

Warm Hearted Advice

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Date: 25 September 2022

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[0 : 00] Okay, we're going to return to the passage that we read together from 1 John chapter 2, from verse 12 to verse 17.

And we've seen in the last few weeks that this is a letter that was written probably to churches in Ephesus or around that area. And as with many of the New Testament letters, they're written in the context of problems arising from false teaching, from people coming in and moving away from the gospel message that was brought by the apostles, that was inspired by the nature, the character and the work, death and resurrection of Jesus.

And Cori last week was looking at that section beforehand from chapter, from verse 3 of chapter 2, which where John was giving indicators to this Christian people, giving indicators to them to assure them, to examination, to look at things in their own lives, to assure them that they were following Jesus and that they were reflecting what it meant to follow Jesus.

They weren't tests to say, if you pass these tests, then you're a Christian, and we stress that, but rather they were indicators that you'd already, that the church here that he was writing to had already become Christians and were following Jesus and not to give in to the false teaching and the lives of those false teachers that didn't reflect the character and love and grace of Jesus.

And so what we find here, and right throughout the epistle, that John is speaking to the heart, he's speaking into the hearts of believers.

[1 : 49] And that is a really important thing for us to remember when we come every time to Scripture, every time to preaching, every time to worship, to work, that what is God saying into my heart?

What are my, what are the circumstances of my life doing? What is God teaching me through that? What is He teaching me through His Word? What is He wanting to transform and change from His truth in my heart?

And we recognize that God uses His Word to protect us, to show us His grace, to help us overcome in different and difficult circumstances.

And that's true today, as just as much as it was in John's time. And he was saying to them, look, there's false teachers coming here trying to bring you away from Jesus. It may sound great, it may sound flash, it may sound easy, but they're moving away from the gospel.

So look at your own heart, and look at what they're saying, and look at what they're saying brings you closer to Jesus and is in line with the apostolic message or is not.

[2 : 55] So we're looking at that today as well. And if you're not a Christian here today, if you've come into church and you're not a Christian, brilliant, fantastic to see you, and we're glad you're here. You might have seemed a little bit weird to you up till now.

You might seem even weirder with me preaching. But if you're not a Christian, I would really encourage you. We're going to look at two key truths from this section. And I hope that these truths will also help you to maybe understand a bit more about the Christian faith, maybe attractive or challenging, at least for you to consider Jesus and his claims as the one who we know has transformed our lives and the truth of Him is in His Word.

So there's two things that I want to speak about from this passage today. The first is, as Christians, we all need to be aware of being family.

We need to be aware that we are a family and that we belong to His family and that we're a family. That's the first section, 12 to 14. And then we're going to look at the second question, which is taking away the gap, be aware of the world.

So be aware of belonging to God's family and be aware of the world, which is 15 to 17. So John here is wanting to...

[4 : 11] He's kind of given them quite a hard time in the first section of John, the first chapter on the tenets. He realizes it's a difficult situation. There's tensions in the church. There's false teaching. There's guys coming in and they're rubbishing the message of the gospel.

And he realizes that's brought difficulty. So he's been quite strong in what he's said thus far. But now he comes... this section, verses 12 to 14, if you've got your Bibles, you'll see it's kind of...

It's written like a poem. Like a poem. It's more poetic in form. And he's... This section is kind of taking a break from what he's saying.

I think he knows the potential fragility and the lack of confidence within the people. And so he's almost taking a break from what he's teaching. And he's...

He's a really wise teacher. And what's he saying? He's saying, stay with me. Look, stay with me here. Remember who you are. And just stick with me as you listen to... or as you read what I'm saying.

[5 : 09] And he gives us this lovely section where he speaks to the church that he's writing to as a family. Little... See, that's a tone of it. He's not coming...

He's not coming heavy-handed. He's not coming as a distant leader ramming truth down the front. He says, little... I write to you, little children.

And again, at the end of that, I write to you, children. And you know, he's reminding them that we're family. We're a family together. It's really Christ-like, sensitive leadership.

