



## ***Foundations of Faithful Followers – 1 Jn. 2:12-17***

(Expanded Sermon Notes)

Redemption and forgiveness are powerful experiences. In the 12-step recovery process, steps 8 and 9 are dedicated to asking for forgiveness so that relationships can be repaired. The simple truth is when we are forgiven, that is an experience we never forget. The Apostle Peter had a pretty profound experience with forgiveness; we can read about it in John chapter 21. Let me recount it for you.

It has been just over a week since Jesus in resurrected form appeared to the disciples. The events of the last two and half weeks feel surreal, hazy, and all too fresh at the same time. For Peter, though, there is one particular set of moments that still hang heavy on him. Those three questions... “Aren’t you with him?” “Don’t you know him?” “Aren’t you one of them?” Hours before these questions came, Peter would boldly declare that he would follow Jesus wherever he went. Now, he’s denied him three times, just as Jesus told him he would. Faith and fervor disappeared quite quickly for Peter. That wound still hangs heavy, hanging over him. Yes, he has seen Jesus in resurrected form, but honestly, he wonders if this feeling would have just gone away if Jesus had never come back. If Jesus had just stayed in the tomb, Peter could have gone on with his life. The last three years would have been an amazing adventure, but he could put it behind himself and settle into a peaceful life of fishing and family. But, Jesus didn’t stay in the tomb, and Peter now remembers the sting of denial every time he sees him. Yet, there is something that draws Peter to Jesus.

One morning when they were just about finished fishing, Peter could barely see through the fog and morning mist to the shore. They were coming in tired and empty-handed, having not caught anything. There on the bank was a figure that called out to them, “Catch anything?” They answered, “No.” Then the figure told them that on the right side of the boat were some fish, and the memories came flooding back. This is how Jesus invited them to follow him in the beginning. Peter turned to John and said, “It is Jesus!” Then he jumped out of the boat and swam to him. On the shore, they shared a meal, and then Jesus turned to Peter and asked him three times, “Do you love me?” Three times just over a week ago, Peter denied Jesus. Now, Jesus is asking Peter if he loves him. Peter’s response each time is, “Yes, Lord, you know I do.” This on the shore of the sea of Galilee, a place where Peter’s faith caused him to step out on the waves, is now the place where he receives forgiveness and redemption; a moment that is so powerful that John will write it down years later so that it is never forgotten. That day, Peter and the disciples with him had an experience that would inspire faithfulness.

***As faithful followers of Jesus, we all have an eternal experience to remember.***

*I.e., Every believer has a foundational experience that inspires faithfulness.*

## **Rewind: John is a trusted voice.**

Last week, we heard John's words to this group of believers that he loves; he told them that he was not writing a new commandment to them; instead, it was the same he told them from the beginning. He was giving them old news. This was important for them to hear. They have been sorting out and being torn apart in the controversies that have arisen from the new ideas that were being taught among their body. They needed to hear from a trusted voice, and John was that trusted voice. We are just like them.

**When we are in the swirl and confusion of an upheaval, a disruption, or a traumatic experience, we need to reach for basic and simple truths from people we love and respect.**

So what had John told them from the beginning? He told them about Jesus. About how if we confess our sins, that the Father is faithful to forgive us because Jesus, in an act of selfless love, went to the cross to pay our debt. A debt that caused us shame and fractured our relationship with the Father. But, Jesus put on our shame and paid our price so that we could be restored to the Father. And then John taught them that when God's love is in us, it will change how we live and treat one another; that the selfless love of Jesus is the same love that we are supposed to treat each other with. And we can know that our faith is authentic and real by the substance of our actions and the fabric of our lives. We show our love for God by being obedient to God's commands. **Obedience is God's love language.**

1. **John has abruptly concluded the exposition of his second test.** He does not mean to give his readers the impression that he thinks they are in darkness or that he doubts the reality of their Christian faith.
  - a. His purpose in writing is as much to confirm the right assurance of genuine Christians as to rob the counterfeit of their false assurance.
  - b. **Remember last week – “Beloved, this is not a new teaching...” (2:7)**
2. **Brotherly love was part of the original message which had come to them.** John was not now inventing it. It was not an innovation such as the heretics claimed to teach. It was as old as the gospel itself.<sup>1</sup>
  - a. **When we are in the swirl and confusion of an upheaval, a disruption, or a traumatic experience, we need to reach for basic and simple truths from people we love and respect.**

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<sup>1</sup> John R. W. Stott, [\*The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary\*](#), vol. 19, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 97.

