

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 7 January 2013

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 1 John, verse 1.

A happy new year to you! It's been a few days since we got together; I took them off to rest up and gain perspective. And I think I needed that perspective because I feel hesitant to comment on the New Testament. The Old Testament is closed history, finite and finished. Not so the New Testament, which is still unfolding because it is Christ's message for how to live now, not just way back when it was brand new.

1 John was written by the Apostle John, Jesus' personal friend, 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.' He had been with Christ throughout His earthly ministry: at the Sermon on the Mount, when Christ was transfigured, in the upper room at the Last Supper, and at the foot of the Cross the next day. John wrote the book of John, the mysterious and terrifying Revelation, and he wrote the three short epistles that are numbered with his name.

I like how he started this letter with first principles. John didn't speculate, or equivocate, or even wax lyrical. He simply stated what he had learned to be the truth, then shared it so others could know it too. So why does it seem hard to understand that this is recorded history? Maybe I just need to get over myself.

In the past year, my daughter got married, my son became a junior, my other daughter got a new job selling clothing, I traveled everywhere, and my wife worked longer hours than anyone I know. Romney fell short in the election, a lunatic murdered those people in Connecticut, and Christmas has come and gone. These were real events, things that really happened.

Just like what and who John saw. He recorded history that he saw because he personally knew the Savior, and witnessed Jesus' many miracles, even participating in them. In our so-called modern age, it's easy for us to look with scorn at the Bible, as if it's a myth or simply a collection of stories. That's just not true, though. These verses talk about real things that really happened, and lay the groundwork for solid lessons to come. It's history, the truth.

Knowing that, thanks to my wife for the following idea: let's close with a prayer.

Jesus, thank you for eyewitnesses who recorded the things you taught, did and want us to know. Walk with me through the reality of today and guard my heart with your real, lasting love.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 8 January 2013

The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 1 John, verse 2.

This one talks about life: real life and the real source for that real life. When I think about life, I think about newborn babies, and lush fields of green. I think of coral reefs in the ocean, and a city teeming with busy people, and the vivid colors that are the tapestry of humanity. Behind all that, supporting all that, is the source of all life, God. All life stems from God, is given by God, is from God. God is life. And all that life God put into a human version of Himself in which He walked around for a few, short years in a time and place long past. Christ must have been an exciting person to know, full of joy, knowledge, energy, optimism, real feeling and wisdom.

John knew Him face to face, and he was compelled, inspired to write it down to share with you and me so that, in a different way, we could come to know this same Jesus. John knew Him when Jesus was starting out, branching out beyond Nazareth, when twelve men walked, talked and lived together as students of the Most High incarnate. What's more, John knew him as a best friend, man to man as well as man to God. Crocodile Dundee said it: "Me and God: we be mates." That's how John knew Jesus.

What's more, John speaks in the third person because he's speaking for his friends as well. Twelve had been intimately close with Jesus, hearing Him explain things that man had always desired to know. Of the four Gospel writers, only John could claim to authentically speak for the others of Christ's inner circle. When he says "we have seen it" he means that all who were close to Jesus, and then even all who knew, saw, or heard Jesus in person, could testify to what they saw.

What does that mean to you? All my life I've looked for an authentic Jesus encounter, thinking I should have some 'aha' moment where I can definitively point to my conversion. That moment has yet to occur. And yet, I can't even count how many times I have felt Jesus' loving touch on my heart, comforting my psyche, teaching my mind, sharing in the happiness and weeping in my tears. I have felt His life in my life, and I have known Him as friend, even while I've never seen Him. Someday, I'll meet Him face to face and know Him as John did because, like Mick Dundee said, "Me and God: we be mates."

Lord, I want to know you more. Thanks for giving life, inspiring life, and giving meaning to life. Thanks for being my friend. Because You live I live, and I want to live knowing you more.

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Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 9 January 2013

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 1 John, verse 3.

Already John has talked about his history with Jesus, how Jesus was the real life of the world and how He was his best friend. Here, John takes it to another level, saying that we can know Jesus that way as well so that we can be in fellowship with others who already know Him, who are in fellowship with God.

Fellowship: that's an old word. In our world today, it's old fashioned, like some formal church group word. Or it's very 'Lord of the Rings'ish. Fellowship of the Ring; Odd Fellows, old fellows: we think of friendship, not just fellowship. And we think of friendship as in the Spice Girls, whose 'friendship never ends.' Our friendships come and go; I think it's rarer in America today to have really, truly close all-life-long friends. At least that's been my experience.

The kind of friendship, fellowship, that John is talking about is deeper than our experience. Dictionary.com defines 'fellowship' as "friendly relationship; companionship" as well as "communion." Communion is unity, sharing of thoughts and intimacy, not just sharing of the Eucharist. That's what John was talking about: being in communion with others because he was in full communion with God Himself. Not just that first Holy Communion on Maundy Thursday. John is talking about truly asking someone into your life and truly being part of theirs. His words are more than just a proclamation: they're an invitation.

When was the last time you or I invited someone to be in communion with us? When have we really asked others to really join us as soul-brothers or soul-sisters? I've had many friends in this life, but very few with whom I felt I was in real communion and fellowship. They're the friends with whom we share our inmost thoughts, our plans and dreams, and the people to whom we go when we need the straight scoop. We trust them with anything, even our lives and the lives of the people we love. We really love them. We're in true fellowship with them, real unity and companionship.

You know, like the Apostle John was with his fellow, Savior and friend, Jesus.

My friend Jesus, forgive my shortcomings and teach me to talk with you, for you and about you as my friend. Let me be in fellowship with you, and be in fellowship with me. Help us to grow this fellowship to include many others.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 10 January 2013.

We write this to make our joy complete. 1 John 1, verse 4.

It's not about me. It really isn't. It's about Him, through us. And through you. It's about serving Him through serving you so that our joy may be complete.

Though this verse says "our," in some Bible translations it says "your." For this, I like that second interpretation better, because I think that's what John was talking about. It was the best news he had ever heard. Most likely, John wrote this letter when he was an old man, decades after Jesus had ascended back to Heaven. Yet the news was as fresh as this morning to John. Every day, maybe even every minute of every day, he had lived conscious that he had personally known the Almighty God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob as his close and personal friend. That loving wise knowledge filled him with joy. He didn't want to hold on to it: he wanted to share it, to help others know the joy that had changed his life forever.

He wanted to share the news so that you and I could have that same joy. Two thousand years later, John is still sharing. The joy can still be shared with new people. You can I can do what John did.

What's more, we'll revert back to 'our' and realize that this word is correct as well. 'Our joy' is complete when we all are in communion, in friendly fellowship, in Christ with each other. Think about your happiest moments, then think about them purified, cleansed of petty evil, and then make them never-ending. That's the kind of joy John mentions, like the joy he felt having Jesus open his heart and mind, and truly expand John's consciousness and his love. Pure peace, pure wisdom, pure knowledge, pure love: that's the kind of thing John wanted to share so that we could all know it. So that our joy would be complete.

All of us. All of us together because God doesn't want even one person to not know that joy.

What brings you joy? I'm not talking about getting your kicks while doing something you know you shouldn't. Joy isn't like that. Think about it: what really makes you sense, feel, live, absorb, share joy? Know this: real joy is a gift from God. It's the presence of Christ in your life, something so good that you feel like you'll burst if you don't share it. I'm hoping something today brings you joy, and that you'll share it in your own way with someone else. When we do that, God is smiling because that joy isn't about us. It's all about Him.

Dear Jesus, thank you for your joy. Thank you for wanting to share it with me, and inspiring me to want to share it with others. Your joy is love. Forgive me when I forget that, and help me to share it with everyone I meet.

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Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 11 January 2013

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 1 John 1, verse 5.

My friend, Patrick, pastors a church in Coppell, TX whose focus has recently become how we are all agents of light. This is one of the verses that is the foundation of that focus. What does that really mean: agent of light? One way of looking at it is that you represent light in darkness. If you believe in Christ, you represent Him to a world that's pretty dark. It's like you're in the pitch black woods at night, and yet all around you, shining from you, is this light. In the light there is no uneasiness, no hidden deeds, no shame, nothing cold.

Think about it: people are drawn to the light. A positive attitude, a patient demeanor, the wisdom to listen: everyone values those behaviors. They're also fruits of Christ's Spirit and people are drawn to folks who have them. Couple them with other talents we're given and we can shine wherever we are. Some of my talents are with project interactions, and these words, and in working with the earth. When I work to righteously build and use those talents, I can give glory to God. If I do it when I'm being positive, helping, patient, selfless or understanding, I'm an agent of light. I get to share the light He gave to me with others. I don't have to: I get to.

Dig that. Chew on that idea for awhile because, if you do, you'll be changed. In God there is no darkness. In God there is no regret, temptation, worry, fear, anger, angst, depression, conspiracy, politics, or dread. All the things that make life undesirable or unpleasant are absent from the light. God is pure light and that light is pure knowledge and that knowledge is pure love; the purest love possible. It's so pure it shines as the brightest light in the universe.

Nobody's forcing us to be agents of light, but we get to be. He invites us to be. He invites us to actively shine His light.

That's the point of my friend's ministry: sharing the good light God shares with us so that He may be more involved in our lives. How about you and I look for ways to be agents of light today? Buy someone a coffee; pay it forward. When you ask someone how they are doing, really mean it and be interested. Be kind at the crossing or in the elevator. Behind your 'game face' is someone who likes it when the light shines on them. Shine in your own way.

Lord, shine today. Shine your light to scare away the darkness. Shine through me today, Lord, so that others can feel your warmth as well. Amen.

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Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 14 January 2013

If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 1 John 1, verse 6.

Let's start Monday with a confession: I struggle with this. Last week, a friend of mine called me out on Facebook for saying I believe in Christ yet post about things that are counter to Christianity. The subject of his post was guns and how my sometimes over-exuberant support for the Second Amendment is in opposition to Christianity.

He had a good point.

And there's bad language. Around my dinner table, we have a good time and we really talk, have fun. But we aren't the Waltons. Yesterday, we had nine people around the table, and while I wouldn't trade our times together for anything, I would gladly trade our vocabulary for something better. We didn't walk the walk. I'm the worst offender.

Different point but same basis yet again.

Rehashing old thoughts and old arguments; the same old financial woes; lip service on Sunday giving way to bad service on Monday; an ogling eye even as the rest of me is chaste; not letting go of grudges while praying for forgiveness: I'm guilty of all of these. How about you?

I read verses like verse 6 and feel like a hypocrite. That's the beauty of God's word. It's convicting but encouraging at the same time. Some folks will use your faith as a battering ram against you, beating you with it to expose you as a hypocrite so as to deflect and justify their own unspoken hypocrisy. That works because we given them the weapon to use. People will always find reasons to attack us for what we believe. They're attacking us because they are attacking God. It works, though, because we give them the ammo. To the outside, is it so hard to understand why they might think we're liars? After all, they have a point.

Sin is comfortable even as you and I can see that it's comfort is elusive. Yet change we can. We don't have to settle for that false comfort. God has remolded my life in so many ways that I'm not the man I was only a few years ago. I give Him credit for that because He led and I followed. Temptation is always there, but we can choose to ignore it, or to turn away when it's up in our face. We can emulate Jesus, ask for help, live those behaviors we talked about just the other day. We can do better, be better. We don't have to walk in the darkness. The light is very real and we can walk in it, bask in it, share it. That is the better point.

Dear Jesus, encourage me to live the way you want me to live, to share in your light.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 15 January 2013

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 1 John 1, verse 7.

Yesterday we talked about doing better, and not being hypocrites and trying to follow God to let Him change our ways. I think this is a hard thing to grasp, that God purifies us from all our sins. Some of the things we do, we don't even consider them to be wrong. We justify some pride; we look but we don't touch; we didn't say the REALLY BAD words, just a few lesser ones: you get the picture.

You and I aren't God. We don't see things from His perspective because, from His perspective, anything that isn't holy is sin. God is right, and whether we like it or not, what isn't right is wrong. Those things we don't think are so bad? To God, they're bad. Damn-you-forever bad; go-to-hell-with-no-get-out-of-hell-free-card bad. Parts of me are conflicted by this. That wrong part screams "that isn't fair." Another part wants to fall down prostrate and cry unworthiness. Yet another wants to get on the bandwagon and scour out any hint of ambiguity over sin and purge it all from my being.

Lighten up. Lighten up now because there's a better part, a better way. The verse can look at us and point out our sins, but that's the flip side of what it says. At face value, it reminds us there is a better way to live. We can choose to walk in the light just as we can choose to walk in the darkness. In the light there is fellowship with God and other like-hearted people. In the light, there is real freedom. In the light, there is opportunity, and optimism, and the chance for real happiness.

It's because He is in the light and He purifies us from all sin. Even those things we don't consider wrong that He does. Those sins we choose, when we choose to step over the line, we incur guilt. Convicting guilt and psychological guilt. Have you carried around your share of guilt? Doesn't it weigh you down, make things seem worse than they really are? Doesn't that guilt sometimes hurt?

How about we put it down and walk away from it? God purified us from it and we don't need it anymore. And when we realize we don't need it, we can gain strength to walk away from the things that caused the guilt. We can gain strength to do better, to resist, and to accept forgiveness. How about we start that here and now? How about we take a walk in the light?

Lord, thank you so much for purifying us from all the junk we carry around. Please strengthen and help us where we are so we can help others.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 16 January 2013

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 1 John 1, verse 8.

Years ago, I was talking with a co-worker who was disparaging the fact that I was a believing Christian. Something he said stuck in my head: "I've always had trouble with the concept of original sin." This was one of the best project managers I've ever known. My friend, Curt, was a good debater, a funny guy, and a loyal friend. But what he said really shocked me because it is so opposite one of the things that's fundamental to accepting God into your heart.

We're chock full of sin. Even when we let God take control of our lives, and even when we realize how He's paid the penalty for all our wrongs, we're still chock full of sin. Maybe we don't lie, screw around, cheat, steal or do whatever we did before. But do we still feel pangs of envy? Do we still lose our tempers? Do we still worry, or not trust when we should? Do we still hold grudges, even small ones? Sin. Whether we like it or not, we've got it. It is all around us and some consequences of it remain in us.

We've got it because that tendency was passed down to us from our ancestors. Whether it's fair or not, what Adam and Eve and their children did is grafted into our very humanity. Our disposition to sin is part of us just like blood, bone and tissue. We lie to ourselves if we think otherwise. Jesus' friend John not only confirmed that. He added that there is no truth in us if we keep telling ourselves we're without sin. No honesty, no Spirit of God, no hope, no redemption, no wisdom. If we say we are without sin, we are in direct opposition to everything God stands for.

In other words, we're chock full of sin. That's an ugly truth but it's a truth just the same. It's a truth my friend denied. And it's a truth that begs a really good question: why bother?

Why bother? Because God sent His Son to clean it out. If sin permeates our body, Christ is the medicine to cure it. He is like dialysis to unhealthy blood, like bleach to stained clothing. You and I can't change our genetic makeup on our own, but God can. If we believe that He died for our salvation, He does change us. He makes what is impure pure. He removes our deception and replaces it with hope. He does something so good that even a sinful skeptic like my friend would glare in thanks at its brilliant truth. He does it when you profess, "I believe."

Jesus, thank you for doing for me what I couldn't do. Thank you for cleaning me up and changing my nature. Help me to share this great news with others.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 17 January 2013

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
1 John 1, verse 9.*

Just yesterday we were reminded that we are all sinners, and indirectly reminded that Christ is the remedy to that condition. Today comes the how of that remedy. If we believe in Him, then we are accepting what is written about Him, the words He divinely inspired in others. Foremost of those words (about the Word) is that He forgives all sins. All we need to do is confess them. I am forgiven and so are you. Simple, right?

Why do we struggle so much with that? Many thousands of books have been written about that question. I don't know about you, but for me it comes down to pride. I'm proud. I'm ME, and it's all about me, after all. Nothing in this world is so great as me...until there actually are things greater than me. Those things are everywhere, and that gob-smacks me, well, in the gob nearly every day when it becomes all too easy to see that even the dirt on the floor is greater than me. When I get too big for my britches, pride trips me up every time.

Pride then compels me to fall at the cross and remember that I'm a sinner. And pride, this time pride as a forgiven believer, pulls me back on my feet knowing I'm forgiven and purified. I can be proud in God, seeing that God's pride is actually humility. Sure, it's a yin-yang struggle between pride and humility, but in battling I know God is always on my side. God, in His Spirit encouraging me. God, in His Son, holding my hand and standing beside me. I know it: I'm forgiven. So are you.

But remember this: the deed is already done. What Christ did 2000 years ago, willingly let Himself be murdered on that cross, is the atoning sacrifice that already redeemed you, me, and everybody else on this planet. It doesn't need to be done again; once for all and once is enough. You and I don't have to do anything special, and we don't earn His forgiveness, and we don't merit His forgiveness because of anything we do, are, or try.

We need constant reminders, though. We need to be reminded and know we are forgiven again and again because we keep messing up again and again. For me, just last night it was judging, lust, anger, bad language, arrogance, impatience, grudges, worry, fear, and rudeness...and that was all with me being alone in my hotel room. I keep on sinning, so I keep needing to be reminded that I'm forgiven, that He is my model for how to live, and that I can do better through Him. I need it and so do you: I'm forgiven. So are you.

Dear Jesus, thank you for forgiving me.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 18 January 2013

If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. 1 John 1, verse 10.

On the surface, this seems like a repeat of verse 8, which says “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” Read closer, though, and you’ll see that’s not fully true. Verse 10 is also about transferring.

In a way, transferring is a key theme in the New Testament, namely God transferring our sin-guilt to Himself and taking it away. That can’t happen, though, if we don’t submit to Him. We need to recognize we’re chock full of sin, and that we can’t save ourselves from the consequences of it. If we keep on believing we’re guiltless when, in fact, we’re guilty, then we aren’t submitting. Worse, if we really think we’re not guilty while wallowing in our wrongs, yet say we believe in Christ, then we’re wrongly transferring our sin to Christ, thinking Him to be a sinner. We’re mocking Him. He said and proved He was without sin, yet it’s like we’re transferring our dysfunction to Him. “I’m screwed up therefore you must be screwed up too.”

How screwed up is that?

And yet we do it all the time. In politics, when one side accuses another, it’s a good bet that there’s hypocritical transferring going on, that the accusing side is guilty of what it’s accusing. I see it in my teenagers, when they try to pin their indiscretions on me, saying “when you were a kid you did this too,” as if I’m to blame for what they did. And I see it all the time in my own actions, transferring my shame and guilt to God without addressing why I felt ashamed or guilty, without truly giving them over to Him in submission, confession and repentance.

When we do this, we’re pitting ourselves against everything Christ lived and died for. There’s a right way to transfer and a wrong way, too.

God doesn’t want us to live as lowly roaches. Instead, He craves for us to really, truly transfer all our sins to Him and then let them go forever. He wants us to share in His ultimate, powerful, truly loving glory. That can’t happen when we let ourselves be continually tainted with the crap we’ve done. It can’t happen when we try to make Him out to be a liar. He knows the spiritual power of giving all we are over to Him because it is His power. He knows the psychological release that comes from confession and realization. And He knows the physical impact of being freed.

Are you tired of being screwed up? I am. I’m really tired of not truly transferring. Let’s do better.

Dear Lord, forgive my wrongs and take them, and me, from me. Help me to transfer everything to you, then lead me where You will.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 22 January 2013

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 1 John 2, verse 1.

I don't usually like it when someone speaks to me as if I'm a child. I'm not a child: I'm a grown man. I've been to college; I've faced down enemies; I served my country; I've raised a family and built a marriage. I've been around, and I don't appreciate it when my parents, my pastor, the president, or anyone on the planet to talk down to me as if I'm a child. So I need to keep in mind that John was probably an old man when he wrote these words, writing as a sage and fatherly figure to people who wouldn't have known him when he was a younger man.

But he's got a point too: we're all children. We all need reminders that, to God, we are both His magnificent creation and also His children. He's God; we aren't. To God, we probably are petulant children, especially when we fuss – I fuss – about people not talking at us as if we're children. I'm thinking I must look pretty childish sometimes.

My God is a patient God, though. And He's a father. An understanding, wise, loving father. As God, man and Spirit all in one, He knows how I feel when I'm a child, and He knows how I feel when I'm a father to my own children. He's something on His own that I can never be, though: righteous. He's virtuous and clean without someone having to intervene for Him...like He did and does for you and me.

I need that, even when I'm doing something as simple as reading the verse. Satan plays word games with us, trying to distract us with things that are hot-button triggers. It's easy to be distracted because 'children' isn't even the full point of the verse. The real point is proclaiming that Jesus is our intercessor, our lawyer, our transference, our mediator, and our friend. Yet I foolishly get caught up in keying on a word instead of grasping the real message. That's something kids would do.

