

Eternal Life- Knowing for Sure

1 John 1

Does anyone have a favorite disciple or Jesus follower? Maybe you really like, and/or identify with *Peter*- his brashness, blunt honesty, how Jesus still loved him well even though he was hard headed and made mistakes- I wonder if Peter even had an ADHD type thing going on- he has many characteristics that make him quite endearing, right?. Or maybe you're drawn to *Matthew*- this guy who was meticulous in recording Jesus' life in His gospel account, a guy who was a despised tax collector, viewed as a traitor, but who was redeemed according to the mercy of Jesus. Or maybe you would feel a bit intrigued by *Thomas*, who many refer to as "doubting Thomas," but I think that nickname is a bit unfair- Thomas was a guy who had been let down, who didn't want his hopes to be dashed again, and he needed some solid evidence in order to feel like he could let down his heart's protective defenses again. I can identify with that for sure, perhaps many of you can too. Maybe you identify a bit with Mary Magdalene who lived in darkness for so long, but was drawn in to Jesus' light and life changing love and forgiveness expressed to her. Hopefully your favorite isn't Judas Iscariot- if you haven't read the gospel books yet- spoiler alert- he's a bad guy! For me, my favorite is *John*. I love John's Gospel account, for me there's a certain "epic-ness" to it, and I love the clear way he presents Jesus as God in human flesh- I love the light and darkness, life and death contrasts. And we have described in his Gospel book that he had a special bond, a unique friendship, a special brotherhood type relationship with Jesus. He was Jesus' closest earthly friend it appears. And then of course John is also the author of the book of Revelation which we've mentioned several times that we'll be studying soon. But before we get there, there are three little books, 3 letters of John that we'll be walking through, the 1st letter being the longest of the 3- containing 5 chapters, seemingly written as a general letter to the churches; and then we have the much shorter 2nd and 3rd letters- both so short they each fit on a single page of the Bible, and these two shorter letters appear to be written as personal letters to specific individuals.

These three letters were most likely written somewhere in-between the year 85 and 95, with most scholars believing the Book of Revelation to have been written around the year 95. John is now an older man- he's now writing some 50 plus years after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension into Heaven. Paul is

no longer alive, many if not most of the other disciples have already been martyred for their faith- John is most likely one of the last remaining individuals from the generation who eye witnessed Jesus face to face. Most, if not all, the people in the churches he is writing to are followers of Jesus not because they met Jesus in person, but rather because of the testimony of others who knew Jesus. They didn't know Jesus physically, but they ended up believing in Him and coming to know Him *spiritually*, as you and I do, because John and others older than them had shared with them.

And during this period of history, as we saw in Peter's letters, there were many false teachers arising- even some appearing to be quite "Christian" in the things they taught, yet who were deceived and were deceiving others. We see in the letters of the New Testament that there were false teachers arising teaching wrong things about Jesus' return, there were false teachers attempting to bring into the church culturally acceptable sexuality that went against God's design and against His Word, there were false teachers promoting the idea that it was ok as a follower of Christ to live in sin. Historically one of the big false teaching movements of this time period was the movement of "Gnosticism." That term comes from the Greek word Gnosis, which means knowledge, and the idea was that there was a special "knowledge" shared amongst this cult who attempted to identify with the church as Christians, who attempted to spread their "special knowledge" to the church. And what was this special knowledge? Their idea was that Jesus was not fully human- but that He was just a Spirit being. They believed in a very strong separation between what is spiritual and what is physical, and believed that it is only the spiritual things that can be good, and all things physical are corrupted- so the conclusion was that Jesus couldn't of had a physical body, because physical is bad and that would have tainted Jesus. The further implication was that since the human body itself is bad and sinful, and since it is only the Spirit inside that is good, then it doesn't matter what happens in the physical body.

