

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

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KNOWING GOD AND KNOWING YOU ARE LOVED BY GOD

1 John 4:13-21 - "By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. [14] And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. [15] Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. [16] So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. [17] By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. [18] There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. [19] We love because he first loved us. [20] If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. [21] And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."

There are phrases in this text that give it incredible strength:

"....we *know* that we abide in him and he in us..."(13). "....we have come to *know* and to *believe* the love that God has for us."(16). "....so that we may have *confidence* for the day of judgment...."(17).

This is not the expression of some wishful, inner longing for self-esteem. These are words of ***certainty***. They are words you can ***lean*** on. They will ***hold you up*** when all else seems to rot and crumble.

John has come to ***know something for sure***. He has ***experienced*** it. It isn't just something wistful in his dreams. He has ***seen*** and ***witnessed*** what God has done for him in Jesus Christ. It isn't some philosophy or therapy. It's not just in his mind. It's a done deal in solid events of history.

Some things are matters of ***opinion***. You like beef and I like chicken. Neither one of us is ***wrong***. We're just of differing ***tastes***. Other things ***aren't*** matters of opinion, but also aren't very ***relevant*** to daily living. You think it's cold on the far side of the moon while I think it's hot. Only one of us is right, but not much is at stake for either one.

Other things ***aren't*** subjects of opinion and ***do*** matter greatly. ***What has God done to save us? And how can we know for certain He has done it? And, most important of all, even if God has done something in others, how can I know He has done it in me?***

In short, the issue of this text can be boiled down to ***knowing God*** and ***knowing you are loved by God*** and ***knowing you are saved by God***. In the long view of things, those are the three most vital issues for any thinking person. I have only one main point in this teaching:

- 1) **ONLY JESUS CHRIST CAN BRING FATHER GOD'S ABIDING PRESENCE INTO YOUR LIFE**

IPAD TEXT - 1 John 4:14 -16 - “And we have seen and testify that the Father *has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.* [15] *Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.* [16] *So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.*”

John is clear about the *intent* of Father God in sending Jesus Christ, God the Son - “....**the Father has *sent* his Son to be the Savior of the world**”(14). The fact that the Father *sent* the Son doesn't express any *unwillingness* on the part of the Son, but it **does** focus our attention on the *plan* and **deep desire** motivating the Father's actions. He **wants** to save the world.

Pondering this truth carefully has an encouraging, assuring effect on our hearts - **So we have come to *know* and to *believe* the love that God has for us....**”(16). This is profound. We **know** about God's love and come to **believe** and **rely** on God's love when we see His saving reach to us in His Son Jesus Christ.

Verse 16 is the logical fruit of **verses 14 and 15**. You and I can't grow in assurance just by thinking vague, pleasant thoughts about **God**. We certainly **can** come to know His awesome **might** and endless **power**. We **can** see something of his **blazing holiness**. We can easily see His **justice** as we gaze upon His unbending **law**. But none of those things will encourage us with **assurance**. In fact, they will **rob** us of whatever confidence we may have had. Who can stand before such an undefilable, uncompromisingly holy God?

No. Look to Jesus on the Cross. See the beautiful **givenness** in the Father's **sending** grace. The Father **sent** His Son to be the **Savior** of the world. This is where you and I can come to know and rely on the love God has for us.

"The Father sent His Son to be the Savior of the world"(14). But there is a problem. The beautiful simplicity of that clear, life-giving sentence is hard for all of us to ingest. It is hard for me to believe - not just **acknowledge**, but **deeply drink in** - that all I have to do to partake of God's saving grace is reach out and **rely on it** in Jesus Christ.

In spite of all of the doctrinal statements and creeds this is not the view of God most religions have. We find it hard to comprehend a God who sends His Son to die for **bad** people like we and then says, "Here! Here is all of My forgiveness, love, and grace. Here is eternal life in my Son Jesus Christ. Please, just believe it and rely on it!"