And when I re-read that message, I'm thankful the apostle took his liberty and called me a child. Maybe he knew something I've forgotten.

Dear Father, thank you for your messenger reminding me of things I need to hear, like how I'm your child and how You rescue me every time I mess up. Hold me close today.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 23 January 2013

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 John 2, verse 2.

Your neighbor. The Dalai Lama. Hugo Chavez. The guy who sells bagels at the deli. A Turkmenish yak herder. Scientists at the South Pole. The stripper who turns tricks on the side. An imam in Qum and a neo-Nazi in Hamburg. Katy Perry. An Amazon pygmy. My saintly grandmother. Your boss. The pope. You and me.

Jesus Christ is the one, the only, sacrifice for every sin in life. Not just you and me, not just people we know, and not just the in-crowd at church: He is the only atoning sacrifice for all the sins of everyone in the world, including those people mentioned above. There are over 6 billion of us living on this planet, with maybe another 10 billion who have lived throughout human history. Jesus Christ is the only way in which the many trillions of sins humanity has committed are forgiven by God Almighty.

If you don't know much about Biblical history, let's sum it up with this: Jesus is the only fulfillment of all the ancient Biblical laws and rites, as well as the only person in all of human history who satisfied all the prophecies foretold about the perfect Messiah. Buddha didn't do that. Mohammed didn't do that. Nobody else has ever done that. Only the God-man Jesus.

There's more. Christ is not just the lawyer for our wrongs: He is the sacrifice a just and holy God demanded for them. From the beginning of history, God demanded sacrifices for the ways in which we defiled His holy being. We had become separated from Him and His holiness can't tolerate any kind of disobedience. He demanded sacrifices so people could see their need for His love and forgiveness. None of those sacrifices could ever truly heal the rift, though. For that to happen, God had to take it on Himself. He had to make right what we made wrong. He willingly, heroically, brutally let Himself be murdered in a sacrificial death so that His demand for a holy life could restore balance to our spiritual divide with Him. Only He did that. You can't do it. The Dalai Lama can't do it. Barack Obama can't do it. Only Christ could do it. And He did.

We have a deep spiritual, emotional, even physical need to release our guilt. God's sacrifice in Jesus gives us the way to release that guilt, to give it to Him, and let Him take it away forever. Think about that today. Think about it and pray about in your life today. It's God's gift to us.

Jesus, I don't really understand how You did all that you did for humanity, but thank you for doing it. Thank you for living and dying so that we wouldn't be apart from You forever.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 24 January 2013

We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. 1 John 2, verse 3.

Jesus told us not just to do better: Jesus tells us to be perfect. There's a scene in "Remember the Titans" where the team reminds Denzel Washington that he had implored them to be perfect (in how they played football). They were in danger of losing their first game, and Coach Denzel is giving them the speech about how that's ok. One of the players stands up and reminds the team, then, that they had been taught to be perfect, so they should strive for perfection now.

Good lesson for all of us.

Let's face it: the touchy, feely, lovey Jesus is only part of His personality. The other part is justly radical and harsh. He is God, man and Spirit all in one triune being, and He demands perfection. He doesn't just teach us to live in love: He also teaches us to brutally scour out all wrongdoing in our lives. Actions, thoughts, words, friends, family, even parts of our body: if they cause us to sin (or, worse, cause others to), He tells us to radically expel them from our lives. And He reminds us that, if we don't and if we tolerate sin, then He will sadly but forcefully damn us to hell forever.

Jesus' brother, James, taught that faith without works is dead. We don't earn salvation with what we do, but Jesus fully intends for us to let Him change us, then for us to act on how He changes us. He wants us to change even the smallest detail, to reflect how He changes our hearts. The consequences of not doing that are that excruciating damnation, void of hope for love in eternity.

So how do we strive for perfection? Simple: we do what He says. He commands us to love one another. So let's do it. He commands us to give unlimited forgiveness. So let's do it. He commands us to change and turn from the ways that led us into wrong. So let's do it. You get the picture.

Easier said than done, right? I struggle with that every day. I post too many rants on Facebook. I'm intolerant of people who think different from me. I'm angry on the road. I'm short with my kids and my wife. I'm selfish with my time. Hardly doing what Jesus wants me to do, eh? How about you? Do we want to do better? Then maybe we really need to let Him take control and simply do it. Then we can truly know Him. It'll prove to others that the change is real, and that He is real.

I think even Denzel might agree with that.

Lord Jesus, I'm not perfect but you are. Strengthen me to strive for your ideal, and change how I live the life You've given to me.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 25 January 2013

The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 1 John 2, verse 4.

Something from yesterday stuck on my heart and I'd like to talk about it. Jesus will damn us to hell if we tolerate sin. It's not just that we choose to do things He says not to do. That sin of disobedience is bad enough on its own because holy God won't tolerate it. But there's more. It's actually a violation of the first commandment. Don't forget that the first commandment reminds us that there is only one God and we are not allowed to put anything before Him. He is to be the most important focus of our lives.

If we choose to tolerate sin, we're getting in God's face, like a petulant, ranting teenager, and throwing our sin in front of Him, screaming "this is more important than you."

This is part of what John reminds us of in this verse. We are making idols of our sin if we continue to tolerate it. Whatever your pet sin is, if you center your life, your behavior, around the lie that "I can't change this" or "God can't change this," then you're lying to yourself. You're putting your faith in a lie. The worst part is that the truth you say you believe about God isn't really taking root in you and you're not letting it bear the real fruit that it's intended to bear.

Forgiveness, caring, selfless love, understanding, patience, kindness, peace: those are the real fruits that Jesus intends to produce in us. If we defiantly throw down our sins to God, is it any wonder that He might condemn us for it? Here's where I picture one way Jesus could react. Not as an equally defiant person, not as the vengeful deity, and not as the all-powerful controller of the universe. Instead, I picture Jesus looking at me with tears in His eyes. "I'm sorry this is happening to you, but you can't be with me. You keep showing this 'thing' is more important to you than I am. Here are your consequences."

That would be terrifying. To be judged unfit by the holy One, knowing He has the power to permanently separate me from Him forever. That would be terrifying. And it doesn't have to be this way. He doesn't want it to be this way. He wants better for us. How about we give Him what He wants? Life is guaranteed to change for the better as soon as we do.

Lord Jesus, forgive my dishonesty. Forgive me all the ways and times when I've lied by what I think, say, and do. Change me for your better goodness today, and help me in it.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 28 January 2013

But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2, verses 5-6.

I just got back from the gym where I did two miles on the treadmill. One was a run and one was a warm up/cool down walk. Now, I know many people who walk and run more, and to be honest I have been one of them. Not long ago I would run 14 miles and walked one. Injuries, weight gain, and lazy lethargy took my initiative, though, so now I'm taking it back. It's my hope to get back up to that run and do a marathon soon.

Do you think that, if Jesus were here in body, He would be on a treadmill?

The obvious answers are, "yes and of course not." The truth is that Jesus IS on the treadmill with me. He's right behind me holding me up. He's beside me setting a pace. He's in the sweaty gal a row over to the right, who's struggling to keep her stride. He's in the athlete just doing daily cardio. He's in the guy chatting up the weightlifter about how to clean 300. The truth is that Jesus is wherever you and I are, whether we acknowledge Him or not.

And of course not, Jesus wouldn't be on a treadmill. Because He's fully man (as well as fully God), for His sake, I hope He sleeps in a bit more. I'm only up out of habit. Jesus is God and I'm not. I hope He doesn't need to keep in shape. I'm thinking He's in shape without the treadmill. Perhaps I need to think about that one some more.

Here's the difference that I don't need to think about: whether I'm on a treadmill at the athletic center, or walking a carriage down the aisle at Kroger, or driving in my car, waiting at the post office, sitting on my sofa, or doing anything in this world, Jesus is where I am. I can only be in Him, though, if I fully submit to Him in every way, spiritually, emotionally, mentally, consciously, physically. Only when I fully rely on Him can I truly say I'm in Him. God's blessings are all around. The proof of His love is in every miracle breath we take. Only when I submit in thankful reverence to Him for those miracles can I truly get understand the idea that I am fully in Him.

And to do that, I don't even need to hit the gym.

Jesus, wanna hit the gym with me? Thanks for giving me endurance and the miracle of life to live in You. Be in me today and teach me to be in You, to give all to You.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 29 January 2013

Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. 1 John 2, verse 7.

Sometimes I laugh at the news. To be honest, I don't watch the nightly news broadcasts anymore; they're a turn-off. But I still pay attention and it amazes me that every generation, including my own, seems to think it is the next big thing. What is new today, what happens today, is reported as if things like it have never happened before. This is the coldest winter in history. Our problems are worse than anyone else's ever have been. Our wars are the worst. Our successes are the greatest. You get the picture.

The book of Ecclesiastes is written explicitly to point out that there is nothing new because God has always been. Everything about humanity has been before and, God willing, will be again in the future. Sure, technologies and behaviors change. Have you ever considered, though, that we aren't changing into anything truly new. I mean, science doesn't make new elements. We don't create more land or water. Humans can't create the essence that is life. There is nothing new under the sun. Thank you, King Jesus, who was, and is, and is to come.

Knowing that, the old command is Him. The good news of Him, the fact, wisdom, love, teaching, correction and forgiveness of Him: these are all part of who He has always been. He gave us the message to love God with all our being, and to love each other reflecting how we love God. He taught that so that we might learn to submit, be forgiven, and to forgive. There's nothing new in that: it's how He has loved since Eden.

And I like how, from the beginning, Jesus 'brought it.' He didn't equivocate, moderate or pontificate: he confronted the source of problems and offered God's powerful love as the antidote. Jesus lived and taught us to trust in Him in every circumstance, to give everything over to him in every circumstance, and to be ready for Him in every circumstance. He didn't mince words: He gave all at all times. And why? So that we would be ready any time. Why just yesterday a construction worker was killed on the road behind my house. I bet he went to work yesterday not thinking he wouldn't survive the day, yet yesterday instead of a day's pay, he received an eternal reward. I hope he was ready.

Be ready in every moment because there's nothing new here that can happen, including death. You might not hear that on the news.

Lord, I want to be ready for you now. Forgive my sins, I praise you for your love, and help me to share this news with others.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 30 January 2013

Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. 1 John 2, verse 8.

So there's nothing new in the world; there is nothing new under the sun, and this is certainly true. Verse 7 confirmed that. Yet here John writes that, in the very next verse, there was a new command. It was radical at the time, that we should love, forgive, and be at peace with even the people who would torture or oppress us. Two thousand years later, that idea is still radical and still very new.

It's new because you and I have friends to whom the idea of Jesus' love is brand new. They don't know Him, and some say they don't want to. We talk with them in the course of our lives, being friendly and hopefully kind. On my end, I email them or talk with them, in the hope that something in that hard heart will crack and open to Him. That hope is possible because Jesus' true light shines in the darkness of our proud sins.

What does that mean? I can understand why unbelievers are incredulous at believing. Why cling to hope when the world just beats us down? 'Put your hope in some guy who died 2000 years ago? Sure, he was a good teacher, but God?'

Actually, yes.

The evidence is everywhere, speaking to heads and hearts. Don't believe in miracles? Ever wonder how many hundreds of times you could be killed in a day yet aren't? Chalk that up to chance, or chalk it up to the supernatural protecting us in a natural world. Think about your own feelings, about how confession really does make you feel better when you know you've done wrong. Psychological tool? Not hardly. What about love? Can you really, truly tell me that the love you feel for someone is just a neurological condition or a chemical reaction in your brain? Not even the coldest skeptic, when warmed by the caring of someone close, can be so cold as to embrace that.

Consider these things and maybe, just maybe, you get a glimpse of how the darkness is passing and true light is already shining. His love and His example, even from millennia ago, is still very much at work today. There's nothing new in it. God's love has been around since the beginning, for it was out of love that He made this world. It was because of that love that He came to redeem it. And it is in love that Jesus still lives and works in our lives here today. He loves us, draws us close, so that we can share His light with others and do the same.

My lord, how brilliant is your light! Your love saves, forgives, and strengthens. Thank you for this, and help me to share that love with the people around me.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 31 January 2013

Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. 1 John 2, verse 9.

This is a loving but hard, bitter pill to swallow. It's loving because only someone who cares for you would tell you like it is, and this verse is brutally hard truth. You know it: only a good friend, someone who has your back and someone who genuinely loves you for you are, would tell you a cold, hard truth. And it's bitter because, every day, I mess it up badly.

Sure, there are things our brothers do that are wrong, or things they say that are wrong. Or maybe we simply disagree and that's not wrong; it's ok. And we should always eagerly forgive but only a fool forgets.

That's not what the verse is saying.

I hold grudges against people who hurt me. Bullies who picked on me in school. People who slighted me years ago yet the downstream effects still play out today. Friends who let me down. People I cared for who didn't care in return. Even my own family: I hold on to way too many things that still hurt when I think of them.

Say the verse again: ANYONE who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. If you or I say we believe in Christ yet we cling to our junk for whatever 'reason,' we are calling the creator of the universe a liar and a cheat. We are in darkness.

Darkness is how you feel when you know you are stuck in something but don't feel you have the energy to pull out of it. Darkness is where you are when you know you shouldn't do something but you do it anyway with a smile on your face. Darkness surrounds us when we live in denial, blaming our problems on others, or our situation, or always looking for a reason and excuse.

Darkness is wherever we are without Jesus.

I say these things because they're where I've been, what I've done. I hate the darkness. I really, honestly, don't hate 'my brother' but when I don't act towards people the way Jesus tells us to act, I'm choosing the darkness. I'm choosing to act like I hate them. It's the middle finger when driving, or feeling sorry for ourselves, or always trying to get the last word, or being impatient. When I live my life in these ways, I'm showing disregard, dislike, disrespect for other people. When I live like that, I'm hating Jesus.

That's what the verse is saying.

Jesus, I don't hate you. I love you and need you. Remind me of that when I stumble, or when I'm tired, or when I'm living in the world. Help me to walk out of the darkness and live in Your light.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 1 February 2013

Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. 1 John 2, verse 10.

After swallowing a bitter pill yesterday comes a cool drink of water today.

Jesus forgives everything. Repeat that and commit it to heart: Jesus forgives everything. He isn't a forgiveness mechanism, like some bubble gum machine where you mess up, put in a nickel, and get a forgiveness gumball. When we genuinely confess our wrongs and regrets to Him, like we would to trusted loved ones and friends, He forgives. He fully forgives and forgets. It's as if our transgressions never happened and we are free to begin again, to try harder, to live in the way He asks us to live.

He does it so that we can live in the light.

And when we live in the light – when we live in Christ's forgiveness – nothing can make us mess up again. Sure, we make mistakes, and we slip and fall. We sin again. Nothing about Him can make that happen, though. It's our choices and actions that bring about our sins. In the Son of God there is only light. In that light there is forgiveness, mercy, love, peace, and justice.

What's more, when we bask in that light, we're open to letting God change our ways. We want to do better than we've done; we want to turn from our mistakes and not make them again. We want to live a life pleasing to Him who forgave us. Most of all, we want to model Him for others and change our ways so that we don't cause other people to mess up.

And let's be honest about it: our sins are dark. We need God's light. Just last night I was looking at old pictures with my son. His history class is studying the Cold War, and I showed my son pictures of my military days, when I used to follow Soviet ships and airplanes around the oceans. Those were some of the best days of my life. I had quite a lot of fun but I also remember doing many things I regret. I was immature, unkind, vulgar, cold, arrogant, and rude. In short, I was a young man. God changed all that. It has taken many years – and even worse times when I've regressed – but God has been at work in my life. I'm thankful for the days I lived through, but I wouldn't want to again be the man I was.

I wouldn't want that because Jesus forgave everything. He asks that we do better, that you and I do better. Sometimes that's tough, but the light shining in our lives makes it possible and desirable.

Lord of light, shine in my life today. Open my eyes that others may see Your light in them, and that you may be glorified.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 6 February 2013

But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him. 1 John 2, verse 11.

Here's another comparison, this time to verse 9, which also talked about darkness. Notice, though, how the Apostle John takes verse 11 a little bit farther.

Darkness is blinding.

It's not that it causes our eyes to not work because they work just fine. Or that the things of the world are not present in the darkness because if you've ever stepped on a Lego in the dark, you know they're there. And it's also not as if we can't choose otherwise, because the verse insinuates that we choose the darkness because we choose to hate our brothers.

It's because that darkness symbolizes the result of hatred. It's a condition caused by our emotions, by our choices. We foster hatred against someone and it leaves us feeling moody, pensive, edgy, even more emotional. Isn't it easier to call on other emotions, to whip things up, when we're arguing or bathed in anger and hatred than when we feel relaxed and loved? That's no coincidence. It's how we're wired, and it's something the Apostle understood. Those feelings of rage, anger and malice cause us to feel dark inside, to harbor thoughts or intentions that we wouldn't otherwise do.

The thing about the dark is that we don't have to choose to be in it.

I've had the flu for the last five days. For most of the time, I sat in bed or in a chair in front of the TV feeling miserable. It forced me to cancel a business trip, to take off sick from work, to be completely un-functional at home, and to not write these words for several days. It felt dark to me, as if the virus was a dark agent invading my body. For awhile, the darkness took hold. However, I knew that, in time, with vitamins, rest and medicine, my body would fight back and be healed; I had faith. The thing about darkness is that it's blinding but we don't have to choose it. We can choose light because healing is in the light. Life is in the light. Christ is the light. We're free to choose that, to choose Him and be un-blinded.

Dear Jesus of Light, thank you for your healing bright light. Shine your light on the dark places in my life so that you can heal them and help me to help others today. Help me to turn from ways I've hated my fellow man, and to live as you would live.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 7 February 2013

I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. 1 John 2, verse 12.

You and I can forgive each other. In fact, we should. Some psychologists now believe that we actually must if we are to really ever be able to move on from situations that hurt us. We can forgive almost anything. Adultery, lying, perceived slights, smashing the car; I remember when the Pope visited his assassin in jail and publicly forgave him. We can forgive anything. We can move on.

We can't forgive sins, though. Specifically, we can't forgive the consequences of our sins. If my kid smacks up the mirror (actually the passenger mirror) on my car, I would easily forgive him (I did). The mirror, however, remains broken. If I accidentally run over your dog, I can apologize and you might even forgive me, but your dog would be just as dead. We can't undo what's done because there are consequences for our sins, even when the consequences are unknown to us. Even when the only party aggrieved is God. And EVERY sin aggrieves God, even the tiny ones we don't remember or rationalize away. We can't forgive our sins.

Jesus did. Jesus forgave all of them.

He did it because He is God: Father, Son, Spirit all in one and He cannot tolerate un-holiness, which is what even the least of our sins still is. The Apostle records this forgiveness, speaking to us on God's behalf as children. We are reminded that small children need, first & foremost, to know they are safe whenever trouble comes around. When trouble takes the form of the consequences of our sins, we need comfort.

Jesus is that comfort. Jesus forgave all our sins because of His name. Jesus forgave all our sins because He is the great I AM. He didn't have to do it, but He did. He did it because He knew we couldn't and that, to share Himself fully, He would have to. I think that's called "love" and "heroic."

Now that it's done, His model is our model. Now that He did this, we're free to do with it whatever we will. We can go the Penn Jillette route and reject it. We can flaunt it. Or we can share it. We can use His forgiveness as the basis of our belief, of all our knowledge in life, and share that good news with others. We can freely forgive others when they hurt us even if we can't change all the consequences. We can do it because that's what Jesus did.

Dear Jesus, you died to forgive the penalty of all of my sins, all of them forever. Thank you for doing that, for forgiving me, for showing how to forgive others, and for restoring me in your Father's eyes.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 8 February 2013

I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. 1 John 2, verse 13.

This is a strange verse. Its pattern of addressing us as children, fathers, and young men carries over from verse 12 (and will carry over also into verse 14). It's unlike anything else we've seen so far in the book.

Fathers knew God from the beginning. Fathers (think 'parents') are assumed to have grown wise, responsible, and shrewd. We are supposed to teach our children all about God; it is our first and most important duty as parents. Our second is to teach our children how to live in this world, how to know they are loved, and how to use their talents to succeed, to work, to thrive. As fathers (and mothers) we are to understand that God is in all the world, and always has been, and always will be. Our understanding is to be based on having a relationship with God and how He reveals Himself in all things throughout the world.

