All your power, all your money and all your sexuality are God's gifts for putting on display the supreme worth of God's glory." (END QUOTE) Pray on these things. Amen.

OUR FATHER'S EYES**1 John 2:28 – 3:10****(Read 1 John 2:28-3:10)**

Intro: Kathy is considering Lasik surgery on her eyes. She is near-sighted, which means her cornea is too steep and needs to be flattened out. The surgeon will use a laser to flatten the cornea and she will no longer need corrective lenses whether in contacts or glasses.

My grandmother had cataract surgery when she was in her late 80s and she was amazed that the color which had literally faded to black and white, as her eye's clouded over with cataracts, was restored in all its glory. She was amazed!

More years ago than I care to mention, Amy Grant sang a song called "Father's Eyes" where she prays

*"When people look inside my life, I want to hear them say
She's got her Father's eyes, her Father's eyes
Eyes that find the good in things, when good is not around
Eyes that find the source of help, when help just can't be found
Eyes full of compassion, seeing every pain
Knowin' what you're going through, and feeling it the same
Just like my Father's eyes
My Father's eyes
My Father's eyes
Just like my Father's eyes"*

She said she was singing about her heavenly Father and also about her earthly father. Those eyes are good for dad's to have. They're actually good for any person to have and that was Amy's prayer.

We need our eyes to be transformed. In our text from 1 John, the apostle writes about the need for Christ Follower's to have their heavenly Father's eyes so that they walk in righteousness and holiness. It's a good reminder on this Fathers Day to have those eyes as we live as witnesses in this world. It's what we want for little Fiona, it's what we want for dads, and truthfully, it's what every Christ follower should aspire to. So let's explore it in the time remaining.

Starting at the first verse of our text John takes on the role of spiritual father and tells his dear children that . . .

The best way to be ready for the coming of Christ is to live with him every day.

- Not just when we think it's convenient, but all the time. The truth is, Jesus is going to come back, and when he does, how will he find us? John says, don't be ashamed, be ready.
- F. B. Meyer writes "*This abiding life involves not merely that we should work for God, but that God will work through us.*" God is in us. In fact, as John often does, he says we are born of God. The one who does righteousness has been born of God. There is a resemblance.
- Kathy and I were talking about this as we traveled last week. We were talking about how you can just see Jesus in people. We stayed at a bed and breakfast and at breakfast on the first morning we at a table with a retired couple visiting from Florida. There was just something about them. They had their Father's eyes. Jesus was all about them. And then it was confirmed: as our hostess brought the first course of our breakfast, Cliff took Roberta's hand and she leaned her head toward him so that their foreheads were almost touching, and they discretely prayed a blessing on the food. I KNEW IT!!! You can just tell true Christ Followers!
- Leon Morris says, "*Believers are not simply worldly men who are trying to live a little better. They are men who have been radically renew. They have been born all over again.*" Righteousness is a habit.
- The pay-off is this, John gives it to us in almost majestic terms as he talks about God's lavish love for his children. And it's clear that he's not just using flowery terminology, it's a reality that . . .

We are not merely called the children of God; we ARE the children of God.

- William Barclay gives a poetic Scottish paraphrase of 1 John 3:1-2. Listen,
*Behold the amazing gift of love
the Father hath bestow'd
On us, the sinful sons of men,*

*to call us sons of God!
 Concealed as yet this honour lies,
 by this dark world unknown,
 A world that knew not when he came,
 even God's eternal Son.
 High is the rank we now possess,
 but higher we shall rise;
 Though what we shall hereafter be
 is hid from mortal eyes.
 Our souls, we know, when he appears,
 shall bear his image bright;
 For all his glory, full disclosed,
 shall open to our sight.
 A hope so great, and so divine,
 may trials well endure;
 And purge the soul from sense and sin,
 as Christ himself is pure.*

