

# **The Epistle of First John**

## **Lesson Five**

### **A Pure Life (1 John 2:1-17)**

#### **Introduction:**

- I. John's first reason for writing this letter (1 Jn 1:3-4).
  - A. A desire for Christians to live a joyful life.
    1. Having fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.
    2. To share in that fellowship, two things are necessary.
      - a. Understand God is personified as "light" – no "darkness" whatsoever.
        - (1). "Light" is used throughout the scriptures to speak of the qualities of goodness, holiness, godliness, purity, righteousness, etc.
      - b. We must "walk in the light as He is in the light" – living a life consistent with faithful obedience to the will of God.
    3. But sooner or later we will sin.
      - a. We need to be cleansed from sin to remain in fellowship with God and Jesus Christ.
- II. John's second reason for writing this letter (1 Jn 2:1-2).
  - A. A desire for Christians to live a clean life.
    1. To do that we must avoid sin at all costs.
    2. What do we need to know when we sin?
      - a. Jesus is our advocate and our propitiation.
  - B. We must "know" Christ (1 Jn 2:3-6).
    1. Knowing Christ through our obedience (1 Jn 2:3).
    2. Being disobedient means lying about knowing Him (1 Jn 2:4).
    3. The love of God is made perfect or complete through our obedience (1 Jn 2:5).
    4. Obedience is how we "abide" in Christ (1 Jn 2:6).

- C. We must love one another (1 Jn 2:7-11).
  - 1. Important to understand the difference between the old commandment verses the new commandment (1 Jn 2:7-8).
  - 2. Hating our brother means we are still in darkness (1 Jn 2:9-11).
- D. However, we must not love the world (1 Jn 2:12-17).
  - 1. John has a personal message to Christians whom he calls little children, fathers, and young men (1 Jn 2:12-14).
  - 2. John warns against loving the world and the things of the world (1 Jn 2:15-17).

**Discussion:**

- I. To avoid sin, we must remember Jesus Christ is our advocate and our propitiation (1 Jn 2:1-2).
  - A. The response Christian should have to the good news.
    - 1. We have fellowship "with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:3).
      - a. That brings a fullness of joy.
    - 2. We must "walk in the light as He is in the light" (1 Jn 1:5-7).
    - 3. But we are sinners.
      - a. Rom 3:23; Jas 4:17.
    - 4. We can be cleansed by confessing our sins and repenting of them.
  - B. What should be our response to "the gospel of God's grace" (cf. Acts 20:24)?
    - 1. Some things to understand to fully appreciate the good news of the gospel.
      - a. First, John addressed readers as "my little children" (also: 1 Jn 2:12, 13, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21).
        - (1). An expression of endearment and deep affection.
        - (2). Jesus used this term (Jn 13:33-35).
        - (3). The apostle Paul also used this expression (Gal 4:19-20).
      - b. Second, John urged his readers to avoid sin.
        - (1). There is no excuse for sin (1 Thess 5:22; 1 Cor 15:34; Psa 119:11).
        - (2). But sin is a reality (Jas 1:14-15).

- c. Third, John addressed the only solution for this dilemma.
  - (1). Jesus is our advocate – "negotiator, intercessor, one who is called to stand along-side, arbitrator, mediator, a go-between."
    - (a). Who better to represent us before God (Phil 2:6-7; Heb 2:17; 4:15)?
  - (2). Jesus is our propitiation – "atoning sacrifice" (NIV), or "satisfaction."
    - (a). No permanent "propitiation" for sins under Law of Moses (Heb 10:1-4).
    - (b). Jesus became the perfect sacrifice to appease God's wrath and satisfy His demands for justice (Heb 7:26-27; 9:12-15; 10:11-14).
    - (c). Paul spoke of this all-important role of Jesus, as prophesied by Isaiah (Rom 3:23-26; Isa 53:5-6).
    - (d). Peter and Paul explain how Jesus became our propitiation (1 Pet 2:24; 2 Cor 5:21).
  - (3). The only one who could fill this role was "Jesus Christ the righteous."
    - (a). The name "Jesus" describes his human nature – the Word that became flesh through the miraculous virgin birth of Jesus.
    - (b). "Christ" speaks of His divine nature – the fact that Jesus is God, the Son.
    - (c). "The righteous" speaks of His sinless nature – tempted in all points as we are yet without sin.
- 2. All this explains why John is so adamant that we "may not sin" (1 John 2:1).

