

Beloved: A Study of 1, 2, & 3 John
Lesson Two - Be Obedient
1 John 2:1-17

“The greatest benefit of spending time in God’s Word is the power of transformation which comes by way of application.”
(*Beloved: A Study of 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 78)

Becoming a student of God’s Word and developing a tender spirit of obedience to His revelation and the prompting of the Holy Spirit will cause radical transformation, conforming us into the image of Christ. So, let’s dig in!

As we look into this passage, we need to remember John’s heart as he pens this letter. He is seeking to correct specific problems that are erupting in the early church. John recognizes that there is a gap between *their belief* and *their behavior*. His writing is as relevant today as when he took quill to parchment in the first century. Like the believers in the early church, we need to strive to make *our practice* match up to *our position* in Christ!

I. Christ our Savior (1 John 2:1-2)

John’s tender feelings towards his readers are evidenced in the way he addresses his readers, “My little children.” This phrase “is a term of affection by a teacher to his disciples under circumstances requiring a tender appeal” (*Strong’s Concordance* on Logos).

Chuck Swindoll writes:

This is a “family meeting,” in which his readers are sitting at their spiritual grandfather’s feet and gleaning timeless wisdom. When he opens his mouth, his words aren’t meant to impress or to chide. This isn’t a rebuke or a scolding. These are words of loving instruction and concerned warning. This isn’t lofty sophistry but loving wisdom (Chuck Swindoll, *Insights on 1,2 &3 John, Jude*, pp. 39-40).

In this section John lays out a warning against committing sin writing, “I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.” John Phillips notes:

Even though by natural birth we are tainted with sin, sin is not to be the habit of life for the believer. John will repeatedly remind us later in this letter, the believer is a born-again person, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, possessed of a new heart, and a partaker of the divine nature. John wants to lay to rest the notion that sin may be regarded as normal in the life of a believer as it is in the life of the unsaved (John Phillips, *Exploring the Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*, p. 40).

It is true that God “has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” (2 Peter 1:3) and “that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin” (Romans 6:6). It is equally true that as

long as we are living in the time and space continuum of earth our flesh continues to draw us into sin. Therefore, it is a mistake to say that believers do not sin. The Word teaches otherwise, and our Christian experience clearly dispels that notion.

As Dr. Rogers said, “God doesn’t fix you up where you cannot sin anymore; He just fixes you where you cannot sin and enjoy it anymore” (Dr. Adrian Rogers, retrieved from sermon *A Cleansed Life*).

Praise God that “we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1) when we do sin. Christ is our Advocate, our Holy Representative, the One who takes away our sin and replaces it with His own impeccable righteousness. In the High Court of Heaven, Jesus represents us before the Father when we confess our sin. Satan most likely attends (all or some of) these proceedings to accuse us before God. Phillips writes, “The accuser is met by the Advocate, and all He has to do is raise His pierced hands and Satan is silenced—that is how effective Christ’s finished work is. God puts our sins under the blood and beyond the reach of recall” (John Phillips, *Exploring the Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*, p. 41, quoted in *Beloved: A Study of 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 62).

In addition, John writes that Christ “is the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:2). The word propitiation can be defined as an offering that turns away or satisfies God’s divine wrath against sin. This has been provided in the person and work of His Son “who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4). Jesus’ resurrection is proof positive that God’s wrath was satisfied at Calvary. Therefore, Jesus is our Advocate because He is our Savior who paid sin’s price with His own sinless blood.

John emphasizes the fact that Christ paid for the sins of the whole world, but His blood is only applied to the sin account of those who have receive Him through repentance and faith as Lord and Savior.

II. Christ our Life (1 John 2:3-14)

The acid test for our identification with Christ in salvation is a life of obedience to Him. While we will continue to indulge in bouts of sinful behavior until we arrive in Heaven, the overarching theme of our lives will be obedience to the Lord in keeping His commandments. Through the (slow and often painful) process of sanctification, we progressively mature in the Lord and our treks of self-indulgence become increasingly less and the time needed for conviction and confession of our sin accelerates.

Walls and Anders note, “Apparently, some people in Ephesus claimed to know God, but they made no effort to keep God’s commands...John set them straight about this claim: ‘If you know God, you keep His commandments, and if you make no effort to keep His commandments, but still claim to be a Christian, you are a liar’” (D. Walls & M. Anders, *I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*, p. 172).