We learn that as young men, who overcame the evil one. Young men and women struggle to find themselves in the world. They take what they learned as children and apply it as grown adults. In doing this, we come up against some of the worst the world has to offer. An example I think of is the Amish, who actually encourage 'wilding' (their word for self-discovery) in their young adults. Before taking vows to live as Amish, young people are encouraged to live in the 'English' world to see if it is what they are called to in life. Once you take the vows, there is no going back. Young men and women 'wild' and come up against the enemy's temptations. And when they learn to live through God, they overcome the evil one.

And we were all once little children who knew God the Father. When we are little kids, most of us know our parents. We know them simply as Mom and Dad, as just parents. Parents are providers, mentors, teachers, doctors, chauffeurs, policemen, rescuers, friends, playmates, guides and models all rolled into one. There is nobody else like a parent, and we each have only our own. Little children know God simply, and as awesome, and lovingly. They accept Him just as He is, as a parent, because they see Him without the filters of adulthood.

In reality, John writes to us all, channeling the Triune God to people of all ages and all times. How good is it that we can see things at just the right times, even in verses that seem strange.

Triune God, I praise you for speaking to me at all times of my life. Thank you for being divine, understanding, and my God.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 11 February 2013

I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. 1 John 2, verse 14.

Continuing from the last verse, the Apostle John relays how God speaks to us no matter what stage of life we are in. As parents, we understand why things are the way they are. We have known God who WAS, FROM the beginning. Those to capitalized words carry great depth, identifying all history and all perspective on that history. Adults know this because adults learned it.

We are reminded that young people are strong because they are in the prime life. God evidences Himself especially in younger people especially because their innocence is a trait that God Himself always displays. Think about it: God's love is deep and complex, yet the more we dive into it, the simpler, clearer, almost innocent and youth-like it becomes to us.

I'm reading a book now called "Undaunted," by a man named Josh McDowell. It's his life story, how he came from unending abuse and an unloving childhood to the point where he embraced God and forgave. What is becoming apparent to me as I read the book is that God was always present, always at work in Josh's life, even in the terrible times. That, and it took a man of great strength and determination to not give in and become bitter. McDowell when through times in his life when he denied God even existed, and with all the physical, alcoholic, and sexual abuse he endured, I suppose that even becomes understandable. Yet he came to find that God was always present, even from the beginning, and that it was only through God that he could overcome the urge to live in anger that happens when we give in to the evil one.

Isn't that same thing true for you and me, that only through God can we overcome the evil one? No matter what stage in which we find ourselves, if we submit to God and believe, we become unstoppable. The power to forgive is the power to move forward. I've known people who have lived through some of the most terrible things you can think of, but who learned to live beyond them when they learned to love through God. The closer they draw to Him, the more they find that He is the same God who has always been, even in the middle of their shame, bitterness and trials. He is still the great I AM yet still also the soft, quiet voice of full comfort in the middle of any panic or fear.

God of comfort, I pray your comfort over me know, in this stage and place in which I find myself. I'm not who I thought I would be, but I'm comforted knowing I'm who you know me to be.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 12 February 2013

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 1 John 2, verse 15.

Without turning into either a cliché or a bad song, here's a partial list of the things I love in this world: my wife and family, medium rare steak, red wine, morning devotions, being motivated, Christmas snow, movies with an unexpected twist, long cross-country drives, sightseeing, wine tastings, puppy dog breath, hot coffee, cold beer after working in the summer heat, warm sweaters, tourist traps, Jimmy Buffett concerts, laughing until it hurts, writing words that say exactly what is on my mind, fishing, cut country grass, Saturday picnics, bacon and eggs, and almost anything sung by Diana Krall or Grover Washington.

Those aren't what the verse is talking about.

Here's a list of some of my favorite places in the world. The Boundary Waters of Minnesota; Garden of the Gods; Edzell, Scotland; Rampart Reservoir northwest of Colorado Springs; Fisherman's Wharf; the Nile spring in Uganda; central Pennsylvania; Spring Mill just outside Mitchell, Indiana; Clearwater Beach, Florida; Walt Disney World; Oberammergau, Bavaria; anywhere with my wife, and Lake Eufaula, Oklahoma.

Those aren't what the verse is talking about either.

The verse isn't talking about anything in the world, around the world, or about the world. He wasn't talking about inanimate places or things. The Apostle wasn't talking about a place on the planet: he was talking about a place in our hearts.

If ANY of those things I listed above begins to encroach on my love for God, then my professed love for Him is hypocrisy. It's worthless, good for nothing. Worse, it's damning. If I put any one of those things over my respect, love and devotion to Him, then they become my God, my focus in life. All the pretty words and flowery talk might as well lock me behind the bitter gates of hell.

There's a lot of talk these days about how we are creeping up to the end of the world (something folks have been saying for many hundreds of years). I don't know about all that, but I do know that I wouldn't want the world to end and have God call me on the carpet for what I believe only to find that He saw through me and saw that I didn't love Him as much as I said I did. I'd be damned. Damned. If you or me cling to the 'what' here instead of the 'why' behind the what, we're just as good as dead. The love of God isn't in us because we don't let it guide our lives.

That's what the verse is talking about.

Dear Jesus, rebuke, convict, and love me. Please always expose me when I cling too tightly to the world. Don't ever let go of me, and use me to grab others so you can hold on to them too.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 13 February 2013

For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. 1 John 2, verse 16.

Cold water alert: I'm the sinful man. So are you. No, this isn't your daily guilt trip, but it is hopefully a reminder. The world is full of temptations. We live around them, we are tempted by them, and sometimes we give in to them. You're a sinful person. So am I. Face it, embrace it, race from it.

And when you're in the race, whether you want to or not, you slip up. I slip up every day; usually in multiples. Sometimes, the slip-up is deliberate; deliberate as in how you flirt a little too enthusiastically with that someone other than your spouse. Or how I flipped off that kid on the bike who cut me off at lunch. Or just saying 'no' when mom and dad tell you to do something you don't want to do. Or staying at the office only 8 hours but marking 9 on your timesheets. Or that extra drink, that extra helping. Deliberate.

Sometimes the slip-up isn't deliberate, as in how your trip-wire reaction is angry and defensive. Or you run out of time and can't keep that small promise. Or you exaggerate that old fish story so much that you don't even notice it anymore (or the one about how you helped out around the house, or what you did and didn't do at x, y or z). Or that curse that happens to slip out at the inopportune time. It's not something we think long & hard about doing, but we do it all the same. They're still sins.

None of those – let's repeat it, none – are of God. They're of the world, first and last. It goes back to the attitude we talked about yesterday: nothing with an attitude that prefers the world is of God. Nothing. None of our slip-up's and sins are of God. They're about what He tolerates instead of what He designed.

Today, you and I will have moments when we can choose to avoid something we should avoid. When we choose it instead – and at times we will – how about we stop and ask ourselves 'what would God think?' Chances are, when my conscience starts to ache about that, I'll know I did wrong. Whether we realize it or not, that's the start of repentance. When we see how we've chosen the world, and we realize it, we are at the starting point to repent.

That's a good way to start off Lent, don't you think? It's how to race back to the Father and away from the world.

Jesus, every day I'm bombarded with cravings, desires and temptations. Forgive me when I mess up and give in to them, and strengthen me to resist those others.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 14 February 2013

The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. 1 John 2, verse 17.

What is the will of God? In a world full of things that demand our time, shock us to no end, and always challenge us to conform to it, what is the will of God? Is the will of God something that only believers can know, or is it one of those things that is self-evident to everyone? When you say you believe in Christ, do you automatically, suddenly understand the will of God?

Ah, so many questions. How about let's just get back to basics, shall we?

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." That's from Mark, chapter 12. Immediately after it, Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these." This, I believe, is the will of God.

God's will – His desire, His substance, His determination, and His testament – is love. I'm no pastor, so if you ask a pastor you'll probably get a different answer (and some might tell you that mine is full of 'it', and chances are no two would give you the same answer). Yet I believe those verses from Mark 12 (verses 30 and 31) come closer to describing God's will than anything anywhere else in Scripture. God wants for us to love Him completely because such love is selfless, giving, sacrificial, and complete. It sends out more than it takes in, yet when it comes back it always comes back greater. God's will for us is that we should first love Him fully, and then love Him even more fully by loving each other.

I don't know about you, but I mess that up regularly, in a hundred different ways. Look no further than my own life for proof of that. The photos on my iPhone, my Facebook page, the words from my own mouth: in too many ways, I have willfully failed to love others as God has loved me. The ironic thing about it is that those photos, that webpage, and my puny words are so temporary, so fleeting. They will be gone in minutes, not more than a short span of years. I cling to such meaningless things and in doing so, I spit on the will of God.

So, in keeping with the basics, let's resolve to change. I resolve to argue less, to rebuke less, to mock less, to be sarcastic less. More than just a Lenten promise, I resolve to replace these soul-less things with the will of God in my life, then to send it out to others. What is the will of God? To love.

Father God, help me to love in your will. Forgive me where I've made you look bad, and where I've been stupid. Love me and build me to love others as you would.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 15 February 2013

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. 1 John 2, verse 18.

As I write this, the Roman Catholic church is undergoing a substantial change. Benedict XVI is abdicating his position as pope. Nobody knows who the College of Cardinals will elect, but one of the favorite front runners (in the media) is a cardinal named Peter Turkson. Already the internet is abuzz with conspiracy theories that electing this man as pope would fulfill an ancient prophecy concerning the end times, about how the next pope would be the last one and a man who would consciously strike a deal with Satan.

So let's say this again: nobody here knows when the world will end. Nobody. Not even Jesus, because He said that only God the Father knows and He isn't talking about it. Anyone who prognosticates that "this is THE SIGN" doesn't really know any more than you or me. They're interpreting and speculating.

What I believe this verse means, and is, is a call for vigilance. We are to be on our guard, living each hour as if it was the last...because it could be. The promise of mayhem, violence, and destruction is given in Scripture. It's coming; it may be here; the time may be now; we may be in it. But we don't know. None of us knows: not you or me. Not Barack Obama. Not Judge Judy. Not Billy Graham. Not the pope or the College of Cardinals or Cardinal Turkson. And because we don't know, and because God says so, we should remain vigilant. Cling to Him, follow Him, share Him, live for and through Him, and live in this way knowing we could die at any moment.

We need to cling to Him because forces of evil really are at work in the world. We are to interpret signs of the times as proof that evil can be on the rise. Forces of evil are at work in terrorists, governments, fanatics, and religious militants. They are also at work in the suburbs, in the indifference in which we deal with our brothers and sisters and to whom life, death, despair, and a hundred crises plague their lives daily. Evil is at work in how we disregard the starving and poor, and how we choose safety and comfort over helping others. We need more than ever to cling to God because these petty evil antichrists are always at work, tempting us to follow them, lying to us that they know better. Signs and wonders say so. We need to cling to God to be able to stand, resist, and overcome them.

God Almighty, I'm scared and confused in this world sometimes, and I am tempted to follow evil. Help me to stand, to resist, to cling to you, and to do battle with evil using weapons of light.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 18 February 2013

They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. 1 John 2, verse 19.

This is a continuation from the last verse, which talked about how antichrists have come and these are our last hours. After writing Friday's words, that verse hit home for me, just like today's does as well. You see, I said and did something that was very un-Christian, and showed a little of what those antichrists look like.

A friend and I disagreed online. Both of us have very strong views, and to be fair we're both right and we're both wrong. I respect him and his strength of conviction even as we so strongly disagreed. Friday, we were debating/arguing/disagreeing/being dumb and he de-friended me. It caught me by surprise, and I was offended. Rather than using it as an opportunity to extend God's grace, my reaction was to call his action gutless and stupid, and in the process I made myself look equally stupid. Worse, I brought discredit on these words of Christ that I proclaim here.

This bothered me all weekend, so today I took some steps to help build bridges and make amends for my thoughtlessness and stupidity. Last week, I said I'd pray for my friend, and I do and will keep doing so even as we aren't friends anymore. I think that's a miracle of faith, that we get the privilege of praying for people who wronged us, or people we've wronged. It's one of the ways God buys back the consequences of our sins, reshaping the world, and increasing His glory in the face of our human frailty.

The whole episode illustrated this verse, how our sins aren't of God. The apostle writes here that the little antichrists are everywhere. They are all the things that are anti-Christ, against God. All of my sins separate me from God, and all of them are diametrically against who and what He is. When I do stupid things like I did last week, I pit myself against God, siding with the sin of pride. When that happens, it's like Don McLean sang: "I saw Satan laughing with delight the day the music died."

Thank God that He works through ALL things, that He gives us the privilege of apology and sometimes the opportunity to make amends. Even more, thank God that He atoned for the things I've done wrong and built a bridge between the pit of sin in which I put myself and the glory of love where He lives. Who knows what opportunity today will bring. Me, I hope it brings an opportunity to say and do better than I've done.

Lord, I'm sorry for the wrong things I've done, for how I've sinned, hurt others, and hurt You. Forgive me, help me to change, and help me to make amends.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 19 February 2013

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. 1 John 2, verse 20.

Think about it: when God entrusts us with His love, He anoints us. He forgives each of us for the myriad ways in which we hurt each other, bring conflict into His creation, and reject Him. He forgives us and anoints us with His grace that flows down over us like sweet water. We are given that love and it is the ultimate truth.

Anointing sets us apart. If you aren't familiar with the practice, a Hebrew priest would anoint God's selected leaders with blessed oil. He would pour it over their heads, signifying that they have been marked and identified for a divinely-appointed purpose, imparting through unction a sacramental holiness. That happened to only the most special, on those whose lives were marked by God Himself.

So consider the wonder in how the Apostle John says in this verse that we are ALL marked by God Himself, that we are all anointed and set aside in divinely-appointed purpose. Our purpose is to stand and resist the antichrists of this world, the things that are designed to draw us away from God. What's more, our divinely-appointed, sanctified, consecrated purpose is to do that by sharing God Himself, his son Jesus. The same Jesus who pursues us in love and redeemed us by His own love sets us aside as special to Himself for the purpose of sharing Him and His love with other people so that they can know how He loves them too. That privilege of sharing Him is the highest calling of humanity.

It's what we're anointed for. Anointing consecrates. Jesus consecrates us in the truth of His love, in knowing that that love is the ultimate truth of the universe. Some churches, I'm sure, still anoint called servants in their ranks, though I haven't experienced this myself. In the past, I have served in various capacities in several churches, and I hope to do so in the future as well. Yet none of those offices or tasks is anointed nearly as well as the simple forgiveness that is mine and yours through following Jesus the Christ. He forgives, calls, consecrates and empowers us where we are so that we might represent Him to this world that needs Him but doesn't know it.

Father, God, bless your name for all you do to protect, anoint, and consecrate me. I have been unworthy to accept your call in my life, yet You made me worthy through your blood. Call me today and lead me where you will.

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Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 20 February 2013

I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. 1 John 2, verse 21.

I'm reading a book called "Follow Me" by David Platt. If you want to read something that will rock you out of Christian complacency, read Platt's books, especially this one. Platt, a minister at a congregation in Alabama, stridently insists that conventional faith is dead, even unchristian. When we sit by and think we've done enough, we need to remember that this Jesus we profess demands everything. Our profession of Him is our death sentence, and we are called to follow Him so that we might die, literally die, to everything this world has to offer.

That's the truth. It's harsh but true. Jesus spoke all truth, and all of His lessons, parables and words imparted only truth. There is no lie found in anything He ever says or does, including this call to death. Our call is to put Him and only Him as first in our lives, and to follow wherever He leads us even if it means sure and painful death. Indeed, we will die; it's the consequence of our humanity. Consider that most of the people of this planet are hostile to all things Christ, and most of the original apostles died horrible deaths as a consequence of following Jesus. Following Jesus means accepting the hard challenge, walking the hard road to death.

Again, that's just the truth. John writes this to us the same as he wrote it to his first century brothers and sisters. When we understand this truth, it is because Jesus has imparted His Spirit into our hearts so that our human failings won't stand in the way of grasping His truth. We know the truth when we recognize that Jesus is God and that God is three and that the three-in-one God is true love. We acknowledge that this truth is the ultimate knowledge of the world, and that only God can redeem this world through His love, through the love He poured out over us in Jesus' blood. We live this truth when we are anointed by King Jesus to share Him and His love with other people in how we think, speak and act, and when we represent Him to an anti-Christ world that is hostile to Him. We accept that truth when we set our feet onto the difficult path of following Him, knowing that our faith journey will lead us to death, both dying to the antichrists of this world and dying in penalty for our sins. And we live and love that truth of Jesus when we know that He has saved us from all that by His pure sacrifice so that we might share that true love with Him here and forever.

True Jesus, bless your truth and let me profess it in how I think, speak, and act for You today.

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Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 21 February 2013

Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. 1 John 2, verse 22.

We each have friends who live for the world. The next party, the cool shoes, the big house, the harem of friends, rising up the ladder of success: we each know people who live for all this life has to offer. Sometimes, that's a good thing, and sometimes that's pretty hollow. We each know people who, in how they think and speak and act, deny that Christ is God and God is Christ. We each know the antichrist.

Let's be honest, though: I am the antichrist. When I get angry at my wife or kids, I am the antichrist. When I give into temptation at whatever pet sin plagues me in a moment, I am the antichrist. When I do things that make me into a hypocrite, contrasting with these words I profess to you, I am the antichrist. When anything I think, say or do in this world brings disrepute on Jesus and in any way fosters even subtle denial of Him, I am the antichrist.

Look in the mirror, my hypocrite friend: you are too.

The antichrist isn't like Damien, movie character spawn of Satan. The antichrist isn't just a myth-like figure portrayed in the Bible as being indwelt by the devil himself. The antichrist isn't just this all powerful being who will rain down death and mayhem on the world; these things are promised as part of how this world will end. No, the anti-Christ is also you and me and all of us when we commit that petty, earth-shattering grave sin of putting ourselves before Jesus. When it's all about you, you are the antichrist. So am I.

When we pit ourselves against God, thinking we are better than Him, even thinking we could be equal to him, even thinking we can handle things all on our own, we are against God, Father and Son and Spirit as well; we are anti-Christ. When we do this, we are the antichrist.

Thanks be to Him that He sees us where we are, seeing through this shabby veil of idolatry and wanting to shake all of it away. Thanks be to Jesus that He washes even these antichrist sins of ours away and forgets them for all time. Thanks be to the Christ that He is the Christ, the only Son of God and the only Way to eternity. You and I are merely travelers with and to Him on that path to forever. We all need His Spirit and His forgiveness. We all need to be reminded of this. I challenge you to do it today.

Lord, strengthen my faith to share you where I am today.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 22 February 2013

No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. 1 John 2, verse 23.

Relationships matter. We were made for relationships, to be in a fellowship relationship with the Creator and to share this fellowship in Him with others. We do that by building relationships. Whether it's your family, or you and your bestie, or co-workers, or even people you meet on an elevator, you and I build relationships.

Think about it: we talk about the weather and we talk about the game last night. If you know someone, you talk about their kids and their work and their clothes and how they are feeling. When we really get to know each other, we share ourselves, opening our minds and our hearts to people who set us at ease and with whom we exchange trust.

That's how God designed us. And that's how He shares Himself with us. He gave us Himself through His word so that we could get to know Him, then share our living knowledge of Him with those people from the elevator, from our close friendships, and from our intimates. And when we know Jesus, we know God the Father. When we know God the Father, we know Jesus.

Here's the scary part, too: when we deny Jesus, we deny God the Father. When we deny God the Father, we are denying God the Son as well. When we do that, we defame His Spirit. Maybe that isn't our intention because, well, this whole triune God is a mystery. Want an answer for it? Don't look at me: I don't have one other than "that's God." He is three in one, Father in the Spirit in the Son. When you get to know one, you get to know all three distinct persons who are indeed distinct and individual yet still one. Mysterious.

I don't know why He is the way He is. I just know He is. When Moses asked what God's name was, God (the same three-in-one God) answered "I AM." Not some pretender but I AM. He is and isn't constrained by the limits of single-personhood humanity even though He is both human and spirit. God is I AM. There is no dissecting Him or chunking Him down to meet our definition of the way we think He should be. And the way He is means that He has a mysterious relationship that He wants to share with us. He constantly crashes into our lives and facilitates our relationships so that we might recognize Him and His life-changing love. Sharing that love is why He does it. That's what makes our relationships matter.

Three in one God, you are a wonderful mystery to us. I want a relationship with you that can grow and be shared with my family, friends and strangers too. Live in me, live through me, and live here today.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 25 February 2013

See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. 1 John 2, verse 24.

Faith is tough. I have lived both in and out of faith and I'm here to tell you that the high road is the tougher one to walk. Keeping the faith is much tougher than giving in to the temptation of things my past and the world around me tell me are a lot of fun and feel pretty darn good. They are fun and they feel great. No, I'm not going to guilt you in this and try to do the comparison thing and try to logically reason why faith is the better choice. We're beyond that.