- These verses are again directed at the problem of gnosticism. We've seen previously in this study of First John and also Jude that this was a very troublesome false teaching that had come into the church in the late first century. Gnostic false teachers said that they had special knowledge. It was because they had taken the time to truly research sin by experiencing it. But they were safe, because they were just experiencing sin with their bodies – their minds and their souls were safe. They said that the body was evil and therefore, there was no harm in satiating its lusts, because what happened to it was of no importance. Barclay tells us that they said that the truly spiritual man was so armored with the Spirit that he could sin to his heart's content and take no harm from it. They even said that the true Gnostic was under obligation both to scale the heights and to plumb the depths so that he might be truly said to know all things. This is, of course, hogwash. But it's familiar hogwash. We hear this kind of drivel today. Sin is rationalized in very similar ways.
- The truth is, the children of God live in the purity of God. If the world doesn't understand it, John reminds us that it is because the world doesn't know God. So don't be surprised when people don't understand you. Just be ready. That way . . .

When Christ appears, we shall see him and be like him.

- I already pointed out that someday, sometime, Jesus is returning. And our goal is to see Jesus. And it's not to say we're better or to keep from burning in hell – that's all very self-serving. The goal in seeing Jesus is to become like him.
- And that takes purity. When we see him, we will see how purity is a possibility. My dad has been gone for almost 20 years, but I watched him for the 40 years I knew him. I watched him as he lived as a man of God. He was the real deal – nothing fake. Jesus oozed out of his pores. I watched him as a husband as he cherished my mother. I watched him as he was a father and a grandfather with his consistency and love. I watched him as was a faithful friend. I watched him because I wanted to be that kind of man so that I too, could be that kind of man. That's how you do it. To be like Jesus you watch how Jesus lived.
- When we watch Jesus we realize sin is not part of the equation. Christ and sin are incompatible. So . . .

We continue in holiness

- In the same way law officials are taught to know what counterfeit money looks like by knowing what the real thing looks like – we know what real holiness looks like by knowing what the Christ-like life looks like.
- In just a few words John gives, by implication, some basic truths about sin – so that we know it when we see it.
 - Sin is deliberate – in fact it is to obey oneself rather than to obey God.
 - Sin undoes the work of Christ.
 - Sin comes from the failure to abide in Christ.
 - Sin comes from the devil – and he minces no words in 1 John 3:8, that the one who sins is of the devil.

- Sin is conquered by the power of Jesus Christ and when we abide in Christ we have the power to conquer it.
- Now, this can get frustrating for the person who struggles with sin. It makes it sound like we're supposed to be perfect and never sin. And that's because . . . we're supposed to be perfect and never sin. But we know that the only perfect person who ever lived was Jesus. So how are we supposed to do this?
- Well we need our Father's eyes. When we have our Father's eyes we know what sin is. We know when it happens in our lives. And we know we need to repent of it. In fact, if you struggle with sin, it shows you are growing in holiness. Sin as a practice is not what a Christ Follower does. The person who wallows in sin, seeming not to have care in the world, is not struggling with sin. He/she simply doesn't care. John points out that such a person is not a Christ Follower. A Christ Follower knows sin when he is in it and knows he needs to get out of it. Because he has his Father's eyes.

Conclusion: B. F. Westcott wrote "*Life reveals the children of God.*" The light of Christ shines from them. You can see it in their eyes, because we have our father's eyes. Amen.

WATCH OUT!
1 John 2:18-27

(Read 1 John 2:18-27)

Intro: On Friday my niece had just buckled her daughter into their car and had climbed into her own seat when a hit and run driver sideswiped their parked vehicle. Just a couple minutes sooner and the two of them would have been the ones sideswiped. Fortunately, no one was hurt and the person had a very memorable vanity plate that was easy to remember and was easy to track down. The truth is we have to watch out! The age of distracted driving is upon us. You never know when someone may careen through the parking lot looking down at the latest text that came in on their phone or see someone crossing the center line on the highway and heading straight-on for us as they send a text or spill coffee on their lap. You just never know.