- II. To avoid sin, we must "know" Jesus Christ – a knowledge that is validated by our obedience (1 Jn 2:3-6).
  - A. John addressed the difference between truly knowing Christ verses the so-called knowledge of the Gnostic.
    - 1. The word Gnostic comes from a Greek word meaning "knowledge" or "to know."

- a. Gnostics claimed a special esoteric secret knowledge of God and Christ that no one else possessed.
  - b. This is not the "knowledge" of which the apostles spoke and said comes from reading and understanding God's divinely inspired Spirit-given Word – the written Word of God.
  - c. The Gnostics claimed to have received their wisdom apart from the written Word.
2. Paul repeatedly warned against being persuaded by this so-called "wisdom" (1 Cor 2:4-5; 3:18-20; Col 2:20-23; 1 Tim 6:20-21).
  3. Peter affirmed that we have already been given everything needed for life and godliness through the knowledge of God and Christ (2 Pet 1:2-4).
- B. To counter false Gnostic teachers, John said we must keep the Lord's commandments.
1. All who know the Lord will be obedient to commandments.
  2. Anyone who does otherwise is a liar – the truth is not in him.
- C. The love of God is "perfected" (made complete) in those who keep His will.
1. If we "know" Him, we will walk as He walked (1 Jn 2:5-6).
- III. To avoid sin, we must understand the old and new commandment concerning the nature of genuine love (1 Jn 2:7-11).
- A. Genuine love for God is validated by two things: obeying Him and walking as Christ walked, and by our love for one another.
1. We walk as Christ walked when we love one another (2 Jn 4-6).
    - a. The new commandment is the same one Jesus announced to His disciples (Jn 13:34-35).
    - b. The old commandment may be a reference to the Levitical law (Lev 19:17-18).
  2. This commandment "is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining" (1 John 2:8b).
    - a. When we love as Christ loved darkness no longer has the power it once had because we now "walk in the light."

3. This could not be said of those deceived by Gnostic teachers.
  - a. According to their twisted philosophy, any sins committed in the flesh are not charged against the spirit – this is how they justified hating fellow believers.
  - b. John said they are in darkness (1 Jn 2:9-11; 3:11-18; 4:19-5:4).

IV. To avoid sin, we must recall John's words of encouragement to believers (1 Jn 2:12-14).

A. John addressed his readers as little children (or "dear children"), fathers, and young men.

1. It seems "little children" is an endearing term directed to all Christians, while "fathers" and "young men" refer to two levels of spiritual maturity among all believers.
  - a. John affirmed to all believers, "your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake" (v. 12), and the reason they can be assured of this is "because you have known the Father" (v. 13).
  - b. John addressed "fathers" – the spiritually mature among all believers – acknowledging that he has not only written them in the past but reminded them again that they "have known Him who is from the beginning" (vs. 13, 14).
  - c. John addressed "young men" – those who are newer to the faith – and affirmed they "have overcome the wicked one" because "you are strong, and the word of God abides in you" (vs. 13, 14).

V. Lastly, to avoid sin, we must not love the world (1 Jn 2:15-17).

A. Our spiritual priorities must be straight.

1. Who do we love more – the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, or the world and the things of the world?
2. Anyone who loves the world and the things of the world cannot be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.
  - a. The words "love" and "world" in John 3:16 are used completely different here than they are by John in this passage.

