

4,16,26 1 Jn. 2:1-5, Knowing Christ as He is

(1 Jn. 2:1-2) My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

The goal, of course, is to avoid sin. But if we do sin, and then confess that sin to God (as we saw last week in 1 Jn. 1:9), it's extremely important to not let the enemy constantly remind us of something God has "cleansed";

(Heb 12:8) I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.

Satan tempts and maneuvers us into sinning, and then tries to lock us into permanent guilt over that sin. So, John reminds us that there is Someone advocating for us Who will use His own sacrifice which paid for our sins as the basis of His appeal for the justice of God to be excluded from any sin that a child of God has placed under the blood of Christ.

Justice has already been served, God will never hold a confessed sin against us, we should not let the enemy manipulate us into accepting a stronghold of guilt by holding onto what God has promised to "remember no more." We have the option of taking God's side on this and also "remembering it no more".

In Rev. 12 Satan is called "the accuser of the brethren", but once a sin is confessed, the only ground the enemy has for accusations against us is the ground we give him through unbelief in the efficacy of the Cross. Here's a good overview summary of this;

The "accuser of the brethren" is a biblical title for Satan (or the devil) found in Revelation 12:10, describing his role as the one who constantly accuses believers, highlighting their sins, flaws, and failures to induce guilt, and shame. He is portrayed as a liar and adversary who tries to break fellowship between God and His people. Believers overcome these accusations through the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and the advocacy of Jesus Christ.

So, what exactly is an Advocate or Advocacy; and why is it needed?

I'll start with Ironside;

In the original the word *paraclete* (translated "advocate" in 1 John 2:1) means "one who comes to your side to help." This same word is translated "Comforter" in John 14:16; John 14:26; John 15:26; John 16:7. In the Gospel Jesus spoke of the "Comforter" that the Father will send in His name. The Comforter-the Spirit of God-comes from the Father and is sent both by the Father and the Son. The Lord said in effect, "I am going away, but I will send the Paraclete-One who will come to your side to help in time of need."

On the other hand, in 1 John 2:1 we read that we have a Paraclete or "advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." In other words, God sent the Holy Spirit down to earth to dwell in me, to be my Advocate here on earth-to look after God's interests in me. Then He took the blessed Lord up to Heaven to be my Advocate with the Father-to look after my interests with the Father.

Why do I need an Advocate in Heaven? Because I have a great adversary. An advocate is someone who goes into court to represent you and to plead your case. You cannot defend yourself, but, when you go to your Advocate, he defends you and pleads your case against your adversary. Satan is called in Revelation 12:10, the "accuser of [the] brethren...which accused them before our God, day and night." When you sin, the devil appoints himself the prosecuting attorney in the high court of Heaven. The devil goes right into the presence of God and says, "Is this one of your Christians? Listen to what he is saying now; see what he is doing!" He is there to accuse, but the blessed Lord is there. He shows His wounds and spreads His hands, and says to the Father, "I took all that into account when I died on Calvary's tree."

As we know, salvation is never an issue for us, but John's letter isn't about salvation; it's about fellowship. Satan challenging our salvation to the Father is not John's point – Satan is trying to sabotage our *fellowship* with God. If he was successful, because, for example, we try to "make up for our wrong" by doing good works or

something, or if we go into a guilt mode which is a denial of full value of the blood of Christ, then we aren't "abiding in Christ"; our fellowship is broken. Not because of the sin itself, but because we won't believe that God has forgiven it and that He wants us to do the same.

We often find ourselves at a crossroads – will we believe that our confession, our transparency and honesty, is all God is looking for? If that's the stand we take, we can move on without guilt, grateful for the sacrifice of Christ, or we can believe the enemy's accusations that our sin has caused God to turn away from us. Satan's goal is always the same – put distance between us and the Lord, and as with Eve, put a question mark about God's goodness in our brain.

Our response becomes one of a million responses throughout our lives to something that has come to us and has forced us into a position in which we either believe or disbelieve God's provision. Faith or unbelief is always the bottom line when it comes to fellowship with God, but also to practically everything that we come up against in this spiritual race we're running.

We spent a lot of time talking about the importance of faith when we studied Heb. 11, and we all know instinctively that this is where the battle for our minds is fought. So, what I thought I'd do this time is just give you a variety of comments on the value and necessity of faith in our walk with the Lord from a variety of authors. Some of the one's I liked were "anonymous", so when I know the author, I'll mention him or her; if I don't know, just go for the content.

