



That We May Know Him (1 John 5:14-21)

I. INTRO

- A. Two weeks ago today/yesterday our eldest daughter was married on one of the San Juan Islands off Seattle.
- B. All of our four children and all five of our grandchildren were able to attend the wedding. It was one of the rare times we have all been able to get together in the last few years.
- C. We spent a few days in Victoria Canada before the wedding -- I drove and Linda flew. So, a good chunk of my vacation was spent driving to Canada and back.
 - 1. With all the driving, I had a chance to reflect, listen to some audio books, catch-up on some podcasts – and I even took the time to pray (you'll be happy to know 😊).
 - 2. One of the days I was driving, reflecting, and praying I felt the Lord ask me a question and I want to tell you what I think He said (strong impression).
 - 3. I sensed the Lord asking me, "When will I be enough?"
 - 4. Here's the idea: If I were stripped of EVERYTHING else in my life, would God be enough? If I had no friends, family, possessions, or resources could I still find my joy, comfort, and delight in God?
- D. That's a powerful question – and I want to pass it on to you today: "When will God be enough?"
- E. That Jesus would *"come to have first place in everything."* --Colossians 1:18
- F. I think it's a good day to ask this question of ourselves because, in essence, that's what John has been asking throughout this first letter to the Christians in and around Ephesus.
- G. During the 1st century Christianity was primarily an urban movement and the common people in these urban settings often endured VERY difficult lives.

1. Most people lived in homes that had dirt floors, no windows, and, of course, no indoor plumbing.
 2. When their food supplies were affected by famine, they could go for long periods without provisions.
 3. Medical and dental care was sparse or non-existent. Plagues could come and go ravaging whole cities.
 4. Women and children were treated no better than livestock.
 5. There was harsh persecution aimed at the young and budding Church – by the unchurched community as well as other cults and religions, and then there was the occupying Roman army.
 - a. The book of Revelation, for instance, was written to encourage Christians to remain strong in the face of cruel persecution (Rev. 2:10).
 - b. Peter refers to “fiery trials” of the early Christians and being “reproached for the name of Christ” (1 Peter 4:12-14).
 6. There was often wanton kidnapping, rape, and murder.
 7. These were some of the conditions that the people John was writing to were living in.
- H. What John is saying in this letter is that – in spite of all these difficult circumstances God can be enough. He’s saying:
1. You can know God
 2. You can be assured of God’s love for you
 3. You can know God’s joy
- I. The title of this sermon is: “That We May Know Him.” John uses the word “know” 38 times throughout this letter (“love” is used 33 times). The word “know” is used 7 times here in the last 9 verses.
- J. Today we will look at 1 John 5:13-21. Vs. 14-21 are commonly thought to be a postscript – a P.S. at the end of John’s letter that adds some concluding, or summarizing thoughts.
- K. As we prepare to read the text I would pass on to you an observation of John’s writing by pastor/theologian D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: “The way to understand John is to remember that his method is rather that of the poet or

musician then that of the logician or the one who uses a more orthodox type of reasoning.” --D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones¹

- L. I will read our passage, pray, and then see how John will summarize this important letter... *“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. [Postscript:] ¹⁴ This is the confidence, which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests, which we have asked from Him. ¹⁶ If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. ¹⁷ All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death. ¹⁸ We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. ¹⁹ We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. 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. This is the true God and eternal life. ²¹ Little children, guard yourselves from idols.”*

II. BODY

- A. There are three main groupings in these final eight verses that we can identify as three points.
1. Vs. 14-17 – **The importance of prayer:** God loves, or longs, to give us what we pray for.
 2. Vs. 18-20 – **The importance of knowing:** Three confident affirmations, “We know...”
 3. V. 21 – **The importance of guarding our heart:** a concluding exhortation.
- B. Let’s look at them one at a time:
1. Vs. 14-17 – **The importance of prayer: God loves, or longs, to give us what we pray for.**
 - a. *“This is the confidence, which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests,*

¹ *Life In Christ*. Crossway 2002: 681.

which we have asked from Him. ¹⁶ If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. ¹⁷ All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin **not** leading to death.” [These are certainly the most confusing sentences in our passage – so, what’s being said?]

- b. The big picture assertion, or promise here, is that God loves, or longs to provide what we pray for.
- c. “If we want to have real confidence in prayer, then we must know that we ourselves are accepted by God.” --D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones²
- d. But did you notice a couple of “elephants in the room” in those verses? The elephants are found in verses 14 & 16: v.14: IF we ask anything according to His will... and v. 16: There is a sin leading to death...
- e. **Elephant #1 - V. 14** -- This can be a troubling qualification because the Bible doesn't spend much time addressing the problem of unanswered prayer, though the NT does give us at least three clues, which I want to pass on to you...
 - 1) **1 Peter 3:7** teaches that strained interpersonal relationships, especially between husband and wife, hinder prayer: “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker³ vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”
 - 2) **James 4:3** teaches that prayers aimed at merely enhancing our own private pleasure will go unheard: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”
 - 3) **1 John 3:22** implies that in active, willful disobedience to God's commandments, our prayers won't be answered: “And

² *Life In Christ*: Crossway 2002: 661.

³ Greek: *asthenēs*. A fitting synonym may be the word *vulnerable* according to Jim Summer & Sarah Summer in their book, *Just How Married Do You Want To Be?* ReadHowYouWant 2009: 47-59.

whatever we ask we receive from him, **because** we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.” (The first work of obedience is to listen.)

