

Monday, December 23, 2019—1 John 3-5

John was combatting a form of false teaching called Gnosticism, which claimed special knowledge was necessary to be a true believer. John assured his readers that trusting Jesus alone was enough, but he made clear there would be evidence in the believer that he truly believed. The true disciple lived a life of obedience, marveling in the grace of God which allowed him to be a child of God and obeying His commands. If one did not obey, that person was clearly not a disciple of Jesus (3:1-10).

The true disciple also loved others. The indwelling Holy Spirit spurred him on to love Christ and love others (3:11-24, 4:7-21). The test of a disciple was not knowledge but love, yet knowledge was critical as John told his readers to test those who claimed to speak for the Spirit (4:1-6). The faith Jesus enriches is a faith of loving and thinking.

John knew his readers were deeply troubled by the false teaching that surrounded them, so he told them his motivation in writing them was so they could know without a doubt that they had eternal life by believing in the Jesus (5:13). This confidence in eternity gave them confidence in the present to pray according to God's will and know that He heard them (5:14-15). This would then move them to hold one another accountable to walk in righteousness and away from sin.

Thank God for eternal life in Jesus. Thank God for listening to prayer. Pray for a life of love and obedience and a church family that longs for and celebrates the same.

Sunday, December 22, 2019—1 John 1-2

The early church grew because ordinary people boldly proclaimed the transformative news of Jesus Christ. When the early church struggled, some of those closest to Jesus made the time to write letters of encouragement, instruction, rebuke, and correction. Paul, Peter, and James all knew Jesus in unique, powerful ways that colored their writing, but few knew Jesus like John, the beloved disciple. His unique perspective of love and obedience fueled his exhortation to struggling believers.

Sometimes the struggle for believers comes from outside pressure and persecution. Often, the challenge is within, as false teachers rise up among the flock and create doubt about what is true and righteous. John confronted this inner conflict to assure his readers their faith was genuine.

Jesus was precisely who He said He was. John and many others had seen Him and heard Him (1:3) and passed that on faithfully and correctly. They did not need to believe in anything or anyone else. There was not some special knowledge of revelation that would give them new insight. Jesus was enough to cleanse, revive, and unite them in fellowship.

Some wondered how they were to deal with sin. Was this allowable? Should sin be present at all? Could sin be a habit? John told them their love for Jesus would be evident in their obedience to His commands (2:3-5). Sin would happen because all remained weak in the flesh, but sin could not be a habit for one following obediently.

Pray for love for Jesus that empowers obedience and love for others that deepens your fellowship.

Saturday, December 21, 2019—2 Timothy 1-4

Paul had written many letters during his ministry. He had known Timothy for years, and they were likely closer to one another than any other relationship they enjoyed, so when Paul wrote a letter, there was really no need for introduction. Still, when Paul wrote, he used the common practice of greeting—describing himself as one sent to tell others about Jesus.

As his time on earth drew to a close, Paul saw this as his most important identity. He wanted Timothy to have that same conviction and to testify boldly about the Lord. He also wanted Timothy to fan into flame the gift God had given him to equip and strengthen the church, entrusting reliable men with the role as teachers and leaders (1:3-2:2).

Timothy was leading the church in Ephesus, so Paul encouraged him to lead the people away from the constant temptations in their culture into faithfulness to Jesus alone. As God shaped them, they would grow more patient and loving

and more committed to leading people into truth. Faithfulness to the Word was vital as the culture around them became increasingly ungodly. They would suffer for following Christ (3:12), but the unchanging nature of His Word and His Kingdom were sufficient to help them endure and flourish. To lead people to know Jesus and grow in Jesus would complete the ministry to which God had called Timothy (4:6b).

Pray for the daily reminder to do the work of an evangelist, and pray for strength to endure the struggles that come to the faithful.

Friday, December 20, 2019—Titus 1-3

Santa Claus arrives this time of year to bring a bag full of presents to good boys and girls. He knows his mission. Everyone else does as well.

Paul knew his mission. God had sent him to bring faith to those God had chosen and to teach them how to live godly lives (1:1-2). That purpose in life was a powerful motivation in daily life and a source of great peace in difficult days. Paul reminded Titus of his purpose—to help those in Crete be the churches God intended. Titus was to help raise up leaders for these churches, so Paul reminded Titus of the qualifications necessary to promote faith, sharpen disciples, and avoid false teaching (1:5-16).