He knows that he needs to give them loving, protective, sensitive teaching and words because it's a challenge and it's a battle to live the Christian life.

And that's a great emphasis that he's bringing here. And it's one that we always need to remember and think about as a church, that we think of St. Columba's in church in terms of family and in terms of a family together.

[6 : 09] And you know, that's quite hard for us as a city centre church because, you know, people are coming and going all the time. We're a transient congregation. We work hard at community, but it's difficult, you know, because we change so much.

And today at the end of service, we'll be saying farewell to some more people. And that's hard and hurtful. Not hurtful, it's hard and painful for us to say farewell.

And of course, we welcome lots of people as well. But this emphasis is so significant that we see one another in terms of being brothers and sisters in Christ. And as John saw this people, and it will always temper how we respond to one another.

And we think about ourselves as family. And when we consider how we're called to love one another and share with one another and give to and with one another. So he speaks to them as little children.

And he's bringing a message to them, isn't he, in this poetic section from 12 to 14. He says, and he says three times, he says, I write to you, I write to you, I write to you.

[7 : 16] And three times he says, I am writing to you, I am writing to you, I am writing to you. And if you've been here before, looking at this study, you'll remember we've said that John often writes in threes.

There's lots of threes in this little letter. And this is a double three. This is actually a six. So he's writing three times he says, I write to you, and three times he says, I have written to you.

And he's just, it's really just, he's just wanting to repeat what he's saying. In other words, it's important. It's trinity, there's trilogy, there's triad of thoughts that he has.

He wants to repeat them for emphasis. And it is repetitive, this little section. And maybe he's saying to them, I'm writing to you, and look, I've just written to you just now, or he might be saying, I'm writing to you.

And I've also written to you in the gospel, the gospel of John, because it's the same writer and there's the same themes that go through the gospel of John and this little letter as well. So he's maybe pointing them back to that as well.

[8 : 18] But either way, he's reminding them that having looked at the evidence or the indicators for them to look at in their own hearts to see whether they are following Jesus, he now assures them that they are exactly the kind of people that are following Jesus.

He wants to assure them that the evidence he spoke about, which he asked them to look at in their own hearts, was maybe a subjective challenge to them, to be self-reflective, to look into their own Christian lives.

Now he's saying something objective, he's now saying, I know that you're Christians, I can see it, and I know that you're following Jesus and the gospel. So don't listen to the false teachers and don't walk down that road because you're going to walk away from what you clearly are revealing.

And he wants them to be assured. So he speaks, when he says little children, I think he's... And we see that throughout this little children, fathers, young men or youth, I think they're just representative titles that he's giving up.

I'll speak a little bit more about the other ones. But when he says little children, I think he's speaking to the whole congregation, and he's saying to them, I'm writing to you because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

[9 : 40] You know that, that is your experience. He says that and reminds them of that fundamental truth that all of them, they come together as children because their sins have been forgiven in Jesus' name.

And that when it talks about in the name of Jesus, just speaking about all that Jesus represents, what He came to do, how He died in the cross, He rose from the dead, and they put their trust in this amazing King of Kings.

And you know, that's the biggest... He knows that, doesn't it? He knows that's the biggest statement that any believer can have declared over them. It's the biggest thing you will ever understand in your life as a Christian, or as a person, is that as a Christian, we can know that our sins are forgiven because what Jesus has done and because we put our faith in Jesus Christ.

It's just the biggest shadow over every single life is that however it reveals itself, we're a people who are estranged from God.

And there's a sense that we know Him, but we're estranged from Him because of sin in our hearts and lives. And to have Jesus declare your sins are forgiven is the biggest thing, the biggest declaration, the biggest call that will ever be made in your life.

[11 : 00] Whoever else happens in your life, whether it be long or short, however famous or infamous or ordinary or special or life's the biggest declaration that will ever be heard over you, is that your sins are forgiven because you put your trust in Jesus.

It's the greatest thing ever. And He then goes on to speak about some of the other characteristics that He recognizes and sees in this Christian community and is in all believers.