In other words they advocated that sin committed in the body does not matter, because there is nothing that could be done to redeem the physical body- all that mattered is rather just what exists in one's spirit, in one's mind, in one's beliefs basically. Now this idea *kind of* sounds like a Biblical truth, it kinds of sounds Christian, right- our bodies are sinful, God's Spirit is good inside us- but the movement took this idea, that kind of sounded Christian, and they used it as

logical reasoning for supporting sin. The idea was that it didn't matter what you did in your body- you could indulge in whatever type of sexuality or drunkenness you wanted to, as long as your mind/spirit believed in Jesus. And the response we see shouted out from the New Testament authors is "Noooo, that is not correct." (Turn to your neighbor and say "noooo") The New Testament authors' response came out as things like: "the wages of sin is death, you are a holy priesthood- act like it, abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against you, may people see your good deeds, follow in the steps of Jesus who committed no sin, live no longer for human lusts but for the will of God, be of sound judgment and sober spirit, be aware of the false teachers who have eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, etc." And we'll see that John too writes against this trend of moral laziness amongst those who claim to be followers of Jesus.

What's interesting to consider, is that the idea of Gnosticism, is still alive and present today amongst those who attend churches and call themselves Christians. They probably wouldn't describe themselves as "Gnostics," but their Christian world view in practice would lean towards that Gnostic idea. The idea that as long as they believe in their mind the truths about Jesus, then how they act in their body is irrelevant. It's acceptance of the duality of verbally acknowledging Jesus is Lord, and yet being ok with sin. It's the idea that I think I'm good and on track to go to Heaven if I believe Jesus died for me, but I'm not ever going to change my behavior. And what the New Testament shouts out concerning this subject is that, no- you're not going to Heaven, you're not a real Christian if this is your practice. Jesus says "*why do you call Me, Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?*" (**Luke 6:46**) In other words Jesus is not your Lord (and Savior) if you don't do the things He says. Jesus and the New Testament authors say this type of living is not ok, and that you are on the way to the fires of Hell if this is your attitude, lifestyle, belief.

And so John is defending against this type of mentality, but his motivation behind writing is expressed by him specifically, in two different places. The first is mentioned in **verse 4**, he says "*These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.*" And what is it about writing that gives John joy? Well in his Gospel account, John says that his words were written "*so that [the reader] may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing [they] may have life in His name.*" (**John 20:31**) And actually John wrote a similar statement in his 1 John letter as well, we'll later see in **chapter 5 verse 13** that he says

“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.” So the gospel book of John was written so people would know the life and mission of Jesus and would so chose to believe in Him, gaining eternal life, and then the 1 John letter is a follow up to those who have *already* chosen to believe, and the purpose of the letter is to confirm and make solid the understanding of eternal life obtainment. Anyone here want to know for sure or not if they have eternal life?

So here’s what I think makes John’s joy complete, this is what his motivation, purpose, and intent is in writing: that the reader will believe in/hope in/trust in Jesus and would know with certainty that they have truly acquired eternal life. And the way in which John goes about writing to fulfill that intent in 1 John is just as epic as his Gospel book. There are so many great passages contained here, many verses worth memorizing and meditating on- I know many of you are excited to get to the book of Revelation, but don’t miss out on all the good stuff John has for us here before we get there. Let’s go ahead and get into the 1st chapter, here’s the first 4 verses... **(1 John 1:1-4)**

If you remember, the *Gospel* book of John starts out talking about the beginning, echoing the words of Genesis 1:1. Actually, let’s put Gospel book **John 1:1-4** up on the screen, and I’ll read it... The emphasis here is on Jesus’ existence from the very beginning of time, from creation, and how He is the light, and John will in the verses that follow explain about how this light entered into the darkness of humanity, and appeared in human flesh amongst the people. But when we get to the little letter 1 John, the first 4 verses are talking about the “beginning” in the context not of creation/book of Genesis beginning, but rather the beginning of Jesus’ ministry on earth- who was the Light in darkness, the Word of God, the Word of Life, the eternal life, in flesh, who John and many others interacted with personally. John says “we saw Him ourselves, we heard His voice directly, we sat under His teaching in real time, we touched Him with our hands- and even though you didn’t get to have that experience with Him- I’m telling you He is real and that you can be 100% sure that what I’m telling you about Him is true.” He continues to then say that the reason He is proclaiming these things about Jesus is so that the reader too can have the opportunity to experience fellowship with others who know Jesus (verse 3), and to experience fellowship with God the Father and fellowship with Jesus the son. If John can help make fellowship within the church and fellowship with God/Jesus happen for

others through his writing, then John can die a happy man- his joy will be made complete.

