

Living in Truth

How about we insert “God” in this lesson title? The problem with faith in this everyday world is connecting God with our thinking, values, and actions.



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We begin this personal evaluation by reading a letter written in the later half of the first century by a disciple named

John who is most likely the author of the beautiful gospel “John” and the final electrifying book of the New Testament we call “Revelation.” So, what do you do between the story of Jesus and the final chapter of this world? You live, either as a wanderer lost in random events, or, as a child of the creator-sustainer-redeemer God. Enter John, disciple of Jesus: “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life ... truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (vv. 1, 3).

Faith must be real for every generation, not just a handed-down tradition. Written toward the end of the first century to the church in Ephesus, this letter confronts the growing influence of gnosticism. The Greek word *gnosis* means knowledge, not just knowing more than the next person, but a superior, secret, spiritual mystery. The secret to knowing “god,” the gnostic believed, was in the secret codes and rituals. Mystery religions constituted the very serious threat to the early church. Those cults fastened on emotions, using rites and elaborate stagings. These same tantalizing approaches continue to draw people into various religious groups today. People want to feel good about themselves, be part of a select group, get in on success and the prosperity of God, and be free of constricting moral codes.

John calls those early Christians, and us, to a personal accounting, a frank examination of our faith foundation and motives. It is as though John walks into the room, brushes aside all the impressive charts, glowing candles, success formulas, and says, “God is light and in him there

is no darkness at all” (v. 5). The world always tries to co-opt Jesus into healthy-wealthy-wise formulas, political groups, and feel-good philosophies. Jesus will not fit those self-serving deceptions. He had no political or philosophical agendas. He spent his time among ordinary people, in their suffering and challenges -- listening, loving, helping, encouraging, weeping, praying, confronting, and giving himself away. We are so blessed to have four accounts (gospels) of his life and teachings, each one unique but clear in the portrayal of God’s love and grace for all people. Jesus offered God’s love to a Pharisee named Nicodemus (John 3:1-15) and a Samaritan woman at the well who had been married multiple times (John 4:5-26). Jesus met people where they were in life instead of in the structured religious form of the world. His “sermon on the mount” (Matt. 5-7) confronts the hard issues and offers a blueprint for a meaningful and blessed life.

John confronts our failings as God’s people. The first failing is the disconnect of our words from our actions. “God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true” (vv. 5-6). We see this disconnect in the words of politicians, in the world of finance and industry, in community events, and in churches. Hypocrisy confronts us daily and takes a serious toll on Christianity. Jesus said plainly, “Whoever shall do the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, sister, and mother” (Matthew 12:50). True faith is not membership in an organization or following rituals ... it is a life-shaping personal faith in God.

Which brings us to our second failing: denial or self-deception. Have you ever wished you could recall words spoken or that you could erase something you had done? In his very demanding “sermon on the mount” Jesus asks: “Why do you call Me “Lord, Lord” and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46) The proof of faith is always in the living. In true faith there is an availability or openness to God. John warns: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (v. 8). To forget our failures is to forget

our need for God’s grace and to bring shame on our Savior. John warns: “If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and his word is not in us” (v. 10). Did you get the significant difference in those two verses? When you leave God out of your living, you are separating yourself from the Holy Spirit’s leadership and you are showing the world that God’s way is unimportant. What you say, what you do, what your values reflect, and where you go either denies or affirms that you are a Christian.

Why is John using such strong language? Because our values, actions, and words are the flesh and blood witness to the great good news of Jesus Christ before this dying world. Why is John writing? “So that you (my little children) may not sin.” John hastens to say, “But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” John reminds us of the expansiveness of God’s love: “he (Jesus) is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (2:1-2). There is no space in this letter of confrontation and hope for the followers of Jesus to claim superiority in the grace of God. We are all saved by grace, not by family or racial heritage, not by our own religious observances or secret rites.

What the world must see in us is the evidence of God’s love. To obey God, to live out his love and grace, to treat others as Jesus treated even his enemies, to build life on biblical teachings, is to reach “perfection” (2:5). Be careful here. That word “perfection” actually means “to grow up” or “to become God’s kind of person.” Only God is perfect. But when you commit your life to God in Christ, when you truly desire to serve God out of love, when you honestly say “I abide in him,” then, and only then you “ought to walk just as he (Jesus) walked” (2:6).

We want things explained, laid out in a nice neat package. Believe and do! But life is complex and we are too easily distracted. So John says, pay attention to how deeply God loves you and what Christ endured to make that love real and accessible. Every day make your choice to live in God’s truth.