

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

COME, JOIN THE CONVERSATION!
ON
THE EPISTLES OF JOHN

Lesson Plan for Thursday – February 27, 2014

Conversations #4 – “*LOVE and OBEDIENCE*”

I JOHN 2:3 - 17

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;
- to engage in a ‘Quick Review’ of essential points from 3 prior sessions;
- to examine some ancient Greek words used in biblical texts, and thereby comprehend more completely John’s understanding about the “Personhood of Jesus Christ” – refer back to biblical texts printed in Lesson Plan #3
- to consider the Apostle’s teachings on Love and Obedience, and consider some modern applications thereof.

AN OPENING PASTORAL PRAYER -

QUICK REVIEW -

a/k/a – “What basic facts have been acquired after 3 weeks of in-depth study of I JOHN?”

The **JOHANNINE EPISTLES** were written about 90-95 AD to **address some problems** in the “*home churches*” in Ephesus, and in churches in surrounding cities in Asia Minor. John was overseeing these churches as an elder, teacher and apostle. The believers in these churches seem to have been divided up into four groups:

- Those loyal to John and his disciples
- Those who were leaving the church (1 John 2:19)
- Those who were leaning toward Jewish influences (*Judaism*)
- Those who were leaning toward Hellenistic influences (*Docetism/Gnosticism*)

The **MAJOR ISSUES** in the early church fell into two categories: **theological** and **ethical**. The theological confusion that John was addressing involved an incorrect understanding of Jesus. At one extreme were the ***Judaizers***, who thought Jesus was only a man; and at the other were the ***Gnostics***, who thought Jesus was only God. This division left those in between confused and shaken in their faith.

FROM AN ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE, the issues involved an understanding of The Law and its relationship to both salvation and behavior. (*A distorted Christology always leads to a distorted understanding of law and sin.*) **In response to Gnostic teaching**, John asserts that Jesus had a physical presence in the world. **In response to Judaistic doctrine**, John says that access to God is through fellowship with Jesus. Explaining this “*balanced Christology*” was the way John dealt with this serious problem in the Church.

False claims by John’s opponents about sin and fellowship with God (1 John 1:5-10)

1. It is possible to have fellowship with God exclusive of Jesus.
2. Humans are without sin!
3. “We” have not sinned!

The **first claim** is that there is a way to have fellowship with God without being obedient to Jesus and His message. This speaks to the beliefs of both extremes in his church: the Judaizers who believed fellowship with God could come through righteousness, and the Gnostics who believed that fellowship with God could come through spiritual knowledge.

The **second claim** was probably made by the Gnostics. It came from the idea that sin could only be spiritual, and if one had achieved spiritual enlightenment, they were without sin. What they did in the physical realm (*their ethical behavior*) could not be sin. They thought there was no physical sin.

The **third claim** was probably made by the Judaizers. It was the idea that strict obedience to the Jewish Law was sufficient to meet God's requirements for righteousness. They believed that they were successful in doing this, and so, they thought, they had not sinned. Those who claimed they were “*without sin*” and those who claimed they “*had not sinned*” believed that they had fellowship with God apart from Jesus Christ. Yet neither side accepted the other's path to God, so the division was deep and destructive to the entire church.

In the **GOSPEL OF JOHN**, the Apostle used some vivid metaphors (**light, life, truth**) to describe the complexities of Jesus and His ministry, including the fact that Jesus described Himself as “**the Way the Truth and the Life**” (John 14:6), and “**Light of the world**” (John 8:12). Using another metaphor, John opened his Gospel by describing Jesus as “**the Word**” (John 1:1), meaning God's message of *light, life and truth*.

In **1 JOHN**, the writer repeats these metaphors to form a framework around which to build an understanding of Jesus and His ministry. The metaphor of **light** describes many characteristics of both the Father and Jesus, including their holiness, their righteousness and the idea of living righteously as obedience to the truth of the Gospel. In the prologue, John called Jesus the “**Word of Life**,” meaning that Jesus is the living message of God's love and redemption – the living Gospel.