Faith is to believe that what God has said is true; that what we can't see is real; and its reward is to see and enjoy what we have believed.

Peter Boechler wrote this to John Wesley; Live by faith until you have faith.

J.W. Buchsel wrote; Truth can be learned from others, but living faith must be a matter of personal decision and experience.

Frank A. Clark; Faith on a full stomach may simply be contentment, but if you have it when you're hungry, it's genuine.

John Dewey; To me, faith means no worrying.

Arthur Evans, Faith is not a sense, nor sight, or reason, faith is simply taking God at His Word.

Fear knocked at the door. Faith answered. No one was there.

Last one: Helen Keller. A simple, childlike faith in a Divine Friend solves all the problems that come to us.

It's like we saw in Hudson Taylor. The way he conquered his faithlessness wasn't by trying to get more faith, but by resting in the one Person he knew He could trust.

So, why did I spend so much time checking out how men and women in the past have seen faith? Partly because we all have so much in common – same fears, some struggles, same excuses, etc. But mostly because faith is that which pleases God the most (Heb. 11:5) and in our context in 1 Jn. 2, it won't be *knowing* the truths we discover that bring us into their experience, it will be *believing* them.

For example, knowing that we have an Advocate with the Father is not what calms our soul when we are under the accusatory attacks of the enemy; it's *believing* that we have an Advocate that gives us the anchor we need to carry us through.

Now, I won't need to spend a great deal of time on vs. 2, I just want to mention that this is one of those verses in the Bible that destroys the foundational truths wrapped up in what's called "Calvinism" (or "Reformed Theology"). Here's what an orthodox Calvinist believes regarding the forgiveness of sins. I'll give you a brief sketch of the five doctrinal pillars of Calvinism so you can see why 1 Jn. 2:2 is so important. The acronym used to list the pillars is "TULIP".

Also, I should mention that Calvin himself didn't come up with this acronym and he may not have believed every part of it. This was developed over time by his followers and even today there are Calvinists who would probably call this "hyper-Calvinism". So, I'm just using it as an illustration to show what some theologians have done with the scriptures which totally distorts their meaning. This reflects the doctrines of many of the contemporary Calvinists, but not all.

T stands for Total Depravity. The lost are incapable of choosing to follow God, to be saved, unless God gives them the ability of saving faith (which He only does to those He's chosen to be saved.)

U is Unconditional Election. Before the foundation of the world, God chose (elected) certain individuals for salvation based solely on His own sovereign will and pleasure, not based on any foreseen merit, faith, or good works in them.

L is for Limited Atonement. Christ's death on the cross was intended to pay the penalty *only* for the sins of the elect (those chosen by God), rather than making salvation possible for everyone.

I is for Irresistible Grace. When God calls the elect to salvation, they cannot resist it; the Holy Spirit regenerates the sinner's heart, gifting them with saving faith, enabling them to repent and believe.

P is for Perseverance of the Saints. Those whom God has elected and drawn to Himself will be kept by His power to the end; they cannot ultimately fall away.

As I mentioned earlier, there are a massive number of books written in support of, and against this form of Calvinism. To say that I am in the "against" crowd would be an understatement. Without going into it now, I believe that the doctrine of Calvinism is one example of what Paul warned the Galatians about in Gal. 1:6-9;

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another (in Name); but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

Can you guess which one of the five statements in TULIP is contradicted by our passage in 1 John 2:2?

It's the "L" in TULIP:

Limited Atonement: Christ's death on the cross was intended to pay the penalty *only* for the sins of the elect (those chosen by God), ensuring their salvation, rather than making salvation possible for everyone.

I personally see a significant difference between "Christ's death on the cross was intended to pay the penalty *only* for the sins of the elect", and 1 Jn. 2:2; "He is the propitiation for our sins, and *not for ours only but also for the whole world.*"

But like I said, that's just one example. If you do a deep dive into Calvinism, you'll see that every one of those five points cancels countless passages that acknowledge the free choice of Man. Besides whatever technical errors can be discovered in Calvinism, the most dangerous deviation from the gospel of grace that surfaces in the current forms of Calvinism (or "Reformed Theology") as represented by men like John McArthur, John Piper, Matt Chandler, Tim Keller and others, is the fact that, in one way or another, works are attached to the salvation formula. Works are either needed to secure our salvation, or what is more common, works are needed to confirm the existence of our salvation.

Whether frontloaded through concepts like faith plus baptism or faith plus repentance or faith plus confession, (the key phrase being "faith *plus*"), or works are backloaded through the teaching that our works, our lifestyle, as professing Christians determines whether our profession is genuine or not.

