

FIRST JOHN PART 3 "What a Real Christian Looks Like"

1 John 2:7-27

We're studying the letter of First John. The Apostle John is writing at the end of the 1st C to Christians. Although he has certain groups in mind, the Holy Spirit has preserved his words for us. John re-states basic principles that he and the other disciples were taught by Jesus Himself 60 years earlier. Nothing that John says here is new. His audience had heard it all before. So why does John repeat it? Why is it so important to him? He gives 4 reasons for writing. These are his purpose statements. I showed these to you a few weeks ago. Here they are again...

The first reason John writes is so that our joy may be complete. Many Christians are discouraged by the way things are in the world. Things were bad in John's day and they've gotten worse. Too many of us are not experiencing the joy of our salvation. But God wants us as His children to be united with Him and with each other in loving fellowship (1 Jn Ch 1). God wants us to experience the "riches of His grace which He lavished upon us" (Eph 1). He wants us, as members of God's family, to enjoy all of our "spiritual blessings" in Christ. That's what God wants for us.

The second reason John writes is so that we may not sin. All of us Christians struggle with sin. We live in a fallen world and even though we have been saved by grace thru faith, we're still here in our human flesh. Many of the things of the world allure us. But thankfully God has provided us a way to deal with our sin (1 Jn Ch 1 & 2). *[Quote 1 John 1:9]*. Sin was a problem for believers in John's day and it still is. A lot has changed in 19-plus centuries since John wrote this letter but THAT has not.

The third reason John writes is to keep us grounded in the truth. In John's day and today there are many false religions, false teachings, heresies, wrong doctrines floating around out there. God's word reveals all truth to us. The Holy Spirit who indwells us guides us into that truth and He keeps us from straying away from it. The fourth reason John writes is

so that we would KNOW that we have eternal life. If you have come to know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, then your salvation is secure. John says that we CAN know for sure that we are saved.

We left off last week (1 Jn 2:6) with these words: "whoever says he abides in Him [Jesus] ought to walk in the same way in which He walked." That statement by John leads us to ask the obvious question: "Practically speaking, what does this look like? this idea of abiding in Christ, of walking like Jesus walked? The next section we'll be in this morning answers this. Whatever it looks like, it obviously does NOT mean sinless perfection. None of us are perfect, are we? John's already reminded us that we all sin. So then, what does a true believer look like? What are the marks, indicators, evidences of a genuine Christian? If we CAN know that we're saved, how? What assurance do I have, do you have that we really do belong to Christ? The passage that we're going to look today will help us to answer these questions. I've divided it our lesson into 4 parts (see Handout). Questions?

READ First John 2:7-11

V1, "Beloved," is a term of endearment that John uses for believers. It's a favorite term of his, used 6 times in 1 John and 3 times in 3 John.

What John writes is nothing new. They've heard it before. In a sense it's an old commandment that they "had from the beginning," since they first came to Christ. Today we might say that we've heard it since back in our VBS days as children. It's basic. But in v 2, John makes an interesting statement: "At the same time, it's a new commandment." How can it be both an old and a new commandment at the same time? The commandment John is referring to, in v 10, is what? **Love your brother.**

The reason John refers to it as a new commandment is because that's exactly what **JESUS** referred to it as. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34-35).

But this call to love one another is ALSO an old commandment. Paul tells us in Romans 13:8-10: "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments (referring to the Ten Commandments, Exo 20), 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Lev 19:18). Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. So this commandment for us to love our brother has its roots way back in the O.T., it goes back to the **LAW**.

Basically what Jesus does is He takes the principles taught in the Law to a higher level. He shows us the whole purpose behind the Law. We see the heart of God. Jesus wants His followers to love each other the way HE loves them (the way God loves). And how is that? Unconditionally. Self-sacrificing. Jesus put others first. That kind of love!

So to summarize this section, the mark of a true Christian is that we love our brothers. We don't hate them. The meaning of "brothers" certainly refers to our fellow believers (our brothers and sisters in Christ). But it has a broader meaning – our neighbors, our fellow man, people out there. This is what Jesus taught: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6:27-28). Not only are we to do what Jesus tells us, love one another. We are to follow His example. Did Jesus only love those who loved and followed Him? No, He loved all people, not just His own disciples.

Christians, then, are characterized by their love. If we say we follow Jesus ("in the light") but we hate our brother ("walk in darkness"), there's a big problem. This thinking is contradictory. Bottom line: a lack of love is one indication that a person may not be saved. So then, the application for us is clear. We need to examine ourselves. We ought to walk in the same way in which Jesus walked. We ought to love the same way that He loved. Questions?

READ First John 2:12-14

This brief section talks about the various stages of what? Spiritual **GROWTH**. John describes these stages of development with the words "children," "young men" and "fathers." He begins in v 12 with a general statement about all of us believers, "Your sins are forgiven for His name's sake." The great reality of our salvation is that we have been forgiven. We talked about this last week – that should change our lives! "For His name's sake" simply means "for God's glory." A forgiving God puts His name on display so that the world can see just how great He is. Psalm 79:9 says, "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins, for Your name's sake!"

In this section John skips around. In v 13 he is talking to fathers, then he goes to young men, then children, then back to fathers again, then to the young men again. Let me summarize what John's saying to each group. To children, v 13, he says "you know the Father." Children delight in the relationship with their parents. They have this innocent, unconditional love for mommy and daddy. They practically worship the ground their parents walk on. But children lack wisdom. They're gullible, vulnerable to the bad things, the bad people that are out in the real world. They need their parents' protection and guidance.