John also used the idea that **God and Jesus are truth**. (...referring to their holy and righteous nature). There is no compromise with God; so, any relationship we have with God, any fellowship with

Jesus, must be based in truth. Moreover, there is an incompatibility between the holy character of God as Light, and the fallen character of men and women living in the darkness of sin. Fellowship between them is impossible and any claim to the contrary is self-deception.

To live in the Light means to have an honest and realistic understanding of sin! For any person to say, or believe that they are sinless, is a very serious problem. Such persons deceive themselves; they ignore the holiness of God. They also are ignore the fact that Jesus came in the flesh to die a physical death for the physical sins of the world. It is only possible to be without sin by acknowledging the penalty owed for that sin, and allowing Jesus to pay that penalty. Confessing sin is a central part of confessing our Christian faith and is the only way to have true fellowship with God. It is John's wish that his readers do not sin; therefore, he writes this letter because he sees big mistakes taking place.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

2 items held over from last session

JESUS is (THE) PARACLETE

1. In Greek, the word is **"PARAKLETOS"** (*see its use marked in 'red' in text of Lesson Plan #3*).
2. A word frequently used in the Gospel of John and elsewhere meaning **"to comfort"**
 - a. Genesis 37:35 - ***All of his sons and daughters got up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted, telling them, "I'll go to my grave mourning for my son." And Joseph's father wept for him.***
 - b. Isaiah 61:2 – (the prophets function is...) ***to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and a day of indication for our God, to comfort all who mourn***
 - c. Matthew 5:4 - ***Happy are those who mourn; God will comfort them!***
3. But, the most common and frequent use of the word **PARAKLETOS**, especially in non-biblical Greek, is ***"to call someone to one's side in order to use that person in some way as a helper or counsellor."***
4. In early Christianity, the word came to be used to describe one who pled the case of those Christians, who for reasons of faith, were about to be fed to lions!
5. Use of the term in this textual context is to convey the idea of Jesus as being the ongoing friend, the advocate, the defender of humans.
6. To those promoting the heresy that Jesus – the man – was forever dead, John's message is that Jesus lives and still bears his concern for all human beings!

JESUS is (THE) PROPITIATION [*atoning sacrifice,* 'means,' or 'way of dealing' with our sins.)
In Greek, the word is "**HILASMOS**" – (also, marked in 'red' in Greek text in Lesson Plan #3)

1. comes from the practice of 'sacrifice'
2. purpose of Jewish sacrifice was to maintain a '*right relationship*' or maintain '*fellowship*' with Jehovah. (think of the Temple offerings regularly made every am & pm)
3. The Greek verb "**HILASKESTHAI**," derived from "**HILASMOS**," has 3 meanings:
 - a. "**to placate**" or "**to pacify**" someone who has been injured or offended or insulted, and especially to placate a god.
 - b. however, if the subject of this verb is GOD, then the verb means "**to forgive**" – meaning that God Himself provides the means whereby the lost relationship (*with humans*) is restored
 - c. the verb can also mean "**to perform some deed, some ritual**," by which the guilt is removed – [somewhat allied to meaning in #a]
4. When John writes that Jesus is the **HILASMOS** for our sins, your Facilitator thinks that he is bringing all of these different meanings into one!
5. **JESUS IS THE PERSON** –
 - a. through whom guilt for the past and present is removed
 - b. through his action on the Cross, the penalty of eternal death is removed
 - c. who brings us forgiveness for the sins we have committed
 - d. who clothes us with a new purity that takes away all defilement
6. **JESUS IS THE ONE** – through whom our fellowship with God is first restored, and then maintained!
 - a. all-important – this promise is intended not only for us – but for the whole world!
(remember the words of **John 3:16**)!

CONVERSATION DISCUSSION:

1. Why was it necessary for the Son of God to be united with a complete and full humanity? Do we minimize His humanity in our present devotion to him?
2. How does a person come to have fellowship with God, and how is that fellowship deepened and reflected in everyday life?

