

GLENKIRK CHURCH



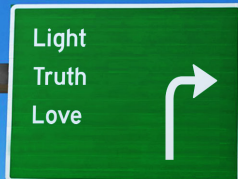
WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

NOVEMBER 18 - 22, 2019

WALKING IN THE TRUTH

SERMON SERIES 9/8 - 11/24



MONDAY

1 John 5:13-21; 1 John 2:16; Matthew 22:36-40

We started Glenkirk's 1 John teaching series about 11 weeks ago; this week completes our related study. Some Bible scholars lament the challenges of summarizing 1 John, as it can read like a rambling collection of semi-connected thoughts. John may have been approaching 90 years old when penning it, "possibly the last of the New Testament to be written ... [and] therefore, the last word we have from the apostles." (Ray Stedman) Even 1 John 5:13-21's nine verses may sprawl in your opinion, ending with a seemingly disjointed admonition that we'll explore Friday.

Look a little closer, however, and this epistle feels very contemporary and cogent. "[First John] was possibly written to the Christians in this city of Ephesus, who were facing—as we are—dangers and difficulties of living in a godless, pagan world, given over to the worship of sex and to licentious practices, lovers of human wisdom ... and especially desirous of exalting man and his abilities." (Stedman)

The book of 1 John may have been the apostle's swan song, the veil between John and eternity growing razor-thin as he scribed it. Perhaps this prompted him, under the Spirit's inspiration, to consider many of the things needful to those he had pastored in Ephesus, as well as the greater early church. By now John was elderly and, while Scripture's ultimate author is God Himself, the human penman's personality, hot-buttons, and history are reflected in the text.

“John is concerned about one thing, primarily, ... authentic Christianity! ... [which] is always made up of ... truth, righteousness, and love. ... The truth about Jesus is that He is God and Man. ... Righteousness ... means that your behavior changes [for God’s glory] ... and [your life radiates] love toward ... fellow members of the human race [and other believers].” (Stedman)

My summary attempt at characterizing the whole of 1 John: Believe on Jesus and love one another, demonstrating thereby that you are God’s. Walk faithfully, gratefully knowing that Christ paid for your sins. If you are His, it will show; if you are not, you will continue sinning without remorse. We are citizens of another kingdom; act accordingly, knowing that God protects us from the enemy. Sounds pretty coherent and relevant to me!

QUESTION

How do the challenges facing the 1st century Ephesian church feel very contemporary? What things make up “authentic Christianity”?

PRAYERS FOR JULI MCGOWAN AND LIVING ROOM INTERNATIONAL

Pray for Juli McGowan serving with Living Room International and the team of 108 Kenyans to remain courageous and compassionate to daily care for the sick and dying who come to its hospices.

TUESDAY

1 John 5:13-15, 20; Mark 11:23-24

What does it mean to “*believe in the name of the Son of God*” (1 John 5:13)? Jesus’ name in Aramaic is *Yahshua*—*Iesous* in Greek, Joshua when Anglicized—meaning “God saves.” John wants us to grasp who Jesus is—God the Son, the Christ or Messiah (Anointed One), and Lord (Supreme Ruler)—and that His mission is to rescue all believers. Thereafter we “*may know Him ... and are in Him who is true ... the true God and eternal life*” (v. 20). When we truly know God through Jesus, we are then “in Him” and in God’s eternal family thereafter.

Verse 14 sparks significant Christian controversy: “*... if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.*” Some who embrace a “prosperity gospel” or “name it, claim it” theology apply this, along with Mark 11:23-24 and proof texts, to support their “If you have faith in God (and donate liberally), He’ll deliver health, security and prosperity” views. Such philosophy has fueled the careers of numerous televangelists.

Bruce Wilkerson authored a popular, award-winning Christian book, *The Prayer of Jabez*. It’s based upon 1 Chronicles 4:10: “‘[God,] *bless me and enlarge my border! ... be with me, and keep me from harm ...*’ And God granted what he asked.” I once met Wilkerson at a Christian conference and asked, “How do you distinguish your book from ‘name it, claim it’ theology?” He smiled faintly and said little.

Among the problems with the “prosperity gospel” is that it discounts God’s sovereignty, suggesting that He “owes us” when we give generously, pray faithfully, etc. But God is accountable to no one and need not be. Yahweh is not the mean, vengeful “cop in the sky”; however, He’s also not a “cosmic Santa Claus,” heavenly short-order cook, or genie compelled to grant our wishes.

