

07. The Epistle of 1 John—2:9-12

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(6/12/19)

In this section we are currently studying in 1 John, he is laying out the ‘litmus test’ that determines if a person is genuinely saved.

This was a concept he really introduced in Chapter 1 with the idea of having ‘fellowship’ with Jesus Christ—

1 John 1:6-7 (NKJV)

⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

In Chapter 2, John continues his thought when he says—

1 John 2:3-4 (NKJV)

³ Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

As we said last time, the word ‘**keep**’ in verses 3 and 4 is in the present tense in the Greek and denotes a continuous action. In other words, a true Christian is someone who ‘*continues to keep God’s commandments*’ or that the general pattern of their life is that they ‘*consistently (not perfectly) keep the commandments of God*’.

It seems, from what John goes on to say, that he has one particular commandment in mind which he believes if kept, more than any other, proves the validity of someone’s salvation. This was a commandment that Jesus gave to His apostles (and to all Christians) in the upper room the night before He was crucified—that they love the brethren (other Christians):

John 13:34-35 (NKJV)

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

We know this is the commandment John had in mind because of what he goes on to say in verses 7-8—

1 John 2:7-8 (NKJV)

⁷ Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. ⁸ Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.

As we said last week, there is only one commandment that is both ‘**old**’ and ‘**new**’ at the same time—Jesus’ commandment in John 13:34. The commandment is ‘**old**’ in the sense that these Christians had heard it preached to them their entire Christian lives (John wrote this epistle around 96 A.D.)—so in that regard it certainly wasn’t *new* to them.

But it was ‘**new**’ in the sense that Jesus called it *new* when He gave it to His disciples in the upper room the night before His crucifixion and told them to love each other “as I have loved you.”

The distinguishing characteristic of a true Christian isn't wearing a cross or a Christian tee-shirt or carrying a Bible or even going to church—the true mark of a Christian is love and especially for other Christians.

With that in mind, we continue with John's thought on this subject—

1 John 2:9 (NKJV)

⁹ He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now.

The 'light' that John is referring to could be a reference to the *light* of God's Word—"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105).

In other words, any person who claims to be right with God (a Christian) and living according to the light (truth) of God's Word but hates a fellow Christian—John says is deceiving him or herself and is still in darkness (lost without Christ).

But I think in particular he has in mind being in the 'light' of salvation in general—

1 Thessalonians 5:4-5 (NKJV)

⁴ But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. ⁵ You are all sons of light and sons of the day [saved]. We are not of the night nor of darkness [unsaved]

1 John 2:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

In the New Testament, 'stumbling' refers to sinning—

John 16:1 (NKJV)

¹ "These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble.

1 Corinthians 8:13 (NKJV)

¹³ Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

By saying that those who love fellow Christians "**abide in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him**"—it seems the idea that John is conveying is that a true Christian would never willingly cause a brother to sin or do anything that would even tempt them to sin ("just come out with us and have one beer...")—because the love of God in them would never allow it.

1 John 2:10-11 (NKJV)

¹⁰ He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹ **But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.**

In saying this, John no doubt had any person in mind who goes to church and calls themselves a Christian—but hates other Christians for whatever reason (Jewish 'Christians' hating Gentile Christians and vice versa).

As we said a few weeks ago, this would have mirrored the Christian church in the deep south in the middle part of the twentieth century where the church was highly segregated and where some (not all) white 'Christians' hated black Christians and supposed black 'Christians' hated their white counterparts.

However, I believe John also had in mind (maybe primarily so) Gnostics who considered themselves to be Christians but had superimposed Gnosticism onto the Christian faith in an endeavor to produce a superior form of Christianity.

This version of Christianity, they believed, had deeper spiritual insights, knew God in a deeper way and flat out was a more spiritual form of Christianity than most of the Christians in John's day knew.

One pastor writes—

"The false teachers of John's day arrogantly claimed a higher knowledge of the divine nature and communion with deity, but it produced only proud disdain for unenlightened, common people. But the Christians, most of whom were slaves or members of the working class (1 Cor. 1:26–29), were the truly enlightened who demonstrated their true knowledge of God as they not only loved one another but reached out in love to those lost in sin's darkness."

Gnostics back then (including false teachers today) all believed they had superior 'light' and knew how to walk with God better than non-Gnostics—but as Jesus said, *"If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"* (Matthew 6:23)

In other words, if a person thinks they have spiritual light (truth) but their so-called light is really darkness (error, Satan's lies)—that darkness is greater than any other darkness.

Matthew 23:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte [convert to Judaism], and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

This is essentially what John is saying in verse 11—

1 John 2:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Please understand, John doesn't have 'backsliding' Christians in mind when he said this but—church-going *unbelievers* ('tares' among the 'wheat', 'goats' among the 'sheep').