LOVE AND OBEDIENCE

I JOHN 2:3-17

A) THE MORAL TEST (vss. 3-6)

³ *This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commandments.* ⁴ *The one who claims, "I know him," while not keeping his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in this person.* ⁵ *But the love of God is truly perfected in whoever keeps his word. This is how we know we are in him.* ⁶ *The one who claims to remain in him ought to live in the same way as he lived.* (COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE)

³ **And this is how we may discern** [^adaily, by experience] **that we are coming to know Him** [to perceive, recognize, understand, and become better acquainted with Him]: **if we keep** (bear in mind, observe, practice) **His teachings** (precepts, commandments). ⁴ **Whoever says, I know Him** [I perceive, recognize, understand, and am acquainted with Him] **but fails to keep and obey His commandments** (teachings) **is a liar, and the Truth** [^bof the Gospel] **is not in him.** ⁵ **But he who keeps** (treasures) **His Word** [who bears in mind His precepts, who observes His message in its entirety], **truly in him has the love of and for God been perfected** (completed, reached maturity). **By this we may perceive** (know, recognize, and be sure) **that we are in Him:** ⁶ **Whoever says he abides in Him ought** [as ^ca personal debt] **to walk and conduct himself in the same way in which He walked and conducted Himself.** [THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE]

1. For the teaching of Jesus on the relationship of love and obedience in the Christian life, see John 14:15.
"If you [really] love Me, you will keep (obey) My commands."
2. Jesus gives an illustration of what union with God means: John 15:1-10:
"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vineyard keeper. ² He removes any of my branches that don't produce fruit, and he trims any branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit. ³ You are already trimmed because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch can't produce fruit by itself, but must remain in the vine. Likewise, you can't produce fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can't do anything. ⁶ If you don't remain in me, you will be like a branch that is thrown out and dries up. Those branches are gathered up, thrown into a fire, and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified when you produce much fruit and in this way prove that you are my disciples. ⁹ "As the Father loved me, I too have loved you. Remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love."
3. One of the questions that had come before John's church was how do we know God? Knowing God was a favorite theme of ancient religion, and no doubt a popular claim from all sides of any argument.

- a) **The Gnostics said** that one can only know God only in a spiritual sense through the secret knowledge only they possessed. They relied on mystical experience, such as visions, to know God. For them, there was no connection with moral behavior.
 - b) **The Judaizers said** that one can only know God through obedience to the religious law of the OT. For them, knowledge of God was expressed in their ability to know and obey the religious ceremonial laws that set them apart from others.
 - c) **John was threading a careful line between these two heretical extremes** to get at the truth. Some parts of both of these claims were true, but both spiritual experience and religious practice had to be balanced in the way that Jesus demonstrated through His life. It is not just in the spiritual sense that we know God. He has given us revelation that relates to our lives in the physical world, and our obedience to that revelation measures our true knowledge of God. John was not talking about salvation, which is only obtained through belief in Jesus, he was talking about everyday living in the Christian community. John's point was that our personal experiential knowledge of God will affect the way we live, and the way we live, obediently or disobediently, will reveal how well we really know God.
 - d) The 'test' suggested by 1 John 2:3 is not of the *saving* knowledge of God or of Christ, but of the *experiential* knowledge of God and His Son. John did not say that obedience is a condition of knowing God, i.e. that it must come first. Rather, his meaning is that knowing God results in obedience.
4. In vs. 4, John turns to the negative side of the issue and makes a very clear statement of the exact opposite condition as he stated in v 3. Obedience is the clear test of the knowledge of God. But what kind of obedience did John have in mind? Was it the kind of obedience that the Judaizers demanded?
 5. In vss. 5-6 John clarifies his meaning by defining what he meant by obedience. It is obeying God's word in such a way that God's love is reflected in our conduct so that we behave like Jesus.

FOR DISCUSSION – The question of God's love being 'perfected,' or made complete, in the believer has been the subject of discussion over many centuries.

- How might the relationship that John sees, between knowing God and keeping the commandments of Christ, be best explained to people today?
- Did John mean perfect obedience, or perfect behavior, or some other level of perfection that the believer was expected to achieve?