- i. Time, energy, and emotions are limited commodities in these moments.
- b. We also need to come back to the moral and social tests.
  - i. What does the fabric of my life testify to?

### 1. Obedience is God's love language.

- ii. Selfless love is a mark of an authentic Jesus follower.

## Eternal experiences of faithful followers. (2:12-14)

John has just created a very stark image of light and darkness in verses 9-11, and he doesn't want his audience to be discouraged, so he pauses to write about how they can be encouraged in their faithful pursuit of Jesus. To do this, he references three groups, children, young men, and fathers. This list can seem odd to us. Is John talking to certain age groups or specific genders? The answer is no; he is using each stage or group to refer to a growth point in faith. **What he wants them to understand is that at every stage of growth in faith, we have a foundational experience to remember that then inspires us to be faithful.**

1. The stages John references are not stages of life or comment on the ages or genders of his audience.
  - a. The author divides his readers into **three groups**, whom he names *dear children*, *fathers*, and *young men*, and addresses each group twice. **He is indicating not their physical ages, as some have thought, but stages in their spiritual development, for God's family, like every human family, has members of differing maturity.**<sup>2</sup>
2. Why is John repeating himself in vv.12-14?
  - a. It seems more probable that the tense of the second trio is an epistolary aorist referring to the present letter, in which case there is really no difference in meaning between the two tenses, as the NIV rightly indicates by translating all six *I write to you*. **John first 'writes' and then confirms what he 'has written'.**
    - i. **His message is sure and steadfast; he does not change his mind; this is his 'full and final testimony'.**<sup>3</sup>
3. Each stage represents growth and grounding in faith.
  - a. **"Faith is wanting God and nothing else."** – Brennan Manning<sup>4</sup>
    - i. **As our faith grows in maturity, we want the fullness of God more and more.**

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<sup>2</sup> John R. W. Stott, [\*The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary\*](#), vol. 19, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 100.

<sup>3</sup> John R. W. Stott, [\*The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary\*](#), vol. 19, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 100.

<sup>4</sup> Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel* (Multnomah, 1990), 167.

- b. Contrast this to our definition of sin from last week.
    - i. **The fundamental unbelief, distrust, and rejection of God and human displacement of God as the center of reality.** <sup>5</sup>
      - 1. **Sin has deeper roots of distrust and displacement of God that are expressed through my behavior.**
        - a. I.e., Sin is not just the wrong actions I willfully do or the right actions I willfully ignore.
        - b. **If I am the center of my reality, how can I love someone else selflessly?**
        - c. **Instead, I need to put God at the center, and then from and in and through Him (the one who loves selflessly), I can begin to love selflessly**
    - ii. **Faithful does not equal perfect.**
      - 1. These are not experiences reserved for perfect followers.
      - 2. We have already heard that we are sinful, but God is gracious.
        - a. **“If in our hearts we really don’t believe that God loves us as we are, if we are still tainted by the lie that we can do something to make God love us more, we are rejecting the message of the cross.”** – Brennan Manning<sup>6</sup>
4. **Little children** – Spiritual infants (v. 12, 13c)
- a. New life – We are and have been forgiven.
    - i. **The first and most fundamental word of encouragement that John can give to all members of the church is that in the past, they were forgiven of their sins and that this forgiveness remains effective in their lives.**
  - b. Do you remember that feeling of forgiveness?
    - i. Joy, Freedom, and Hope were all present.
  - c. **Our forgiveness is stable and sure because we know the Father.**
    - i. *Hesed* – The loyal love of God.
    - ii. To know the Father is to be like the Father. **Spiritual maturity moves us into a deeper and fuller knowledge of our God, with the result being familial resemblance.**
      - 1. **“For the soul trained in love will do nothing to offend the one who is beloved.”** – Augustine
5. **Young men** – Spiritually established (v. 13b, 14b)
- a. “Have overcome” (perfect tense) particularly relates to the manner in which they have withstood the attempts to lure them away from the community.
    - i. Victorious in spiritual warfare.
  - b. **Do you remember the first time you experienced spiritual victory?**
    - i. This does not mean final victory.