Obedience, plain and simple, should spring forth from love and respect for our Redeemer. It should permeate our lives and testify to the lost world that we belong to Jesus. John is rather

emphatic about it writing, “Whoever keeps His Word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 John 2:5-6). How did Jesus walk? In total obedience to the Father.

I can't help but wonder if, at this point in his writing, John was not reflecting on the events of the Last Supper, an event which would be firmly etched into his memory bank. Jesus said,

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments...He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.’ Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, ‘Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him’” (John 14:15; 21-23).

The indwelling Holy Spirit enables believers to live out the commands of Scripture. By doing so, we demonstrate to the world that the light which Jesus brought into the world continues to shine in the darkness. Paul writes, “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves” (2 Corinthians 4:6-7).

It is interesting to note that John does not address the issue of carnal Christians in his letter. Carnal believers are those who are genuinely saved but never grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. They may adopt a level of religious rituals which is little more than behavior modification. They often adhere to a standard of pious behavior while the internal development of sensitivity to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and/or study of the Word is neglected. Therefore, they remain dysfunctional believers, trapped in a cycle of seeking the approval of man while ignoring the greater calling of living for the applause of One!

While John does not address the issue of carnal Christians, he does write concerning the different degrees of spiritual growth represented in every body of believers. They consist of new converts which John refers to as “little children” (1 John 2:12). These are new converts who need to be nurtured and disciplined in the Truth in order to grow. John uses the term “young men,” (1 John 2:13) a term which speaks of teenagers, those who are still under the tutelage of teachers but are growing strong in the Lord and able to overcome the enemy. John writes of the “fathers” (1 John 2:13; 14), a reference to those who have grown mature in the faith. None of these references have to do with age, but rather reflect levels of spiritual maturity.

III. Christ our Treasure (1 John 2:15-17)

John warns his readers against falling in love with the world. The Greek word he uses here and generally throughout his letter refers to the wicked, fallen world system under the headship of Satan.

As Swindoll explains:

“This world is led by Satan, who works against Christ and His people. It’s therefore hostile to righteousness. The world magnifies humanity, celebrates depravity, and rejects God’s word. In this negative sense, the world’s values, pleasures, pastimes, aspirations, and even attitudes have no room for God, no respect for Christ, and no regard for His followers” (Chuck Swindoll, *Insights on 1,2 &3 John, Jude*, p. 54).

It is impossible for us to love the world and love the Lord at the same time. James 4:4 says, “You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” James equates loving the world with spiritual adultery. Strong language to be sure! John conveys a similar message, “Do not love the world nor the things in the world” (1 John 2:15).

John classifies the world’s temptations in three categories:

The lust of the flesh simply means wanting to gratify our body’s desires at the cost of morality and what’s good for our soul. It can be adultery, drugs, alcohol or food — whatever meets a physical need in a manner that competes with the role Jesus plays in our lives.

The lust of the eyes generally means anything craved excessively or inappropriately, from food to sexual impurity. In this context, it’s not about normal or necessary physical desires. Second are desires of “the eyes,” again a general term. The world system has made it a science to arouse the lust of the eyes, especially through print media and advertising.

The pride of life describes the arrogant spirit of self-sufficiency. It expresses the desire for recognition, applause, status, and advantage in life. The phrase describes the pride in what life can offer you.

All of these traps interfere with our fellowship with the Father. They also disrupt our pursuit of personal holiness and practical righteousness, causing our time and energy to be dissipated and our faith to be derailed.

There is no life like a life sold out to Jesus Christ. No worldly pleasure compares to the fulfillment and joy of walking in close intimacy with the Lover of your soul. The devil is a liar. He will cleverly dangle the world’s offerings like a shiny lure, and just like that lure, he will snatch you up and drag you away to misery and death (*Beloved: A Study of 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 79).

Beloved: You are blessed and highly favored. You are loved more than you can comprehend. God’s affection towards you cannot be measured in human terms for it exceeds every kind of love we know in our earthly journey. You are loved. You are treasured. You are God’s beloved daughters and He is pleased to call you “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17). Selah. Think on that for a while!!