

Route Sixty-Six

Part Sixty-Two

1 John

That You May Know That You Know

(John 5:39; John 20:31; 1 John 5:13)

With Study Questions

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3/7/2021

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That You May Know That You Know

(John 5:39; John 20:31; 1 John 5:13)

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39).

...but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:31).

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

Introduction

From time to time issues resurface in the church which must be readdressed. One of the most recurrent, and critical, issues (since it has to do with salvation itself) revolves around the distinction between Jesus as savior and Jesus as lord. We often use the words *lord* and *savior* without giving a great deal of thought to how different they are. But they are indeed different. It is one thing for a lifeguard to save you. It is quite another thing for the lifeguard to be your master.

During one of my stints in seminary the debate surrounding this issue was raging. The camps were commonly referred to as *Lordship Salvation* versus *Easy Believism*. The concern revolving around Easy Believism was that if you could get someone, perhaps at a weak or vulnerable moment, to prayer a specific prayer, you could immediately assure them that they had eternal life. The concern orbiting Lordship Salvation was that it, perhaps unwittingly, intertwined our obedience as meriting salvation; a doctrine traditionally known as *legalism* (salvation by our keeping of the law).

Simply stated in juxtaposition, is a person saved by the mere uttering of a prayer? Does a person's ethical or moral excellence somehow contribute to their salvation?

Otherwise good theologians would get caught in these traps. More than once I've heard that all the rich young ruler had to do in order to be saved was sell all his possessions (Matthew 19:21). It seems to escape the notice of people that Jesus was putting an impossible task (Matthew 19:26) before this young man who had deluded himself into thinking he was a law-keeper (Matthew 19:20).

Other highly popular, and generally orthodox, teachers have given testimony as to how one summer they accepted Jesus as savior, then the next summer as lord. One must ask, during that year, who was this man's master? But Jesus taught,

No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other (Matthew 6:24a).

That Jesus would be, at the same time, someone you trust in as Savior but despise and hate as master, is demonstrably unbiblical. Yet this problem didn't begin in the 1970s or 80s. John, the apostle, was confronted with this issue in the early church. It has been said,

The Gospel of John was written that men might have life, the epistle of 1st John that believers might know they had life.

This is seen when we compare two, similar sounding, verses.

...but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:31).

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

It is one thing to have eternal life. It is another thing to know you have eternal life. This is not a mistake a person wants to make. The enemy

of our souls would ever have the Christian doubt that they are in the loving hands of their Savior. He would also, more dangerously, want to assure those who are not truly saved that their souls are just fine. The means by which this is to be assessed is a major theme in 1st John.

Survey of 1 John

John opens by establishing the true and concrete nature of the Christian faith. He does this by establishing the historical and material nature of Christ. Concerning the “**word of life**” John testifies that they had

“heard...seen with [their] eyes...looked upon and have touched with [their] hands” (1 John 1:1, 2).

Jesus was not a fictitious inspirational character and the Christian faith is much more than a set of good ideas. The eternal Son of God entered history and was made manifest to humanity (1 John 1:2). This event, which theologians call the incarnation (the act of being made flesh) would, and still does, come under attack. From whence does this attack come? John explains,

...every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already (1 John 4:2b, 3).

Seeking to dispel the truth of the incarnation is a dark deed from a dark place. In terms of our self-examination regarding the sincerity of our own faith, this seems to be of critical importance. Denying that Jesus has come in the flesh comes from the spirit of antichrist. One other doctrine, we learn from John, is of the antichrist. It promotes the denial that Jesus is in fact the Christ—that is, the promised Messiah of which the Old Testament continually speaks.

As we examine the genuineness of our faith, we are to seek to be assured that the object of our faith is not misplaced or twisted beyond recognition. Everything we’ve learned in the Old Testament regarding the Messiah anticipated the Jesus, the Christ. He then became flesh. He lived a

life without sin (no darkness found in Him), died on a cross, becoming a curse (Galatians 3:13), then rose again in a grand display of victory over sin and death, granting His victory to all who call upon His name. Is this the Jesus in whom you trust your eternal soul?

We will also be given the means by which we access the necessary information. In case you haven't noticed, spirituality is at an all-time high. The claim of being spiritual is ready on the lips of anyone who finds themselves engaged with a message of redemption in Christ. This is nothing new. It was rampant during the time of John.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

Of course, if I am to test something, I need access to the answers. John, in an appeal to his own apostolic authority, just a few verses later points us to the source document.

We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:6).