He speaks to the mature, that is, He titles them fathers, the mature in the faith, and He speaks to the young men, which I think represented just, it could be translated youth to the young people in the church and really covering everything within the church.

And He says to the fathers, He says to them twice, He says, I write to you fathers, verse 13, because you know Him who is from the beginning. Verse 14, I write to you fathers, repeating it completely the same, because you know Him who is from the beginning.

So this crucial focus, this crucial reality of growing Christians, of mature Christians, is that they have a real focus on fellowship, on knowing God, that knowing God is critical for them, knowing the Father, knowing Christ, the One who is from the beginning, Christ, the Redeemer.

[12 : 23] It's almost clumsy, it's so repetitive, but James is wanting them to say, you know, you've got it. I see it in you. I see that you do know God, that it's made a difference in your life.

It's what distinguishes you from unbelievers and from the false teachers. And it's significant because as He said earlier on, this fellowship with the Father which He wants to share will mean that we walk in the light.

And so He's seeing that there are people that are walking in the light because they know the Father and it's changed their lives. And what He's saying to them is, look, don't risk that. I'm convinced that you're following Jesus and that you know the Father.

Don't risk it by listening to teaching that takes you away from that. Don't risk it by drifting from Jesus Christ into a false teaching, into doubt and sin and conflict.

I can see that you follow the main thing. And I can see that here, I can see that here with mature believers. The mature believers are people who know that fellowship with God, relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ, fellowship with Him is the main thing.

[13 : 34] They're not scrabbling about with legalism and pettiness and other things that I see it here, Christians living in that way following and knowing and fellowshiping with God is the main thing.

And then He speaks to the young people, the youth, and He says to them something very important as well. He says, you might be young in the faith and you might be thinking you're struggling because you're young in the faith, but He says, I can see that you've overcome the evil one.

I can see that you are strong and the Word of God abides in you. You've overcome the evil one. And what He's saying to young, those who are young in the faith, He's saying, you may feel vulnerable and weak, but actually I can see that God's strength is already in you because you believe because you believe.

And that is only God that can give us that belief. You've overcome the deceit and the darkness of Satan who wants to keep us away from Jesus.

And you therefore are strong, even though you may not feel that in your life. And so the encouragement is for all of the church both to focus on the fellowship with God and to remind ourselves that the strength we have as Christians isn't our own, doesn't come from being mature in the faith and doesn't come from our head knowledge.

[15 : 02] It comes from God Himself, His strength because He has overcome the evil one He's enabled us to also do so. And we are to remain focused in His Word and in Christ who is the representation of the Word Himself.

So that's the encouragement He gives to this church. He says, look, I can see that in you. I can see that you, the fact that you believe at all is testimony that you're relying on a strength that's not your own.

It's testimony to the fact that you recognize that what Christ has done on the cross is empowered and enabled you to believe. And you've come to Him for salvation and you see that fellowship with Him is central.

And that really doesn't change. And that's the encouragement for us whether you're young or old in the faith. And I think really John here is speaking to everyone. He's just highlighting characteristics.

And these are Christ-breathed characteristics. There's this vital commonality between all of us as believers that our strength, our ability to overcome comes from Jesus, from trusting in Him.

[16:17] And fellowship with the Father is our goal, is our aim as Christians. And may we be like John who takes time to encourage the church and to speak gently to them and say, look, I can see this in you.

And may it be that we do that as well for one another that we encourage with, I can see that you're following Jesus. I can see that you understand and know the gospel and that you're living and walking in the light and that you want fellowship with the Father.

Encourage one another in these important truths. Easy to knock each other down. Let's build each other up in the knowledge of truth and speak into one another's lives and have that pastoral focus and sense of priority.

I was asking to do a question time with the students in ETS in Archeological Seminary across the road. And one of the questions was about pastoral care and how do you do pastoral care kind of thing in a bigger congregation.

And the answer to that for me is very significant, is that we each learn to pastor one another. Is that we have that pastoral heart and care and support of one another.

[17:24] And we speak spiritually and encouragingly when it's needed into our own, into each other's lives because it's impossible for one person or even a group of leaders to pastor if there's not this great loving concern for one another that is shared by the words John is saying here.