- f. **Elephant #2 - V. 16** – “There is a sin leading to death.” This verse has provoked widespread discussion.
- 1) This is where the Catholics affirm their concept of mortal⁴ vs. venial sins.
 - 2) It seems clear that the one who sins unto death is not a Christian. This is probably a reference to what John was saying back in chapter 2...
 - 3) 1 John 2:18-23: “Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. ²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. ²¹ I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. ²² Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. ²³ Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.” --1 John 2:18-23

2. Vs. 18-20 – **The importance of knowing: Three confident affirmations, “We know...”**

- a. John Stott calls these three affirmations: “Three clear, candid, bold, dogmatic certainties -- which summarize the truths that have been shared in the earlier parts of the letter.” --John Stott⁵

⁴ From a Catholic perception a mortal sin is a grave sin that ruptures our link to God’s saving grace.

⁵ Stott, John. *The Letters of John*, Tyndale NT Commentaries Vol. 19, IVP Academic 1964 & 1988: 192.

- b. **1st Affirmation** - (v. 18) – *“We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He [Jesus] who was born of God **keeps him**, and the evil one does not touch him.* –1 John 5:18
- 1) The phrase *“born of God”* literally means “begotten” and indicates a **new birth**.
 - 2) New birth results in new behavior. John Stott writes, “Sin and the child of God are incompatible. They may occasionally meet; [but] they cannot live together in harmony.” –John Stott (Besetting sins?)
 - 3) If we have Christ, we have the power for deliverance from sin.
 - 4) This is what we are praying when we say in the Lord’s Prayer: *“deliver us from evil”* --Mat 6:13b
- c. **2nd Affirmation** - (v. 19) – *“We know that **we** are of God, and that the whole world **lies** in the power of the evil one.”* --1 John 5:19
- 1) The word *“lies”* indicates that the *“whole world”* is unconscious and asleep in the embrace of Satan.
 - 2) We should not attribute too much power to the *“evil one.”*
 - 3) John draws a very clear line here: We are either 1) awake and *“of God”* (or *in God*), or 2) we are slumbering in the arms of Satan. There is no third category.
- d. **3rd Affirmation** - (v. 20) – *“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. This is the **true** God and eternal life.”* --1 John 5:20
- 1) The Christian position is one truth and certainty.
 - 2) Nothing is more important to John than that we should know these three things for certain.
 - a) That we may KNOW Him who is true
 - b) We are IN Him who is true
 - c) This IS the true God

3. Vs. 21 – **The importance of guarding our heart: a concluding exhortation.**

- a. *Guard yourself from idols* --1John 5:21
- b. At first glance this concluding, or final, exhortation might seem a bit odd...
- c. So why conclude with an exhortation regarding idolatry? Because idolatry is the opposite of what is true. If we want to know "*Him who is true*," if we want to know that we are "*in Him who is true*," if we want to know the "*true God and eternal life*," we will need to be vigilant about what is counterfeit and false.
- d. Because this is where we are so easily sucked into finding our comfort in something (or some one) other than God.
- e. One of the best definitions for idolatry is when we make good things ultimate things (Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*).
 - 1) Another term for idol is a "*functional savior*." When we look to other things to satisfy and fulfill us – to 'save' us, this becomes a '*functional savior*.'
 - 2) Sometimes our surface sins are only symptoms of a deeper problem. Underneath every external sin is a *heart idol*—a false god that has eclipsed the true God in our thoughts or affections.
 - 3) Some scholars would say we don't really have a sin problem, we have a worship problem. In this context all sin is idolatry. And every time we choose sin we have chosen to find our comfort, joy, or delight in something (or someone) other than God.

III. CONCLUSION

- A. To sum-up: I want to ask you the question I presented in the introduction:
When will God be enough?
- B. I will close our series with the same illustration that D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones uses to conclude his commentary on 1 John,,,
 - a. There was a prayer that Hudson Taylor, the British pioneer missionary to China, loved to pray...
 - b. After his death it was found on a piece of paper that had obviously traveled with him.

- c. According to Hudson Taylor this was the most important thing to him...

Lord Jesus make thyself to me,
 A living bright reality,
 More present to faith's vision keen,
 Than any outward object seen,
 More dear, more intimately nigh,
 Than e'en the sweetest earthly tie.

- C. Even in the midst of difficult circumstances Grandpa Pastor John is encouraging the church to make sure that Jesus is enough.
- D. In our *Living In the Light* study John leans in to an associated group of churches undergoing severe living conditions as well as severe persecution, and severe conflict.
1. Grandpa Pastor John is seeking to (re-) mold their concept of God and life within the church by carefully describing salvation and its fruit in a Christian's life.
 2. Throughout the letter John brilliantly defines what a Christian is by clarifying the borders of our faith with the elements of knowing light, truth, and love.
 3. John, an eyewitness to the ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus – as well as His most intimate earthly friend, enables us to discern where we are in our lives and carefully sets our focus on where we COULD -- and where we CAN be as we press in to wholeheartedly love God and one another.
4. A baseline for *truth* is seeking to understand the clearest concept of God, Jesus Christ, and humanity.
1. Love is the way we imitate Christ in sacrificially relating to one other.
 2. His light is the reflection of holiness stemming from Christ dwelling in us through the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit – causing us to delight in what He has done.
 3. We wouldn't want a Christianity without these three elements as John has defined them. It would no longer be what Jesus Christ taught and revealed to us.

4. Because of this, we are exhorted to surrender to God's transforming love and to love one another in ways that are consistent with how Jesus Christ revealed Himself to us.