- Knowing God is not simply the product of the correct thought process (*Gnosticism*) or of the correct religious behavior (*Judaism*), rather it is the product of a relationship that comes from knowing God's heart as expressed in His Word.
- To obey Christ is to obey the command of love, which is to love Christ and one another. It is the believers who base their relationship with God on obedience and love, who truly know God and therefore have fellowship with God.
- The true test of our knowing God and consequently the true test of our religious experience and practice, is whether we produce a reflection of Jesus in our daily life. Mystical experiences, spiritual visions, religious ceremonies, Biblical knowledge, theological concepts, and whatever else we might use to draw closer to God are valid only to the extent that they cause us to live in love as Jesus lived.

B) THE SOCIAL TEST 2:7–11

“⁷ Dear friends, I’m not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the message you heard. ⁸ On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light already shines. ⁹ The one who claims to be in the light while hating a brother or sister is in the darkness even now. ¹⁰ The person loving a brother and sister stays in the light, and there is nothing in the light that causes a person to stumble. ¹¹ But the person who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and lives in the darkness, and doesn’t know where to go because the darkness blinds the eyes.” (CEB)

“⁷ Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the message which you have heard [the ^[a]doctrine of salvation through Christ]. ⁸ Yet I am writing you a new commandment, which is true (is realized) in Him and in you, because the darkness (^[b]moral blindness) is clearing away and the true Light (^[c]the revelation of God in Christ) is already shining. ⁹ Whoever says he is in the Light and [yet] hates his brother [Christian, ^[d]born-again child of God his Father] is in darkness even until now. ¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother [believer] abides (lives) in the Light, and in It or in him there is no occasion for stumbling or cause for error or sin. ¹¹ But he who hates (detests, despises) his brother [^[e]in Christ] is in darkness and walking (living) in the dark; he is straying and does not perceive or know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.” (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

1. “The Old Commandment” to love God is found in **Deuteronomy 6:5** - ***“¹⁵ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your [mind and] heart and with your entire being and with all your might.”***
2. The Commandment to love one’s neighbor is spoken of in **Leviticus 19:18** - ***“¹⁸ You shall not take revenge or bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”***

Special Note: St. Paul (*writing 2 generations earlier*) speaks of love in **Romans 13:8-10** - *“¹⁰ Love does no wrong to one’s neighbor [it never hurts anybody]. Therefore love meets all the requirements and is the fulfilling of the Law.”*

3. John begins by reminding his readers that he is not issuing a new command. The call to love each other was a commandment they had known about from the beginning of their experience as Christians In fact - love was the hallmark of Jesus' ministry.
4. But, Jesus' teaching on the meaning of love was so radical, that it was like a new commandment. Jesus' idea of love expanded on the OT concept and carried way beyond what they had understood in the past. It was not just love of God and neighbor, but also love of strangers and even enemies.
5. The idea that the fellowship was being split and that brothers and sisters were being lead to hate one another was a sure sign that they were not walking in the light. Learning to hate was not the way a Christian fellowship should develop. It was not what Jesus had done, nor was it what He taught.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT and DISCUSSION: Is the “new commandment” exactly the same as the command to love one’s neighbor? Before providing a final answer, check out the following passage –

Mark 12:28-34 – “One of the legal experts heard their dispute and saw how well Jesus answered them. He came over and asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” ²⁹ Jesus replied, “The most important one is *Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord,* ³⁰*and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength.* ³¹The second is this, *You will love your neighbor as yourself.* No other commandment is greater than these.” ³² The legal expert said to him, “Well said, Teacher. You have truthfully said that God is one and there is no other besides him. ³³ And to love God with all of the heart, a full understanding, and all of one’s strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself is much more important than all kinds of entirely burned offerings and sacrifices.” ³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered with wisdom, he said to him, “You aren’t far from God’s kingdom.” After that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

C) **THE THREE GROUPS** - 2:12-14

¹² *Little children, I’m writing to you because your sins have been forgiven through Jesus’ name.* ¹³ *Parents, I’m writing to you because you have known the one who has existed from the beginning. Young people, I’m writing to you because you have conquered the evil one.*

