

SERIES: Authentic Christian Community

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What if my way isn't the best way? Maybe a better question is, "What if my way isn't the *right* way?" Jesus said, "There is a way that seems right, but the end is destruction." What if my way is that way?

If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 John, Chapter 2. Up to now, John's had a pretty clear train of thought from Chapter 1, Verse 1, all the way through Chapter 2, Verse 11. But now he digresses just a little bit. He's hit it pretty hard, talking about the false teachers and his concerns, trying to give responses to those teachings, but now he backs up a little bit -wants to again affirm the believers - and then he's going to talk about two different operating systems within the world.

We pick it up in Verse 12 of Chapter 2:

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. (*NASB, 1 John 2:12)

Now he uses the word **children**—it's the exact same Greek word he used in Chapter 2, Verse 1. Now maybe in our culture we would find that somewhat insulting, but in First Century culture, the word wasn't insulting at all. The Greek word literally meant *to come forth from*, and it carried the idea of a child *coming forth from* a parent. So maybe John's identifying that these were his spiritual children, and that's why he's so greatly concerned. Or maybe more likely, I think, he's identifying that we are a family, because we all *come forth, born from*, the same parent. And that makes sense, because he is going to use a family metaphor: he's going to talk about *fathers*; he is going to talk about *young people*; and he is going to talk about *children*. He reminds them that their...**sins have been forgiven for His name's sake.**

Now throughout the Bible, there is this kind of two-level of forgiveness theology that it's important to understand. There is the reality, that when we trust Christ as Savior, our sins are forgiven—past, present and future. They all fall under the shed blood of Jesus on the cross. But there's also discussion about how sin affects our relationship with God, and the need to confess that sin, and experience God's forgiveness, in order to experience intimacy with Him. That's what he was talking about in Chapter 1, Verse 9. There are both of those levels. In this particular case, he's talking about that first level. The grammar would be past tense, but an ongoing effect—that God has forgiven your sins once and for all. What's at stake in the forgiveness of God is His very reputation **...for His name's sake.** Just think about the names of Jesus that John has used, just in a chapter and a half. He's talked about Jesus being the *Word of Life*. He's talked about Jesus being *the Son of God*, being our *Advocate*, being the *Propitiation*, Jesus Christ *the Righteous One*. Christ is the *Messiah*, the *Savior*. When you think about the

names of God, they're descriptions of God. And for the sake of His name, and what He has promised, your sins are forgiven. God stakes His reputation, His Name on it. So it's just the assurance of their forgiveness, the assurance of their salvation.

Verse 13:

I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. (Vs. 13a)

He's going to break people down into three categories: the mature, kind of the young people, and the children—spiritually speaking. I don't think he's talking about physically; he's talking about spiritually here. It's really important to remind ourselves that, just because you've been a Christian a long time, doesn't mean you are spiritually mature. I've known people that have been Christians for fifty years and they are still very immature, and I've known Christians that have been Christians for ten years, and they are very mature. Time is no guarantee one way or the other. What he's talking about here, are those who are spiritually mature—those who know God. And he talks about God **...who has been from the beginning**. There's a reminder here, that ultimately God's desire is, that we would know Him in a passionate love relationship with Him— that that's the ultimate end to salvation.

John told us, that what he's sharing in this letter, is what he heard directly out of the mouth of Jesus. He told us that in Chapter 1. Jesus told him this in the upper room. He said, "This is eternal life— that you may *know* God." The term **know** does not mean *know about*. It's a term of intimacy. It's exactly the same word that's used to describe sexual relations between a husband and a wife. It carries the idea of knowing in a deep, real, personal, intimate way. The fact that he adds **...who has been from the beginning** is significant. Now we've talked about this several times already in this letter. What he's talking about is, that Jesus is the manifestation of the life that has been forever. For all eternity, there has been life: God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit—sharing life and love together. All other life flows out of that. God is the Fountainhead; God is the Originator. All life comes from Him. Therefore the deepest, richest, fullest life comes from God. Therefore, to know the One who has been from the beginning, is to say that they know this life that defines God, and they've entered into it. That would be the definition of spiritual maturity—that we actually *dance with God in the light*. There is this beautiful, passionate, love relationship with God. That's what He wants. So He starts there. Second of all he says:

I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. (Vs. 13b)

Now he's talking about fathers; he's not just referring to men. When he talks about young men, he's not just referring to men or males; it's the mature spiritually, male and female. The second category would be probably where most of us would find ourselves. It's those who are on the journey, those that are in the trenches. We are feeling the warfare every day, battling to overcome the **evil one**, battling to live God's way. We kind of feel that sense of trench-warfare. That's what he's talking about...**overcoming the evil one**.

