

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

COME, JOIN THE CONVERSATION!
ON
THE EPISTLES OF JOHN

Lesson Plan for Thursday – April 10, 2014

CONVERSATION #10 – “I JOHN 5:13-21 “EPILOGUE”

Our objectives for this session:

- to share ideas, attitudes, and experiences relating to the message proclaimed by John; and, in doing so, strengthen our SAKLC fellowship;
- after many weeks of study focused on specific parts of John’s message, to be able now to view the essential unity of that message;
- to understand what it means to possess “boldness in prayer” and to have the “assurance” that God hears our prayers, and then apply same to our own prayer life;
- to apply John’s final warning to our time; our place; our society.

OPENING PASTORAL PRAYER and SHARING GOD’S PEACE

FACILITATOR’S SYNOPSIS OF I JOHN, as the Epistle now concludes:

The *First Epistle of John* is first and foremost a message about love – God’s love and our response in expressions of human love. What does it mean to love like God?

Honesty with ourselves demands that we acknowledge (*as John pointed out earlier in this letter*) that we, at any moment, are either Cain or Abel; our offering is either what God desires, or it is what our prideful selves desire. God asks from us a heart full of love, and we give him a heart full of pride.

Unable to face the guilt of that truth, we fashion for ourselves a “god” who agrees with us. Our “god” defines love according to our needs; and, excuses our pride as being justified by the righteousness of our own creation. So, we walk through this life with our heads held high and try to live in a spirit of self-righteousness based on our “own revelation(s).”

But deep down, where we must be honest with ourselves, we encounter God’s love, which reveals the darkness of our pride.

John’s message in this epistle is that as brothers and sisters, as leaders in the family of God, it is our mission to encourage and pray for one another, so that we may all live as we already know He lives – with the indwelling of His Spirit - among us!

God has given us many commands in His Word; but, Jesus condensed them into just two: Love God and love your neighbor. The Apostle understood this and repeatedly called his readers to love one another as the only way to know God. You will remember how clearly he says this in I John 4:8 **“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”**

There is no *god* who does not love. Any *god* who is not completely and fully love is an idol of human creation. Anyone who follows such a *god*, disobeys and dishonors the true God, and is, therefore, an idolater.

Jesus taught, very plainly, that love and obedience is the same thing. That link is the very essence of love. Love is what God ultimately shows us through Jesus Christ.

Whatever word we use, the only definition of love is *“Christ crucified.”* For John, this is God; this is love; this is the love that is characteristic behavior of God’s family. It is a unique family trait that identifies a Christian as being *reborn* as a child of God.

There are 3 stages of God’s Love in I John. These stages are: (1) **love manifested to the world**; (2) **love given to the family of God**; (3) **love perfected in a smaller group(s) within this family**. The love of God does not reach perfection until it finds objects of love beyond itself. When it does, God, whom no one has seen, will be visible in this manifestation of love.

Our belief in Jesus, His identity and His work, is also what tells us what love is and how we are to live as members of His family. This faith gives us supernatural power to overcome the world and its version of love, and choose instead to love as we have been loved by Jesus. John says that Christian love is empowered by the Holy Spirit; God desires love; Jesus defines love.

John concludes the main part of his letter by reminding us that when we see the family resemblance of love in our lives, we know with confidence that we have entered into that relationship with God which we call **“eternal life.”**

FACILITATOR’S FURTHER COMMENT ON TODAY’S SPECIFIC SCRIPTURAL TEXT:

This section [I John 5:13-21] forms the conclusion to the First Epistle of John. It is composed of 2 subsections: (1) – I John 5:13 the *“conclusion,”* (which is also a transitional statement from the main body of the letter); and, (2) – I John 5:14-21 the *“epilogue.”* The epilogue, in turn, consists of 2 subsections: (a) I John 5:14-17 and (b) I John 5:18-21; Verse 21 forms both a conclusion and final warning.

A) THE SCRIPTURAL RECORD –I JOHN 5:13 – ‘THE PURPOSE BEHIND JOHN’S WRITING’

I’ve written this to those who believe in the Son of God so that they will know that they have eternal life. [COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE TRANSLATION]

I write this (these things) ***to you who believe in*** (adhere to, trust in, and rely on) ***the name of the Son of God*** [in the peculiar services and blessings conferred by Him on men], ***so that you may know*** [with settled and absolute knowledge] ***that you*** [already] ***have life, yes, eternal life.*** [THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE VERSION]

A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS PORTION OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT:

- 1) The whole purpose of John's epistle is summed up here: to give his readers true "**gnosis**," – knowledge.
- 2) This '**knowledge**' was in direct distinction to the understanding of '*life*' being advocated, practiced and taught by others in 1st century society. [*remember back to our earlier discussions about first century society in Ephesus!*]

B) THE SCRIPTURAL RECORD –JOHN 5:14-17 –

"CONFIDENCE; and CONCERN FOR THE FELLOW CHRISTIAN"

We are confident that God listens to us if we ask for anything that has his approval. ¹⁵ We know that he listens to our requests. So we know that we already have what we ask him for.