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, [\*Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms\*](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 107.

<sup>6</sup> Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel* (Multnomah, 1990), 165.

- ii. This can and most likely looks like a small victory. I.e., Winning the battle but still fighting the war.
  - iii. **“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”** – 1 Cor. 10:13
    - 1. We do not have to give in!
- c. How do we fight sin?
  - i. **Our victory is rooted in our knowledge of God’s word.**
    - 1. “You have overcome the evil one because God’s word abides in you.”
    - 2. **In fact, the reason they have overcome the evil one is that they are strong, and they are strong because the word of God lives in them.**<sup>7</sup>
      - a. Abides / Lives = Remains
  - ii. Identify patterns of when you are tempted.
    - 1. When, where, feelings, people, etc.
    - 2. We are not tempted at our strongest points and moments.
      - a. Luke 4 – Jesus was hungry and tired at his temptation.
      - b. Heb. 4:15 – Jesus was tempted and did not sin.
- 6. **Fathers** – Spiritually Mature (v. 13a, 14a)
  - a. **The knowledge they have is indicative of a deep, ongoing spiritual relationship (“have known” is in the perfect tense) that is grounded in the historical death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, not in intellectual speculation that perverts the true picture of who Jesus is, the eternal Son of God.**<sup>8</sup>
  - b. Actively living with an eternal perspective.
    - i. Abiding and bearing eternal fruit. → Jn. 15
    - ii. Can you put a name on discipleship?
      - 1. That is, are we actively investing in others?
  - c. Our eternal perspective comes from an abiding relationship with Jesus.

### **The Tension of Eternity vs. Temporary (2:15-17)**

After encouraging this group of believers in verses 12-14, he moves on to tell them of the incompatibility of this world with the Father. See, the Father and everything in the Father is eternal. In contrast, this world and everything of this world is temporary. John has already told them that their actions and behaviors must come in alignment with Jesus. After all, he is our example of what a life lived in a perfect relationship with the Father is supposed to look like. It

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<sup>7</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, ed. D. A. Carson, Second Edition., Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2020), 100.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, vol. 38, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 104–105.

is as if John can hear his audience asking the question, “What does it look like to be faithful?” here, John will say two things, selfish love is incompatible with eternal love, and only what is in the Father is eternal.

1. Selfish love is incompatible with eternal love. (v.15-16)
  - a. When I am the center of my own universe, I am bound to selfish love.
    - i. This is what drives my bend towards preference. I.e., I can only pursue what I prefer.
  - b. The present form of the imperative is used in the prohibition “do not love” (*mē agapate*), **indicating that the author is presenting the love of the world, which he counsels his readers against, as a continuous action.**<sup>9</sup>
    - i. The faithful believer will see their resistance to the world as a continual and permanent discipline.
    - ii. **“For the soul trained in love will do nothing to offend the one who is beloved.”** – Augustine
2. Everything of this world is temporary. While everything of the Father is eternal. (v.17)
  - a. Because of all that has been set in motion by God through the coming of Jesus Christ, the world is passing away, and its days are numbered (cf. 1 Cor 7:31). **All that is antithetical to God and his grace is passing away; it is doomed. There is no future in worldliness.**<sup>10</sup>
  - b. This is an identity conversation. (Jn. 17:6)
    - i. Christians know themselves to have been chosen ‘out of the world’ (John 17:6) in such a way that they no longer belong to it. They are still ‘in this world’ (4:17; cf. John 17:11, 15), yet distinct from it so that we and the world are set over against each other.<sup>11</sup>
    - ii. Preference leads us to hate.
    - iii. Who is at the center of my universe?
      1. **There are only two options: You or God.**

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<sup>9</sup> Colin G. Kruse, [The Letters of John](#), ed. D. A. Carson, Second Edition., Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2020), 101.

<sup>10</sup> Colin G. Kruse, [The Letters of John](#), ed. D. A. Carson, Second Edition., Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2020), 103–104.

<sup>11</sup> John R. W. Stott, [The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 19, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 106.