Let the Apostle John simply tell you the way it is: if you keep the faith, you keep Christ alive in you. If you don't, you don't. It takes work. Jesus did ALL the work of salvation; you and I do nothing to save ourselves. We gain that salvation through faith in Him, through surrendering ourselves to Him. He still comes to us; He still does all the work of salvation; we do nothing.

Holding on to that faith, however, can be tough; really tough going. It's hard to say 'no' when our friends and even our families pressure us to do otherwise. I'm here to testify that it's worthwhile, but it's tough. It takes practice, namely constant fueling in His Scriptures, and intimate prayer with Him, and letting Him change our behaviors. It's hard to tone down our language, or change our habits, or even let go of friends who refuse to help on our faith journey. It's tough to resist the temptations that are always there.

Anyone, any Christian, who tells you that their life is all peaches and cream now that they're on a faith journey needs to have their heart examined. Jesus promises trials, and difficulties, and that the enemy will work even harder to turn us. That really happens; it happens with even greater severity if you profess your belief in Christ and work to live in Him.

But it's worth it. Live in the peace of knowing you let go of your regrets and tell me the verse is wrong. When we live through Christ, Christ lives through us. When we don't, we don't let Him. There is peace, real knowledge, understanding, fellowship and real freedom, not this lie of freedom that the world offers us. Real freedom is the Father and Son living in us through their Spirit. And it can be a tough road to walk.

Lord, thank you for leading me on Your path and for walking beside me on it. Live in me, love through me, help others through me, serve through me, and fight for me when the enemy comes to attack.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 26 February 2013

And this is what he promised us—even eternal life. 1 John 2, verse 25.

My church has a slogan posted on a banner: Eternity Matters Most. There's another one posted as well: It's Not About Me. Read them over and over and I think you'll see that they're like yin and yang, supporting and reaffirming each other; you can't really have one without the other. There are Scripture verses associated with them, so while you won't hear those specific slogans in the Bible, the thought of them is indeed implied.

I like both slogans, and I remember them often. But I think if you had to point to one being more important than the other, Eternity Matters Most would be it. It's not about me in this life because it's about God, it's about Jesus. It's not about me because I'm a servant here, put here to learn to love Jesus by sharing and serving others in love. It's not about me because we were made to be caring, not selfish.

It's not about me because eternity matters most.

Eternity matters most because Jesus is, and is in, and is from, and will be, eternal. He exists in this other dimension we think of as 'forever', which is both a time reference and a place. Christ exists there just as surely as He also lives through us here. It's the central mystery of our lives, how God, three in One, is and was and will be; how He is I AM. That mystery matters to us, though, because God made us in love to share forever with Him. We weren't made to be slaves who work this creation, and we weren't made to party like it's 1999 (which, in fact, was 14 years ago; 2000 zero zero party over, oops, out of time).

Eternity is more than the turn of the century. Eternity is more than something waiting for us after this temporal life is complete. You and I are part of eternity right now. We are marked for it; there is a place for us in it; we are sharing God's love here and now that is shared and rejoiced over in eternity right now. Jesus promised us that, when we become His, we are promised eternal life. That's not just life after human death: it's a perspective on life as a whole. Life is forever, pure, loving, exhilarating, challenging, bold, worshipping, glorifying and fun. It's not just for when we die: it's for here and now. And it's forever. It matters because we all need to know that.

Check out watersedgefrisco.com or, better yet, if you come through Frisco, Texas some Sunday, come see us. It's a welcome if somewhat quirky place where it's not about me because eternity matters most.

Jesus, you're eternal and You've made me eternal. Thank you and praises to you for that, and for the opportunity to share it today.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 27 February 2013

I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. 1 John 2, verse 26.

God bless the people who love us most. They're our drinking buddies who have seen us three sheets to the wind. They're our spouses who try to manipulate or change us (for our own good, of course). The people we love most are the helicopter parents who don't let us fail because it would be too awful to see. And they are the pastors who say one thing but live another or, worse, are simply cold. They're the good friends who tell us white lies to save our feelings, and they're the not-so-still small voices in our heads that tell us "it's ok. Just one time won't hurt."

What leads you astray? You and I are different people; what makes you tick – and your vices too – differs from what makes me tick. Some folks are tempted by the sound of the casino, or the thrill of a drug high. I could care less for those things. But stroke my ego to make me proud, or let a pretty woman pay me attention and my vice-meter starts to peg. I NEED to be reminded that this is a tough, fallen world, and that my vices are known to the enemy. I need those reminders just like I need air and water.

God knows that. It's one reason why He loves us.

But don't forget the placement of this verse. It comes immediately after John reminding us that eternity matters most because Jesus promised it. And it comes right before a verse that offers encouragement. That matters, because we constantly need encouragement. We are constantly caught in-between good things, and it's easy for us to lose our focus on God. We need to have our strength built up, our resolve stiffened, and our goal reminded. You and I are imperfect people doing our best to meet the highest standards of all, and sometimes we fail. Sometimes we let ourselves be led astray. We need to be reminded that we are part of eternity, and that eternity matters both here and later. And we need to be real.

Thank God that He keeps it real. His word deals with all the fundamental emotions, challenges and issues of this life. Even though it is thousands of years old, God's word offers us all the timely encouragement and divine strength that we need to repent, forgive, stand, and resist. It's all done out of His love.

Yes, indeed: God bless the people who love us most. God bless them with the same love He blesses us with. The world is better when we stand together.

Jesus Lord, bless those who tempt me. Bless those who persecute me. Bless those who hurt me. And bless me to bless these others so that Your light and Your glory may increase.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 28 February 2013

As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him. 1 John 2, verse 27.

A few days ago, we talked about how anointing consecrates, sets us apart for God's purpose. And we've been talking all along about how it's tough to remain in Jesus because evil is always smiling at us, beside us every step of our faith journey. Today, let's talk about two other thoughts.

One is that we don't need anyone to teach us when God speaks to us. Do you have the temerity to stand up to God and say "yeah, but" when He speaks? I know I don't. It's not cowardice: it's simply an acknowledgement that He is God and I'm not. When God speaks, his every word is a teachable moment. And when God speaks, what He says is complete. His Scriptures are complete just as they are; they don't need addition or subtraction (or my commentary). They are enough. And besides, can you think of a better teacher than the original one?

The second thought is that God's teaching to us is good advice. Not just our hearts: everything. Did you ever consider that the first few books of the Bible, the ones that teach the history of man and God's commands for living, are excellent practical advice? God not only taught his people then – and us now – about how to live a spiritual life. No, those words from Moses also teach us how to live in community, complete with codes for hygiene, justice, commerce, and familial relations. Everything that we need to live in harmonious society is contained there. Everything we need to know on how to deal with anything that's happening in our lives is there. What's more, where Jesus came to then teach how He is the fulfillment of all things, He also taught us to live in that perfect communion, both re-affirming those Mosaic dictates while putting them in true perspective.

It's in knowing these things that the apostle cautions us to remain in Him. That takes study, prayer, open hearts, repentance and forgiveness. It takes patience, yet here again God is both teacher and advisor. He modeled those actions in His time on earth as man. In reality, He has been modeling them for all time. It's still our privilege in life here to remain in Him. We are to be fueled, to share, to forgive, to worship, to love, and to grow in our relationship with Him. Everything else is second rate.

Lord, strengthen me to remain in you. Teach me, guide me, rebuke me and love me.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 1 March 2013

And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming. 1 John 2, verse 28.

I know where I'm going when I die. I know I'm going to heaven, to be with Jesus through eternity. This is a fact I accept because He promised it through His Word. Despite all the bad things I've done, I know in my heart that He forgave all of them. Because of that, He has worked to remold my life here to better share His love. When I die, I know He will welcome me home.

And yet...

And yet doubt still creeps up at me from around the edges of my life. The tempter still tries to lure me into sin the same way he tempted Eve: by creating doubt. He attempts to plant the seeds of division between God and I by saying "yeah, but" in the same way he did in Eden. He does it by shaking my confidence. "Are you really SURE that what Jesus said was true? After all, He said it so long ago, and you don't get nearly as many reminders of it as you would like." It's hard to remain confident in the faith when the attacker tries to get to you where you are most vulnerable. When that happens, my resolve weakens.

And then he does it by reminding me of my shame. "You know, you really should be ashamed. That X, Y or Z really was pretty bad." He tries to plant doubt in my mind by reminding me of how I felt when I wrapped the guilt of those sins around me like a torn blanket. I laid down that guilt a long time ago, but the deceiver still tries to use it against me, sticking me in the conscience, trying to get me to pick up the shame and wear it all the days of my life.

Hear Jesus' words from Isaiah 54: no weapon formed against me will prosper. The deceiver's words of doubt have zero effect on me when I remain in Him. When I keep my eye on Christ and live Him in my life, I'm bulletproof. No creeping doubt or stinging blame can really hurt me. Inside, where it counts, I'm gold. Outside, I can stand. Indeed, that redemption fuel gives me the fire I need to shake off the doubts, to kick away the serpent, and move forward into the day. No weapon formed against me will prosper because I continue in Him. And He always continues for me. Because of that, I know where I'm going.

Dear Lord, thank you for being my strength, my sword and my shield. Help me to resist temptations, to fight off evils, and to stand up for you. Let me be a good example for others so they learn to do the same.

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Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 4 March 2013

If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him. 1 John 2, verse 29.

If we do what is right, even if we don't believe in Christ, are we still righteous? And are even unbelievers 'born of him?' This seems like a luxurious topic to talk about. After all, there are starving people in Africa; I've seen them. There are homeless and jobless people in America; I know some. A million babies are murdered every year in America but we call it 'a choice;' incomprehensible and indefensible. Evil seems to be on the rise everywhere; just read the news. All this is happening and yet we're talking about whether or not someone is righteous?

What's more, not everyone knows this. Most people don't. 2/3 of all the people in the world don't believe in or literally don't know who Jesus is. Most people don't care. Yet most people are decent people who only want what's best for their families and themselves. That's not always a bad thing, right?

Wrong.

It's a harsh fact that if we aren't in Him, we aren't really righteous. If we aren't in Him, we aren't born again, literally reborn, and we have no promise of all the redemption He is. If we know He is righteous yet we don't believe He is, then we reject Him and we are choosing the opposite of love. If we know He is righteous yet we reject Him, then even if we live upright lives in the eyes of the world we are damned. Damned to hell forever in and after this life.

There is nothing right apart from God. Saving babies from burning buildings, helping old ladies pay their heating bills, working in the slums of Kigali and Mumbai, or volunteering in pediatric burn units to help the little children? All wrong. All worthless. All sin, in fact, if the motivation to do them isn't to serve God. If we reject Christ then we reject love, forgiveness, and redemption. If we reject Christ, then nothing we do, think, or say can ever be right. Everything we would do would not be born of Him; everything we would do would be of this world. Indeed, Jesus said "apart from me you can do nothing." He meant it.

Please know this is tough love to share. We are only righteous because God Himself made us righteous through His love and atonement. We only really do right when we are motivated by the love He gave us. We love only because Christ loved us. Any 'love' apart from this, not a part of it, is only worldly lust. Know this, then, as the righteous truth: Jesus loves you. Nothing else matters.

Lord, I want to love others as you loved me. Teach me to be selfless, caring, faithful, and helpful. Forgive me when I fall and bless those who oppose me. Help me to love as You love.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 5 March 2013

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 1 John 3, verse 1.

God the Father has but one natural Son. Father and Son are one God with their shared Spirit composing the three persons of God. It's a mystery, and neither you nor me nor the pope (or the cardinals in Rome) or anyone else really understands how they all work as One. It's just a matter of faith to know that He is and does. Yet God has only one Son, only one child: a Son, begotten from eternity into a being fully man and fully God all in one. Amazing mystery that we just can't compare to anything else.

Anything else, that is, except you and me. You see, we are adopted children of God. You and I were born, made, created by the same triune God, not as a person of Himself but as other created sentient persons made of His love. Our belief in the Son Jesus as the only forgiver of sins and the only path to heaven is our adoption transaction. He adopted us because we believe in Him. When God looks at us, He doesn't see our sins: He sees us through the perfection of His Son, who is Himself but who is also His Son.

As adopted children of God, we have the full status of sons and daughters. We are equals with Christ as children though we are clearly not His equals in all ways. Think about it: the Savior of all mankind is our peer, friend, fellow man, and confidant. And our brother. He is our brother. He is all God and all deity and all supernatural Savior, yet He is also a child of God as we are children of God.

More mystery? Absolutely, but don't get too wrapped around that at the moment. For just a moment, during this Lenten season of confession and repentance, just let yourself be blown away by the fact that your God and my God wants to treat us as His siblings. He loves us not only as a superior God but also as a peer on our level. God, the omnipotent awe-inspiring true power of the entire universe chooses to get to know you and me as us, as equals, as brothers and sisters. He wants to chat, to hang out, to be involved in us. Not because He has to: because He chooses too. God has only one natural Son, but He looks at you and me as sons and daughters and loves us just as much.

Father God, thank you so much for your saving love, for loving me as your child. Thank you for all you do for me as my father, my parent, my teacher, mentor and king.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 6 March 2013

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 1 John 3, verse 2.

Friends, the best is yet to come. We are brothers and sisters of our Brother our God, and there is no way this side of actually being in eternity to know exactly how He made that so, what it feels like in heaven. We can speculate, and there are a few hints given to us about the splendor of eternity. But we really don't know yet. The only way to really know is to go, and from there nobody reliably reports back.

But the best is still yet to come, even if we don't understand it now. When we are resurrected, we will have remade bodies, re-purified bodies. Maybe I won't need to do that Insanity workout after all! Instead, we will be remade, glorified, made good again. There won't be disease or decrepitude. You and I will be able to look at each other and marvel at how beautiful God made everything, including each of us. In our looks, there won't be lust or envy: there will only be adoration for God in appreciation of who He made us to be.

And what about that 'when Christ appears' part? Is that a reference to the Second Coming? It definitely could be; I dare say many men much smarter than me would say it is. Naturally, I'll dissent. Instead 'when Christ appears' could refer to when we are done with this life, either through our death or through His return. The whole rapture theology: for me, it doesn't add up. So 'when Christ appears' means once for all only one more time.

What does add up is that, either when I die or when He returns before that, I will get to see Him as He is. Jesus will be in His full glory, his radiant God-man supernatural glory. It won't blind like the sun or strike me dead because of my sin. Instead, because He forgave me and remade me to be like Him and with Him forever, I'll be able to look at Him in adoration, worship, thanks, and in love. I'll look at Him as a brother and as my Savior.

So will you. And it all starts with believing. It's believing that the Son of God has erased all your guilt and that, because of that, the best days are still up ahead. These are the 'good old days,' but, truly, the very best is still yet to come.

Coming Jesus, I can't wait to see what You are like in the next phase of life. I'm so glad and thankful for how You saved me, and I want to use the rest of my years here to bring You glory by spreading Your message.

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Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 7 March 2013

All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. 1 John 3, verse 3.

In Lutheran churches there is a phrase: 'works righteousness.' It's a desultory term actually; an observation about a belief system that many people embrace. If we work hard enough, we can earn our own salvation. Our efforts make us righteous; our righteousness comes from something we do. It's actually at the heart of what drove Martin Luther to question the Roman Catholic church because works righteousness was at the heart of the indulgences the Pope was selling (to pay for his new cathedral). Lutherans (and many other believers) reject that idea. It is Christ who makes us righteous; there is nothing we do to earn or make that so because He did it. He, and what He did, are simply facts.

So how is it that this verse seems to insinuate that we do something, that we purify ourselves? Is having faith a form or working towards your own righteousness (or working out your own salvation)? Tough questions asking for tough answers.

Brace yourselves. The answer is "it doesn't" and "no." The verse doesn't insinuate that we do anything to cleanse ourselves from our sins. Christ did that, and He imparts that to us as we acknowledge "I believe." But back up a few steps and remember what drove each of us to make that confession. We can't even begin to say "I believe" without God having pursued us to get to know Him. It has always been this way. Read through Scripture and you find that, all the way back to Eden, in every action, prophecy, every historical time when God's people went to Him, He was already waiting to hear their request. God reaches across eternity to even us today to let us know, before we even question Him, that He is there and He is God. It doesn't matter what you or I try to do or think. That isn't God or how He rolls. He has already purified us...are we ready to accept it?

And, no, having faith isn't a work of works righteousness. Same answer as above: we couldn't have the faith if God hadn't already reached out to us, in love, to show our need for faith in Him. Or to show how He loves us. He provides for us whether we believe in Him or not. He loves us even when we hate Him (as evidenced by how we misunderstand provision...He provides for unbeliever and believer alike). We gain salvation not through choosing faith but, instead, having our hearts convicted of our need for faith, then opening up to the love that is already standing in front of us.

Chew on that one whether you're Lutheran or not.

Dear Lord, thank you so much for purifying me because I couldn't do it myself. And thank you for being there for Me even when I didn't realize You were.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 11 March 2013

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. 1 John 3, verse 4.

A few weeks ago we watched a movie called "Lawless." It was about bootleggers during Prohibition, and how both they and the legal authorities pursuing them flaunted the law to get what they wanted. I have to admit: it was enjoyable. There's something about a shoot-em-up movie that's just fun to watch; the good guys against the bad guys...except the 'good guys' weren't really that good, and the 'bad guys' were the ones who were supposed to be doing good.

Then it hit me: that's us. We are like lawless bootleggers.

It's easy to point out some sins as being lawless. Murder, stealing, lying, cheating: people in all societies see these things as lawless acts that go against the norms of society. Those who perpetrate them must be held accountable for society to function. But go beyond the obvious and ask yourself if ALL sin isn't lawless. You don't have to slaughter people in concentration camps to be lawless. The child who says 'no' in defiance has done a lawless thing. The man who gives his word and then decides to not follow through has done a lawless thing. The woman who holds a grudge against her friend has done a lawless thing. When I think against God's will, I'm lawless. Do you see?

Implied in the second clause of verse 4 is "all." ALL sin is lawless, even the seemingly innocuous ones. More, sin as a condition is lawlessness. It is more than just the act. When we do the sin, we are in a lawless state; the action says something about us. The choice or desire to commit the act comes from within. It comes from our hearts. If the sin itself is lawless, it is how we embrace doing the sin that is lawlessness. All sin is lawlessness whether we want to accept that or not.

It isn't just bootleggers who break the law, and it isn't just the really bad rats in the movies, or politicians in the White House, or just the people we see on the TV news. It's us. We break the law. I break God's laws a thousand times a day, and even that number is optimistic. Extrapolate that out to see that, if I broke God's law a thousand times per day, because I'm 46, if God were accounting for my sins like an accountant, my tally would be at least 16,790,000. That's 16 million reasons I should be damned. Tell me, do you think I have the wherewithal to pay for 16 million sins, to right 16 million ways in which I've wronged God or others?

Thank God I don't have to. Thank God you don't have to. Thank God He paid for them Himself. Thank God He made a lawless people like us clean again.

Thank you, Lord, for your redeeming love and forgiving mercy.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 12 March 2013

But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. 1 John 3, verse 5.

Knowledge is power; intelligence is advantage. We can't prove that gravity exists, but we know it does. Nobody can prove that what is behind me is actually there, but I know it is. We only have paintings of famous people from the distant past; we don't really know exactly what they looked like. I can't prove that my family loves me, but I know they do.

Nobody can prove that Jesus Christ even existed, or that He was resurrected, or that He is even the Son of God. No empirical proof exists or has ever been found to point to these things as being undeniably true. To say they are true, one must have faith. Indeed, that's the case for almost every truth in life: that we must put our belief, our faith, in it for it to be seen by us as true. Whether it's evolution, the rights of humanity, or the likelihood that the Cubs, yet again, will not make it to the World Series this year, we must believe in things to know them to be true.

I know Jesus appeared so that He might take away our sins, and that in Jesus there was and is no sin. I know this to be true because He spoke His truth to my heart through His love, through His word, through His Spirit, through how I've seen it play out in the lives of other folks who believe in Him. I know it's true because I believe it, and I believe in Him. What is contained in the Scriptures I believe to be the inerrant word of Him who came to take away my 16 million-plus sins. This knowledge (based on belief) is power. It is the key to living freely; indeed, it is the secret to living in everything.

The goofy, mysterious thing about it is that it isn't a secret at all. It is out there for anyone to see, anyone to know. The highest calling of a believer is to love God with everything we have, then to share that love by telling others about it. Believers don't have some secret handshake or some innate core belief that unbelievers can't know. Nothing could be further from the truth. But central to that truth is suspending empirical logic in favor of spiritual following. Seeing isn't believing: believing becomes seeing.