¹⁶ If you see another believer committing a sin that doesn't lead to death, you should pray that God would give that person life. This is true for those who commit sins that don't lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I'm not telling you to pray about that. ¹⁷ Every kind of wrongdoing is sin, yet there are sins that don't lead to death. [COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE]

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¹⁴ And this is the confidence (the assurance, the privilege of boldness) ***which we have in Him:*** [we are sure] ***that if we ask anything*** (make any request) ***according to His will*** (in agreement with His own plan), ***He listens to and hears us.***

¹⁵ And if (since) ***we*** [positively] ***know that He listens to us in whatever we ask, we also know*** [with settled and absolute knowledge] ***that we have*** [granted us as our present possessions] ***the requests made of Him.***

¹⁶ If anyone sees his brother [believer] ***committing a sin that does not*** [lead to] ***death*** (the extinguishing of life), ***he will pray and*** [God] ***will give him life*** [yes, He will grant life to all those whose sin is not one leading to death]. ***There is a sin*** [that leads] ***to death; I do not say that one should pray for that.***

¹⁷ All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin which does not [involve] ***death*** [that may be repented of and forgiven]. [THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE]

A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS PORTION OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT:

- 1) **Verse 14** – asserts the confidence that believers have regarding answered prayer; asking according to God's Will brings assurance that God hears believers when they pray.
 - a) The "**confidence**" described by the Greek word "**PARRHSIVA**" primarily relates to the Christian's confidence in asking things of God; the same term occurs in contexts connected to the '**PAROUSIA**' and may also allude to the Christian's assurance of a positive outcome at the judgment when Jesus returns.

- b) **ANSWERED PRAYER** and the phrase **“according to His Will.”** – this is just what John said previously @ I John 3:21-22, in a context where **“confidence”** before God was the subject, as it is here.
 - c) In I John 3:22, the Apostle stated that the reason believers receive from God whatever they ask is **“because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing to him.”** To **“keep God commandments”** is to do God’s will, and this is why a believer may confidently expect to have his/her prayers answered!
 - d) See comparison to Jesus’ teaching and his action: Matthew 26:39ff – **“Then he [Jesus] went a short distance farther and fell on his face and prayed, “My Father, if it’s possible, take this cup of suffering away from me. However—not what I want but what you want.”**⁴⁰ **He came back to the disciples and found them sleeping. He said to Peter, “Couldn’t you stay alert one hour with me?”**⁴¹ **Stay alert and pray so that you won’t give in to temptation. The spirit is eager, but the flesh is weak.”**⁴² **A second time he went away and prayed, “My Father, if it’s not possible that this cup be taken away unless I drink it, then let it be what you want.”**⁴³ **Again he came and found them sleeping. Their eyes were heavy with sleep.**⁴⁴ **But he left them and again went and prayed the same words for the third time.”**
 - e) See, also, John’s teaching in John 15:7 - ⁷ **If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you.**
- 2) **Verse 15** - Assurance that God hears believers when they pray gives assurance that they will get answers to their requests
- a) Note the double use of **“we know”** in this verse. [in Greek = **“OIDAMEN”**]
 - b) This usage points to the total assurance that believers can have of answered prayer!
- 3) **Verse 16** – here John asks his readers to pray for the fellow believer who commits a sin not resulting in death.
- a) Conversely, the sin resulting in death is the sin of the heretical opponents whom the Apostle has throughout this letter regarded as unbelievers
 - b) Although somewhat ambiguous, the **“sin resulting to death”** seems to refer to the Christological heresy of John’s and the early Church’s opponents, which has marked them as unbelievers and sealed their fate. [*Over a period of time a person(s) who has persistently turned away from God to sin; and this has become a fixed habit so that all the heart and mind ever desire is to sin.*]
 - c) Refusal to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, is a dire sin; a sin which cannot be forgiven, because it denies the only means of forgiveness that there is available to us.
- 4) **Verse 17** – having implied that sins committed by believers (*sins not resulting in death*) may be prayed for and forgiven, John does not want to leave the impression that such sin is insignificant, because this could be viewed as a concession to the views of Gnostic opponents (*whose indifference to morality, downplayed the significance of sin in the Christian’s life*). Therefore, he reminds his readers that **all unrighteousness in sin!**

C) THE SCRIPTURAL RECORD – I JOHN 5:18-21 – “THREEFOLD ASSURANCE and a WARNING”

¹⁸ *We know that those who have been born from God don't go on sinning. Rather, the Son of God protects them, and the evil one can't harm them.*

¹⁹ *We know that we are from God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.*

²⁰ *We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we know the real God. We are in the one who is real, his Son Jesus Christ. This Jesus Christ is the real God and eternal life.*

²¹ *Dear children, guard yourselves from false gods.* [COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE]

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¹⁸ *We know* [absolutely] *that anyone born of God does not* [deliberately and knowingly] *practice committing sin, but the One Who was begotten of God carefully watches over and protects him* [Christ's divine presence within him preserves him against the evil], *and the wicked one does not lay hold* (get a grip) *on him or touch* [him].