After spending as much time as we have learning about the Corinthian Christians, I would think that by now all of us are very aware that a person living a horrible lifestyle does not automatically classify them as never having been saved.

But to stay in our context, I'm going to move on in 1 Jn. 2.

Before we break down the next few verses in 1 Jn. 2, please keep in mind the introduction I gave when we started this letter showing that John's phrasing is designed to expose the hypocrisy of Christians who are claiming to live the true Christian life, but have instead moved into Antinomianism or Gnosticism to some degree. John is not laying out a listing of tests we can use to determine who is and who is not saved; he's not addressing the issue of wheat and tares; he's challenging

the soundness of certain Christian's claim to genuine spiritual life – to fellowship with God.

He's doing the same thing James did in his letter when he challenged the health of the faith of Christians who's lack of backing up their claim of faith with works demonstrated that, although they were saved, there was nothing happening in their lives that provided evidence that they were anything but carnal, flesh-controlled children of God in need of correction and repentance.

Here's how I described this in our intro to 1<sup>st</sup> Jn.;

. . . Each of the letters in Revelation, and in the other writings of the apostles were written to Christians to admonish, to encourage or to instruct. When we see contrasts in the New Testament epistles, those contrasts are distinguishing between spiritual and carnal, faithful and unfaithful believers- not between Christians and non-Christians.

Knowing all of this is going to be extremely important with John's letters because there are many verses that have been interpreted through the grid of believer/non-believer which completely misses both the point of the verses as well as creating a false sense of security for believers who are led to believe that the warnings can't apply to them.

Now 1 Jn. 2:3-6;

By this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

John intros this part of his instruction with the issue of "knowing God" – who does and who doesn't?

If I was a Calvinist, I'd probably go to Matt. 7:22-23 to show that whenever Jesus talks about "knowing God" (or not knowing Him), He's contrasting true Christians

with false Christians; which, in the Matthew passage, is *exactly* what's the Lord is doing'

Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and, in your name, perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me...

Pretty clear. Not everyone who claims to belong to Christ actually *does* belong to Christ, and according to the wording in this passage, it's a majority. The word "many" in the original ("polys", pronounced, "pol-oos") does not refer to a minority or a remnant, but to the majority within whatever people group is being discussed.

The first two questions we always have to ask when we are interpreting something is "Who's the audience?" and "What's the context?"

In Matt. the audience is "the multitudes" (Matt. 7 is part of the sermon on the mount). The context is instruction on what the Lord calls, "The narrow gate" that leads to life vs. "the wide gate that leads to destruction". In vs. 14, Jesus adds, ". . . small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." Again, 'majority' vs. 'minority'. And in that context of addressing a multitude of people, some who are saved and some who are not, with the issue of "life" or "destruction", it's easy to see the importance of what "knowing" or "not knowing" is meant to represent.

None of that is the apostle John's audience or context in 1 Jn. 2. He's addressing fellow believers, not a random multitude, and the context is fellowship and abiding, not lost or saved.

I'm taking so much time on a mini-hermeneutical instruction because without using these guiding principles of interpretation, we could easily miss the message John is trying to bring to us. It might be easier to just run with the popular approach, but as we saw in Hebrews, as a teacher, I'm going to be held accountable for what I teach; so, it's actually to both of our advantage if I take whatever time is needed to be honest with the passage we're studying.

Ok, so there is a "knowing" God that is related to salvation, and there is a "knowing" that relates to growing spiritually and to fellowship.

I remember as a new Christian in the 70's that I read a book called "Knowing God" by J.I. Packer. I don't remember a lot of it now, that was awhile ago, but I do remember the main theme that ran throughout that book – and he did everything he could to make sure that our highest desire as God's children should be, must be, knowing our God. He didn't mean it in the sense of figuring Him out or even expecting to fully do that. God is both infinite and incomprehensible.

But we can grow in our relationship with Him in two primary ways. One is obviously to study the Bible because the scriptures show us the thoughts, the thinking, of the God Who is now our Father. And the other way is *experientially* learning His ways - which is consistently brought up, especially in the Old Testament because of its emphasis on history. The scriptures plus life experience, if we pay attention to both, can give us a never-ending increase in our knowledge of God.

Here's a unique take on this that I thought I'd share – if for no other reason than to show that there is a myriad of ways the Bible describes this relationship as well as a myriad of ways we experience Him.

It is true, of course, that a saved person can be said to know God or Christ. In John 17:3 we are told: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." So, salvation brings with it the knowledge of God.