John rapidly moves from a focus upon Christ to an evaluation of self. It is one thing for Jesus to save sinners. It is quite another to know if we are in that number. This self-evaluation is presented in a series of conditional sentences. We have a sort of 'if-then' method of spiritual self-analysis.

It amounts to this: if we say we're Christians, yet live a life walking in darkness, we're lying. If we walk in the light, that is an indicator that we are covered by the blood of Christ. Walking in the light, it must be said, is not to be understood as sinless perfection, but of a lifelong following of Christ. We know walking in the light is not sinlessness because John adds, **"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8)**. One feature that our eyes have been opened to the truth is the recognition of our own sin. This is restated in 1 John 1:10.

This series of conditional sentences climaxes with the well-known 1 John 1:9.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

It may do us well to take a few moments on this powerful, comforting verse. To “**confess**” means to agree *homologomen*, in this case with God, that we are sinners. We are not left to our own devices for this, as if sin-laden creatures have the final word on the definition of sin. For all the anti-law rhetoric which goes on in the church today, John appeals to the law as the means by which sin is defined.

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4).

When we look at the perfect law of God, then look at ourselves, we arrive at the conclusion, which we confess. John then highlights the faithfulness of God. The very best humanity has to offer will still find itself riddled with sin and weakness. There are many people who I love and trust. But when it gets down to our eternal souls, there is only One who will be faithful no matter what the obstacle.

We see faithful followed by “**just**” *dikaios* (also can be translated righteous). Why is this added? We often think God can forgive the way we forgive, which usually means we’ll just forget about it and seek to move on (or something like that). But for God to say something along the lines of “Let’s just pretend that didn’t happen” would be a violation of His character. God is just and the source of all that is just.

Imagine a court room where the judge, in a great act of “mercy” upon a convicted criminal, said “Today I have chosen not to make you pay for your crimes. You’ve been set free.” That court might be many things, but it would fail to be a hall of justice. Justice has not been served. The penalty for the crime has not been paid. But God maintains His just character in forgiving us because the price has been paid for us by another-Christ our Savior.

These wonderful words of pardon are followed by John giving one of the reasons why he is writing this letter.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin (1 John 2:1a).

In the same verse he very pastorally recognizes the battle of being human. He therefore finishes the thought.

But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1b).

Herein lies the ongoing walk, battle, struggle of the Christian faith. If we are in Christ, we will ever seek to walk in the light-obedience governed by His word. This is an attribute which we can observe in our own lives which is telltale.

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments (1 John 2:3).

It is critical though, for us to recognize that John, in this verse, is not telling *how* we have come to know Him, he is telling us how we know we have come to know him. It is one thing for me to know that I am rich. It is quite another thing for me to know how I became rich. Am I rich because I've earned it or am I rich because I inherited it?

Pouring over this short epistle, John never strays too far from this message. The message that we are saved by the love and grace of God (1 John 3:1) which evidences itself in our love and service of God and one another.

No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸ Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil ⁹ No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰ By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother (1 John 3:6-10).

Is it possible that a simple prayer might be included in God's saving of a soul? Certainly. Should there be a call to repentance and acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord in the presentation of the gospel? Jesus did not hesitate to communicate to His would-be followers that they must be willing to "**count the cost**" of discipleship (Luke 14:25-33). For many, the cost of discipleship was their own lives.

The confusion surrounding the Lordship Salvation/Easy Believism controversy is that whatever cost we, as disciples, might pay, it can never purchase redemption or pardon from God¹. Those who simply pray a prayer that is not followed by a life pursuing obedience, should not be deluded into thinking that they are in the favor of God. Nor should those who seek obedience think that their obedience is the means by which that favor is found. The blood of the martyrs may be the seed of the church, but it is the blood of Christ alone that makes the church a house of redemption.

We, as the believers, will soon commune with God and each other in the Lord's Supper. But as the words of institution so clearly indicate, it is Christ's body and Christ's blood alone that "**is poured out...for the forgiveness of sins**" (Matthew 26:28).

¹ It is of value to distinguish causation and correlation.

Questions for Study

1. Define and discuss Lordship Salvation versus Easy Believism (pages 2, 3).
2. What is one comparison made between the Gospel of John and the First Epistle of John (pages 3, 4)?
3. How does John open this epistle? Why do you suppose he leads with this (page 4)?
4. What are some things the spirit of antichrist is seeking to deny (pages 4, 5)?
5. How does one go about testing the spirits (page 5)?
6. John offers a series of conditional sentences in chapter one. What is he seeking to help us determine (pages 5, 6)?
7. Discuss why “just” is included in 1 John 1:9 (page 6).
8. What do you suppose is John’s main point in this epistle (pages 7, 8)?