Living as a Christ Follower has been that way since Jesus went away and said he would be back. We need to be alert. Not just because, as our text said, we are in the last hour, but because we never know when we will be blindsided by some kind of false teaching. We need to watch out!

John continues his warning for his dear children. He was really struggling with false teaching that were making deep inroads in the church. He wants his spiritual kids to be ready for what would surely come. That was 2000 years ago – and the warning is just as relevant as then.

The other day I was just telling my family about the hellish impact of the Jehovah's Witness cult on the BIC 120 years ago. The Sippo Valley BIC church, which was about 45 miles from here, closed a number of years ago. It's almost like it never really recovered from the onslaught of the false teaching of the Russellites at the turn of the last century. It was so bad that, at its worst, there were only 2 people left in the congregation – the pastor and one member – even the pastor's wife had taken up with the Russellites (what the Jehovah's Witnesses were called at the time).

We still have JWs and Mormons knocking on our doors, and we have people who have so watered down their Christianity that anything goes. So John's warning still goes – we need to watch out. Let's learn from him. First, there is an urgency . . .

Every hour is the last hour

- John, and everyone else in the early church thought that Jesus's return was imminent. Every generation, including ours, has believed the same. And the truth is – Jesus's return IS imminent! He told his disciples in Acts 1 that no one knows the day or the hour. Looking at the state of things in our world – it seems close. But regardless – if it's now or in another 2,000 years, we need to live each second, minute, hour, or day like it's the last one. Be ready!
- We need to be ready because where we go when we move from this life into the next has eternal relevance. Have you given your life to Jesus Christ? It matters.
- We need to beware of antichrists. What is an antichrist. In Revelation, John seems to point out that it is a person. But here John seems to pointing out that it is any person, system, or belief that tries to take the place of Christ. Barclay tells us that "*The simplest way to think of it is that Christ is the incarnation of God and goodness, and Antichrist is the incarnation of the devil and evil.*" In fact he goes on to say. ". . . *the fact is that Antichrist is not so much a person as a principle, the principle which is actively opposed to God and which may well be thought of as incarnating itself in those men in every generation who have seemed to be the blatant opponents of God.*" That is why some people, and I see great merit in this, see Islam as the Antichrist John writes about in Revelation – a system rather than a person.
- But it's important not to get too wrapped up in who or what it is, but to know what is antichrist when we see it. Suffice it to say, anyone and everything that is opposed to God is antichrist, plain and simply. We'll look a bit more at this later.

Sometimes participation in the church is not a good indicator of where a person actually stands before God

- John talks about people who had gone out from the church family. They've followed after and probably had spread false teaching. He points out that they probably never really believed in the first place. It's like he had an inkling about them, but their leaving and chasing after false teaching confirmed his fears.

- His warning is clear – just because a person is in the church doesn't make them a saint. We've all seen people who can quote scripture inside and out and say all the right things, but there is just something about them. Lots of times it's because they are so knowledgeable that it's tempting to follow after them as they twist the scripture to say what they want it to say and what they want you to believe. John says watch out for these people.
- Instead he bolsters the faithful with a reminder that . . .

No Christ Follower needs to feel inferior to the most learned scholar

- I'm a preacher – I'm not the deepest theologian. I've always been impressed with the people who can expound on deep theological subjects. And that is needed to some extent. But when a person's theology takes them away from the clear teaching of the Bible – we need to watch out.
- In verse 20 John assures his readers that all of them possess knowledge. We've heard time and again in this study, that the people who had left were Gnostics who claimed to have special, secret and better knowledge. And this special knowledge was not open to the ordinary Christian. John assures his leaders that they just need to hang on to the truth they already know.
- Westcott writes, "*The object of the apostle in writing was not to communicate fresh knowledge, but to bring into active and decisive use the knowledge which his readers already possessed.*" In other words, the best defense against false teaching is simply to remember what we already know. What we need is not new truth, but that the truth which we already know being activated and utilized in our own lives. Simple belief is enough when it is backed up with the simple truth of the word of God. Know what that means? You NEED to know what's right here in these pages!
- Paul told the Thessalonians: *Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.* 1 Thessalonians 4:9. And to the Romans *I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another.* Romans 15:14. What John's and Paul's readers needed to know is what we need to know – we don't need new truth, we simply need to practice the truth we already know. Here is the perfect summary of the thought from another commentator, "*It is the simple fact of the Christian life that things would be different at once if we would only put into practice what we already know. That is not to say that we never need to learn anything new; but it is to say that, even as we are, we have light enough to walk by if we would only use it.*" AMEN!
- And then John addresses the subject of lies. He's been pretty free with the word but drastic times call for drastic measures. The point is the quote on the front of your worship folder . . .