So we remember that we are a family together in Christ and we keep that emphasis and we work at it and I know it's hard sometimes and I know it's challenging.

But we look to share these characteristics and encourage one another. But the second point and with this we come to a conclusion is that short two verses 15 to 17, we need not to, not only to be aware that we are family in Christ but also we need to be aware of the world.

Do not, he says love the world, the things of the world, anything, love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. And again it's really interesting for us that the focus of John's message here to the people is our hearts, is your heart and his mind.

He recognizes when it comes to the Christian faith and the Christian walk that our heart is key and is critical where our motivation lies, where our desires lie.

[18:53] What we are in our very being. And he says, and he's really coming to us with two kingdoms here, he's saying we either love the world or we love the Father. And that's the great difference between the believer and the unbeliever and it's one we battle with as believers ourselves in our own hearts.

It's about the focus when John here speaks about the world, he's not speaking about the cosmos, he's not speaking about the material world as such because we all live in the world, the world was created by him.

He's not speaking about the cosmos and he's not just speaking about life in general. And he's particularly not speaking about the world as a set of taboos.

The cultural taboos are the legalistic rights and wrongs that we sometimes talk about. But rather when he speaks here about the world, he's speaking about a disposition, an outlook that governs your life, governs your heart, governs your choices.

And when he's speaking about the world, he's speaking about, or being worldly, he's speaking about having an attitude or a disposition where God is not involved, he's not part of it, where God's rejected or ignored or manipulated or at best peripheral.

[20 : 14] And he warns about having that worldly attitude in our hearts. Don't look outside, don't point the finger at others. He's asking us to look into our own hearts and into what motivates our life and what's at the core of our life.

Each of us need to do that. And he gives us, in describing what the world is, he gives us another descriptive trio. He gives us another three, doesn't he? He says, for all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes and the pride of life.

These are the things that he says separate us from the living God. And in other words, he's saying the desires of the flesh, that is, our cravings, our appetites, our longings that come from within but that are self-centered, that don't take God into the equation at all, our sinful desires, in other words, that focus on me, me, and me, and me.

So it's about me. So the desires of the flesh, what comes from within us. But then he also talks about the desires of the eyes. In other words, living such a way where we're coveting what other people have.

We're not content even with what we've got but we're kind of lusting after what we see. They're both linked, I guess, at that level. Our inner desires are triggered by what we see and what we want and what we must have what is significant.

[21 : 43] And the third thing that he speaks about in describing the world is the pride of life. In other words, that sense of contentment with who we are in ourselves without any need for God, boasting about the gifts that we have, boasting about our wealth or our life under the sun and living simply as if we don't need God.

There's no need for God in my life. It's all about my choices, even my morality, maybe, and my perspective. And what God is wanting through John is he inspired him to remind them and us as the reality of two kingdoms and the reality of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world.

And it's the fundamental difference that has always been there, that there's the world without God and the world with God, and Satan has always tempted us to live without God.

That's what he's done right from the beginning. And in fact, there's a lot of similarities between this threefold desires of the flesh, desires of the eyes and the pride of life. And Satan's temptations, first at Eve in the garden, you want this, this is good for food.

I really love it, the appetite. And it was pleasing to an eye, he coveted it. And there was a prideful usurping of God command. If I get this, I'll be like God. I'll be as good, I'll be equal with God.

[23 : 14] But again, we see that fundamental temptation to Jesus in the wilderness, we're setting time to Jesus. And he says, look, turn this bread into stone, you must be starving Jesus.

Turn into stone, turn into stone and the bread, eat it, fulfill your appetite, you can do your God. Well, he showed him the kingdoms of the world, and he said, you can have all this as well.

He showed him it all. You can covet this, Jesus, I can give you. You don't, and almost challenging him to the glory of being the king of all these nations without the cross.

He said, you don't need to go that way, just bow down quickly to me. And you don't need to go God's way, go your own way. And you see that the same core temptations that are used right throughout Scripture that we're tempted by as well to question God, to question His love, to question that He cares for my desires and that He'll not give me good things.