¹⁹ *We know* [positively] *that we are of God, and the whole world* [around us] *is under the power of the evil one.*

²⁰ *And we* [have seen and] *know* [positively] *that the Son of God has* [actually] *come to this world and has given us understanding and insight* [progressively] *to perceive* (recognize) *and come to know better and more clearly Him Who is true; and we are in Him Who is true—in His Son Jesus Christ* (the Messiah). *This* [Man] *is the true God and Life eternal.*

²¹ *Little children, keep yourselves from idols* (false gods)—[from anything and everything that would occupy the place in your heart due to God, from any sort of substitute for Him that would take first place in your life]. *Amen* (so let it be). [THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE]

A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS PORTION OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT:

1) Verse 18 – Since the Apostle has just said that believers do sin (5:16), when he now says that everyone fathered by God does not sin, he must be referring to the sin to death committed by the opponents. Genuine believers do not commit that sin, because God protects the one he has fathered and the evil one cannot touch him.

a) The claim that “*everyone fathered by God does not sin,*” is essentially the same as the assertion made earlier in I John 3:9. There the apostle was speaking in an absolute sense; speaking out against the Gnostic opponents who, as being indifferent to morality, were saying that sin is unimportant for the Christian and does not interfere with one's relationship to God.

b) It makes God the protector of the Christian (*rather than the Christian himself*).

c) The reference to “*the evil one*” (Greek = JO PONHROS) points to the devil [SATAN].

- 2) **Verse 19** – John is here affirming that the whole world is still under the controlling influence of the evil one. However, believers do not belong to the world any longer. [cf. I John 4:5-6]
- In Greek, the preposition ‘EK’ (from) indicates both **source** and **possession**. So, **Christians are “from” God** in the sense that they are fathered by Him, and they belong to him (cf. I John 2:16)
 - True believers, who have the Holy Spirit, are not daily victims of sin. In the power of the Spirit they gain victory over sin as they look to Christ. (cf. Romans 6:11)
 - True believers are conscious of belonging to the family of God, the household of faith; they are also conscious that this new humanity is governed by different standards from those of the world in which it exists. (cf. Romans 5:12ff.)
 - True believers are united in the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ with God, who is the ultimate reality. To be united to God is to share his eternal life.
 - In what sense does the ‘**whole world**’ lie in the power of Satan? While it is true that God’s purpose in sending the Son into the world extended to the entire world, it is also true that the world, comprised of unbelievers, lies in Satan’s power.
- 3) **Verse 20** – The Apostle John is here summing up the major assertions of his letter:
- The readers know that the Son of God has come ...**
 - The Son has given the readers insight to know him (God) who is true ...**
 - Believers are “in” God who is true**
 - Believers are also “in” His Son, Jesus Christ ...**
 - Finally, John asserts that THIS ONE (Jesus Christ) is the true God and eternal life.**
- 4) **Verse 21** – It is highly probable that the author of I John knew what idols he meant, even if we do not! Since virtually the entire letter is a discussion in one form or another of the Gnostic opponents with their false teaching – who are continuing to trouble the Christian community – it is not surprising to find the Apostle referring to them in closing. The opponents are called “**idols**” because of the course of idolatry that they pursue. Since so much of 1st century Ephesian social life was dominated by religious values and presuppositions, this was not easy!

(Note: some of the ancient texts unearthed during the 20th century @ the Qumran community, also give evidence of a similar description.)

FOR GROUP CONVERSATION:

- What gives “*boldness*” in prayer? Why?
- What “*confidence*” do we really have in prayer? (*...that if we ask anything according to God’s will, He hears us?*)

3. If God only answers prayers which are in accord with His will, why should we bother to pray at all?
4. How can we best help our fellow Christians whom we know to be falling into sin and neglecting their Christian duty and commitment?
5. What are the “*idols*” of contemporary society against which Christians in 2014 are to be on guard?
6. What is the “*sin unto death*?”
7. What is “*unrighteousness*?”
8. What does it mean that “*whoever is born of God does not sin*?”
9. In the last eight verses of I John 5, the word “**know**” occurs 7 times. What are the things John says we know?
 - a) 5:13 Know _____
 - b) 5:15 Know _____
 - c) 5:15 Know _____
 - d) 5:18 Know _____
 - e) 5:19 Know _____
 - f) 5:20 Know _____
 - g) 5:20 Know _____

NEXT WEEK: APRIL 17th – is MAUNDY THURSDAY - no session will be held.

THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 2014 - ~~CONVERSATION~~ on II John

THURSDAY, MAY 1, 2014 – FINAL ~~CONVERSATION~~ (for Spring 2014) on III John