To deny that Jesus is the Christ is the master lie, the lie par excellence; the lie of all lies

- John says that he who denies the Son is denying the Father too. Just like we have today, the false teachers of John's were suggesting, "*It may be that we have different ideas from yours about Jesus; but we do believe the same things about God.*" John's answer is that is an impossible position; no man can deny the Son and still have the Father.
- Beliefs matter! There is no other reading of the Bible, and especially the New Testament, that has Jesus Christ as anything other than God the Son. Jesus said quite clearly that no man knows the Father except the Son and him to whom the Son reveals that knowledge. Just one example is. *Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me.* John 12:44. Or this, *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him. Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us. Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? John 14:6-9. It is through Jesus that anyone may know God; it is in Jesus we come to God. One person wrote, "*Apart from Jesus we have no secure knowledge of God; to deny him is at the same time to lose all grip of God. To deny Jesus is the master lie, for it is to lose entirely the faith and the knowledge which he alone makes possible.*"*
- It's like trying to say you can get to Los Angeles by driving to Miami. It's simply impossible! You cannot get to God by way of Buddhism, Mormonism, Islam or any other way. It takes no special knowledge other than believing in Jesus Christ to get to his Father.

- So John says . . .

Just hang in there!

- John is pleading with his people to remain in the things which they have learned, because, if they do, they will remain in Christ. As we remain, or as some translations put it, abide in Jesus, the promise is eternal life. I hope you understand what the alternative of abiding brings – eternal death. And John is warning that following after false teachings brings that.
- Watch out for “new” revelations. Don’t be deceived! They will only bring death. There was a new revelation with the Gnostics that John was speaking against and many fell away. There was a new revelation when Mary Baker Eddy because the Christian Science movement and many fell away. There was a new revelation when Joseph Smith “discovered” the gold plates buried in a hill in New York and millions have been deceived and have either fallen away or never knew the truth. There was new revelation when Charles Taze Russell thought up the “Watch Tower Society” which was first known as Russellites, but we know them as Jehovah’s Witnesses. Millions have fallen away and been deceived. Jim Jones and Charles Manson and David Koresh have all come up with new revelations and many have been deceived. All deny the deity of Christ in some way (often by saying they, themselves, are Christ). To deny Christ is to deny God and to forfeit eternal life.

Conclusion: So, in the same way that John urged his readers, I urge us to hang on to the anointing we have. This was a wonderful thing for believers to hear in John’s day. It was reminder of a blessing that came in Christ. In Hebrew teaching and practice anointing was connected with three kinds of people. Priests were anointed; kings were anointed and prophets were anointed. You had to be kind of “special”. But in Christ Jesus the playing field is level and all who come to him receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The ground is level at the foot of the Cross. Accept your anointing and live for Jesus. Watch out! Don’t be deceived. Don’t allow anyone to tell you what you know to be truth from the Word of God to be anything other than what you have always understood. To deny the Son is to deny the Father. Anyone who opposes Christ is an antichrist and you are perfectly correct to call them what they are – false prophets and deceivers. You are saved by your confession of Jesus as Lord and nothing else. Remain in him! Amen.