You see, John is writing to people he loves. He loves them so much that he doesn't want to experience the gift of Heaven without them. He wants to make sure they believe, and that they believe the *right* things, so that they will not miss out on the amazing party that is going to happen in God's Kingdom. It wouldn't be the same without them. How many of you have people in your life that you know and love, and you want to be able to hang out with them also in Heaven? Anybody here enjoy fun experiences? Sports, travel, beautiful settings, good movies, vacations, whatever it may be- often times those experience are more fun if you have someone to share them with, rather than experiencing those things alone. I think that's what John is saying here- he knows he's going to Heaven and is excited about it, but it will be even more fun- his joy will be made complete- if that experience will be shared. And I think in verse 4 he's saying not only will His joy, and the joy of the other authors of scripture, but perhaps included in that word "our" of the phrase "our joy" perhaps he is thinking even of the *reader's* joy. He's including us as the readers in on it, he wants those he is writing to, even including us today- to experience along with him and the others, a complete, lacking-nothing-type-of-joy that can only come from the assuredness of eternal life. Ok, so how can we be 100% assured that we have eternal life?

Verses 5-7...

Eternal life is accessed through what the end of verse 7 says- being cleansed from all sin- past present future sin, by the blood of Jesus. It's kind of a intense illustration, but the Bible tells us that the blood spilled by Jesus when He was murdered on the cross, *that* blood that came out of His body can wash away the filth of our sin. So how do you do that if you can't find any of His physical blood? Well, this concept is more a figure of speech, not a concept to take literally in a physical sense. Yes Jesus literally, physically died and shed real blood, but when the Bible says His blood cleanses us from sin- it is pointing to a spiritual reality that His death accomplished. According to what God has revealed to mankind, Jesus took upon Him once and for all the punishment of sin so that we could be cleared from the punishment of death. Though we may die in this world, God has given us access to live forever in the world where He lives, through the process of having our sin nature, our disrespect for authority, our

natural worldly selfish desires- being removed/washed away, made clean- by the sacrifice of Jesus for us.

So the question is, who exactly does the washing sacrifice of Jesus' blood apply to? He died for the world, right? He's willing that none should perish, but that all should have eternal life, right? Well yes, but notice that this passage presents a clear *conditional* statement, an "if _____, then _____" type of statement. This isn't a complicated usage of language. We use this type of language structure quite often in every day life. Parents, you perhaps have said something like, "if you clean your room, you can have a friend over and play video games." And the simple understanding is if they *don't* clean their room, then they don't get to have a friend over and they *don't* get to play video games. Verse 7 says *if* we walk in the Light- we *then* have fellowship with one another and we *then* have the blood of Jesus cleansing us from all sin. The simple understanding is if we *don't* walk in the light, then we *don't* have fellowship with one another and we *don't* have the blood of Jesus cleansing us from sin. (Which would mean we *don't* get to have fellowship with Jesus here on earth *nor in Heaven*) So the cleansing blood of Jesus that removes sin and gives eternal life is only available to those who: *walk in the Light*. Well crud, what does walking in the light mean, how do we do that? Again, if we take the Bible literally here, we might come up with all kinds of ideas- I better not ever get up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom in the dark- I need to start flipping on all the light switches so I can walk in the light and so I can have the blood of Jesus cleanse me from sin so that I can be with Jesus in His Heavenly Kingdom, right? No... That's probably not what this means.

It's always a little funny to me when I hear good intending Christians attempting to defend God's word by saying that they take all of the Bible 100% literally. If you take the Bible 100% literally you're totally going to miss most of it's intended message. Now on the other extreme of the spectrum, there are people who incorrectly take everything written in scripture as being all figurative or symbolic, who say things like the flood never happened or none of the history is true, but rather all that is written is symbolic and has figurative meaning in order to guide us into spiritual truth. So the question is, how are we to correctly interpret the Bible? The answer is we are to study it and correctly identify figures of speech, to understand the context of the surrounding text as well as the context concerning the genre of the book where we are reading (is it history,