We talked about the difference between our *default setting* — to ultimately live our lives for ourselves and our own selfish desires — or to completely reorient our lives, in order to love and to give ourselves away. That would be an example of: as we are living out our faith, we feel the

strain of that; we feel the pressure of that; we feel the warfare on a daily basis. And so those are the people that are really feeling it in the trenches. Thirdly, he says:

I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. (Vs. 13c)

Now this word **children** is a completely different Greek word. This is a word that means *to subordinate yourself under, to be under the authority of*. This is talking about children that are under the authority of their parents and I think, in this case, he's talking about spiritual infants—those that really need those who are more mature to parent them, to protect them, to guide them, to help them in this Christian walk. And so he's talking about those **who know Him**. They are believers. But notice what he doesn't say. He doesn't say *know Him who has been from the beginning*. In other words, they are new believers—they don't yet really know the life of God. They don't know the fullness of it; they don't really know the abundant life. They are on a journey. They are pursuing; they are seeking, but they don't know, in the fullest sense, as those who are spiritually mature. So you have this imagery of the mature, of the disciples who really duke it out in the trenches, and spiritual infants. Now strangely enough, he gets quite repetitious here.

Verse 14:

I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning [*an exact repeat of what he said before*]. **I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.**

I think what he's saying there—the point of the text here—is that there are spiritual infants who are very vulnerable to the false teachers, and so he's writing these things in this letter, to remind the spiritually mature, and those that are battling it out in the trenches, to listen to what he has to say. They need to expose the false teachers; they need to stay on track, or the victims are going to be these new believers, who are going to lose their way and ultimately be destroyed by the false teachers.

Now I think there are a couple of things from this text that are helpful to walk away with. One is the reminder, that in any healthy church, there are those who are spiritually mature; there are those who are really feeling the battle in the trenches; and there are those who are spiritual infants—new believers. Now in a physical family, I would not have the same expectations for a five-year-old, a sixteen-year-old, and a forty-year-old. That would be unrealistic. If I look at how I live my life as a fifty-two-year old, and expect my children to live that way, and to see it that way, and to understand it that way, that's unrealistic. It took me fifty-two years to get here. So we understand that there are differences and, rather than kind of picking at others and being judgmental of others, just like a family, we need to encourage one another, challenge one another, teach one another, and mentor one another—and get this sense that we are in this together. Let's help one another on the journey, because we are going to have people at all different levels that are going to see it differently, understand it differently. Also, as a church, it's just a good reminder that not everything is for everybody. There are certain ministries; there are services; there are certain programs, which are targeted to certain people at different maturity levels, because we are a family. It's just important to remember that.

I think more importantly though, this text reminds us that, ultimately, the purpose of Salvation is to have a passionate love relationship with God — to know Him and to know this life that has been forever. It's so easy to reduce this down to a *ticket to Heaven*. Think about how many of our presentations of the Gospel ultimately talk about: if you do this, you'll go to Heaven. But the story of the Gospel is not about going to a place; it's about a relationship with the Person. God wants us to live in a passionate love relationship with Him — to know Him, and to know the life that has defined Him forever. When we reduce Salvation down to a *ticket to Heaven*, then it becomes cold, stale religion. We feel an obligation, because we are given a ticket, to play by the rules. So we want to know, what are the rules, and do I have to obey the rules? So that becomes kind of the essence of the Christian life — trying to operate within the rules, because I have my ticket, and I probably owe God at least that. There's nothing very motivating about that. It just turns into cold, stale religion.

Now think of it this way: use the analogy of a marriage. What is the point of marriage? Is the point of marriage to get a marriage certificate and, based on that, there are certain marriage behaviors I'm required to fulfill? Now I do a lot of weddings. I've never stood at the altar and said, "Okay, here's the deal. Based on what we are doing here today, I'm going to give you a marriage license, but with that comes a long list of *do's and don'ts*, because your job now is to act married." Nobody gets married for that reason. We get married because we fall deeply, passionately in love with someone, and we pursue this deep intimate relationship. Does that mean behavior doesn't matter? Absolutely not! It matters a lot. Think about it in a marriage relationship. There are certain marriage behaviors that define my life, not because they are the rules, but because they are part of what it means to pursue an intimate relationship with someone. They are not the goal; they are not the end, but they do affect the end. If my life is defined by misbehavior within my marriage, it is a barrier to experiencing intimacy. I'm never going to experience the passionate intimacy I desire, because of my misbehavior.