We have our doubts and there's a reason. For all our talk about salvation by grace rather than works we still know how important **holiness** is. Even if we didn't have preachers harping on it we'd still have to come to terms with the clear pronouncements of Holy Scripture:

IPAD TEXT (2) - Hebrews 12:14 - "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness *without which no one will see the Lord.*"

Ephesians 1:4 - "...even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, *that we should be holy and blameless before him....*"

IPAD TEXT (2) - Ephesians 5:27 - "...so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, *without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*"

1 Peter 1:15 - "...but as he who called you is holy, *you also be holy in all your conduct....*"

No doubt about it - holiness is very important. That much is obvious. But **how** can we, at the same time, **both** magnify the Biblical importance of **holiness** and exalt the **freeness** - the wonderful, unearned **givenness** - of grace?

In other words, to get right down to it, how can it **both** be true that it is God's delight to **freely give unearned eternal life** and yet **there must also be holiness, without which no one will see the Lord?**

Isn't that the issue for us? *I* think those two ideas are in conflict and the **Bible** apparently doesn't. How will we come to terms with this?

You can only untangle this apparent mystery by starting with the central issue. Perhaps it's best boiled down in the form of a foundational question: **What makes people holy and devoted to the Lord in the first place?** The answer you give will illuminate everything else.

"Tell people about sin and punishment. That will make them holy!" It might not. It will certainly make them feel **guilty about their sin.** And there **is** a proper place for that. We **need** to feel guilty about our sin. And we **don't** always. There are whole sections of the Scripture - both Old and New Testaments - written specifically to help me **identify** my sins.

I know **some** things are sinful - murder, theft, child-abuse, rape, and usually lying. But there are **other** things - worldly ambition, pride, worry, love of self, the omission of things I know I should do - **these** sins aren't even on the radar screen for many professing Christians. So **yes**, there is a place for telling people like you and people like me about sin and punishment.

But remember the question we're considering. ***What makes people holy in the first place?*** And, as important as it is, proclaiming warnings about sin and judgment **won't** make people holy. It only **promotes** holiness **indirectly** when it leads to **repentance**. Preaching about sin doesn't **make** people holy. It only **opens the repentant door for grace, and that makes people holy.**

"Well, tell them about God's commandments. Tell them what God expects them to do. That will make them holy!"

Maybe not. The Bible says with the law comes the **knowledge of sin** . That's what the law **does**. It shows me how far I fall short of the glory of God. Paul's whole point in the book of Romans is the law is powerless to make anybody righteous.

Read it for yourself - **Romans 3:20 - "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."** - IPAD TEXT

"Well then what **will** lead people to really be holy?"

The Bible **does** give a very clear answer to **that** question - **Titus 2:11-13** - "For **the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ....**" - IPAD TEXT

Grace **changes the heart to want to please God**. This is the testimony of both the Old and New Testaments. What I am outlining to you now isn't some optional new understanding of the Christian faith. It's the gospel itself.

I know I'm laboring this point. But I want to make sure everyone really gets - **deeply** gets - this **first** point because the **other** points all build on this foundation. **Law** doesn't fuel the Christian life. **Grace** fuels the Christian life. Law doesn't make you holy. Grace does. Law doesn't give you assurance. Grace does.

None of this makes holiness unimportant. This doesn't **belittle** holiness. It **magnifies** holiness. And it **deepens** the reach of holiness by reaching all the way down to the motives and inward desires of my heart.

If you stop to consider this truth you'll see we've been singing about it for years - "*T'was grace that taught my heart to fear....*" The hymn-writer caught something very profound in those words. We don't think of grace and fear as ever belonging together. But they do. They belong constantly in the same theological marriage bed.

When **grace** has done its work in my heart, there's nothing I **fear** more than displeasing God. His saving grace in Jesus Christ becomes my motive for presenting myself to Him in holy adoration and devotion.