¹⁴ *Little children, I write to you because you know the Father. Parents, I write to you because you have known the one who has existed from the beginning. Young people, I write to you*

because you are strong, the word of God remains in you, and you have conquered the evil one. [CEB]

¹² I am writing to you, little children, because for His name's sake your sins are forgiven **[pardoned through His name and on account of confessing His name]**. ¹³ I am writing to you, fathers, because you have come to know **(recognize, be aware of, and understand)** Him Who **[has existed]** from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have been victorious over the wicked **[one]**. I write to you, ^[a]boys (**lads**), because you have come to know **(recognize and be aware)** of the Father. ¹⁴ I write to you, fathers, because you have come to know **(recognize, be conscious of, and understand)** Him Who **[has existed]** from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong and vigorous, and the Word of God is **[always]** abiding in you **(in your hearts)**, and you have been victorious over the wicked one. [THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE]

1. John used the metaphor of physical development to help his readers understand spiritual development. He presented the idea of **little children, young men** and **fathers** as the three levels of Christian maturity, rather than as age-groups. Thus all people were included, no matter where they are in their relationship with the world and with the Lord.
2. Some biblical commentators feel that John wrote this epistle to enable his readers to determine whether, or not, they were true believers. The questions John raises throughout the epistle, they say, were 'tests' of the presence of spiritual life. Your facilitator sees no evidence that John was writing to test his readers' salvation. Rather, John said he was writing to them because they were genuine believers. John presented tests of fellowship rather than tests of the presence of spiritual life.
3. In many cases spiritual maturity is related to age. The **"fathers"** have enjoyed fellowship with God through Christ for a long time and are mature in the faith. The **"young men"** are growing in grace and knowledge and ready to assume positions of leadership; the **"children"** are young in the faith and need careful guidance and teaching.

FOR DISCUSSION:

1. John states that "the young men" have defeated the devil (*verse 14*). Since the devil still tempts us, what does this mean?
2. In formulating an answer to question #1, immediately above, you may want to give particular attention to the temptations of Jesus (**Matthew 4:1-11**) and St. Paul's description of a Christian's armor (**Ephesians 6:1-17**).

D) THE WORLD - 2:15–17

¹⁵ *Don't love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in them.* ¹⁶ *Everything that is in the world—the craving for whatever the body feels, the craving for whatever the eyes see and the arrogant pride in one's possessions—is not of the Father but is of the world.* ¹⁷ *And the world and its cravings are passing away, but the person who does the will of God remains forever.* [COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE]

¹⁵ *Do not love or cherish the world or the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him.* ¹⁶ *For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh [craving for sensual gratification] and the lust of the eyes [greedy longings of the mind] and the pride of life [assurance in one's own resources or in the stability of earthly things]—these do not come from the Father but are from the world [itself].* ¹⁷ *And the world passes away and disappears, and with it the forbidden cravings (the passionate desires, the lust) of it; but he who does the will of God and carries out His purposes in his life abides (remains) forever.* [THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE]

1. The word **“world”** (in Greek, **KOSMOS**) has at least 3 meanings in John's writings. Sometimes it refers to the **planet earth**; the physical world.
2. More often, it means humankind, the **human race**, created by God, and redeemed by the Son. See John 3:16–17 and 1 John 2:2. (*Usually in John's writing “world” signifies mankind organized in rebellion against God.*)
3. In still other places it refers to **human culture as influenced by Satan**; the power of sin working in the human race and in the structures of society. See John 15:18; 17:14; and 1 John 3:1. This is the godless world in which “lust” is prominent. Sin is deeply embedded in the hearts and souls of human beings, as Jesus taught in Mark 7:20–23.
4. In this particular section of I John, it is the godless world which is in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). At the end of the age this godless world will be judged and destroyed by Christ at his Second Coming.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT and DISCUSSION:

1. In what ways are 21st century Christians tempted to love the godless world?
2. In particular how do affluence and the “benefits” of technology present the devil with special areas of temptation?

OUR NEXT CONVERSATION is on: **“TRUTH and ERROR”**

read: I John 2:-18-27