LOVE, HATE AND WHAT IT SAYS ABOUT WHAT WE BELIEVE**1 John 3:11-24**

Intro: You can always recognize a Christ Follower – the love of Jesus is written all over them. That love has been tested a lot lately. Politics and race and gender and religion and all kinds of things, that people get passionate about, have stretched the LQ (love quotient) of the children of the only true and living God. But you can tell a real Christian, or as the quote from Bishop Westcott says that I used in my last talk, "*Life reveals the children of God.*" You see, what we believe soon shows up. And in a divided, hate filled society and world, we need to be banners to the life of the love that God calls us to. John helps us with that in our text for today.

(Read 1 John 3:11-24)

Now let's look into it. First . . .

Life without love is death

- Sometimes it's hard to love our fellow man, but as Christ Followers we must. Actually, it's a matter of life and death. F. B. Meyer wrote, "*Love to the brethren is a sign we have born into the family. We may not like them all, yet we can love them. If we love, we live, and if we live in the deepest sense, we shall love.*"
- In kidnapping situations, especially in Latin American ransom situations, something called proof of life is required before any dialogue is entered into with kidnappers. So the kidnappers snap a photo of their victim, perhaps with a current newspaper, as proof of life. It's a poor comparison, but love is a proof of life in Christ for those who claim to be his followers. Barclay wrote ". . . *that a man loves his brother men is the final proof that he has passed from death to life. Life without love is death. To love is to be in the light; to hate is to remain in the dark. . . We need no further proof of that than to look at the face of a man who is in love and the face of a man who is full of hate; it will show the glory or the blackness in his heart.*" As you really think about it, you can plainly see how true this is. There is joy on the face of a person who truly loves his/her fellow man, but there is the emptiest despair on the face of a hater.
- The words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount are all over John's words here in verses 11-15. To not love is to become a murderer – if not in reality, certainly in attitude. Truth be told, in Jesus's mind, they are the same. Listen, *You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.* Matthew 5:21-22. Jesus shows that the old law forbade murder but the new law declared that anger and bitterness and contempt were just as serious sins. Whenever there is hatred in the heart, a person becomes a potential murderer. To allow hatred to settle into the heart is to break a definite commandment of Jesus. One commentator states, "*The question is not whether a murderer can become a Christian but whether a person can continue being a murderer and still be a Christian?*" The answer is no. To hate is to murder in the heart. John's point is, the person who loves is a follower of Christ and the person who hates is not. It's that painfully simple.
- For the person who wonders what loving a brother or sister means, John answers it in v. 16; where he says, in so many words, if you want to see what this love is, look at Jesus Christ. Love is fully displayed in his death for humanity on the Cross. In other words, the Christian life is the imitation of Christ. Paul said it this way, *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.* Philippians 2:5. Peter wrote, *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.* 1 Peter 2:21. **No one can look at Jesus and then say that he or she does not know what the Christian life is.**

Without trying to, the righteous life of a good person points out the glaring deficiencies of a person who is walking in evil.

- And people just hate this. They don't like to be shown up and those with hate in their heart, instead of being able to respond appropriately to love, are turned off by it. It makes them mad. Sometimes they are angry enough to kill for it.
- Cain was jealous and that jealousy drove him to murder. One commentator wrote, "*Bad living produces the jealousy that grows into hate and murder.*" The Christ Follower must not be like Cain. Why did Cain murder

his brother? Because he took the evil path and his brother's actions were good. That's why John says, *Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.* (v. 13) Why is that? Barclay points out this truth, *"An evil man will instinctively hate a good man. Righteousness always provokes hostility in the minds of those whose actions are evil. The reason is that the good person is a walking rebuke to the evil man, even if he never speaks a word to him, his life passes a silent judgment."*

- Julian Love (an appropriate name for a commentator on this passage) says, *"To be children of God not only means to live rightly, but to love rightly."* That proves that . . .