But eternal life in the Bible is not just a static entity. It is not merely a measurable essence whose parameters can be precisely defined. Instead, eternal life is the very life of an infinite God. It follows, then, that eternal life can be possessed in varying measures and degrees. This becomes clear to us from our Lord's words in John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

But if eternal life is knowing God, then having that Life "more abundantly" must mean knowing Him better. Or perhaps we should say that it means knowing Him in a larger number of ways; i.e., knowing Him at various levels of experience or in various facets of His character and nature. Thus, the New

Testament concept of eternal life is fluid enough to allow for various conceptions of what it means to know God.

We should also point out here that in most languages the idea of “knowing” someone tends to be multi-faceted. Thus, I once heard a husband addressing other husbands and saying, “Men, get to know your wife.” No one misunderstood him. Of course, all the married men in his audience already knew their wives. Presumably none of them had married a stranger. But obviously, this husband’s exhortation really meant: “Get to know your wife in depth.”

Since John’s emphasis is on fellowship with God, every time John warns us about something in his epistle, what he’s really doing is showing how to avoid sabotaging the kind of fellowship that can allow us to know God as He really is.

Different theologies, different hermeneutics, different denominational grids (let alone personal pride, immorality, or agendas) can all distort our view of God. I’m sure you can see why this is such a problem and has *been* a problem since the time John wrote his letters.

Knowing the Lord as He really is, is our only hope of experiencing the abundant life He’s offered and it’s the only way we can be inwardly free – free from fear, from anxiety, from condemnation, from a multitude of neuroses that result from untruth about God.

There’s a very solid reason the apostles were so consistently warning us about false teaching. Whether it’s obvious like Mormonism, Antinomianism, Catholicism or New Age Gnosticism – or more subtle like Calvinism, Charismania, Christian Nationalism or Seeker-Sensitive Christianity, no matter what it is, a little leaven can so leaven the whole lump that we end up seeing a God Who is a misrepresentation of Who God is; or our view of Him is so skewed and distorted that we are miserable and hyper-skeptical when it comes to knowing whether He can be trusted. Either way, the kind of fellowship and growth in knowing God that can lead to stability, gratitude and genuine love for Him *only* happens if, as John will tell us in John 3, we

are “walking in the truth”. We have to see Jesus as He really is. And the more of the true Christ we see, the greater will be the fellowship in Him we experience.

(Eph. 4:17-21) You should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus. . .

This is what the enemy is really all about when it comes to what’s called “spiritual warfare”. He never stops his attempts at painting a slightly off-center picture of Christ to us. Just enough to keep *us* off-center in our relationship with the Lord; to keep us questioning, worrying, wondering if we will ever really see Christ as He is.

We know that the people we read about in the Bible suffered; we know they were sometimes confused and scared, we know they doubted Him from time to time. Jeremiah even accused God of “deceiving” him. But in spite of all that, there was a deep assurance of the integrity, wisdom and absolute trustworthiness of God that sustained them in the worst experiences imaginable.

We stub our toe and wonder if God hates us. I’m sure all of us could make a list a mile long about (quote) “issues” we have with God. Issues that wouldn’t be there, if as Paul said, “...we had spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ”.

But we are young in many ways; we have a lot to learn and a lot to unlearn; we have an extended history of being lied to and of Christ being misrepresented to us by people we admired and assumed were giants in the Christian faith. God is aware of all this and is not holding any of it against us, but He also knows that we won’t find “rest” until we “learn of Christ” and see Him as He really is. Listen to this very familiar passage in Matthew as if you’re hearing it for the first time – at least as if you’re hearing it in the context of 1 Jn. 2;

(Matt. 11:27-29) No one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him . . . learn of Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Only the truth sets free – only the truth brings rest. If freedom and rest are illusive to us; then it's possible that our knowledge of Christ is either limited (which, to some extent, is a given for all of us), or it's a view that is unworthy of the Person we are now in union with. Either way, the goal is not self-condemnation or piling on more anxiety to ourselves; the goal is praying that the "revelation of the knowledge of Christ" Paul spoke of will increasingly become the result of our very intentional study of the scriptures – of the one place in all the universe where we can come face-to-face with God's thoughts. The written word, under the ministry of the indwelling Spirit, reveals the Living Word to us. We need to see Christ as He is and if we do, *when* we do, even if the process is painfully slow and often fleeting, freedom and rest will become the fruit of our fellowship with the Father and with His Son.