So it's understanding that behavior matters, but behavior isn't the point. The point is the passionate love affair with God. So when God says, "I'm asking you to do this, this and this; I'm commanding you to do this, this, and this," it's not because He's a control-freak. It's not because He says, "You have a ticket to Heaven; here's the rules; that's the way we play ball here." It's because He's saying, "What I want with you is *passion*. What I want with you is *love*. But in order for that to happen, this is the behavior that has to define your life, in order that you might *dance in the light* and we can enjoy relationship together." God is mapping out the journey to intimacy with Him. If I understand it that way, it's far more motivating. Because I want passion with God, I want intimacy with God, I'm going to listen to what God has to say, and I'm going to choose to do it His way.

Well, that leads into this discussion about the world's operating system. Twice in the previous paragraph, he talks about the importance of **overcoming the evil one**. The *evil one* is the architect of the world-system in which we live. I would suggest to you that these three verses—15, 16, and 17—are three of the most significant verses in the New Testament for understanding the system, and how God calls us to live, in order to experience an intimate relationship with Him.

Verse 15:

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Do not love the world. The grammar is actually do not *keep loving* the world. It's important to understand, every single one of us on default mode operates, according to the operating system of the world. Every single one of us has loved this world. That's what comes naturally. That's our default mode. We can make a choice to operate *other than* this world. Now what does he mean **do not love the world**? It's important that we understand this, because he just said, "If you love the world, you don't love the Father."

We've talked about this before. You can't have two lovers. James said it in Chapter 4, Verse 4, "If you make yourself a friend of the world, you have declared yourself to be an enemy of God." That seems rather serious to me. Jesus said it in the Sermon on the Mount, "You can't serve two masters. You are going to have to make a decision. It's Me or it's this world." So what do we mean by **world**? Sometimes the New Testament uses the word **world** to describe the world of people, "For God so loved the world..." Sometimes it's used to describe the universe, God's creation. But oftentimes it's used, as it's used here, to describe the operating-system of the world.

So when he says, "**Do not love the world nor the things in the world**", the *things* in the world are those things that are the outflow of this value system—the things that mark us, the things that identify us with this system. You say, "That's all well and good, but what does that mean? You know, I need specifics." So John says in Verse 16, "Great, I'm going to give them to you."

For all that is in the world, [in other words, I'm going to define it] the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; (Vs. 16-17a)

The text says this value system is passing away—meaning, at the end of the day, it doesn't hold up; it doesn't work; it doesn't deliver the goods. It always destroys. I can choose to live my life my way, or I can choose to live my life God's way, but, the option that's not on the table is, I cannot live it both ways. If I love this world, then I don't love the Father. If I'm going to operate according to this world, I'm not operating according to the system of grace. The systems are not compatible in any way. There is a choice, a daily choice that must be made.

"There is a way that seems right, but the end is destruction." But Jesus also said, "There is a road; it's a narrower road and there's going to be fewer who find it." But I'm telling you, it's the road that leads to life—the choice is yours!

I remember the weekend at Lincoln Berean when we studied this particular text. Immediately preceding the message, I had someone sing Frank Sinatra's favorite song, *My Way*. It's funny how very inappropriate that song feels in a worship service. You could have heard a pin drop. I heard Frank Sinatra once say that he referred to it as our national anthem, and I think he's right; it is how we live. As a matter of fact, it's what we promote: "I'm going to live my life on my terms". I remember one time I actually had somebody request that this song be sung at a funeral, because it embodied how the person who had passed actually lived his life. I think it's the only time I've ever said to a family, I can't do that song. It so represents everything that I oppose, that

either you need to find a different preacher or choose a different song. As long as that's our theme song, "I did it my way", we have no chance for experiencing meaningful relationship with Jesus or with other believers. There's no question that is the theme song of the world. John says, "You either love the world or you love the Father, but you can't love both. You can't have two lovers", but what exactly does he mean by that? We'll talk more about that Monday when we continue to study First John together.