

WALKING IN THE LIGHT- First John and the Path to Living Deeply in Christ - Part twenty-eight

Sunday, September 12th, 2021 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2125

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KEEP YOURSELVES FROM IDOLS

IPAD TEXT - 1 John 5:20-21 - “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. [21] Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”

Greg is a Christian and Mike isn't. We know Greg goes to heaven when he dies and Mike doesn't. But what else is different about them? They both have good strong marriages. None of their kids has been in trouble with the law. Neither one would cheat at work. Neither swears or watches dirty movies. They both do a great deal to help the poor and needy in their communities. Yet, Greg is a Christian and Mike isn't. How are they different?

In his final words, John deals with ***the two parts of life that are radically altered by conversion***. These two areas form the heart and soul of a walk with God. When we talk about how a person is different after being saved, regenerated, transformed, born again - whatever term you want to use - ***these are the kinds of changes we are talking about***.

Some changes can be made to a life with no reference to Jesus Christ or the Spirit of God. Some changes are noticeable, but have nothing in particular to do with Christian conversion. That's what makes these two closing verses of First John especially important. They pin-point the two most basic changes **only** the Holy Spirit can make in the human heart and mind:

- a) **A NEW UNDERSTANDING - 1 John 5:20 - "And we know that the Son of God has come and *has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.*" - IPAD TEXT**

Notice how many times John uses the word "**true**" in this one verse. Read the verse carefully and you will see John is narrowing the path of truth to God - "**....and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.**"

We can only know the **true** God through Jesus Christ. This phrase will lead John naturally into his next point about **idolatry**. People bow their knees to all sorts of gods. They worship. They pray. But any approach to God that excludes Jesus Christ isn't reaching the "**true God.**"

The first phrase of **verse 20** is so crucial - **“And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding....”** Again, it’s all centered around Jesus Christ. John says only **He** brings this **“understanding.”**

Conversion brings with it an **“understanding.”** This Christ-given understanding is dominated by **revelation** rather than **conjecture**, and **absolute, specific truth** rather than **surveys or popular opinion**. Most importantly, Jesus changes the way one thinks about **God** - how one comes to **know** God - how one can find **eternal life** - what **eternity** will be like, and who will be **saved** and who will be **lost**.

Before Jesus Christ entered our lives we had our **ideas** about these matters. We guessed and postulated. But we didn’t **know**. Jesus, says John, has **given** us understanding. That means this understanding doesn’t arrive by **debate** and isn’t open to **modification**. It’s **His** revelation to our hearts. It’s firm and specific. It’s **given**, not **deduced**.

Then John goes on to describe the **second** change conversion makes:

b) **A NEW LOVE FOR GOD THAT SWALLOWS UP AND OVERRIDES ALL THE OTHER IMPULSES AND PRIORITIES OF SELF - 1 John 5:21 - "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." - IPAD TEXT**

John's concern here is **not** that these people will **cease** to love God. They **do** love God. John's concern probes much deeper than that. His concern is God must **not** become **one** of the things these people love. The issue here isn't **love** for God. It's **exclusivity** of love for God. It's the love I have that is **reserved** for God alone. When God competes with any other priority or desire of mine, who wins?

John closes with these two areas because they **form the core of who you are and what you are becoming as a Christian**. The mind and the affections **steer** everything else about you. They **drive** your life. By that I mean they propel you to where you are eventually going to end up spiritually. They are far more important than all the other parts of you put together. And, most importantly, **they best define that part of your being Jesus most wants to rule**.

Let me put it this way. When I stand and sing "**All to Jesus I Surrender**," what specifically should I be surrendering? How can I tell if I've really given Jesus my "**all**"? What does my "**all**" look like? And how can I **know** I'm surrendering it? If you want a Biblical answer to those questions, **look to these two areas of your life**.

We'll study one of these truths today and the second one next Sunday.

1) **WHEN JESUS COMES HE GIVES US UNDERSTANDING**

IPAD TEXT - 1 John 5:20 - "And we know that the Son of God has come and *has given us understanding*, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life."

The Bible everywhere teaches that sin not only affects people ***morally***, but ***mentally*** as well. I'm not talking about ***intelligence***. I'm talking about ***outlook***. I'm talking about ***world-view***.

We need to remind ourselves the ***first*** thing sin produces isn't ***wickedness***. The ***first*** thing sin produces is ***blindness***. The ***blindness*** - the ***twisted thinking*** - is what ***leads*** to the outward acts of wickedness. Sin, like alcohol, ***impairs - slows the ability to make good decisions - clouds the judgement - generates false impressions***. Or to put it in the language of First John, sin ***distorts true "understanding."***

Another part of the sin problem is the fact that the Bible says all are **born** into this condition of sin. We're "**conceived in iniquity,**" so the effects of sin appear **normal** to us. This is what makes it so hard for people to actually **see** their need of salvation **before** the bottom falls out of life. We're scarcely aware of the damage sin does in our own hearts. When you're born in sin it's like being born into oxygen. You don't think about it actually being there. You just breathe.

Sin is primarily manifested in the way it makes it hard for us to know what is good for us and what is not good for us. We treat friends like foes and foes like friends. We treat things of little worth as being treasures and real treasures as being of little worth. Hence John's second warning about ***idolatry(21)***.