And before, after, in the middle, and all the way through that belief is Jesus. THAT is real faith, real knowledge, and the real advantage in living.

Jesus my lord, I believe in you. I believe in you as a fact, as my friend, and as my only savior. I know You are who You say You are, and thank You for that.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 13 March 2013

No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. 1 John 3, verse 6.

Awhile back, I had an online discussion with some people who said we are no longer sinners. Their contention was that, once we are redeemed by Christ, our very nature is changed. They said that everything about us changes when Christ converts our hearts. It's as if we no longer have a taste for a food we used to enjoy, and so we are no longer sinners from that point on. I don't know what their basis for that statement was, but I suspect it could have come from this verse.

There's something incomplete with that concept, though, because we are sinners and we do keep on sinning even as our spiritual nature has been changed. During our discussion, I said that, if you even think an impure thought, you're in sin. Sin is in our nature as human beings just as blood is in our bodies. It's why we constantly need to grasp the forgiveness of Christ. Christ didn't need to redeem sinless people, but sinners very much need Him throughout the rest of our flawed lives.

Here's the kicker: both positions are correct.

Both are correct because Christ changes our very nature once we get to know Him. When He crashes into our lives, He looks to change everything about us from our inmost thoughts to our most disturbing behaviors. Whatever keeps us from living fully through Him, Jesus looks to break away and restore us to living purely. When we cling to Him, nothing, not even the most delicious pet sins of our past, can rip us away. It's as if we lose taste for a bad food we used to enjoy.

What we can do is renounce Him, reject what He does in favor of our own choices. God allows us 100% free choice in all facets of our lives. I think that's why the second part of the verse says what it does, because it's possible to experience Christ and still return to sin, or indeed to never really leave it. Don't believe me? Think Judas Iscariot, who was in Jesus' inner circle and yet betrayed Him.

Sin will always tempt us, and God doesn't promise that we will be removed from those temptations either. Indeed, when the Lord's Prayer says "lead us not into temptation," it's for good reason (and those words came from Christ Himself). Just because He changes our inclination doesn't mean He changes everything around us. How we stand up for Him and live in Him matters even more with every decision we make.

Lord, I'm a sinner who You made sinless. You cleaned me up even as I bear the scars of my dirt. Strengthen and help me to remain in You, to grow in You, and to share You with my friends who need You too.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 14 March 2013

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. 1 John 3, verse 7.

Yesterday we talked about being sinners made sinless by Jesus, how He changes our very nature and takes away our taste for the things of sin that used to please us, replacing them with a taste for His purity. And we talked about how, in the Lord's Prayer, it says "lead us not into temptation" for good reason.

We can be led into temptation all on our own. Jesus never puts us in a position to choose sin, but He does sometimes put things in our way to guide our choices for Him. I think He sometimes allows sin to tempt us, or even shakes up our world with sins, in order to test and build us up in Himself. That's key to remember, especially in times when our economy is rough and the world seems upside down. God is showing us where He wants to take us tomorrow based on starting in the tough situation where we find ourselves today. He's building us up so that we aren't led astray.

Here's a partial list of the things that tempt me: tobacco, good scotch (or bourbon), kind women who are interested in what I have to say, flattery, flirting, codependence, and pride. I work on the road, and I spend much time away from home. Since my wife and I reconciled several years ago, it has constantly worried her that I would fall back into the temptation to slip into some sin of infidelity, addiction, or other dysfunction when I'm out of her sight and out of her influence. That isn't a small or idle worry, because I spend much time alone. It's a good job and a good life God provides for me, but sometimes it's lonely. I've been blessed to resist the old temptations, yet even as I haven't done things to return to my ways of error, the temptation is usually around. Resisting it can sometimes be tough emotional, even physical, going. It probably can be for you too.

It's by our fruit that we're known. Resisting evil counts in the eyes of the world. It's proof to those we love and those watching us that what we believe has taken root. It matters to stay pure, to stay faithful and true, because it builds up trust. And even more, it professes God, shares Him, pleases Him to have us walk the walk and talk the talk. In encouraging us to stand, He delivers us. Even when He allows temptation to surround us, He is glorified when we stand by Him and know that He's also standing by us. In God, no weapon can prosper against us, and no pet sin can truly succeed.

Lord, lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil. Thank you for your strength and encouragement.

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Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 15 March 2013

The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. 1 John 3, verse 8.

So, if you mess up, are you of the devil? Make no mistake about it: all sin is a work of Satan. It pushes us away from God. God can't tolerate sin because He is holy, and all sin is unholy. Sin is not of God; it's of the devil. Yet are we of the devil?

Of course the answer is "yes and "no."

When we hitch our star to evil, we embrace it. It has always been this way, from Adam, Eve, and Cain to Stalin, Hitler, and the Kardashians. Remember, sin is what comes from the heart because sin starts in the heart. Yet when we hitch our star to Christ, even when we mess up and break His rules, when we honestly come back to Him and seek His forgiveness, we are embracing and endorsing Him instead. Love, too, comes from the heart and can be both the cause and effect of our intentions.

What's more, sin and the devil are powerless against Jesus. Dark evil has never been able to overcome Him and it never will. His light shines to overpower any kind of darkness. From the beginning of time, when man first sinned, God intended for His Son to come and make all things new and right again. God knew all the terrible things we would be capable of doing, so He set in motion a plan to render them moot.

"But Dave, it's just so damn hard. You don't know what I'm going through." Oh really now. Perhaps you and I aren't so different. I've done awful things throughout my life. I was an adulterer. I've cheated, hated, and stolen. I have schemed to have what I wanted, and I know much worse than this. Name a commandment and, in one way or another, I have violated it, taken part in it, or thought about it. In my life, I have embraced darkness.

Look in the mirror and stand beside me. Do you like what we see together? Are our filthy, wounded, bleeding souls so much better for the evil things we've done? Yeah, I didn't think so.

So now is a good time to remember, yet again, the light of love who is Jesus can shine clean on any kind of darkness. The devil is powerless against Him. Christ lives and loves to change lives. Someone like me, or you, who has done things of the devil can be washed clean and covered in the Spirit-love of Christ and stand innocent in front of God. He teaches us to turn from the devil and be healed.

Healing Jesus, thanks for shining your light on my dark soul. Teach me to stand and share your light.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 18 March 2013

No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. 1 John 3, verse 9.

A book of contrasts and reminders. First we are reminded that we are all sinners and that we need Jesus to take away those sins. Then we are reminded choosing sin means rejecting Christ. After that, we are reminded that those who choose Christ have their very natures changed. And here, that is reinforced.

When we are born of God, our inclination to sin is replaced with an inclination towards God's love. When you taste of God, you righteously desire Him more. The Apostle Paul called it 'becoming a slave to righteousness.' Where, before, we were bound in slavery to the consequences of our wrongs, in God we become bound in love to change everything about us. It's as if God wraps Jesus' righteousness around us. He prides out the guilt and the consequences of our sins, and with those goes the inclination to sin further. What's left is made pure in Him, and when God the Father looks at us in His holy and just manner, He sees only the purity of His Son. We are free to stand before Him, to adore and be blessed by Him, guiltless.

This becomes our spirit. God's Spirit indwells in us, God's seed remaining in us. When we let God remake our hearts, the body is free to follow. Admit it: you've heard stories of people who could overcome terrible addictions and calamities when God moved in to move out their junk. Those stories are true. If you don't believe them, contact me. I can put you in touch with people, myself included, who know of these things because they happened to them.

And I can also put you in touch with people who have been born of God but find themselves still mired in sin. Not long ago, a woman contacted me and we had an email discussion about how she felt lost, how she thought she had lost her faith. She was under the influence of evil, I think, and was being attacked, prided away from God. She lost sight of how evil is powerless against Christ. It happens: when we pull ourselves away from God's purity, we can become powerless against evil. Evil gets a foothold in us when, like Lot's wife, we turn from God's future to look and long for something else.

Here's the beautiful part: even in our dark moments, Jesus the man of true light is still fighting for us. He is beside us in our sin, beckoning us to turn back, to rest all our longings and sights on Him, and to be redeemed pure. Nothing in the universe can separate us from it and we learn to sin no more.

Jesus in light, shine your pure love-light on me and keep me pure.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 19 March 2013

This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister. 1 John 3, verse 10.

The devil has children? Satan is a fallen angel, a being created by God who was given the free will of a man. In that will, he chose to disobey. I have no idea if angels can reproduce. Some research into the matter shows divided thought. Some scholars believe Genesis 6 points to angels reproducing with early women. Other scholars say angels, as spiritual beings, can't physically reproduce.

But it really doesn't matter, does it? I mean, through faith we are adopted as children of God. Is it any stretch that, through faith, Satan would have followers who are his adopted children? There are people who choose Satan and the dark arts of life; some of them are even upright citizens. Yet choose the prince of darkness they do and thus identify themselves as his sons and daughters. If we can be a follower of Jesus, then we surely can also be a follower of Lucifer.

Perhaps this is a more understandable way of absorbing the verse. When we willingly choose the sin, we choose adoption, identification, and all the 'privileges' of the sin. We take the name representing what we choose. Where love, peace, and contentment are fruits of adoption in Christ, shame, guilt, misery and damnation are natural outcroppings from being a member of Satan's family. Christ adopted me as evidenced by His redemption of me and my faith in Him. So, too, could Satan adopt someone as evidenced by one's faith in his works of sin and how those works bear fruit in dysfunction.

There's another important thing to remember from that description: willingly. We are human and we sin, we make mistakes. All sin is willing, but the willingness that seems to be inferred in verse 10 is a willingness from the heart. When one sins yet feels genuine guilt and (hopefully) genuine repentance, then the verse doesn't describe them. It's when one willingly continues to choose the sin when a better choice, the Jesus choice, is available. That's a choice from the heart as well. It's a willing thing.

Yet even when that happens, Christ doesn't give up on us. I mean, is it inconceivable that God would continue to work on us through misery? God allows us the free choice to choose even sin and He allows the consequences of it to play out in our world so that we might see our need to come back to Him. He's our adopted Father with a love given from His holy heart. Would you rather be a child of darkness or a child of light?

Lord, create in me a clean heart and help me to cleave only to You.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 20 March 2013

For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. 1 John 3, verse 11.

Not long ago I watched a riveting movie: "The Boy in the Striped Pajamas." It's a movie about the Holocaust, so, no, don't expect a happy ending. Murdering millions of people is shocking enough. What I found most shocking, though, was how seemingly rational, 'normal' people could willingly turn their backs while their neighbors murdered their neighbors. The German soldiers portrayed in the movie were just doing their duty, and their duty just happened to be murdering Jews and other 'undesirable animals.' I can't think of any better example to contrast verse 11.

But then I think about things in our own time. If you're reading this, you were alive during the massacres in Rwanda. Most of 1 million Hutu and Tutsi Rwandans murdered each other in the 1990s. Surely that is a work of free choice through the devil, yet what did you or I do to help in some way when we found out? And just yesterday there were reports of chemical weapons being used in Syria. Just under 100 years ago, millions died on the Western Front because of chemical weapons. Have those who may have used them this week not heard of that?

Or is it that they've never read verse 11. And what have we done about it?

Man's capacity to be inhuman is never ending; the depths of our depravity can't be plumbed. It's the reason why Christ came here: to save us from ourselves. Without His outside intervention, like the Gambler, the best that you could hope for is to die in your sleep. You don't have to go far to find inhumanity. Look in every school, where you see some kids being bullied while others stand idle (and teachers as well). Look in families where we harbor unnatural grudges against each other. Look in the mirror when you put on your game face today and tell me that it isn't all about you.

Or me. I'm as guilty as the worst. I'm guilty of not loving my brothers and sisters as Jesus loves me. When I'm like that, I'm a ripe field for Satan to sow seeds of disaster.

Jesus died for our sins: this is the most important concept in all Scripture (even in all civilization). There is no other thought, idea or lesson in all of the human experience that is more important than this. Jesus' death and resurrection as payment for our sins is the ultimate expression of brotherly love. It's the model for how we should love. And it's the antidote to terrifying, sinful things like the Nazis, Rwanda and our suburban apathetic antipathy toward all things of God.

Lord, I praise you for your selfless love, and thank you for dying for me. Help me to love others as You would have me love them.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 21 March 2013

Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. 1 John 3, verse 12.

What about Cain and Abel? Theirs is the third story in the Bible, right after the creation and the fall of man. It's the third sin God directly mentions in Scripture, right after Adam's pride and Eve's denial. And it's not some small infraction: it's murder. Not just murder: murder of a sibling, murder of a brother.

If you don't remember the story, Cain and Abel were Adam & Eve's first and second children. They were farmers, and one day each of them wanted to bring an offering to God. Abel chose the very best he had raised: a first-born of his livestock. It was a gift from the heart. Cain, on the other hand, scraped together a few nice crops and called them ok. What happened? God accepted Abel's gift and rejected Cain's. What's more, God didn't just reject Cain's: he corrected him, then taught Cain the right way.

So what was Cain's reaction? 'I'll get even.' Pride. Anger. He let his anger morph into hatred. It was hatred so severe that he plotted murder, then he carried it out. And what did Cain do then? He stayed in his circle of pride. 'What will become of me? What will I do? People will want to hurt me:' these are the things Cain said when God confronted him. Me; it's all about himself; it was all about Cain.

Today, it's all about us. You and me: we are Cain. The story of Cain and Abel is the story of every sin we've ever conceived. We never murdered our siblings, but we murdered God's love. With every pet sin we kill the good Word that God gave to us, and then blame God. Think about it: in this day just before the start of Holy Week, our sins are already nailing Jesus to the cross. Mine, yours, Kim Kardashian's, Barack Obama's, Karl Marx's, Cain's and Abel's. All our sins are how we try to kill off God's love. Kind of puts it into a different light, don't you think?

It's not about me. It's about Jesus, about Him being God, about Him sacrificially loving us to save us from our inner Cain. Cain is why Jesus came. Our sins are why Jesus was murdered.

After awhile, Genesis doesn't say what happened to Cain much beyond him one day starting a family and building cities. Perhaps he died a natural death; perhaps he lived a long time and died in the great flood. We don't know and it doesn't really matter. What matters is his example, and what it means for us, and that God had greater love.

Lord, forgive me when I have fallen as Cain did. Have mercy on me for your Son's sake.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 22 March 2013

Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. 1 John 3, verse 13.

As long as there has been a Christian faith there have been Christians who have felt under siege. I mean, from the beginning, the church was ridiculed, marginalized, and persecuted. Jesus Himself said this would happen, and right after He was executed, His closest friends went into hiding. I'm sure they thought they would be next. For three hundred years Christians were hunted by the Romans. Two thousand years later, there are more non-Christians on this planet than there are Christians. There are more people who honestly think that the idea of following a self-proclaimed savior from 20 centuries ago is a crazy idea.

So, true confession: they're right. Let's face it: faith is illogical; we've talked about it before, but it needs to be mentioned again. In the eyes of the world, faith doesn't make sense. Mohammed never said he would come back (and he hasn't). Buddha never said he'd come back (and he hasn't). L Ron Hubbard said he would come back but hasn't. Yet we believe this Jesus said He would come back, did come back, and has promised to come back again when His time is right. In the eyes of every other religious or non-religious person in the world, that's a wacko idea. It's illogical. It's unreasonable. It's crazy.

Here's the kicker: when God fills your heart with His real knowledge, it is the world of sin that is unnatural, that doesn't make sense, that is illogical. Once you've known the life-upending love of Christ, everything else is what seems crazy. He changes how you look at people, what you want in your day, and, in time, how you think, love, feel, react, and dream.

But remember this: you're going to be hated for it. Seemingly good friends will shun you like you have a disease. The things you believe in will be ridiculed. The holidays you celebrate will be targeted. Others will work to try to make you self-conscious about what you believe. In time, with just the right chain reaction, you may very well be persecuted for it; in some nations today, you can be executed for saying you believe in Jesus. It's not paranoia: it's fact. Jesus promised this, and His promises always come true. So expect it. But take heart, sister or brother: the hatred of a world suffering in ignorance is a badge of honor to wear that others, too, might come to grasp this illogical, crazy faith.

Lord of crazy love, thank you that your love defies all human thinking. Thank you that your love seems illogical to a world that doesn't understand You. And thank you for using me to share you with that lost world so that they can come to know You, and understand You, and see the rest of the world as crazy without You.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 25 March 2013.

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. 1 John 3, verse 14.

The wages of sin are death; the Apostle Paul said it. He said it having known the faith that the Apostle John knew (and maybe even having personally met John in the flesh). If you do some word substitution with Paul's verse, it takes on a whole new meaning. The wages of sin are death...the wages of following Jesus are life. If we live for sin, we reject Jesus. If we reject Jesus, we reject Him and His love, which is the essence of life. If we live for sin, we reject life.

So if we live for following Jesus, we are paid in life; abundant life of contentment, peace, knowledge, joy, happiness, and fun. Even as the terrible times still happen when we follow Him, we are freed of emotional, even physical, slavery to those terrors and we become able to deal with them realistically, through the lens of Him to teaches that tough times never last but tough believers do.

How do we follow Jesus? It starts with just love. Just love people, learning to love the way Jesus loved. Love is selfless. Love says "you first." Love is empathy and caring, patience and wisdom. Love acts like Jesus does. When we love, we follow Him and we're open for Him to teach us even more.

When we love, the world will hate us for it because love is crazy and illogical. Love goes against the grain of a world that is accustomed to living through logical sin. In the world, unreasonable ignorance is equated with knowing love. In the world, the life that is a fruit of love is replaced with the death that comes because of hatred.

And it happens because I put me first, because I abandon selfless love to get my selfish desires. It happens even though we know there's a better way.

I was an adulterer, and sometimes that weighs on me. They were good women who cared, even loved, despite denying our mutual selfishness and impossible expectations. I've cursed, I've stolen, I've hated; I've done worse than these. The logical outcome for all of my sins is permanent separation from God: death. 2000 years ago, God proved He saw things differently. He put Himself up to die as the price He was willing to pay to save me from myself. When He did that, though I wasn't even born yet, God brought me over from death to life. He did it for you as well. And for Joe Stalin, Joe Biden, Joltin Joe DiMaggio, and Joe the Plumber as well. God did it for all of us average Joe's so that we might follow Jesus and live.

Lord, thank you for bringing me from death to life, from hatred to love, and from hopeless ignorance to knowing hope.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 26 March 2013

Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. 1 John 3, verse 15.

The suburban soccer mom who waits in line for her first grader and detests the woman in front of her is a murderer. The man who sits in church and harbors grudges against people who hurt his family is a murderer. The saintly grandmother sitting in her quaint little house while talking trash about her neighbors is a murderer.

We can go on like this all day long. I'm betting you can see where it's going.

Repeat after me: I'm guilty. I'm a murderer. Think of hearing the sound of slamming bars behind you, and the guards rattling the cellblock. You're a murderer. This prison is where you belong. Indeed, think of your cell as a cell on death row. You're stuck within the tiny, cold, gray cell that is the consequences of all the murders you've ever committed. And make no doubt about it: me and you? We're practically serial killers. We've killed so many, so many times that we're beyond public enemy number one. We're dripping with the blood of saints (and sinners).

For us, death awaits. Horrible execution, unthinkable pain. And here's the most horrible part of it: this never ends. It's prison, terror and execution over and over again for all eternity. Forever. Every day will be the lonely terror of incarceration with the worst of the worst until the time when the executioner walks us to the chopping block and swings the ax yet again.

We belong in that cell, destitute, abandoned, forgotten, punished. We deserve the punishment, the knife that swings over and over in the never ending torture and pain.

Now picture something else. Picture a man of bright light pushing back your cell door. Picture the man with holes in His hands, and this knowing, loving look on His face. Envision Him taking you by the hand and walking you out. There are many of us in this prison, and He walks from cell to cell, beckoning the men within to join Him and walk out free. Up ahead is the door and you can see outside the prison, outside where there are no fences, bars, or guards. Outside is freedom and the Man, now smiling beside you, is guiding you to that place.

Me, David: I was a murderer. So were you, along with the soccer mom, the grudge-bearing dad and the neighborhood gossip. We are all guilty of murder for harboring the anger that is the seed of murder. There's no place for it in believers because Christ crowds out all that darkness with His undeniable light.

Lord of light, crowd out the hatred I let grow in my heart. Release me from the prison of my sins and take me with You.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 27 March 2013

If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? 1 John 3, verse 17.

If you've never done any kind of mission work – work for God's sake – then this is your challenge: listen to what He tells you in your heart and work for Him. You're on a mission today.

I've been blessed to do mission work overseas. One thing I learned is that mission work in a foreign land teaches you humility. If you don't learn the lesson of humility there, perhaps you never will. You're out of your element and in a place where God can use that to His, and your, advantage. When we're away from the familiar, we listen more closely to God, cling tighter to what He says and does. It's a blessed thing to be broken down by God's Spirit, to have the veneer of what we cling to in our material world stripped away and put in its proper place.