This truth is all over the Scriptures. Paul saw God's grace as the prime mover in bringing about consecration of life:

IPAD TEXT - Romans 12:1-2 - "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

The striking feature of Paul's words is he makes his "**appeal**" to these Christians to sacrifice everything for the Lord on the basis of the "**mercies of God**"(1). This is **why** they should shun the world like the plague and present their physical bodies in service, regardless of the cost or pain of doing so. God's **mercies** in Christ Jesus demand everything from those who receive them.

In more shadowy and incomplete ways this is hinted at in the Old Testament as well - especially in the Psalms:

IPAD TEXT (2)- Psalm 2:11 - "Serve the Lord with *fear*, and *rejoice* with trembling."

Psalm 25:14 - "The *friendship* of the Lord is for those who *fear* him, and he makes known to them his covenant."

Notice again that **fear** is married to **joy**, and also to having God **making Himself and His ways known** to His people.

So here's where we are in this teaching. We've laid down a principle from both the Old and New Testaments. **Only grace changes people. Only grace makes them holy.** Or to say it a bit differently, **if you are using the grace of God in Jesus Christ to grow lazy and indifferent toward worldliness and sin, you haven't received it.** Every Christian must test his or her heart with this Biblical truth.

Let me share one more passage with you from the lips of Jesus:

IPAD TEXT - Luke 12:27-32 - “Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [28] But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! [29] And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. [30] For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. [31] *Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. [32] “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”*”

We should be very grateful for these rare words. And notice the link Jesus makes between “***seeking his kingdom***” (31) and the Father’s delight in freely “***giving***” the kingdom (32).

Only Luke records these words of Jesus in his condensed version of the Sermon on the Mount. They come in the context of Jesus' words on fear and worry. People worry about lots of things. They fear lots of things. But deep in their hearts, what they fear most is ***not being good enough to meet God*** - not being good enough to make it - not having what it takes to enter His kingdom.

And into this kind of fear and despair God the Son comes and says,
"Here, just take it. Here's my kingdom. Here's eternal life. Here's forgiveness."

"But what do I have to do?"

"Nothing. There's nothing left to do. I've paid it all. Here. It's free. Just take it."

Have you ever had anybody give you something really wonderful, and they actually seemed to enjoy giving it to you as much as you enjoyed receiving it? You almost feel a bit of disbelief. Then you realize that they really wanted to just give this to you. And you start to feel stupid. Then you gush and say, "O, thank you. Thank you so much!"

And then you can see they feel awkward too. And then they say, "Hey, it's my pleasure." And it dawns on you they aren't just being polite. They really mean it. Their giving is their joy.

God wants to say to every guilty, doubting, struggling heart today,
"Listen, it's My pleasure to give you the kingdom! I'm happy to see you take it. Here. Right now. It's all for you. It's free. It's yours."

I grew up singing, "***You that are longing to see His face, will you this moment His grace receive?***" That's your part. That's what you do. You receive. You rely. You take. And suddenly you wake up spiritually. You start to breathe again. You start to enjoy your salvation. You start to rely on the love God.

And something else will happen as well. God's grace comes like electricity comes. It carries more than ***forgiveness***. It carries ***power***. You will desire, more than you desire money, to be a whole lot ***holier*** as you begin to love God for His grace all over again. His mercies will lead to a life of obedient, passionate, sacrificial service. You'll find the ***fear of the Lord*** that brings ***holy joy***. In Paul's wise words from ***Romans 12***, your sacrificial obedience will be part of your worship. I take that to mean you'll ***enjoy*** sacrificial, costly, painful obedience the way you enjoy singing praises.

William Willimon - "Unless grace is the foundation of all we believe about the Christian life, we are not going to get very far spiritually. People fail in their obedience not because the gospel is too good, but because we do not make it good enough. Only when people see how utterly amazing and lovely is the grace of God are they thankful enough, motivated enough to give their hearts, souls, and minds to serve God."

We've traveled a long way to make our first point. Only Jesus Christ can bring assurance and the presence of God into a life, because only Jesus brings God's saving grace. And grace is what changes people on the inside. It's amazing grace, indeed!