Key to 1 John 5:14 is the phrase, “*according to His will.*” Righteous prayer seeks God’s will, our hearts yearning to honor and serve Him. Note the verse’s ending phrase, “*He hears us.*” God hears and answers faithful prayers; however, His response can be “No,” “Not now,” or “I’ve got something better,” as much as “Yes.” Claim that along with God’s sovereign love.

QUESTIONS

What’s the significance of Jesus’ name *Yahshua* in Aramaic? What are the tenets and related theological problems of the “prosperity gospel” or “name it, claim it” teaching? What are some of God’s answers to prayers?

PRAYERS FOR JULI MCGOWAN AND LIVING ROOM INTERNATIONAL

Pray for continued financial provision for the care of Living Room’s patients. Each day the team physically, emotionally and spiritually cares for adults and children in need of hospice care in Kenya.

WEDNESDAY

1 John 5:16-17; Acts 5:1-10; Daniel 5:20-21

Two curious phrases are featured in 1 John 5:16, 17: “*sin that does not lead to death*” and “*sin that leads to death.*” Notably, John applies both phrases to believers. Christians generally think of death-causing sin as “the state of continued unbelief. The Spirit currently convicts the unsaved world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). ... There is no pardon ... for a person who rejects the Spirit’s promptings to trust in Jesus Christ and then dies in unbelief.” (GotQuestions.org)

The Bible frequently references the “hard heart” of committed rebellion, where “persistence in sin [gets] to the point where authentic confession and repentance have become impossible.” (John Piper) Ancient Egypt’s Pharaoh, refusing Moses’ appeals to release the Jews from bondage, is a notable example (Exodus 7-11). But, again, today’s passage pertains to Christians.

The chilling story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5)—taken by God, though Christians (most likely)—sheds light here. This couple pridefully and publicly offered a generous gift to the Jerusalem church while secretly retaining a portion of the proceeds. Ananias and Sapphira were subsequently struck dead, a stern warning to the newborn church about honesty and honoring commitments toward God. “The ‘sin unto death’ is willful, continuous, unrepentant sin. ...God corrects [Christians] when [we] sin. ... There comes a point [however] when God can no longer allow a believer to continue in unrepentant sin ... removing those who deliberately disobey Him.” (GotQuestions.org)

“*Sin that does not lead to death*” seems straightforward, characterizing my frequent failings. But God’s grace, prayerful confession, and true repentance restore a believer’s relationship with God, releasing sin’s grip upon us. However, if we arrogantly dismiss God’s ways, there are consequences; God will not be mocked (Galatians 6:7). Daniel 4 recounts Nebuchadnezzar’s self-glorification, prompting divinely-appointed humiliation. However, 1 John 5:16-17 reminds us that even believers’ persistent rebellion invites not only God’s loving correction (Hebrews 12:6), but possibly an early exit from earth as well.

I believe that God calls us to our eternal reward when we’ve fulfilled the work that He has for us—Enoch’s story is one example (Genesis 5:22-24). However, God might also take believers to heaven to prevent further damage to themselves and/or to His kingdom.

QUESTIONS

What are “*sins not leading to death*” and “*sins that lead to death*” and how are they different? Why did God strike Ananias and Sapphira dead, a seemingly very strong response to their sin?

PRAYERS FOR JULI MCGOWAN AND LIVING ROOM INTERNATIONAL

Pray for Living Room’s leadership to have wisdom as they make decisions and implement dreams. Pray that God will guide them and provide for all that is required (financially, spiritually, operationally, and with human resources).

THURSDAY

1 John 5:18-19; Ephesians 2:1-3; Job 1:6-12

Two elusive claims are made in 1 John 5:18-19: “... everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning” and “[Jesus] protects [the believer]; the evil one does not touch [him/her].” My objection: I have many experiences suggesting otherwise! A key to understanding these statements, however, comes in what follows, “... the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”

As addressed yesterday, believers periodically commit “the sin not leading to death” (v. 16). As those “born of God” (v. 18) and “from God” (v. 19), however, we claim the redemption purchased by Jesus as our Substitute. We should sin decreasingly and repentantly, gratefully revealing growth in Christ.

Amidst extreme ordeals, Job struggled to grasp God’s protection from the enemy, called the “ruler of this world” by Jesus (John 12:31) and “god of this world” by Paul (2 Corinthians 4:4). However, God limits the devil’s access to believers (Job 1:10), permitting trials to strengthen (James 1:2-4) and/or humble us (2 Corinthians 12:7). Why God presently allows Satan to influence the world transcends today’s scope. Regardless, any sensible person—even unbelievers—can see that evil surrounds and plagues us. The Bible attributes these troubles to the fall of humankind, chronicled in Genesis 3, along with unseen spiritual warfare encircling us (Ephesians 6:12).