He is saying that any churchgoer who claims to be spiritually superior to other Christians by embracing certain (false) doctrines, who then looks down on and even holds in contempt (hates) other Christians for being so 'unenlightened'—is deceiving themselves into thinking they are in fellowship with Jesus but are actually blinded by their own pride as *they 'walk in darkness'* (unsaved).

1 John 1:5-6 (NKJV)

⁵ This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

And by saying this I'm thinking of "Christian" cults like Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. (Comment)

As we said a few weeks ago, the Gnostics denied both the *humanity* and *deity* of Christ (check out study number 2 in 1 John for the details).

This is exactly what John is talking about when he said that some in the church claimed to have spiritual light but walked in darkness (they had embraced false doctrine and were still lost).

This idea is extremely relevant and important for Christians to understand if we're going to be vigilant in these last days by contending earnestly for the faith—

Jude 1:3-4 (NKJV)

³ Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. ⁴ For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gnostics had a deep hatred for those who were true to God's word—and that could be who and what John has in mind primarily in verses 9-11.

1 John 2:12-14 (NKJV)

¹² I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. ¹³ I write to you, fathers, Because you have known Him *who is* from the beginning. I write to you, young men, Because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, Because you have known the Father. ¹⁴ I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him *who is* from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one.

Let's break this down to see what John is saying here.

First of all, he turns his attention from false Christians who hate the brethren and walk in darkness—to true Christians.

1 John 2:12 (NKJV)

¹² I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.

To begin with, “**little children**” literally means “*born ones*” and refers to all believers in Christ at any stage of spiritual growth.

All Christians have been born into God's family through faith in Jesus Christ, and their sins have been forgiven—not by keeping commandments or laws, but by grace because of what Jesus did on Calvary's cross (“for His name's sake”).

There are only two families on earth from God's perspective—the family (children) of God and then those who are the children (family) of the devil. God's children demonstrate they belong to Him by walking in the light, loving the brethren and bearing the Fruit of the Spirit for His glory.

The children of the devil walk in darkness (they love darkness rather than light because they want to do evil), they hate true Christians and produce the ‘works of the flesh’. (Galatians 5:19-21)

Something else we need to address—we all begin as newborn babes in Christ, but we must not stay that way because—our Father in heaven expects His children to grow up! Now, when it comes to the spiritual growth of the children of God—we need to clarify a few things.

1. Spiritual growth doesn't affect a believer's standing before God.

That is a settled issue thru them receiving Jesus as their Savior and God's righteousness being imputed to them at that moment. Spiritual growth (or the lack thereof) has no bearing on a person's righteous standing in the eyes of God because—His righteousness was imputed to them and not earned by them:

Romans 3:21-22 (NKJV)

²¹ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe...

Romans 4:5 (NKJV)

⁵ But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness...

One pastor rightly points out—

“At the moment of conversion, Christ’s own sacrifice for sin is applied to the believing sinner and His own righteousness credited to the penitent so that God’s wrath is turned away, all sin is paid for and pardoned, and the believer is accepted by God in Christ Jesus. The resultant standing is fixed and irrevocable, and it settles forever believers’ heavenly destiny.”

2. Spiritual growth doesn't affect God's love for believers.

God's Word teaches that He doesn't love mature believers more than less mature or even carnal believers—He loves all His children equally.

The reason for that is because ***His love for us is unconditional***, based entirely on Him *choosing* to love us and not on the merit (worthiness) of any individual believer.

Romans 5:8 (NKJV)

⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Satan is always trying to get us to believe that God's love for us is 'merit' based instead of 'grace' based (undeserved blessing).

It's only when a Christian believes that God loves them based on how they *perform* that he (the devil) can cause them to live under the law and condemn them when they fail.

3. Spiritual growth is not measured by how long a person has been saved.

Many Christians think that spiritual growth is like physical growth—it happens automatically over time.

So you'll hear some Christians, when challenged about the way they're living by others who haven't been saved as long—*“Don't tell me about the Bible, I've been saved for twenty years and you for only two years. I'm a lot older than you in the faith.”*

Many Christians haven't been saved for 'twenty-years'—they've been saved for 'one-year' twenty times!

I have known Christians who are still carnal after being saved for many years and Christians who demonstrated a remarkable level of maturity who were only saved a couple of years. Spiritual growth depends on the *hunger* for the Word and the *desire* to grow in each person individually.

Hebrews 5:12-14 (NKJV)

¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. ¹⁴ But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

4. Spiritual growth is not related to the amount of schooling or theological knowledge a person has.

There are many Christians who have degrees in theology (some are professors at Christian colleges and seminaries) who are shockingly immature spiritually speaking.

But as one author warned—

“That is a dangerous position to be in, because the more biblical information one receives but does not apply, the more deceived he becomes about his own spiritual condition (cf. Rom. 2:17–29; Heb. 5:12–14).”

We see this clearly in how carnal and wicked the spiritual leaders in Israel (the scholars and doctors of the Law) were as compared to Jesus’ disciples—

Acts 4:13 (NKJV)

¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

Want to know more? Click [here](#).