But hopefully children grow up and eventually become young men and women, v 13 and 14. John tells them, "you have overcome the evil one," "you're strong" and "the word of God abides in you." Young men and women (adolescents and young adults) delight in truth, in learning, in knowledge that they have gained from the truth they've learned. They tend to be inquisitive and innovative and imaginative. Sure, they may be a bit idealistic and headstrong, rebellious at times, but they're learning. Their reasoning and discerning are a work in progress. God's word as a part of their education will help them to overcome the evil one, to recognize Satan's lies and to avoid the bad things that will hurt them and keep them from making bad decisions with their life.

Hopefully they apply what they've learned wisely and grow up to full maturity. They eventually become leaders, fathers, parents, grandparents to the next generation. To this advanced group John says only one thing, v 13 and 14 – "YOU KNOW HIM who is from the beginning."

It's interesting that the word "know" used for both groups is exactly the same Greek word. But it's not the same knowledge, is it? Obviously the level of knowledge is different. How is it different? Their knowledge of God is based on more than the saving relationship; more than what they read in the Bible or learn by reading some other book. It's more than merely an intellectual belief about God. Their knowledge of God **has grown as they learn from their own life experiences**. As they go thru hard, difficult times (the trials of life) they experience God on a new level. They see Him at work in their lives. Over time they discern the Father's heart. As they grow deeper in their Christian experience they can't help but fall more in love with Him. The more they witness God in action the more in awe of the Him they are. This compels them to talk with Him more and to worship Him every day. They know God, but on a much deeper level.

So what is John's point? The mark of a true Christian is that they grow just like any other living organism. They don't stay spiritual babies. This is something that both Paul and Peter emphasized in their various letters to believers. As we get older and mature, our desire for God and His word and His people should grow and become deeper and stronger. On your handout under Q5 I have given you 5 verses: 1 Timothy 6:11, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Philippians 3:14 and Colossians 2:7. Read these verses on your own time. They describe the process of a believer's growth. As you read each verse ask yourself, do these verses describe me, my life?

READ 1 John 2:15-17

Another mark of being a Christian is that we do not love the world. By "world" John is referring to the system of **EVIL, godless, sinful,**

depraved, fallen human philosophy. The world out there as John defines it is opposed to God. They oppose biblical truth. Have you noticed that? They're increasingly hostile toward Christ and to Christianity. To love the things of the world, then, is to commit spiritual adultery. The picture that comes to mind is O.T. Israel. V 15 says that we cannot love the world and love God at the same time. They are mutually exclusive. James 4:4 says, "You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

As Christians, who are we? We're saved by grace. We're forgiven. We do God's will. We follow Jesus Christ. We belong to Him. He is our Lord. We know the truth. We know God. We follow His word. We are overcomers! We are all of these things.

By contrast, v 16 tells us what the world is all about. "Desires of the flesh" is the lust of the flesh, corrupt thinking, a desire to sin. Why is that? Because sin is fun. It's exciting. It's all about me and my pleasure! "Desires of the eyes" is what I see and want. I gotta have it! Again, it's all about me! "Pride of life" is the idea that I deserve this. The bottom line, John says, is that these are NOT from God.

One last thought about the evil world system: where is it heading? Not the same place we are! V 17 tells us that as Christians we are doing the will of God (or we should be) and that we will have eternal life with the Lord. On the other hand, the world and its evil desires are passing away. There's no point in us pursuing the things of the world because "the present form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor 7:31). It would be a fruitless endeavor, a waste of our time and resources. It would hurt us spiritually, physically and emotionally. All of these apply!

Application: What books do you like to read? What music, songs do you listen to? What kind of people do you hang around? What activities are you involved in regularly? The mark of a true Christian is that we do not

love the world. Instead we're drawn to those things that please God. We should want to be around the people of God.

One last section to finish out our thought for today, in v 18-27. We don't have time to cover it today. I just want to introduce it to you.

READ 1 John 2:18-21

The term John uses to describe someone who is against Christ and Christianity is "antichrist," v 18. In this section John contrasts true Christians from those who pretend to be Christians. Antichrists. He says there are many of them, not just the one in Revelation. A lot of them are actually in the church! They are the wheat among the tares (Matt 13:24-30). They are the wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15). Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So do they. [Show Q9 slide] The bottom line and we'll get into the details next time: True Christians, v 19 says, they **CONTINUE**, they remain faithful to the end. Pretenders, anti-christs, those who opposed to God, they **DEPART**. [Show Q10 slide] True Christians, v 21 says, hold fast to Biblical **TRUTH**. Pretenders (we will see this next time) **DENY** the truth. True Christians affirm their faith in Jesus Christ. Those who are not really Christians deceive others. They embrace and teach false doctrines about Jesus. We'll get into more details about this next time.

To summarize today's lesson: Four marks of a Christian, a true believer in Jesus: We (1) will love others, (2) will experience spiritual growth, (3) will not love (will not become attached to) the things of the world, and (4) will continue in the truth they have been taught, will remain faithful to God. How can I be sure I'm a Christian? First John Chapters 1 and 2 are a really good place to start. So, examine your own life. How are you doing so far?