But it's blessed, too, to learn that lesson where you are. Here's something a better man might have learned before he bought a plane ticket: you don't need to leave home to be on mission. Our mission is to live lives as struggling sinners shining with the grace of the Savior in our homes, in our workplaces, in our schools, in our shopping malls, and in every breath we take. John talks about our material possessions and how we should share those with neighbors in need. That's a meal, a hand mowing a lawn or hanging a fence, \$50 for a tank of gas, or something: something to meet a need in the moment. The presence of the love to share our possessions is evidence of faith. The absence of them is evidence of the absence of faith.

At the bottom of them is the heart. Faith comes from the heart. God reveals Himself to us in our hearts, deep inside where we hold dear what matters most. God speaks to that part of us and moves us to do as we will from there. Our mission should be to be on mission with an attitude from the heart wherever we are. We're on mission in line at the store, or at the zoo, or at our desks, or at the altar. Our mission is to share ALL that God has given to us no matter where we are. Perhaps our primary mission, then, is to the people immediately around us, the folks in our lives. We see them most often and they're most likely to be influenced by what we say and do. Today, let's model God's behavior for them, then step back to see how He goes to work.

Lord of my mission, help me to share all You have given to me so that my neighbors might know You more.

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Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 28 March 2013

Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. 1 John 3, verse 18.

There's a country song that says "love isn't some place that we fall, it's something that we do." I like that song. Then there is the DeBeers commercial that says how love is a promise, but a diamond is forever. And just last night my wife and I watched the last of the Twilight movies. Yes, it was corny, hormonal teenage fantasy (when I was a kid, vampires were evil, but that's another story), but it was also, first and foremost, a love story about how people would fight for those they truly love forever.

Honest love without action is not love.

The Apostle John agreed with the Apostle James. One was Jesus' closest friend, the other his brother by Joseph and Mary. Both of them shared this same message. Love without deeds is dead. Worse, love without being put into action is false, a denial of God. Both of them shared this message unabashedly, putting their friend, brother and Savior's message into motion because that honest love without action wouldn't be love. It would be unshared, unknown, pointless.

Think about it, especially on this Maundy Thursday, the day when Christ said His goodbyes and prepared to die. On this day, Jesus gave His friends a tangible way to remember and honor Him. He talked about love, He conveyed love, He felt and gave love. And to prove it, He did things. Throughout His life, He saved people from themselves. He performed real miracles to prove His supernatural power (and our need for Him). Christ fed people, cried with friends, laughed with children, and confronted the Pharisees. At the end of it all, when He had done all He could, He volunteered to let Himself be hammered to a cross and killed.

His action was the most real truth in all of history: that God is love, and that when God's love is put into action it is so powerful it could overcome even death.

Then it did.

Then it did to prove, once again, for James, John, you and me to know that love without action is not love. For us to love, we must share it, grow it, demonstrate it, and give it away. God's love never comes back empty, even if it takes our whole lives to come back. It took all of Jesus' life, and He is still coming back. Until then, He gives us His love to live with, not to store in a dark closet or keep only to ourselves. He gives it to us because it's something that He, and we, do.

Lord, thank you for your giving, active, sharing love today.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 29 March 2013. Good Friday

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. 1 John 3, verse 16.

I usually write these words the day before I publish them; at the very least, I usually begin them the night before, then edit or finish them the next day. So, when I wrote today's entry yesterday, I wrote it based on watching Christ die. What I wrote imagined standing there, in front of the cross, watching Him die. After all, today is Good Friday and that's an appropriate thing to contemplate on this day. This morning, a different thought came to mind.

Thank God for Good Friday.

Thank God that He, as God and as a man, laid down His life for us. It's not just the whole portion of Him doing something we couldn't do, or even the idea of God humbling Himself enough to die. Those are undeniably crucial. Instead, thank God for Good Friday because, without it, there could be no Easter. Not so long before, Jesus said that 'greater love has no man that he would lay down his life for his friends.' On Good Friday, He did it.

Without His death, there could be no turning-death-on-its-head moment that was the resurrection. Without His death, Christmas would have no meaning and no love. Without His death, Jesus would have been just another wise teacher able to do magic tricks. Without the death of Christ, humanity would have no focus because what followed the death of Jesus Christ was the central event in all of human history. Without the death of Christ reason would have no meaning because the foundation of reason is the love of God, and without the death of Christ, the love of God would have been nothing more than holy vengeance.

And without the death of Jesus, we would have no way to know what real heroism is. A hero is willing to commit everything for others. Heroes put it all on the line. Jesus was the ultimate hero. Fully God and fully man at all times, fully in control of His Spirit, He absorbed more pain and anguish than you or I ever thought possible and did it with nothing to gain for Himself. He chose it; He knew the stakes and He knew the consequences, and He chose it anyway. Heroic.

The pre-edited version of this entry began with a few words from Jim Morrison: "This is the end. My only friend, the end." Those are appropriate words for today. Instead of them being a poem about meaningless endings, they're a finish to God's time on earth. Yet, in a way, they're inappropriate as well because today isn't the end. It's the beginning. The eternity that follows started today. Thank God for Good Friday.

Lord, thank God for how You loved us. Thank you for your once for all sacrifice. Without You, life would be death.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 1 April 2013

This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 1 John 3, verses 19 and 20.

Happy Easter! Now comes the tough part.

It's tough because Easter should be a real celebration. It should be a truly fun thing to celebrate the resurrection. Thanks to Jesus, death has no more power over us. When you think about it, we've been given a gift of nothing. Because nothing was in the grave, we are free. Because Jesus awoke from death and walked out, we are released from all guilt. We are no longer have to go on in our sins.

Today, the day after, it's time to move forward with how we will use that knowledge. Per these verses, the best place to start is to rest in His presence and listen to our hearts. If my heart still hurts from something that happened, then it's important to me; if it's important to me, it's important to God because God knows us fully and loves us fully: fully enough to die and rise for us. When there are things that make me sad, hurting or depressed, or if there are matters of conscience that trouble us, then those need to be resolved.

Lie to your husband? Confess it. Cheat on a test at school? Confess it. Hurt from something said to you? Confess it. Worried that something you did will cause trouble or be found out? Confess it.

I've done those things and I bet you've done some of them too. The start of making them alright is sorting out what's bothering us. Confess it to God honestly. Get to the root of the problem and pull it out. Talk with God about it, no matter how you feel. Generally, that makes things better, and it's the start of more. I'm sure a psychologist could tell you about the healing powers of confession and absolution, and there's validity to that. I'm here to tell you that it's what God wants. He wants us to fully love Him in return for that full love He gives us, and that starts by us telling Him what's in our hearts.

The day after any big occasion can be a let-down, so let's change it up this year. The gift of nothing in the tomb is too good to bottle up, so let's live Easter lives this year, getting down to the heart of the matter and opening up from inside. What matters to us matters to God because the Lord wants what's best for us, and for us to rest in His grace. That begins today inside each one of us.

Easter Lord, thank you for giving me a heart to feel, to open, and to love. Seek what is in my heart and help me to confess and open to You.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 2 April 2013

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. 1 John 3, verses 21 and 22.

Think about it: deep in our hearts, if we aren't bothered any longer by the things that happen or that we've done, then we are free. It's the reason for Easter, you know. Yesterday we talked about confessing what's deep inside of us. Root out the problem, open up, deal with it by telling it honestly to God.

Christ released us from the penalty for our sins. Once we understand that He took away all spiritual penalties for our sins, we realize we're free. Our hearts need no longer harbor resentment, guilt, or shame. We can stand in front of God in full confidence that He doesn't see the guilt, resentment or shame. He only sees us through the love of His Son.

Yet God knows we still live in a world of sin, that one of the fundamental ways that sin creeps back into our lives is from inside. The sadness of things in our lives burrows into our hearts and festers there, like a worm eating an apple from the core. Despite divine forgiveness, the enemy is always looking for ways to get back in. One of the primary ways is for him to plant doubt inside us. We constantly embrace that doubt, then we pick up the hurt again and internalize it.

You know that's not what Easter was for. God wanted us to know that we were free, that we don't need to feel condemned any longer. God sent His Son to die in our place so that we could stand free and clean before His holy presence. He did it so that we might ask more of Him, namely for Him to live fully through us. I'm living proof that He does, that He is always inside and beside my heart, beckoning me to let Him shield me from the enemy's attacks. The lies, the cheating, the theft of love, the hurt, the grudges: I've done them. Have you? Is it any wonder that I felt miserable? How about you?

And is it any wonder that I feel like a burden is lifted off my shoulders when I understand, again and again, that my Savior died so I don't need to live in misery; that I might live to ask from Him a life full of Him. He did it for you too. In these days after Easter, remember that. No death or sin in the grave of Jesus means there doesn't need to be sin or death in our hearts.

Risen Jesus, thank you for removing death and sin. Thank you for taking away my guilt, my shame, my hurt. Live through me to help and serve others as You would have me do.

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Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 3 April 2013

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. 1 John 3, verses 21 and 22.

We discussed these two verses yesterday, but there's something else in them that's on my heart to share. Notice how the Apostle John begins the first verse. "Dear friends." In most of 1 John, he speaks frankly, without such an intimation. In other parts of the book, he addresses his readers as "dear children" or "young men. Yet as often as he says "dear children" he says "dear friends." Not just as an introduction, but as a term of endearment: this from the man who was one of Jesus' closest friends. John says these things to you and me, to strangers, as if we have that kind of close relationship with Jesus. In fact, we do.

I am a friend of God. You and I, with hearts made clean by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, are friends of God.

A few years ago, my marriage was terribly broken. I loved my wife, but I had so transgressed that, for her own good, she left me. She felt she had to get away from me because I had become toxic. I had cheated, lied, conspired, and deceived. She left me as she should have; could you blame her?

At my very lowest, I went exercise at our gym one day, to maybe get some clarity. When I'm at the gym, I listen to my iPod, and one of the songs that came up in the shuffle that day sang "Who am I that you are mindful of me...I am a friend of God...He calls me friend." I had heard that song over and over at our church – at the church where I was, at that time, shunned – and yet it struck me head-on that day. As low as I had sunk, God wanted me to know He calls me friend. With tears in my eyes I ran out of the building and got in my car. I wept there for an hour.

God sent His messenger, John, to tell us that, no matter what junk we've done, we are His friends. We are His friends for whom He would die, for whom He did die. That day in the gym, I felt God touch me and break me apart through the words of a familiar Christian song so that I might begin to remember that He calls me friend. I am a child of God, and I am a father, and I am (still) a fairly young man. But more than any of that, my God and your God calls me friend.

You, my friend, are a friend of God, too.

My God my friend, praise to you for your loving friendship and your friendly love.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 4 April 2013

And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. 1 John 3, verse 23.

This verse paraphrases Luke 10:27, where Jesus tells a follower: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, "Love your neighbor as yourself." The first, most important command Jesus gives us in his very-much-alive Word is to love God with everything we've got. Not just Sundays; not just when we're scared or nervous; not just in lip service. Love God by submitting to Him, obeying Him, then living it out. The second command then dovetails off the first, namely to show that love for God by loving our fellow people selflessly, shamelessly, and ceaselessly.

But there's an important distinction that the verse mentions that makes all the difference in the world. We are "to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ." This was a hard concept for me to grasp; it still is. I mean, I'm David. That's my name. It's 'beloved,' it's historical, it's the name my parents chose for me, it's how I am identified. I am David in word, action, thought, past and (God-willing) future. I'm me, and I go by the name of David. You can say the same things about your name, too.

The best interpretation of God's name is Yahweh, meaning 'I AM WHO I AM.' Wrap your head around it because even Moses, though he spoke one-on-one with God, still couldn't noggin it either. When God came to earth as a man, He named His Son Jesus, who was the Christ, the Messiah. Yet even that is only a description of Him, a moniker, of the Triune, 3-in-1 God. God is the Father, is the Son, is the Spirit, is all three in one and one in three. Before the man Jesus came, God is. I AM WHO I AM is the fullness of existence, in everything, about everything, of everything, and within everything. God is pure being, a pure person, and a pure person of being. And He made His beautiful creation to reflect His pure love, power, and mystery to share His glory with mankind.

How can someone stick a simple name on Him? A name is just the start of describing God.

Thus, to believe in the name of the Son is to believe in Jesus as God, as I AM WHO I AM, and as the fullness of all life and eternity. We are to love Him this way, in fullness, then to share that love of (and from) Him with other people. It's too good to hold on to all by ourselves. We love God by sharing Him in our words, our daily lives, our private times, and in all things.

My lord, I AM WHO I AM, I am in loving awe of You.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 5 April 2013

The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us. 1 John 3, verse 24.

In living a following life of Jesus, the proof is in the pudding. When we say we are following Jesus, we are making a statement, taking a stand. In the face of a world that is hostile to serving others, loving selflessly, and living according to His will, we are taking the side of the Savior, submitting to wherever He carries us. We're doing this 24/7 whether we realize it or not.

Not long ago I got a chance to talk with a friend about things that have happened in my life the last few years. This person, as far as I know, wasn't a close follower of Christ. I got the privilege of living what I believe, standing up for what I believe. I said that living real faith, working through Jesus in my marriage and in all aspects of my life, was what righted my sinking ship. It doesn't seem very often that we really get to have these kind of conversations, these Spirit moments as a part of daily life. They just don't happen on their own. It felt great to be able to sense in the moment that I was saying and doing the right thing, the God-thing, in my own way in a moment that He put in front of me.

I thought about it afterwards, though, and realized that these kinds of moments actually happen every day. It may not happen very often that we get to speak plainly in words with someone who's open to listening, but in reality we speak plainly in our actions as well. As the saying goes, our actions speak louder than words.

This is true because the folks are watching. Our friends, our family, our coworkers, strangers, anybody: they're watching. People can see through a phony a mile away, and I lived long enough as a phony to know this is true. If the things I say or do contradict what I say I believe about God, about Jesus, people can tell. They're smart; they know the score. If I'm a hypocrite, people will know it and they'll be able to tell. If they're bold, even caring, enough, they can call me on it. Either way, people will know that the Spirit of God lives in us by how we act, what we say, the ways in which we live. It's happening all the time.

We know by the Spirit God daily gives to us that the proof is in the pudding.

Lord, let me live in You and You in me today. Help me to recognize that everything I do is a reflection of You by the power of Your Spirit. Help me to be humble as You're humble.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 8 April 2013

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 1 John 4, verse 1.

Just Jesus. I've been writing these shorter proverbials for four chapters now, and I find them much easier to write than I found it to write about Proverbs or Ecclesiastes. It's my hope that whatever I've written has been a blessing to you, but I've been especially hopeful for your blessing in this current series. Thank you for the hundreds of complimentary notes and comments. The reason they're easier to write and is that they're about Jesus. When it's not about me is when the good stuff happens.

Just Jesus. That's the sermon series a friend of mine is preaching here in North Texas. He's on week one thousand (or so) and it isn't getting old yet. The primary message is that all of the Bible – and all of life – is about just Jesus. Everything was made through Him; everything is about Him; He is part of everything; everything good comes from Him. Anything that isn't about just Jesus generally isn't too great. How do we know this?

Simple: test. Feel free, in all walks of life, at every moment, to test the spirits. If something seems right AND isn't contradictory to Scripture, it may just be the right thing. Test it to find out. It isn't a matter of "if it feels good, it is good;" that's not where we're going with this. Instead, if you feel led in a direction and it doesn't contradict what God's word says about it, then it may be worth considering. Such a thing is worth further prayer, deeper consideration. Take it to the Savior. Pray about it. Listen. See where He's leading you.

See where He's leading because you and I both know that not every direction is the one where God is leading you. The folks who say "I'm Jesus" or "I'm bigger than Jesus" or things like that aren't. If it bothers your conscience, there's a good reason. Heed it. Where Christ is concerned, be a skeptic about anything that isn't Him. Check out your New Testament to learn about what He says about coming back, or hearing His shepherd's voice, or about how He interacts with people and never contradicts Himself or any other Scripture. If any of the other things you believe you're being told or led through don't fully jive up with Him, then chances are they're not the right choice.

It's just about Jesus. Anything that isn't, isn't.

King Jesus, life is just about You and thanks for that. Teach me to listen to You, to follow You, and to profess You in all that I do.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 9 April 2013

This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. 1 John 4, verses 2-3.

This seems like a pretty simple test, right? If only it were.

Whether we realize it or not, we give this test every day. And every day we pass it, we pass on it, and we pass it along. There is a real being in this world called Satan, the enemy, and he uses real means to attack us, to do anything to separate us from Jesus. He attacks us through the things that tempt us.

Example: I'm struggling with tobacco right now. This is nothing new. Two of my three kids smoke, and I have smoked on and off for over 30 years. Most of the time, I don't, but if my kids offer me a cigarette, I also usually give in. My willpower on this is weak.

Now, maybe tobacco is from the devil and maybe it isn't. For me, it is. For me, it's a pet addiction, one that almost always makes me feel terrible and awful at the same time. I really enjoy smoking, but I hate the side effects because the side effects are bad. The cough, the smell, the cost, the way it aggravates my wife's allergies, the denial, the divisions: all from that 'harmless' plant. I do think that, some day, medical science will find good uses for nicotine, but for now there just aren't any.

For me, the temptation to smoke is the spirit of the antichrist. It is something not of Christ, not good or wholesome, not based in love. The Apostle John gives this message in today's verses: ANYTHING that does not bring glory to God by giving glory to His Son, Jesus, is anti-Christ. In my example, when I give in to the temptation, I'm not giving glory to Jesus by taking care of the body He gave me. I'm doing something that I know to be bad for me, and for the people around me, and I'm doing it for myself. When I smoke, it's all about me. My friend, that's sin.

Substitute in your own pet addiction: potato chips, procrastination, sex partners, shopping, fighting, drugs, booze, anything. If it testifies to the fact of Jesus being God, then it may be worth a look. If it doesn't, it's a gateway to sin.

Jesus, protect me from my sins. Forgive me, strengthen me, and stand with me against the things that tempt me to fall into sin.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 10 April 2013

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 1 John 4, verse 4.

Notice something about this verse: in the context of yesterday's verse, there are evil spirits in this world who are under the control of the angel of darkness, Satan. They tempt us, ruin us, hurt us, use us: all to try to hurt the Savior Jesus. Satan's minions have possessed people for centuries. These days, I often wonder if we don't mistake demonic work for mental illness. Evil spirits are present in the world and they are bent on doing whatever they can to turn people aside from Jesus.

They're powerless. That's right, powerless.

I think of the civil rights anthem. "We shall overcome...we shall overcome some day." Right was on the side of those seeking equality for all the races; might was on the other side. As it usually does, right overcame might. I like to think that those who oppressed blacks in the American south were doing the work of evil because there is nothing of God in enslaving one person for the benefit of another. Those working towards civil rights overcame because the Lord was at work through them. He and his power are greater than anything or anyone that opposed Him.

And I think of a story my friends tell me from their recent trip to Africa. There they witnessed a genuine exorcism, participating in fervent prayer to drive out very real evil spirits who possessed a young woman they met. They prayed, they wept, they projected faith in Christ and the spirit fled. Evil spirits are powerless against Christ.

So it is with us as well. Faith that lives just for Sunday morning is a waste of time; what would we do the rest of the week? Instead, Christ is alive every day, not just in a coat and tie on Sunday morning. He lives in you, me, and anyone who professes faith in Him. "God of our fathers whose almighty hand" sings one of my favorite hymns. His almighty hand strengthens His children and friends daily to fight the good fight against forces of darkness. Sometimes that fight is minute by minute, yet in every one of those minutes He has overcome the senseless spirits who still rail against Him. Because they rail against Him, they rail against we who stand up for Him. Evil fights against us – confronts us, tempts us, hurts us, uses us – in everything we do here. And every day, the Spirit of Jesus lives in us to reinforce and encourage us, and give us the strength to live and fight another day against the spirits who cannot stand against Him.

Powerful Jesus, You're more powerful than anything in the universe. Praise be for your power, the power of love that flows from You.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 11 April 2013

They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. 1 John 4, verse 5.

This verse is talking about evil, about those evil spirits that plague this world. And 'plague' is the right word to describe them. They are a pestilence that divides, hurts, targets, and tries to destroy us. Don't believe me? Sandy Hook. Auschwitz (and dozens of other camps like it). The killing fields of Cambodia. Crack houses. Cancer. Men beating women (and women who beat men, or their children). North Korea. Iran. IEDs in Afghanistan. Urban blight in Detroit, Darmstadt and Djibouti. Hopelessness.

