

Love First: 1 John

Aug 12: “Keep Yourselves from Idols” 1 John 5:13-21

Intro: This is a rather strange way to end a letter. John is ending with the phrase on purpose. His letter is carefully constructed and comes to the conclusion just as he and the Spirit designed.

***Janet and I went to the US Mint and the Federal Reserve Bank in Philadelphia. In both cases the security was tight. In the case of the Federal Reserve Bank, it was even tighter than getting on a plane. We passed through cylinders that were completely enclosed. They were determined not to put in jeopardy the \$6 billion in currency that sits under your feet as you stand in that massive lobby.

John is doing some security here at the end of the letter. He is taking precaution to warn all his readers about the dangers of idolatry, how easily one can fall into it.

Three threads are interwoven in this letter: faith, love, and obedience. John is concerned about our faith, our affections, and our obedience. He threads these three together.

Idolatry involves these three: faith, affection, and obedience. You are bowing to any idol when you love anything more than you love God, when you trust anything more than you trust God, and when you obey anyone or anything instead of obeying God.

So “keep yourselves from idols” is a fitting SUMMARY of the letter, a fitting WARNING for the close, and a fitting CHALLENGE to all believers. It points to idolatry as the main trouble for those seeking to follow God.

I. FAITH: Confidence in Your Approach: This is the confidence we have in approaching God (v14)

A. We need confidence in our approach. Here John is talking about approaching God. What is more fundamental than that? Are you confident in your approach to life? Are you bold about it? Do you have an assurance of your standing?

1. John has been concerned about our confidence before God. ***John on the plane not knowing the apostle Paul or the real meaning of grace.

2. The idol of INTELLECT.

***I lost my declaration of independence in Philadelphia not far from independence hall. It was printed on the promptly once belonging to Ben Franklin with lead typeset and a wooden press.

The signers of the declaration were smart people, I think, but they were not relying simply on their intellect. In fact, they declared that they had a “firm reliance on divine providence.”

B. Lots of things you cannot know. But some things you can know. And one of those, surprisingly, is that you personally have eternal life. In fact, that is why John wrote this letter to his friends. He wanted them to have confidence before God and to know that they had eternal life.

C. Our knowledge is fallible, so receive God’s knowledge. It will not fail you.

D. Our knowledge is fallible, so depend upon prayer. Know that God will grant you what you ask according to his will.

E. Confidence in our prayers flows out of confidence in our relationship with God and firm belief in him.

II. LOVE: Compassion in Your Community: *If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray...There is a sin that leads to death* (v16).

A. If you see a brother doing something spiritually wrong, you ought to pray for him. This should be standard in the body of believers. The emphasis in this paragraph is upon praying for any brother who is in trouble. We must have love and compassion toward one another. Loving each other includes prayer when someone is in trouble.

***Golfball in the middle of the snake skin under the barn.

B. Everybody sins—present tense. John has already cleared that up for us. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves” (1 John 1:8).

C. Confession brings absolute purity. The sins of a believer are cleansed through the blood of Jesus in a continual cleansing. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

D. The mortal or deadly sins were listed by Tertullian: adultery, idolatry, murder, and blasphemy. This was a futile effort to identify specific sins that fit in the “deadly” category. The “seven deadly sins” are a list compiled in response to this passage. “Mortal” and “venial” sin categories developed out of this teaching.

E. John teaches us that we can know that have eternal life. He teaches us that the one who is born of God does not sin—that is, does not live habitually in sin. So we are not talking about one who has trusted Christ as Savior who would do something for which he would die spiritually.

F. UNBELIEF: The “sin unto death” is the same as that which Jesus spoke of: the unforgiveable sin. It is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit—attributing the works of God to the devil. It is unforgiveable because the person who does this does not know God and will never seek forgiveness. It is unforgiveable on the human side. This sin leads to death because it has no remedy in the heart of the lost person who commits it. Jesus called it an “eternal sin” (Mt. 3:29). This sinner has willfully refused the only remedy for his sin. The result of this pride and arrogance and idolatry and blasphemy is eternal separation from God.

G. The person who commits a sin “that does not lead to death” may be an unbeliever as well. He is given life in answer to the prayer of a believer in the Lord Jesus. A Christian does not experience spiritual separation from God when he sins although he may experience deadly consequences for his sin. But an unbeliever is dead in trespasses and sins.

H. “All wrongdoing is sin.” Everything that may be listed under “wrongdoing” is sin.

III. OBEDIENCE: Disciplines in Your Walk: *Dear children, keep yourselves from idols* (v21)

A. God keeps his children.

B. But he asks his children to keep themselves from idols. This involves DISCIPLINE, VIGILANCE, AND DETERMINATION. John expects us to expend personal energy and attention in this matter of worship. Individually, we are called to exalt God alone in our hearts and give him the honor due his name.

1. “The Lord bless thee and keep thee.” God keeps us. Of this there is no doubt. We are preserved in our salvation and our eternal life only through God’s keeping power.

2. But that does not mean that we have no “keeping” to do. We are to keep ourselves from idols. God wants our worship to be freely given to him. It must be free to be an act of genuine love and devotion. It cannot be forced. Therefore, it is up to us to keep ourselves from idolatry.

C. We live in a fallen world: the whole world is under the control of the evil one (v19).

1. God is in control ultimately. He allows Satan to operate within parameters. Satan and God are not equals in any sense. Satan will ultimately serve the purposes of God in this world.

2. Right now the “whole world is under the control of the evil one” (v19). ***We do not see all things “put under his feet.” In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone*** (Hebrews 2:8-9—include in slide).

3. For this short time the evil one is “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works...” (Ephesians 2:2). The whole world “lies under” his control. The world passively accepts this terrible state of affairs because it knows nothing better.

D. We are susceptible to temptation as children of God. The believer may fall into idolatry, but he comes back to Christ. “We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin” (v18).

1. the believer is protected by Christ himself. Christ is both our power over sin and our power of recovery when we have sinned. He is the advocate before the Father on our behalf.

2. The devil has no ultimate jurisdiction in our lives as children of God. He may tempt us and trap us, but he cannot destroy us. “Neither shall anyone take them out of my hand” and “no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:28,29).

3. Think of the times you come into the house of worship and leave without worshipping. What happened to you? Were you worried about other things? Were you distracted by things going on in the worship hour?

4. People are falling away from the worship of the one true God now as they were in John’s day. This falling away is inexcusable, but that does not mean that people are without excuses. It only means that we attempt to shift the blame from ourselves to others when we do not worship. The devil will use any instrument at his disposal to keep you from worshiping God when you are in this room. Don’t let him do it.

C. Idols are everywhere, inside and out. When we give our lives to them, they steal what is most precious. John is concerned for them, as if the idols are lining the streets or invading their homes.

Confidences. The things I know for certain, not a long list.
Confines, Parameters, Conformity. According to his will, yoke is easy
Commitments
Exclusions, sin unto death
Devotions
Disciplines, keep yourselves

Misplaced belief, idols
Unbelief, sin unto death

***Janet and I were given a little sack of money at the "Money in Motion" display at the Federal Reserve Bank in Philadelphia. Unfortunately, it was shredded. I have been working nights trying to put some bills back together.

***Janet and I actually picked fake bills out of a lineup with some success at the Federal Reserve Bank.

***The recording said that we were standing above about \$6 billion in currency.

***The US Mint in Philadelphia makes millions of dollars' worth of coins. These coins enter the presses as metal slugs no more valuable than doubloons thrown from a float. But then they are minted. The images of the state are pressed into them, and those slugs become money, legal tender for purchasing items in these United States.