And I'm better going my own way. I'm better just ignoring. That's really the fundamental worldly attitude that we battle with, that I battle with in my heart, that actually I know better than God.

[24 : 41] And I'll be happy my way rather than God's way. That remains for a Christian of 40 odd years.

That means a great temptation for me, always, because that's the tactic, that's the battle that we find ourselves in. So the question for us always is we live our Christian lives through Scripture and through truth is, and you must ask today, is that what steals your heart?

What is it that steals your heart? In what or in whom are we in love with? What's our passion? What have we devoted our lives to?

Because that's kind of a big question, isn't it? This world, this physical world that we live in, and it's a great world, you know.

And your life can be perfectly good from a kind of human point of view, loving and moral in many different ways at a human level, but it can be empty of God.

[25 : 54] And God says that's then worldliness. And the battle we face is that Satan will make that really attractive and make that... And he will use Scripture as he did with Jesus to try and defend it, to try and justify it, or twisting Scripture anyway.

And... But the reality is that we were made for God, made to be in relationship with Him, made to find our appetites fulfilled in Him, and our pleasures made content in Him because we were created for Him.

And if He has no place in our hearts, maybe He has a place in your mantelpiece. But if He has no place in your heart, then you're governed by a worldly attitude that denies Him His entry and His rightful place as our Lord and as our King and our King of Kings.

So we have this battle of love, don't we, in our hearts? What do we... Who do we love and what do we love? And that exposes what John is saying here to the people who said, remember that fellowship with the Father is everything.

It is life. It's life eternal. Keep hold of that. Don't listen to false teaching which moves away from that because it has nothing ultimately to offer.

[27 : 19] And so I conclude with the question, why does it matter? Why does all this matter? Why does this gathering together matter? Why is it significant? Well, because verse 17 makes clear as God reveals the truth, and the world...

Because the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does that will have God abides forever. So it matters because where our heart is, or a heart where God is not King is terminal.

So there will be a death of everything that we take, that people take from God as their own, including life, including their gifts, their talents, their careers, their relationships, and the beauty of the desires that motivate them.

There will be an end to that. These desires will end and will never be experienced. At the end, God will take them from us in His holy judgment if we have left Him out.

But the heart, He says, rescued by God will never die. Whoever does the will of God lives forever. And that simply means that we've come to Him for salvation. Just hold on to that perspective to know, as He said, forgiveness, fellowship with the Father, strength as we rely on Him in His Word will enable us to live the beautiful life, even in all the battles and struggles and difficulties and worldliness we wrestle with in our own hearts.

[28 : 57] And for us, then, death becomes a pathway. As we heard a lot of times over this last week, a pathway to eternal life, the deepest of all our longings, all our desires, all our heartfelt longings are found in Him and will be satisfied ultimately in relationship with Him in glory where the good times will never end.

There will be no tears, no partings, no shadows. That's His gift of love. That is the gospel. That's why John was so committed to destroying the false teaching that was moving away from that truth, because ultimately we believe there is a truth and truth is revealed.

Don't walk away. Don't give in. Don't reject. Be encouraged. Keep going and encourage one another. Let's pray. Father God, help us to think about and know and understand the message of the gospel.

It's challenging for us. It's exciting. It's a battle we know. And we are prone to give up. Help us to doubt our doubts and to believe our beliefs.

Help us to be committed and strong and faithful as we rely on You. And may we know Your great love, the amazing willingness always to listen, as we said to the kids, that You're always there.

[30 : 26] You always listen. You will always answer, respond. It might not be in the way that we want or think, but You will show us a better way as we hold on to You. Help us just to know Your commitment that You didn't receive any of the amazing plaudits and glory and wonder and praise that our earthly queen received over her death and funeral.

When You came and when You lived and when You died, died, naked, hung to a cross and vilified, although You were the perfect Son of God and the King of Kings.

And remind us that as You humbled yourself in order because of Your love for us to save us, You will one day return as the King of Kings. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.