The viewpoint of the world is evil. So many of the things that happen to us every day are real manifestations of evil in our lives. Sometimes it is the argument you have with your wife, or kids smoking dope, or taking offense where none was intended, or white lies you mistakenly think will save someone's feelings. We can evade the truth as long as we want, but when we finally allow honesty to break through we see that anything which isn't Jesus acting in our lives is evil. Pure evil. Any time we do something contrary to what Christ taught us, we are giving the evil spirits of the world, that plague, a chance to take root and bear bad fruit.

How quickly we forget that those evil spirits are powerless against the power of the God-Man.

And yet, I believe in people. I believe in people because I'm a follower of Jesus, and Jesus believed in people. He believed fully in His Father's transforming love and that this love was made to share with His greatest creation: people. I believe that most people want to do good, but that most people are prevented from doing good (or being good) by the choices we make. Most people want to do their best, want to do what is right even as we let ourselves be steered and swayed by that petty evil. The grieving parents of Sandy Hook want what is right and best in the aftermath of that tragedy. Cancer survivors (and cancer warriors still fighting the disease) want life to rule. People who lived through the Holocaust want God's peace, and perhaps even forgiveness, for the men and women who perpetuated that modern horror.

You and me: I believe we want to follow Jesus, want to know, experience, and share Jesus' world-inspiring love, yet we constantly fight and sometimes lose the daily battles with evil. We battle it because evil is in our lives right where we live. Just remember today that, while evil is battling against you, Jesus is battling evil for you. He's beside you, with you, working to beat back what troubles us and restore us to His better way.

Jesus, fight evil for me today. Help my unbelief and help me to fight with you to battle back the terrors of the world that plague us.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 12 April 2013

We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. 1 John 4, verse 6.

More proof in the pudding, right? Yes, but more than that. Where 1 John 3, verse 24 said, “the one who keeps God’s commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us,” today’s verse talks about how evidence of that Spirit is in seeing how people listen to Jesus’ Word. That’s a subtle difference but an important one. Verse 6 doesn’t contradict verse 24 but, instead, compliments it. One verse talks about living in Christ and Christ living in us, while today’s talks about that same idea affirmed in how we listen.

So here’s a timely example. Facebook; my wife and I were talking about this just this morning. Usually I’ll post a link to an article and put out a comment on it, or sometimes I’ll simply post the link and see what others say. I like the forum of a town hall, where people of all kinds of ways of thinking can rationally discuss important things, yet Facebook is no town hall. Sometimes it seems more like being on Jerry Springer’s show.

I’ve been posting articles all week about things happening in the world, and not surprisingly some of my friends have challenged my opinions. One of the things I’ve learned through all this – and something of which I need to be constantly reminded – is that having a different opinion doesn’t make someone right or wrong. Except for defending something illegal, I sometimes think that people who disagree with me are absolutely out of their minds; after all, the things I’m saying are common sense, right? What I too quickly forget is that they may think the exact same thing about me. We may each think the other is crazy but in reality we aren’t that different.

Somewhere, Jesus must be laughing at us. He must be shaking His head, thinking that we just don’t get it. He’s beyond these petty things. He gave us His word, His life, through the things He teaches in His Scriptures. That’s enough; we don’t need to add to it. Galatians 1 even says we must not. Our ideas of right and wrong, of debate or disagreement, totally miss Jesus’ point. His word, His love is all that matters. Left or right here are irrelevant, and both are loved by the Savior. How we live our lives from listening to His word matters more than debating some issue that, in the long run, will be forgotten in the white noise of history.

Lord, help me to listen to you more, to ignore the noise of other things, and to always submit instead of trying to get the last word.

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Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 15 April 2013

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 1 John 4, verse 7.

The ancient Greeks thought there were four kinds of love: storge, philia, eros and agape. Storge love is the love you share for a family member. Philia is the kind of love you have in friendship. Eros is sexual love, and then there is agape. Agape love is selfless, true love. It's the kind of love that you have for someone when you're devoted to them. If you didn't know this before, you know it now: agape love is the kind of love that God has for us. Agape love is what nailed Jesus to the cross, and agape love brought Him back to life that Sunday morning.

So how does God want us to love each other, and what kind of love should we have? Perhaps the best answer is simply "yes." The love of Jesus is a mystery, a total mystery, that we can understand but never fully grasp in that we aren't Him while He is us. You and I aren't pure love, yet Jesus is. What fuels Him, motivates Him, does and describes everything about Him and the Trinity is love. All real love comes from God, so when we say "I love you" and we mean it, this is from God. We are sharing the love He gives us, the best part of Himself, with someone in the way He intends it. Whether it's the love in a family, the love between friends, the love between committed lovers, or the selflessness of true love, when we share love, we share God.

And the best part about it is that this is all self-evident. Last Friday, I attended a men's Bible study where the preacher talked about the Bible being self-evident proof. It is because it is without that being a circular argument. Even people who don't understand Scripture, and even people who reject God know what love is. They feel it, and I've often thought that, when you reject God but feel love, you're feeling incomplete love.

Maybe this is one reason why, if I'm talking to someone who doesn't believe in or understand Jesus, the best place to start is the common ground of love. That philia love of friendship, of building a friendly relationship is the best starting point for sharing what you know about God. It's not something forced, or judgmental, or false: it's friendly love. That philia can give way to talking about how this man Jesus loved everyone, loves everyone still, and lives to share that love through us.

Even the ancient Greeks knew that.

Lord of love, thank you for who you are and how you love us. Teach me to share your love and to live in such a way that people know your love.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 16 April 2013

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 1 John 4, verse 8.

It's impossible to know God and not love. It's impossible to talk about this Jesus and not share love because He is the truest expression of love and it's His love that compels us to share Him. Because of that, it's impossible to say "I love you" and mean it and not be sharing something of God. And, finally, it's impossible to know God and still only love part way because God's love isn't something we can parse.

One of the major beefs people have with followers of Jesus is that we're hypocrites. Hypocrite is an ugly word, if you think about it. It means you're untrustworthy, unreliable, unworthy of admiration. A hypocrite says one thing but does another. Politicians, athletes and celebrities are hypocrites, not you or me.

Wrong.

We're in that same boat, my friend. The proof of it is that neither you nor I really loves others the way Jesus loves us. We hear about how this Jesus willingly died for His friends, and how He taught others to live a radically different life with a world-changing outlook of love instead of fear or intimidation. We hear all that, and how He forgave us so we should forgive others likewise...and then we don't do it. We hold grudges, we slander the name of others (and we slander the name of God). We envy, we curse, we hate, we inspire fear or dread, we foster lust in our eyes and at our fingertips.

We're hypocrites. Is it any wonder that people tell us that they see no reason to believe in Jesus when we say one thing about Him and then act so differently? If me and you can't live out the love of God in what we do, how can we expect others to come to know Him. God's ways aren't our ways, to be sure, but He works through us. If we don't love the way He loves, others may not come to know Him. To coin a word, it would be 'impossible.'

But in God nothing is impossible. His love can encourage us in small ways that give us the spirit, emotional strength, and determination to persevere. His love can numb and heal the sharp stabs of hurt, and the love of Jesus can move us to forgive wrongs, forgive others, and let ourselves be forgiven. When that happens, our hypocrisy is ended. It is replaced with renewal and the opportunity to walk the walk while talking the talk. When we love as Jesus loves us, we can move forward in honesty. In the face of a world in terror, when we love as Jesus loves, nothing is impossible.

Loving Jesus, fill me with your love today. Shine it from my eyes and from all that I think, say and do, so that whoever I meet will know I follow you: by your love.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 17 April 2013

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 1 John 4, verse 9.

Remember that verse 8 said that 'God is love.' Now think about what verse 9 truly says: The God who is true love sent His Son, also true love, to show true love to the world. What is your idea of true love?

I used to think that true love was shown in sex. Back in high school – heck, even since then – I haven't thought of myself as particularly attractive to the opposite sex. I wasn't one of the good looking hunks who could pick up a girl with just a smile. I developed an ideal for sexual intimacy that put it on a pedestal as the ultimate expression of true love. If someone slept with you, they must have thought you were pretty good looking, right? Besides, you'd only have sex with someone if you loved them and they loved you? Yeah, sure, whatever.

When I got married, I was 23 and couldn't imagine being 83 and having been married for 60 years. All I knew is that, if I was to stay married to the same woman for that long, it would have to be true love. You would have to see something in someone that nobody else saw, but that you adored about them. I've been married for twenty-four years this month, and I still am not sure what my wife sees in me. I know what I see in her, though, and it keeps me coming back now day after day after all these years together. God-willing, there will be many more to come.

What's your idea of true love? Is it sex on a pedestal or the cute old couple on the park bench? I know what God's idea of true love is: you. And me. And those people who were murdered in Boston this week, and the lineman in South Africa, and the crazy bus driver who drove us through southern China. When Jesus thinks of true love, He thinks of us. God, the Lord of all love, sent Himself, His Son, to live and love among us because He loves us. It's not for just words that the Bible calls us "the bride of Christ." He loves us with the devoted love of an adoring bridegroom. We aren't objects of misplaced ideals, lust, or greeting card cute. We are the true love of true love, so much so that He sent His Son to live, and to die, for us so that we might believe in Him and that love, and thus live forever.

Love of my life my Lord, I love you. Grow your love in my heart so that you might be glorified and share it with others through me.

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Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 18 April 2013

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 4, verse 10.

So, verse 8 says that God is love, then verse 9 talked about how God showed Himself among us. Now comes another description of what love is.

Love is selfless, so selfless that you're willing to give up everything you have for your enemy. Enemy? You and I are enemies of God? Read that again and let it sink in. Without the blood of Christ, you and I are still enemies of God. He didn't create us that way, but we became that way. We're disposed to sin in our inmost being, but we only sin out of an element of choice. Nobody forces us, yet we do it anyway. We are opposed to Jesus, in conflict with love, at war with good. We are enemies who choose sin over light.

When we do it, we separate ourselves from Jesus. He's the same Jesus, who is still holy yet who lived here among unholy people not so different from ourselves. Nobody forced Him to remain holy but He did it anyway, proving that it could be done. He, who was God yet fully man, put aside His Godly side and resisted all temptation to choose what we did.

Yet God didn't just show us what love looked like. He demonstrated what love IS by putting Himself in the breach. The triune God gave up the one so that the three might be understood as complete. He lived and died and lives again so that we might live with Him, stand in front of the three in One, and not be crushed by our unholiness. Jesus, who lived perfectly died perfectly too. He endured spiritual, emotional, physical, torture yet submitted everything He was to the will of God the Father. In doing so, He wiped out the power of unholy sin and overcame the inevitable trap of sinful death.

That's love. It's selfless Jesus.

If you had just one child, who you loved so sweetly that your heart felt the beat of their own, would you let that child die so others might live? If someone needed that child's heart to transplant into another, would you allow it? That's what God did. My heart was rotten, worn out by all my bad decisions and choices, and all the ways I haven't resisted temptation the way He did. So God offered up the heart of His son to transplant into me that I might live again. He did it for you too. And your neighbor, your mother in law, whoever set off those bombs in Boston, and for the three people who were murdered there. It was selfless, designed to give us peace so that we would no longer be enemies of God.

Selfless Jesus, thank you for your sacrifice, for committing all You are to the life that is your love.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 19 April 2013

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 1 John 4, verse 11.

This is a serious commitment, a serious subject. It's so easy to say 'I love you' and it's even easy to mean it. But what are you willing to do to follow through on meaning it? Will you or I be able to love someone the way Jesus loves? Tell me, the person who bullied you in eighth grade: will you be able to tell them "I love you" if you ever see them again? Or that boss who fired me, the soccer mom who cut you off in her Lexus when you were driving, or the man wearing clean clothes but begging for money on the median? Will we be able to love them?

Sure, it's easy to say a prayer for these people; you and I do that, and that's a good thing. But would you be willing to put down everything where you are right now, and focus on that one person who needs your love, your affection, your friendship and give them everything you have? Me neither. We're hypocrites, you and I.

And you're right, then, if you respond by taking offense, by getting your hackles up and thinking "hey, I'm doing the best I can." You are doing the best you can (and, yes, you're hopefully a little miffed that I would call you a hypocrite, you hypocrite). Love is the simplest thing in the world yet it is the most serious. God takes it seriously. He knows love is holy, and He took it so seriously that he wiped out all living things except for a handful on some primitive boat just so He could point that out. He takes love so seriously that He was born, lived, taught, and was murdered all for love: all for His redeeming, perfect, saving love. Because He is love.

And because love is a beautiful thing of great seriousness, we should love the way He does. Our goal in love shouldn't be to find someone to spend a lonely night with, or to just get through the tough times. And it especially shouldn't be just so we can feel good in the few years we have here. Our goal in love should be to love selflessly, giving all we have, doing whatever love demands of us in order to give glory to He who is that perfect love. "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." Remember that from yesterday because those words go with today's that we might remember what love is. Foreigner sang it once and I like what they said: "I want to know what love is. I want you to show me." Lord, show us and teach us Your love.

Loving Jesus, thank You for Your love. Help me to love like You do.

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Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 22 April 2013

No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. 1 John 4, verse 12.

Do we need evidence to believe in God? There's a Facebook site called 'Evidenced Based Faith' whose purpose is to show that physical, archeological evidence supports the history of the Bible much more than any evidence disclaims it. And there is the story of Doubting Thomas, who said he needed to touch Jesus' wounds before he would believe Jesus had resurrected. And then there are your doubts and mine, and the times we feel alone and misbegotten, wishing that God would just show Himself and make things better.

Do we need to see God to believe in Him?

You know the answer, but let's take a gander at it from another angle. What would you believe, feel, think, or consider if you did see Him? Let's say you ask God to show up one morning when you just aren't feeling Monday, and let's say He does, that He shows up *in alio* at your kitchen table. How's that gonna go? The Bible has numerous instances where God said that people couldn't live if He revealed His entire, holy presence to us; we're unholy and His holiness can't abide that, and it would simply wipe us out. Do you think that you or I could be in His presence and withstand it when heroes of old couldn't?

Perhaps that isn't proof enough for you, though. So let me ask a question that gets at the issue differently? Do you NEED proof to know God is real? His Word is evidence of itself; it is completely self-evident, not requiring further proof. Still, so many of us doubt it because we think we need proof. Today's verse, like others, says that, because God lives in us and loves us, His love – and His life – lives in us and is all the evidence we need of His existence. Indeed, because He is pure love, have we considered that it's an act of love for Him to withhold His full presence in this life? If, because of our unholy acts, we couldn't stand in front of a holy God all by ourselves and live, it's an act of mercy and love for Him to give us only what we can bear.

Perhaps that's evidence enough.

After all, if you love someone, you know it, right? If you care enough that they matter more to you than anyone else like them, you simply know it to be true. Love is proof of itself, and when you love someone, the love is evidence of itself. It lives in you, grows in you, endears you more to that person. So it is with God and how He lives with us in this world that is so opposed to Him.

Loving Lord, live through me today, and let your love be all the proof I need.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 23 April 2013

This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. 1 John 4, verse 13.

Most of 1 John 4 has been an exposition about love. To review, it has talked about what love is, how we identify love, how to identify that God is love within us, and characteristics of all these things. Today is a little bit about how that happens.

It happens because of God's Holy Spirit.

We know we have God with us, Immanuel still, in our lives today by the presence of His Spirit within us. When we have that 'aha' moment about faith, it's that Spirit revealing to us. When we feel the releasing comfort of prayer, it's the Spirit giving hope. When we hear our conscience telling us right from wrong, it is God's Spirit instructing us to a better way. When we share love with family, friends, and others we love, it's God's Spirit in motion. When we read something in Scripture that is particularly moving, it is God's Spirit speaking to our hearts. When we profess what we believe to others who might not, it is God's Spirit at work through us.

What does it feel like? It's pure satisfaction and contentment, real peace. Having Jesus' Spirit moving in us is motivating, better than the adrenaline rush of a runner's high. It's feels purer than mountain air or a desert sunrise. It's as innocent as watching a baby sleep while still being as full as after a great meal. It's higher than the rush of a new drug and, yes, (PG-13 alert here) even the ultimate orgasm. It is the sense of real knowledge, lasting truth. What does God's Spirit feel like in us? It's all of these wrapped up in one because it is the touch, feel, and presence of Jesus moving in us from the soul. And that's just the start because it is forever. He works on us here and now from the inside out that we may learn to share Him.

We know we live in Jesus because the way Jesus lives in us is by His Spirit. His Spirit is encouraging, chastising, cleansing, hoping, building, tearing, caring, and rejuvenating. In every way, God the Father and Son move through the supernatural power of that Spirit. A challenge to you today is to not overlook that simple miracle. The Divine God Himself, creator of all that is, of all that you are in your life, chooses to dwell in you. He chooses to indwell you with His Spirit, the very source of His love and His life, and to live through You to reach others. It's a mystical, mysterious, but magical thing, and He bridges eternity to come into your life, where you are today, by His quiet but irresistible, steel-tough Spirit of real love.

Spirit of the Lord, live in me today. Fill my weary heart and I will rejoice in Your love.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 24 April 2013

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 1 John 4, verse 14.

The last verse talked about Jesus' Spirit living in us; it's how He dwells in our lives and moves in them today. We talked about how that's the 'how' of His mission here. Today is about 'why.'

"Why? Because we like you!" Any Yuppies out there remember that phrase from the end of each day's Mickey Mouse Club? "M I C...see you real soon. K E Y...why? Because we like you!" God likes us; imagine that. God resided with early man so that we might be drawn to Him and celebrate His love here in the world. We failed at it. God sent dozens of prophets, lawgivers, kings, and teachers that we might learn about Him. We failed at that, too. God then sent His only Son so that we could see, touch, and learn about Him and learn to love the way He does. We murdered Him.

And still God didn't give up. He still liked, even loved, us. Until He comes back, God now sends His Spirit in the world to reveal Himself, His Son Jesus, as the Savior of all the world. When we learn about Jesus and understand his lessons, it's because God's Spirit, Jesus' Spirit, has spoken to us...and we listened. When we feel real love, it's because Jesus' Spirit has touched our hearts. When we help, serve, and give, it's Jesus' Spirit acting out as He would, through us.

All because He really, really likes us (even more than Sally Field). It's all because of love. It's all because of the love of Jesus.

All because Jesus is the Savior of the world. He came, taught, lived, died, and rose from death to prove His love to weary hearts. He lives in us today, through His Spirit, to advance that love all across the world and prove to an unbelieving planet that He is the start of solving all problems, feeding all hunger, curing all disease, and forgiving all wrongs. The men with whom He spent His ministry testified to it (including John, the author of this book). The hundreds of witnesses who saw Jesus after His resurrection testified to it. The thousands of people who Jesus fed, and who witnessed miracles, and who heard His words of peace all testified to it. In fact, Jesus of Nazareth is the best documented individual in all of antiquity, bar none: all because people testified to the fact of Him.

Him, the savior of the world. To be the savior of the world so that all those thousands – and the billions who have followed – might live with Him forever. That's why.

Jesus, you are the savior of the world and you are why there is hope, love, peace, and goodness in live. Live through me today, help me to serve today, and let me shine Your love today.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 25 April 2013

If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. 1 John 4, verses 15 and 16.

That's all it takes? Say that Jesus is God and you can know that the Triune God is living in you? You can know that God's love is strong enough to be the foundation of all things, good and bad, that happen in your life? Yep. In honor of the Duck Dynasty season finale, think about it this way: "happy, happy, happy."

I'll admit: I've always been skeptical of instant conversion. My skepticism is rooted in the fact that it didn't happen to me. I was raised as a Christian and the concept of Christ immediately and permanently taking away our sins forever, is one I've always understood, even when I was blind.

Note to self: it isn't about what I'm familiar with, or even what I understand; it's not about me. It's about Jesus. Happy, happy, happy. Quite seriously & joyfully: happy, happy, happy.

It's about Jesus because He really does what the verse says. He actually lives through us, instantly changing us from the way of death to the Way of life. The aha moment happened ages ago, because He did the conversion long before we realized it. All that ever needed to be done to remove sins forever and let us move forward was done at Calvary. We can rely on God's immeasurable love to be the only basis for our lives, and the aha moment is important only as far as it can be a basis for our understanding. Being a believer isn't the same as being a Christian, and being a Christian isn't going to save your soul. Believing in Jesus does.