poetry, parable, eye witness account, cryptic prophecy- each of those genres require a different type of understanding). We must rightly recognize what should be taken literally and what should be taken figuratively in a spiritual sense. Metaphors and physical illustrations pointing to spiritual realities are everywhere in scripture. For example- Psalm 119 says God's word is a "lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Hebrews 4 says God's word is "sharper than any two-edged sword." We have to take literally what the Bible says literally, and we have to take figuratively what the Bible says figuratively- and common sense, combined with God's Spirit, partnered with familiarity and time in His word- should help guide us in knowing the difference. And once we begin to recognize figures of speech in the Bible, the next step is to correctly understand the spiritual significance that is being intended. This concept of recognizing genre, context, figurative language, literal language -will again come into play for us when we get to the book of Revelation, we'll have to recognize the genre of the book, and wrestle with what is spiritually symbolic vs what is to be read in a physical literal sense.

Ok, so back to understanding the figure of speech "*walk in the light.*" What does that mean, how do we do that?

Well, if we look at the immediate context and let scripture interpret scripture, there's 2 ways in which the "light" is portrayed in this passage. The first is in verse 5- it clearly says that "God is the light." Which is interesting because in the Gospel book of John passage that we read earlier, John describes *Jesus* as the light. Which might be confusing until you realize that Jesus is God, and God is Jesus, who is light. So in order to have the cleansing blood of Jesus that removes sin and gives eternal life, one has to walk in the light, which in other words could be stated as one has to walk in Jesus the light- who, as verse 7 tells us, is walking in God the light. Jesus walked in the light of God, we walk in the light of Jesus who is God- it's kind of like those Russian wooden dolls that contain a smaller version of itself inside, and the smaller version inside has another smaller version inside. Us in Jesus, Jesus in God- all being light to this world.

The 2nd way in which light is described in this passage, should clarify for us more fully what that means to walk in the light of Jesus who is walking in the light of God. Look again at verse 5, there we have the contrast of darkness and light, but when we go to the next verse 6- instead of darkness and light, we have

darkness and- what does it say, someone help me out- *truth*. Here John substitutes the word *truth* for light. So we are to be walking in *truth* in order to have the blood of Jesus cleanse us from sin so that we can experience eternal life. Well, what does *that* mean? How does one “walk in truth”? Well, it might help us first to see if there is also a substitute for darkness used somewhere by John. If light is God and truth, is there perhaps a deeper understanding of his usage of “darkness”? Well, in chapter 2 verse 8- turn there with me, what’s the end of verse 8 say about the darkness? John says that the darkness is passing away, perhaps inferring that the darkness is likened to the world, as in the world is passing away- the world is getting worse, it’s falling apart more and more, resources are going away, this realm we live in is constantly moving towards a state of more decay and disarray, up until the time when Jesus will destroy this earth (as described in the book of Revelation) and a new Heaven and Earth will be created for Jesus followers to live in. But then John states in the following verse 9, who does he say is in darkness? Anyone who *hates* his brother or sister is in the darkness.

So perhaps we could build a case that darkness represents this passing world and/or even hate, as well as whatever the opposite of truth would be- lies, deception. Right- in the same way that light contrasts with darkness, truth contrasts with *deception*. So I think in the immediate context here, it would be safe to say that light is being portrayed as Jesus/God/truth, and darkness is being portrayed as this passing world/hate/deception. So God’s word is saying in order to have the blood of Jesus applied to us that leads to eternal life, as well as to have true good fellowship community with God/Jesus and others, in order to have these things, then we must *not* walk according to the world, *not* walk in hate, *not* be deceived and *not* be deceiving others- but rather walk in Jesus, in His love, in His truth.

Forgive me for perhaps making this more complicated than it needs to be, but for the sake of us who are perhaps hard-headed like Peter who I mentioned earlier- the question I feel we have to ask *now* is, what specifically do we think John has in mind as he is telling us to “walk in truth” in order to have fellowship and eternal life? I mean, if we’re talking about receiving or missing out on eternal life, we better dissect this thing pretty good and make sure we’re not missing nothin’! What *truth* is he referring to? There’s lots of “truths” that can be told- I can stand before you today and tell the 100% truth that I am standing currently

on the stage at One Church, I could tell you the truth that the sky is blue, that grass is green, that I'm wearing shoes on my feet- but those facts, no matter how true they are, are probably not very relevant to the "truth" John is talking about in reference to walking in truth in order to receive forgiveness, in order to have eternal life. The next two verses describe to us the truth I believe John is referencing. **Verses 8 and 9...**