So when John says that only Jesus brings true understanding, he means ***sin distorts and destroys*** understanding. ***Sin blurs our values.*** It puts everything a bit out of focus, leaving us like a person who has lost his glasses. He may see little bits of fuzzy shapes but he doesn't see things the way they really are.

This is one of the key problems in living a holy life in a fallen world. ***When people get caught up in any sinful action they don't very easily see the act as sinful.*** What's worse, they actually ***think*** they are perceiving things correctly. And this makes repentance, recovery and correction more difficult because they treat the people who try to bring the truth to them like enemies rather than friends.

That's why lives are never spiritually changed by the imparting of ***information***. The ***education*** process doesn't, by itself, make people whole spiritually. That's because, as John says, the kind of truth people ***need*** to be spiritually transformed only comes through Jesus Christ - ***“And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true....”*** (1 John 5:20).

For truth to impart spiritual transformation and life it must be embraced ***in Jesus Christ***. Of course, to ***receive*** the truth in Jesus Christ is to become a Christian. But ***apart*** from this experience even theological data will just be learned the way the words of a song can be memorized.

Jesus must be **embraced**, And there's a huge problem right at this point. John has said the **means** of gaining true understanding of the heart of Father God is to receive Jesus Christ. Yet this whole world system designs its appeal to keep our minds earth-bound and **diverted** from Jesus Christ:

IPAD TEXT - 2 Corinthians 4:4 - "In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

This is an important text. It says more than many think. Paul is reminding us this world doesn't care a hoot whether you believe in God. But it works false values into a culture to keep people from seeing "**glory**" in Christ Jesus and His saving work.

IPAD TEXT - Ephesians 4:17-18 - "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. [18] They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart."

Now that's a terrible position to be in. It almost seems to be beyond hope or rescue. And it **is**, apart from supernatural intervention from the outside. And this is what the Scriptures teach God has done.

IPAD TEXT - 1 John 5:20 - “And we know that the Son of God has come and has *given us understanding*, so that we may *know him who is true*; and we are *in him who is true*, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and *eternal life*.”

The one point to keep on the table for the next few minutes is the way John says this “*understanding*” - this deep awareness of the “*truth*” - is specifically linked with the fact that “*the Son of God has come*”(20a). Something hopeful and spiritually revolutionary has happened with the coming of Jesus Christ, God the Son. We need to think about this because it's not the first time John has pinned his hopes for spiritual transformation to the coming of Jesus Christ:

IPAD TEXT - 1 John 3:1-3 - “See *what kind of love* the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. [2] Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. [3] And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”

Our minds should be clicking in here. Look at those first five words - **“See what kind of love.....”** Remember them. Now go quickly back to

2 Corinthians 4:4 - “In their case, the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”-

IPAD TEXT

There’s a progression in these three verses. When people **“see”** (1) the incredible, beautiful, grace-filled coming and dying and rising of Jesus Christ - when they really **“see”** it - they become **“children of God”**(2). And when that happens, **they** know it has happened, and **everyone else** knows it has happened because the recipient **“purifies himself as he is pure”**(3).

This is a huge change. It isn’t just on the **outside**. It **reaches** the outside but **begins** on the inside. This is what makes **conversion** different from **moral reformation**. The **motives** behind the outward change couldn’t be more different. The humanist may desire improvement on many fronts of his life. But, says John, when the Christian **“purifies himself”** he really isn’t thinking about himself at all. **He’s gazing on Jesus Christ**. Specifically, he’s pondering the day when he will **“see him as he is”**(3).

John has already told us this concern isn't the focus of the unsaved at all. In whatever the unsaved do - both the bad things and the outwardly excellent and good things - they have only one set of concerns:

IPAD TEXT - 1 John 2:15-16 - "...If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world."

The unsaved are driven, in good deeds and bad - by their love for the world. And the Bible *forbids* them to love the world. Because of this *everything they do is sinful*. Paul makes this truth even more specific in another passage:

IPAD TEXT - 1 Corinthians 10:31 - "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

Paul writes these words to the church at Corinth regarding the way they are to respect the weaknesses of those who might be offended by their new found freedom from Old Testament dietary regulations.

That's the **context**. But the **principle** has wider application. Paul's appeal to these Christians is based on a huge principle that must regulate truly Christian activity in **any** sphere of life. We are to do **everything**, not based on **our own** tastes and freedoms and desires, but solely for **God's glory**. **God's glory is the touch stone - the only proper motivation - for everything we do.**

Now comes the important question. How many things does the **non-Christian** do exclusively for God's glory? The answer is, of course, **none**. That doesn't mean he doesn't do "**good**" deeds. Not at all. But it **does** mean something much more profound. It means that even the "**good**" deeds of the unsaved are **sinful**. That's because God doesn't measure righteousness and sinfulness just by the **deed alone**, but by the **motive** behind the deed.

Where does this leave us? How can this hopeless situation be changed? John says there is only one way. There are people who are in love with the visible world. They sin in this love. Then, in **chapter 3, verses one to three**, John says there is a group of people who are looking to Jesus and purifying themselves as He is pure.

These people are purified by the hope of seeing Jesus just as He is when He comes again. When they see Him **fully** they will be **fully like Him**. But even now they have seen Him **partially** through His life and death and resurrection, and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

And seeing God's grace in Jesus Christ - **really** seeing it - makes the love of the material world look ridiculous. It changes the heart. Or, in John's words - ***"And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true...."***