N. T. Wright offers an outline characterizing the Bible's structure and also framing how creation's curse fits into the overall scheme. Wright outlines the Bible as five acts in a play: "Act 1" is creation (Genesis 1-2); "Act 2" is the fall (Genesis 3-11); "Act 3" is Israel's call as God's chosen, earlier means of blessing the world (Genesis 12 through Malachi); "Act 4" is Jesus the Savior coming to accomplish what Israel did not (the Gospels); and "Act 5" is the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in developing the church (Acts through Revelation).

"Fallen creation" is a great place to engage anyone in friendly give-and-take conversation. It's where Jesus met Nicodemus (John 3), the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) and others. Things "are not as they should be." Talk with people about the clear challenges surrounding us—how it's "Act 2"—and see if the dialog moves toward the Gospel.

QUESTIONS

Why is Satan called in the Bible both "*the ruler of this world*" and "*the god of this world*"? What is the framework of N. T. Wright's "Bible as a 5-act play"? What is "Act 2" and why is it a great place to meet people for a spiritual exchange, particularly nonbelievers?

PRAYERS FOR JULI MCGOWAN AND LIVING ROOM INTERNATIONAL

Pray for Living Room as it partners with Kenya's Ministry of Health. Pray they will have favor and wisdom as they engage the larger medical system. Their desire is to see transformation of medical services, improving the quality of life for patients and their loved ones.

FRIDAY

1 John 5:21; Psalm 115:2-8; Romans 1:21-25

John concludes his 1 John epistle, representing perhaps the last pen-strokes of any biblical author, with “*keep yourselves from idols.*” With everything else the apostle addressed, as well other truths that the Bible reveals, this seems like a peculiar ending. Or is it?

God sent Judah into Babylonian captivity in the 6th century BC partly to help cure them of idolatry regarding Canaanite “gods.” This was very successful regarding Baal, Ashtoreth and Moloch. However, in Babylon many Hebrews acquired tastes for entertainment and commerce, areas where Jews remain prominent today.

I love college football. Originally from Omaha, I’m a lifelong, hardcore Nebraska Cornhuskers football fan. As I was preparing these devotionals this week, Nebraska was readying for a huge rivalry game. Scroll forward to today, Sunday; the game was yesterday and the ‘Huskers lost in overtime, a great disappointment. But reflecting upon this, I’m wondering, “God, are you doing a work in me here? Is this ‘love’ of mine idolatrous? If so, help me cast it away!”

“Scripture [emphasizes] that God alone is worthy of worship. Idol worship robs God of the glory that is rightfully His, and that is something He will not tolerate (Isaiah 42:8). Even today there are religions that bow before statues and icons, a practice forbidden by God’s Word. ... Our modern idols are many and varied. Even for those who do not bow

physically before a statue, idolatry is a matter of the heart—pride, self-centeredness, greed, gluttony, a love for possessions [becoming], ultimately, rebellion against God.” (GotQuestions.org)

Exodus 34:14 states: “*You shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God*” (ESV). John himself penned, “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8). Biblical jealousy is “not wishing to lose that which is yours.” God’s jealousy is an expression of His love; God does not want to lose those created in His own image (Genesis 1: 26-27) to idolatry or other sins. What are your potential idols? Sports? Entertainment? Beauty? Career? Prosperity? Family? Even good things are problematic when they become idol-like, encroaching upon one’s right relationship with God. Ask God to help keep your would-be idols balanced and in proper perspective.

QUESTIONS

Why did the Apostle John conclude his 1 John epistle (perhaps the text in the Bible penned at the latest date) with “*keep yourselves from idols*”? What are some common “idols” that even Christians might wrestle with? What does “*the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God*” mean and why is this a loving statement?

PRAYERS FOR JULI MCGOWAN AND LIVING ROOM INTERNATIONAL

Pray for God’s provision as Living Room begins fundraising to construct a 48-bed Family Care Center. The facility will function like a Ronald McDonald House. The dream is simple: to provide a place to stay and to remind people that they are not alone as they go through cancer treatment.

Sources

- Ray Stedman's quotes can be found at <https://www.raystedman.org/bible-overview/adventuring/1-john-the-fruit-of-fellowship-with-christ>
- GotQuestions.org quotes are from <https://www.gotquestions.org/blasphemy-Holy-Spirit.html>, <https://www.gotquestions.org/sin-unto-death.html>, and <https://www.gotquestions.org/idolatry-definition.html>
- John Piper's quote is from <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-the-sin-not-leading-to-death-in-1-john-5>
- N. T. Wright's Bible framework is from his book, *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2013).