Love is practical

- Jesus actually laid down his life for humanity. He loved the world so much that he **gave** – his very life. Well, if we have to, we should, and many Christ Followers have – but lots of times that's not necessary.
- So, what if we don't have to lay down our life? Well then, **GIVE!** If you see a need, and you have the means to meet the need – Give! To refuse to give in those situations means that the love of God is absent. Barclay says *"Fine words will never take the place of fine deeds; and no amount of talk of Christian love will take the place of a kindly action to a person in need."* Christ Followers should be the conscience of society. Are we? Or is our conscience seared so much that we look and sound like society? Though we might be despised and even hated, we need to stand for love and goodness.
- Love is infinitely practical and simple:
 - If you need to lay down your life, you do.
 - If you need to provide for a need, you do.
 - Love sees and then love provides.
 - Love provides compassion.
 - Deed and truth count for more than words or speech. And then . . .

As we love with obedience and compassion, we can have confident assurance

- We can have confidence in God – even when our hearts condemn us. So instead of living in fear of God, we can live in the assurance that he does all things right and will steer us right. People whose heart condemns them are the people God will reassure. The people who have no conscience are not aware of their need and God will not break through their ignorance. In other words, if you care about how well you are doing, God knows he can work with you.
- If we ever have any doubts where we stand with God here is a test: Barclay says, *"Into the human heart there are bound to come doubts. Any person with a sensitive mind and heart must sometimes wonder if they really are a Christian at all. John's test is quite simple and far-reaching. It is love. If we feel love for our fellow human beings welling up within our hearts, we can be sure that the heart of Christ is in us. John would have said that a so-called heretic whose heart was overflowing with love and whose life was beautiful with service, was far nearer Christ than someone who was impeccably orthodox, yet cold and remote from the needs of others."* Wow!
- So if our hearts condemn us, that means there is hope. That means God's still working on us. He is greater than our hearts and in his all-knowing wisdom, he not only knows our sins; he also knows our love, our desires, our frustrations, and our struggles for right. And in that knowledge he cheers us on to goodness rather than allowing us to wallow in any less than what he wants for us. So we should not be any harder on ourselves than God is.
- Finally, John points out that there are . . .

Two Commandments that must be obeyed

- The first is **Believe**:
- We must believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ. Here we have that use of the word "name" which is peculiar to the biblical writers. It does not mean simply the name by which a person is called; it means the whole nature and character of that person as far as it is known to us. To believe in the name of Jesus Christ, means to believe in the nature and character of Jesus Christ. It means to believe that he is the Son of God, that he does stand in relation to God in a way in which no other person in the universe ever stood or ever can stand, that he can perfectly reveal God to humanity and that he is the only Savior. So to

believe in the name of Jesus Christ is to accept him for what he really is – God! The name of Jesus means to stand for the whole person of all he is.

- And the second is **Love**:
- We **MUST** love one another as God commanded us! John is reiterating Jesus’s commandment that is found in his Gospel in John 13:34, *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.* Just as Jesus loved us and still loves us, we need to love each other with that same love. Not a warm fuzzy love, but his kind of selfless, sacrificial, and forgiving love. The love that said, from the Cross, *“Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*
- When we believe and love we have the great truth that we found in our study of James last year, right belief and right action are what the Christian life requires. Works **AND** righteousness. Faith **AND** works. They are integrally linked. Barclay says, *“Our belief is not real belief unless it issues in action; and our action has neither sanction nor dynamic unless it is based on belief. We cannot begin the Christian life until we accept Jesus Christ for what he is; and we have not accepted him in any real sense of the term until our attitude to men is the same as his own attitude of love.”*

Conclusion: So what do people see when they look at you? Do they see a face that has the open look of love and compassion or do they see a dark expression of anger and hatred? What do they hear from you when you speak? Do they hear words of love and understanding, or do they hear vitriol, anger and even hate. You see – the answers to these questions say a lot about what we believe. One shows that we are followers of the One who loved us so much he died for us, and the other shows the kind of hatred that led the people he died for to crucify him in a jealous and hate-filled rage.

What’s in your heart? Love? Or Hate? Think about it. Amen.