The truth that God's word is speaking of particularly in this passage is in reference to sin. Verses 6 and 7 tell us that we are not to live in the worldly darkness deception hateful sinful place- no we are to walk rather in the light, in the truth, living in God's ways. Yet we might twist that to say that we are then perfect, or that we have no need of cleansing because we don't ever do anything wrong, or that because of Jesus we will never sin on Earth again- but no- John says in verse 8 that we definitely still sin. That is the truth. If we don't admit that, then we are liars, and we are not walking in the truth, which in the context would mean that the blood of Jesus does *not* cleanse us, and that we do *not* have eternal life. Verse 8 describes to us what walking in the deceptive darkness looks like (saying we have no sin), and verse 9 describes to us what walking in the truth light looks like (confessing our sin). Wouldn't it be cool if our political leaders would walk in God's truth light and admit when they are wrong or hold others accountable for wrong doing instead of gaslighting us and saying we're silly, petty, or racist for asking questions about the truth?

The truth is that we sin, and yet we are to admit, to confess that sin- we admit the truth that we still do things that under normal circumstances would make us guilty before a Holy and Perfect God- but the ironic *truth* about this admittance, the ironic truth about this confession, is that the honest, humble, truthful confession of our wrongdoings is the very thing that gives God the go ahead to apply the sacrifice of Jesus to us that forgives and cleanses us of wrongdoings.

This is ironic, because the way the world typically works is that when you confess to doing wrong, even if you're remorseful about it and regret doing it, the next step is to be punished for that wrong. If I went down to the police station and turned myself in, saying, "Listen, I need some help, I confess to you that I just killed a man, robbed a bank, and have been plotting a hostile takeover of the city of Brevard, but I feel bad about it all now"- there would more than likely still be

some severe consequences imposed upon my life. The confession that John is talking about here comes from one who is attempting to walk in the light- attempting to follow God's plans for life, reading about how Jesus says to live, admitting that His way is right, and trying to live *that* type of life- and yet still messes up- they then admit it, confess the wrong before God, confess the wrong before those around them who were affected by the wrong, showing remorse, sincerely wanting to make things right again- this is the type of person who God then responds to with love and forgiveness- cleansing their sin, and giving entrance into His Kingdom. And I don't think this passage is encouraging us to "get saved" over and over again- that's not the idea. The idea is that one who is saved, one who walks in the light, in the truth, has this general humble attitude about them; and one who is NOT saved, who's sin is NOT covered by the blood of Jesus- has in contrast the general attitude that sin isn't a big deal, or that there is no such thing as sin, or is so prideful, selfish, and blind that they can't see their own personal wrongdoing, or they say that sin in the body is ok if in the mind they know about Jesus,.

The warning here in verse 10 is that if we are attempting to walk in the light, walk in truth, walk according to God's ways- and yet we live in sin, acting like sin is no big deal, that God is ok with our sin, or saying that we're not really sinning (when God's word would say otherwise)- then not only are we deceived, walking in darkness instead of light, lying to ourselves and others, but we are actually actively calling God a liar to His face, and Jesus, God's word, God- is not in us. Again the conclusion in the context would be that in this situation, under these circumstances, the blood of Jesus will *not* cleanse from sin, and there is *no* assurance of eternal life. Not gonna make it.

You see, these few verses are the key to understanding the end of verse 2 in the following chapter 2. The end of verse 2 of chapter 2 says Jesus died not only for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world. Yes, Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, yes there is an open invitation to the whole world, yes it is possible for every single person's sin to be removed and for every single person to experience fellowship with God their Creator in Heaven- but the only way for an individual to personally access the universal sacrifice of Jesus is through what is described in verses of 5-10 of chapter 1- walking in the light, walking in God, walking in the truth of seeing our sin and admitting it for what it is. It's been said that the mark of a saint is not *sinlessness*, but *sin-consciousness*. May we be

aware of our mistakes- not dwelling on them, nor ignoring them, but confessing them to God and to others; working more on living in the light and truth in God's ways instead of in sin, darkness, deception- and by doing so we can know with confidence that we have right fellowship with Jesus, right fellowship with one another, and full assurance of eternal life in Heaven with Him.