Paul knew the power of a church of multiple age groups. The older men and older women could provide wisdom. The younger men and women would provide energy. Together, they could be an influence on society that would honor Jesus. Paul, therefore, gave instruction for these groups to assess themselves and invest in others (2:1-8). Titus had authority, so he could not let anyone ignore him or disregard his instruction (2:15).

Paul remembered the depths of spiritual death from which God had rescued him. This was not because of anything Paul had done or earned but because of the kindness, love, and mercy of God (3:4-6). What other choice should they all make but to live for His glory? He had called them to a life of significance (2:11-14, 3:8, 14).

Praise God for salvation and purpose. Live for His glory.

Thursday, December 19, 2019—1 Timothy 4-6

Paul's wrote to the Galatians early in his ministry about the dangers of false teachers who would come in to churches and begin putting rules and regulations on people that falsified the gospel. The good news is good news because it declares Jesus' victory over death and His fulfillment of all the regulations for holiness. Nothing else is necessary.

Paul wrote to Timothy late in his ministry once again dealing with false teachers who were requiring certain diets and behaviors in order to be pleasing and acceptable to God. Paul said this was not necessary (4:1-5). Though Timothy was young, he had the ability to set an example for the people and to teach the truth with boldness and effectiveness (4:6-13). Using his spiritual gift, he would be able to encourage others to do the same and build a healthy, Christ-honoring community (4:14-6:2).

Timothy had the charge from God to lead the church, so he needed to take seriously any threat to its unity and doctrinal integrity. Paul said those who wanted to quibble over minor details or who enjoyed stirring arguments in the church were corrupt and a great danger. They were only looking out for themselves (6:3-5). In contrast, those who were pursuing godliness and were content in their financial situation were the ones who had truly found success (6:6). After all, the love of money was the root of all kinds of evil (6:10). Being ready to share resources and bless others was the sign of God's presence and the path to true treasure.

Pray for a life of godliness, contentment, and sharing with others.

Wednesday, December 18, 2019—1 Timothy 1-3

Paul met Timothy on one of his missionary journeys, and he helped him learn how to walk with Jesus. Timothy had traveled with Paul and sat by his side as he wrote several of his letters to churches. Now, in the twilight of Paul's life, Paul was sitting in jail, and Timothy was pastoring a church. Their current situations were far different than their past.

Timothy was now the pastor at the church in Ephesus, a congregation where Paul spent more than two years of his ministry. As in many other places, false teachers had crept in. Others were causing unnecessary discussion,

speculation, and strife. Paul wanted Timothy to move the people out of their confusion and back toward their calling from Jesus. Paul had seen Jesus do a remarkable work in his own life and wanted the Ephesians to focus on sharing that truth with others (1:3-17)

As pastor, Timothy was to help the Ephesians worship corporately in a way that was honoring to the Lord and beneficial to them. They were to make prayer a priority and make choices that would allow their gatherings to focus on Christ and not distractions (2:1-14). In addition, their leaders—the elders and deacons—were to be men of great character and sacrificial service to the people (3:1-13). To lead the Body of Christ required their personal and public lives to resemble and honor Jesus.

Praise God for the opportunity to know Jesus and to share Him with others. Pray for a church that worships and shares faithfully.

Tuesday, December 17, 2019—2 Peter 1-3

Peter knew the grace of God like few others. He had denied Jesus three times, yet Jesus had restored Him. In faithfulness, Peter wrote to persecuted Christians. He reminded them that God had given them everything they needed for life and godliness (1:3-4). His grace was great.

This grace did not mean they were to be idle. Peter called them to work hard to demonstrate the grace of God at work in their lives. If they did not, they would be miserable (1:5-11). Persecution was bad. A Christian who doesn't feel saved, righteous, or useful is even worse.

Peter told them their confidence and strength would come from knowing Christ and trusting His word (1:12-21). They needed to know it and live by it because this would give them strength for the journey and help them root out the false teachers that would inevitably infiltrate their ranks (2:1). Satan has always tried to make the people of God doubt His word or find shortcuts to obedience. He will continue to do so. Those who know the Lord and saturate themselves in His word can identify falsehood.

God had always been faithful, and God had always worked on His own

timetable. He was not slow in keeping His promises to His people. He was giving people an opportunity to repent (3:9). His people could look forward to that day and live in holiness as they expected it (3:14). They were better off at peace with God and in conflict with the world than vice versa.

Thank God for His grace and His strength to endure. Be holy.