This is why I believe knowing sound doctrine is much more important than it appears many seem to believe, and why I'm so insistent that we never give up on pursuing the Truth as it is in Christ.

(1 Jn. 2:3) By this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him.

How does "keep his commandments" come into play? Obedience might indicate faithfulness and commitment, but the context is knowing God.

Those who know God never wonder what they can get away with and still be safe; *because* they know God, they see His commandments as treasures showing the way of life, without which we'd all be stumbling around in the dark throughout our whole lives. Those who know God don't just "endure" and "try hard" to obey Him; they *run* to God's commandments as being life or death advice from an all-knowing

God Who is providing this guidance purely out of love for His children. They see God's word as a treasure chest filled with light and life. Proverbs makes that crystal clear. That's why Jesus said "My yoke is easy and My burden is light".

Neither "easy" or "light" is true for the legalist who see's God as the great Judge in the sky Who is recording our every disobedience anticipating that day when He'll be able to hold us accountable in order to punish us. Instead, our obedience not only protects us in time, but also offers the opportunity to receive rewards, honor and praise at the Lord's appearing.

(1 Pet. 1:6-8) In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.

Those who know their God believe Him and trust Him, and they understand what Peter is saying so, like him, they see their trials as opportunities to be recorded in the history of our lives as moments when our faith in Him found expression and can reap "joy inexpressible and full of glory" in eternity.

I will close tonight with some comments on the final verse in that section of 1 Jn. 2, vs. 5; ". . . whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him."

We've seen the true motive behind "keeps His word". Genuine obedience is not driven by the desire to be accepted by God or to ensure our salvation. We are already fully accepted in Christ and our salvation can't be lost. Our motive for obedience is meant to be based on the desire to please our Lord and to involve us in the divinely orchestrated activities that take us deeper into the experience of true life as opposed to activities that entrap us in the ways of the world or of dead religion (sometimes called "dead works", like in Heb. 6:1).

I'm going to read an explanation of the difference between "dead works" and "living works" that might help us better understand what John is exhorting us about, as related to each of us have God's love developed *in* us as we mature in our

growth in Christ. The word “perfected” means “brought to maturity”, and in this case, it’s having the love of God brought to maturity in our character and actions.

The goal of this is twofold – first, it’s to continue the process of Christ being formed *in us*, and second, it’s to make it possible for Christ’s love, Christ’s life, to be expressed *through* us to others. It’s just another way of talking about becoming “Vessels fit for the Master’s use”. Ok, here’s the article I found;

True service to others is the expression of Life, and not the taking on of a title like “pastor” or “minister”. I once thought that to be in the ministry, to serve the Lord and His people, was to go into a certain kind of work, to come out of the business world, and, well, be a minister. Many are laboring and toiling in it, breaking their hearts, afraid to leave that so-called “professional” order of things, lest they should be violating what they conceived to be a Divine call. Many others cannot get out of it because it is their means of livelihood, and they too are breaking their hearts. It is all false. Ministry is not a system like that. Ministry is the expression of Life, and that is but saying in other words that it is the outworking of the indwelling Christ. Disaster lies before the man or woman who ministers on any other ground than that. When the Lord gets a chance in us, and we really trust Him, and we take our position there by faith, He will show us that there is ministry enough for us; we shall not have to go around looking for it. The real labor so often is to deliver us from this present evil age even in its conception of the ministry, of service to others. The Lord Jesus is our pattern. You see the spontaneous ministry, the restful ministry of that Man. It does not mean that we shall become careless, but it does deliver us from so much unnecessary strain. That is how it should be. May the Lord bring us to it; Christ as our Life and our Resource.

The main thing I wanted to communicate in that was the idea of “spontaneity”. Throughout John’s letter, he will be advocating for “abiding” and “fellowship” because he knows that if we remain in those, we will be looking for, and becoming aware of, opportunities to give to others what God gives to us. It won’t be “professional” or based on some kind of official title like “Executive Pastor” or

“Administrator of Missions”, etc.; it will simply be us being who God is making us in the moment-by-moment walk of our Christian lives abiding restfully in the Lord.

Finally, as to the “how” of this, consider spending some time developing the mindset Watchman Nee recommends in this quote;

Our eyes must “look unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith.” According to the original, it may be translated as “looking *away* unto Jesus”—meaning that we are to look *away* from all the other things around us, including ourselves, and look only to Jesus. We do not look at anything but Jesus only. By looking to Him we may run the straight path. There are many things around us and within us which may easily affect our attention and divert us from our goal. Only by *looking away* to Jesus will we be kept running in God’s course.