- (1). In John 3:16 "love" speaks of God's unselfish and sacrificial love for the "world" (all humankind) that He gave the most precious and priceless gift of His Only Begotten Son.
  - (2). The term "world" in 1 John 2:15-17 describes the material world and all the sinful lusts associated with it.
  - b. The Christian cannot be pleasing to God and have their heart and affections set on things of the earth (earthly and worldly lusts and desires).
    - (1). Paul was very emphatic about this (Col 3:1-4; 5-7).
  3. Although God created the world and everything in it and pronounced it as "good" or "very good" – including the innate desires and ambitions of mankind – the "ruler of this world" (Satan) has corrupted what was "good" and perverted the "good" God created so that it is now used for "evil."
- B. It is not just the world and the things of the world that John condemned.
1. He condemned the "love" one has for the world and the things of the world that rivals the love one must have for God.
    - a. God has always demanded uncompromising and undivided love and affection from His creation.
    - b. He does not allow divided affection.
  2. More specifically, John spoke of the world and all that is in the world in three ways: (1) Lust of the flesh; (2) Lust of the eyes; and (3) Pride of life.
    - a. "Lust of the flesh" simply means having an inordinate, unnatural, and uncontrollable desire for things of a sensual or sexual nature, as well as any act that satisfies an inordinate, unnatural, and uncontrollable desire for fleshly passions.
      - (1). The danger is that many of these passions and desires are disguised as genuine "love" and "affection" for another.
      - (2). The truth is these acts are entirely selfish and self-serving.
    - b. "Lust of the eyes" is an inordinate, unnatural, and uncontrollable covetous desire for things we see as well as for things we imagine in our mind.
      - (1). This desire is prompted by wanting something we do not have.

- (2). It can be a physical possession; a position of power, influence, or authority; or even another person whose love and affection belongs to another.
  - (3). The danger is that the mind imagines how much happier or better off we would be if we had what we desire.
  - (4). The mind then devises ways of acquiring this possession – which, unless controlled, will ultimately lead to doing whatever it takes to get what we want.
- c. "Pride of life" is an expression that covers a wide range of sins – from arrogance and self-glorification to vainglorious pride in one's possessions.
- (1). It is often manifested by prejudice (whether racial, ethnic, economic, etc.), or simply looking down on others with contempt for any reason.
  - (2). The danger is that this sin is often one of the most difficult to identify in ourselves – we are often blinded to our own prideful prejudices.
- C. If our love and affection is found to be on any one of these three, then we will be drawn away from God.
1. One of the reasons these sins pose such a serious threat to the life of the Christian is that they are "not of the Father."
    - a. They are completely contrary to the character and nature of God the Father, and of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior – whose character and nature we are to imitate in our own lives.
  2. Another reason these sins pose such a threat to the Christian is that they are only temporary at best.
    - a. We may enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, but it will only be for a season.
    - b. The world and all these lusts are passing away – even before our very eyes.
- D. The only thing that will endure is doing the will of the Father.
1. He who does the will of God abides (lives) forever.
  2. Therefore, the faithful Christian needs to always remember that this life is too short, and eternity is too long, to waste on the passing pleasures of sin.

**The Summary:**

- I. John's desire for all Christians is that we may not sin.
  - A. To live a life free from the power of sin there are truths we must remember and commandments we must obey.
    1. We must remember that Jesus Christ is our advocate and the propitiation for our sins.
    2. We must remember that the only way we can claim to truly "know" Jesus Christ is through our faithful obedience to His commandments.
    3. We must remember to imitate the nature and character of Jesus Christ in our love for one another – loving one another as He loved us.
    4. We must remember:
      - a. Our sins have been forgiven because we have known the Father.
      - b. The example of spiritually mature Christians because their lives can be a powerful influence.
      - c. The victory over the wicked one has already been won by those who are strong, and in whom the word of God abides.
    5. We must obey the commandment to abstain from loving the world and the things of the world through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.
      - a. These desires are inconsistent with the nature and character of God the Father and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
      - b. Furthermore, these things are temporary and are passing away.
      - c. Therefore, to abide forever we must do the will of our Father in heaven.

**Review Questions:**

1. What does Jesus do as our advocate?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What does it mean to say Jesus is "the propitiation" for sins – for ours and the whole world?

3. How do we truly know that we "know" Jesus?
4. If we claim to know Him, how is it that we would be guilty of lying?
5. Why would we be "in darkness" if we have hatred in our heart toward our brother?
6. What did John's "little children" need to know about forgiveness of sins?
7. What did John say to "fathers" about Jesus?
8. What did John want "young men" to know about the wicked one?
9. According to John, when is "the love of the Father" not in us?
10. According to John, who abides forever?