But don't be naïve: being happy, happy, happy in knowing the we've been changed isn't a ride on Easy Street. We're still stuck in a world of "WTF," "JK," and "LOL." People still die; there are still tears; there are always struggles. Real things still happen to real believers; real temptations still really exist. Don't kid yourself into thinking that believers aren't faced with the same troubles, dysfunctions, or problems that unbelievers wrestle with. Indeed, even I know plenty of non-believing people who more honestly wrestle with these things than believing folks do. Happy, happy, happy is an outlook that builds from knowing Jesus loves us unconditionally and died to save us. It isn't permission for self-righteousness because believing can allow us to see the world as it is, and our part in loving other people to fight some very real battles. Saying we believe is just getting with the program and, yes, that's a reason to be happy, happy, happy.

Saving Jesus, I'm happy with you, and thank You for being happy with me, for saving me before I even knew You did.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 29 April 2013

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. 1 John 4, verses 16 and 17.

After realizing we can be happy, happy, happy in knowing that Jesus has saved us from the consequences of our choices, here comes a tall order. Be like Jesus. Not only the choice to be like Jesus: you and I ARE like Jesus.

It's a miracle to be happy, but miracles happen every day. For me, today is the biggest miracle of all: my anniversary. 24 years ago today I married the woman who changed my life. It hasn't been easy, and our tough times have been tougher than most. She could have given up on me long ago, but she showed me that 'for better or for worse' means something, and because of her, my life is rich and my heart always full.

Because of her, I know that God is love, and the Apostle John was right. In our lowest point and (literally) in the hour of my darkest desperation, when she didn't have to, my wife reached out to me and refused to let go. She said "God isn't done with you yet." In it, she meant "God isn't done with us yet. There is more for us to do together." She was right, and life has been richer ever since.

In this world, to me, she is like Jesus. Here and now, she models faith, strength, understanding, steadfastness, mercy, love and forgiveness. These aren't just words to her: they are my wife's code of conduct. She knows that it's tough to live out those words. Tough isn't macho, brave, and vocal. No, she understands that faith, love and mercy are much tougher to do, and tougher words to live by, yet she does it every day. In doing so, the lives of everyone around her are made brighter because she models for them what Jesus means to her.

And whether we realize it or not, that's a miracle. It's a miracle to channel the divine love of the Creator into everything we do. It's a miracle because the world is set against that; this world is hostile to God, hostile to Jesus. We are supposed to model celebrities, politicians and famous athletes, not a first century rabbi who said He was the Son of God. Yet model we do.

Model does my wife. She lives out her faith and serves as my spouse, my life partner, my inspiration, and my best friend. When I am with her, I realize I'm with the one God made just for me. When I am with my wife, Kimberly, I see Jesus living through her and living in my life.

Jesus, thank you for my wonderful wife, Kim, and for living in her life, in our lives, in my life.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 30 April 2013

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. 1 John 4, verse 18.

There's something unexpected in this verse, something we may not have considered before. You are a witness to God, to His eternal goodness, divine love, unending forgiveness, and true hope. And, understanding how we are witnesses for Jesus and like Jesus, there's an unexpected lesson from something in His life.

Jesus was afraid.

If you're a long-time believer, you might be taken aback by that last sentence, so read it again and chew on it. In His humanity, the only thing that discriminated Jesus from you or I was sin. He lived a perfect life and never sinned. In Jesus, there was perfection in all He thought, said and did. In every other way, however, He lived just like you and I. He was tempted, He wept, He bled, He hurt, He knew anguish. And He was afraid. He knew fear, He understood fear, He felt fear. Just as you and I have our own fears of things in this world, Jesus felt fear. Jesus felt afraid.

If it's Thursday night and you know that, come Friday, every wrong, sin, and torment ever conceived in the heart of man was going to fall on your shoulders, and that the full punishment of God the Father Himself was going to descend on you and you alone, if you were Jesus would you feel afraid? Of course you would because He did. He had genuine anguish and dread in Gethemene, knowing what was ahead of Him. Jesus was afraid.

What He never did was succumb to that fear or let Himself be manipulated by it. He stood up with God, humbled Himself to His Father, and accepted what would come. In doing so, He let that perfect love rule the moment and it drove away the fear. In submitting His will to the Father's, Jesus felt the comfort of God's Spirit fill him and felt again and again that lasting rush of perfect love that drives out all wrongness.

Fear is wrong. Jesus overcame it.

You and me, we are like Jesus. You and me, we can let God's perfect love drive out our fears, too. I pray we never hang on a cross, but no matter what crosses we bear, we can let God's love into our hearts to help us confront and overcome our own pet fears. Manipulators, tyrants and controllers prey on our fears, telling us how dire things are 'if only.' We don't need to put up with that, or be controlled by it, or settle for it. The two of us: we're like Jesus. We can be ruled by His love, instead, and not the world's fear.

Fearless Jesus, when I am afraid, fill me with Your love, drive out my fears, and help me to live more for You.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 1 May 2013

We love because he first loved us. 1 John 4, verse 19.

Brevity is the soul of wit; that's Shakespeare, from Hamlet. Here, I don't think the Apostle John was being witty, or funny, or making sarcasm or light of anything. Here, in seven words, the Apostle explains some of the greatest mysteries and questions that have faced every human since Adam and Eve.

It's really pretty simple, actually. God is love, and God has loved from the start (even when it's been hard for us to see). God created us in love and gave us the best of Himself. We are creatures who know, feel, and desire love. Yet before we felt those things, God loved first and loved us to create us to love us. We love because He first loved us.

Love is the only thing that explains the cross (as well as the Adamic, Noaic, Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants God made with our ancestors). Love is the only thing that explains thousands of years of divine patience when a more human (or humane) god might have wiped us out completely. Love is the only thing that can explain teaching in parables and in kindness rather than at the edge of a sword or in some boring classroom. And, when all is said and done in every one of our lives, love is the only thing that matters. His love.

His love is the only thing that matters and we can know that because He loves us. We can know He loves us because He has from the beginning (and even before) and He loved us first.

Sure, some of this seems like circular argument; I'd be lying if I said it didn't. And it is. It is because love is self-evident: a concept we've discussed before. Scripture explains itself, and the more you ponder it the more you begin to see that the most proper way to interpret God's word is using God's word; use Scripture to interpret Scripture. Behind those intellectual gymnastics you get down to fundamentals, and the most fundamental of them is that love proves itself. Love simply is. Love simply is because of He who said He was "I AM."

I hope you can see that this isn't word play, and it isn't trying to use worldly reasoning to prove a supernatural fact. And it isn't Shakespearean wit even though it is brief. It's simply a universal truth, perhaps THE universal truth behind everything else we are and know. We love and can love because Jesus loved us first.

Loving Jesus, you've loved me forever. Abide in me always and teach me the depths of true love so that I can share it with others.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 2 May 2013

Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. 1 John 4, verse 20.

We've talked about thoughts similar to these before, back in verse 12 (No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us), verse 11 (Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another), verse 8 (Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love), and in verse 17 of chapter 3 (If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person).

But don't you just love how the Apostle John pulls no punches in challenging with something new? He brings it, saying that if we don't love our brothers and sisters, we are liars when we say we love God. He hits right at the heart of disingenuousness because, after all, can you really say you love God if you say one thing about someone but then say something different (about them) to a different audience? His words smash grudges, because we can't love God truly if we hold something against someone who hurt us; God loves them unconditionally, too. We can't love God if we are hypocrites, or if we are vain, or if we see others in need yet refuse to help.

Indeed, this verse hits at the heart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus: to serve. Last weekend, my wife attended a women's retreat whose theme was 'serving.' The group of 18 or so women studied Scripture, talked, (drank wine), shared experiences, and did service projects (for the conference center) together. All week she's been sharing lessons she learned, and the biggest one is the simplest: Jesus serves us and she wants to model her entire life around doing that for others. It's no stretch because she's always been this way, more interested in giving than receiving, doing things for others instead of having them done for her (unless that involves me rubbing her neck, of course).

But that's the central theme for all our lives. We show we love God when we let him re-mold our hearts to serve Him in all things. We share God's love by doing for others: doing the dishes, yielding right of way, helping dig trenches, reviewing work, listening, not reacting, being a friend. All of these and so many more are ways to serve others, ways to show that we love our sisters and brothers. It's nothing new: it's how Jesus lived His life here. We've seen it before. Let's do it today. We're liars if we don't.

Jesus, Lord, let me serve You today by helping others, by serving as You would.

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Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 3 May 2013

And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. 1 John 4, verse 21.

This builds on yesterday's verse which, if you remember, reminded us that we are liars if we say we love God yet don't show that love by serving others, by loving our fellow man. Think of it this way, though: that was a reminder. This one is a command. It's a directive, an imperative.

Before running for the deep end, though, let's keep a few things in perspective. Love in first century Judea was just like it is in 21st century now: unforced. You can't make someone love someone else. The people who first read John's words understood that love came from the heart, not from compulsion. No matter who commands us to love (even God), it is not something forced on us.

Another thing to remember is that love is selfless. We love because we want to give, because we want to share the feeling with another. Love isn't something we're made to do. We want to do it for someone else instead of ourselves. Thus, to love a brother or sister is an act of selfless service.

Yet there is still the command. This is still that order. The Spirit of Jesus still tells us that our highest calling is to love each other. If we say we love God but don't love our brothers and sisters, especially the ones who hurt us, we don't really love God. But if we say we love God and we do love our brothers and sisters, we're being honest and consistent in our love.

It's still a tall order. I think about a few guys who bullied me in school. It's been over thirty years and I still feel the twinges of anger when their faces come to mind. It's hard to love on someone who hurt you like that; the physical beatings or shoving, the insults, the taunts, the put-downs. Here, I can honestly say that I've learned to love them in a Godly way, wishing them well wherever they are and hoping they know in some way that I forgive them whatever happened. Jesus forgives; so do I.

Instead of giving the finger to the guy who cuts me off at the stop sign, I get to sigh and say a prayer of thanks that we weren't in an accident. Rather than picking apart my friends' opposing arguments, I can be glad I'm exposed to points of view I hadn't considered. How about today we look at everyone we meet and tell ourselves "brother in Christ," or "sister in Christ," instead of looking at strangers in quiet disconnect? Love on them. Jesus does.

It's a tough command to live with, but the more we do live in it, the more we find it's the best of all.

Commanding Lord, thank you for your patient love. I want to love the way You do.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 6 May 2013

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. 1 John 5, verse 1.

Here's another affirmation (and reinforcement) of faith, but this one, unlike the others in 1 John, is more plainly spoken. Everyone who believes...Jesus is the Christ (the prophesied deliverer Messiah)...Jesus the Christ is born of God. John spells things out plainly just like a good public speaker would. "Tell em what you're gonna tell em; tell em; tell em what you told em." That maxim is the basic framework for any good speech, and it's what John did in previous verses, then does again here. Indeed, I've been reading John's gospel as well and find that, in many instances, this is how Jesus spoke. They're hallmarks of effective public speaking to build an increased likelihood that your message will be successfully communicated. That we're talking about it two thousand years later is further proof of the effectiveness.

What's more, Jesus and John follow another basic rule that applies to effective communication: keep it simple. Don't crowd out the message. They stick to simple facts – believing in Jesus makes us adopted children of God and whoever loves God the Father loves Jesus the Son (because they are one). When I think of all the reasons why God's word is so effective and lasting in our lives, I think this is one of the foremost. It's easy to 'get,' it's simple, and it is understandable by people at any level or in any situation. Jesus, through the Apostle Paul, tells us to be all things to everyone in how we approach living His Gospel in our lives, but the Gospel itself is universally understandable and appealing.

Finally, John ties it to us, making it relevant in our lives. If we love God the Father by respect, honor, fear, and even intimate love, we love Jesus too because they are one and the same. It's something we can understand because it's something we can model in our lives. If you are friends with a parent, you are generally friends with their children as well. And if we aren't friends with parents, we generally aren't friends with their children either. As well, if we are friends with someone and we meet their parents, our first tendency is to like them (or at least try to) because we're friendly with their son or daughter.

When you get to know Jesus, when you invite Him to be a part of your life, you are getting to know the Father as well. The more you know about Jesus, the more you know about the Father as well. They're the same being and of the same person, three in one with their Spirit as well. Mysterious, but when you think about it, it's actually pretty simple to understand.

Jesus, Three in One, thank you for your simple message of eternal love and for communicating it through me.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 7 May 2013

This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. 1 John 5, verse 2.

Like a good lawyer, John continues to plainly spell out the case for how followers of Jesus express Jesus' love. We love Jesus so we love the Father (and the Spirit). We love Jesus by living out that expression in our lives, in how we think, speak, and act. By doing this, we are loving the Three-in-One God of eternity in simple, understandable ways that other people can see...and hopefully they'll see that and, through it, God the Spirit will work on their hearts so that they might love in the same way.

Why do we muck that up? I mean, it isn't very difficult. Why do we mess it up?

See, I hear what people say about how living as a follower is tough. You HAVE TO give up so many of the things you used to enjoy. You HAVE TO change your living habits, and the way you talk, and change the ways you think. You HAVE TO behave and not be the person you were.

Brother, if you think you have to do any of those things because you follow King Jesus the Savior, then noodle this idea instead: it's not a 'have to' proposition. It's a 'get to.'

We get to give up elusively enjoyable things that cost us more than they were worth. We get to give up bad habits while learning from them. We get to be a person remade in the image of God instead of a good person dirtied by living in a world gone bad. We get to be called 'friend of God.' We get to love God by carrying out His commands...

...the first of which is to love Him with all we are and all we have. And the one that comes right after that is to love each other as He loves us. See, it really isn't very difficult and we don't have to do it...but I guarantee you'll want to because you get to. Get a taste of what it feels like inside to know you're loved and forgiven. It won't take long for you to see that all the beer pong, pot parties and gang bangs you can cram into a weekend will start to look hollow and soiled.

Best of all, the more you read verses like these, the more you'll learn different depths and angles that you may not have considered before. God works that way through His word. John 15 talks about God working with us as friends. Imagine it: after all we do to offend God, He still wants us to think of Him as a friend; mind blowing. He continues to do it despite our best efforts to consciously or unconsciously mess it up.

Friend and Savior Jesus, live in me so I might live out Your good command to love and be Your friend.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 8 May 2013

In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome 1 John 5, verse 3.

When we read this verse, let's keep in mind what we talked about yesterday: that we get to love Jesus by loving others. Love can indeed be a tough thing to do, and tough love is sometimes both the hardest but the best. It's especially tough when it involves resisting temptation.

But not really.

See, love really is a choice and it doesn't have to be a difficult one. Indeed, it's we who make it difficult; we and our choices or the situation around us. We don't have to love...but we get to. We don't have to choose to love...but we can. We don't have to accept Jesus' unconditional love...but we're invited to. We choose to love, and when we choose to love we find that it can be an easy burden to bear. Sure, if your vice is alcohol, it's always a strong temptation; just one more drink. If it's sex, that's like sweet poison. Ditto drugs, tobacco, pride, spending, food, power, co-dependency, control, pain, or exercise. Whatever your pet sins are, they are a strong temptation, and that temptation never goes away.

We don't need to succumb to it.

To keep God's commands means, first and foremost, clothing ourselves in the armor of God. My friend, Patrick, recently preached this from Ephesians but from an unexpected angle. His point was that the putting on the full armor of God really means "be clothed in Jesus" and Jesus alone. Jesus is enough armor to stand against the temptations again and again. And by having just Jesus as the way we live in life, not only can we fight against our temptations: we learn how to keep His commands.

Now, I'm not Pollyanna. I don't seriously believe that wearing just Jesus' armor instantly makes all the world's troubles go away. Evil still fights against us, but even evil KNOWS it is powerless against the love of Christ. Every form of trouble, sin or vice is powerless against the life-changing love of King Jesus. Arming ourselves with the love of Christ is the single best way to keep God's commands to love each other while standing up to the sins that challenge us. Sins tear us down to defeat us but Christ breaks us down while building us up. Sins cost; the love of Christ is paid-for. Sins hurt; Jesus' love heals. Sin clouds our hearts; the love of Jesus crowds out sin from our hearts.

We don't need to let ourselves be defeated by anything when we rely first and always on the love that is Jesus of Nazareth. It's something we are invited and free to do. Once we do it, it becomes easy to see why He helps us overcome all temptation.

Lord Jesus of love, be my full armor and my only defense. Let all I do be guided by Your love.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 9 May 2013

For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 1 John 5, verse 4.

Remember that we choose to love God because He first loved us, and that fully loving Him both protects and preserves us while teaching us to keep His commands. The first word of verse 5 is actually a continuation of verse 4 so that the combined verses would read “And his commands are not burdensome for everyone born of God overcomes the world.”

Um, huh?

Maybe we could think of it this way: Jesus loves us so that we can overcome sin. When we read “the world,” it’s talking about ‘sin.’ Sin is of the world: the fallen world that has grown after sin took root in the creation frustrated by sin. Love is that powerful: that it can overcome the worst evil possible. From massacring innocent people to white lies we tell our kids, only the love of Jesus is powerful enough to crush all our wrongdoing no matter what it is.

Here’s where I have to make a confession: sometimes crazy thoughts like that make my head explode. Seriously. I hear all the church talk about love overcoming sin, and Jesus’ victory over death, and being born of God. I hear the talk but it only partly registers, only adds up in a way I understand in about 6 times out of 10. I read about how the Holy Spirit works Jesus’ love in our lives; I get it. Perhaps I try to over-think it, though, because I don’t understand how it happens. I don’t understand the mechanics of how Jesus did it. I can tell you the history of it, the way it happened, and I will always confess that I believe it’s true. But I don’t always understand the “how” behind the “what.”

News flash: this is one of those things where we don’t need to understand how love overcomes evil. We only need to know it does. It’s not about me: it’s about Jesus and what He’s doing. For proof of the power of His love, we need only look as far as the people we love in this world. We love them and Jesus loves em too. We love them because He loved us first, and because He loved us first, He has given us this incredible thing, this love, that makes everything else irrelevant. Tell me I’m wrong when I think the only proof you need of the power of love is how you feel when you know you love someone. It’s strong, life-changing, enriching, and selfless. Our love is the most powerful force and emotion in the world and drives us to do amazing things. In other words, it’s what Jesus does for us.

Uh huh indeed.

Lord of love, you’ve overcome sin and all I’ve ever done wrong. I praise you and thank you for saving a sin-stained person like me.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 13 May 2013

Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. 1 John 5, verse 5.

Let's face it: that isn't an easy thing to hear. "Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." That means accepting that Jesus is God and the only source of love. In turn, it means admitting that love is only from God. It isn't from anything else, or anyone else, or anywhere else. It's only His gift. It's His gift, given to us, to share, to grow so that He might be advanced.

Today, I wrote these words while sitting on an airplane on my way to Minnesota. I woke up in Texas, flew a thousand miles (and my arms aren't even tired), and sent these words to you from Minneapolis. On the flight were a hundred or more people who were in the same predicament: willingly submitting ourselves to wherever Delta Airlines would fly us. I looked around the flight and, when looking at each person, told myself "brother in Christ" or "sister in Christ." And I said small prayers for the people, praying over them to cover them in God's silent but active care. I can't do much, but I can do this.

And I can only do it because He made it possible. It wasn't anything I could do on my own. It was only possible because God guided these people to this same flight. Looking beyond that, they only got here by His grace and His allowance of the lives they live. And even farther back beyond that, getting down to fundamentals, those lives are only possible because He loved us enough to create life, then to sustain it, then to redeem it.

Indeed, my wife and I were talking about this during our devotion this morning (at 0400, before we each headed to work, she to her pre-school and me to Minnesota). We were talking about how astounding it is that God moves in our lives to make all these interactions possible. He puts us where we are, to do what we do, and not just for our provision but, in a larger and better sense, to make possible the moments when we might share Him. He gives us circles of friends to share fun and happiness, and in doing so we share His love. He allows us to meet people, strangers, fellow travelers on the roads of life, so that we might share Him and how He loves all of us, not just the people we know best. And He deliberately crashes us out of our comfort zone so that we might learn to cling to Him instead of our own self-righteousness or even just each other.

In doing these things, we share our belief in Him and overcome the world set against him.

Overcoming Jesus, help me to share You in everything I do today.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 14 May 2013

This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. 1 John 5, verse 6.

The one who overcame death – and the consequences of life – truly came by water and blood. “By water and blood:” those are difficult concepts to understand, especially if we aren’t steeped in understanding the Bible. There are so many sides of this to examine.

By water: through baptism, God imparts His Spirit into our lives, officially embracing us as His own. That baptismal water is like a mark, something for the prince of this world to see in ways good and not good. He knows a follower is off-limits, but that baptismal mark is like a magnet to sin. It draws evil to us, to target and weaken us. The devil sees it, but God remembers it too. This may sound odd yet Jesus doesn’t need it. He doesn’t need us to be baptized. But we do. We need the symbolism. We need the gesture to remind us of how God holds us dear, of how He washes our sins away.

By water: Christ was also born of a woman. We’re people. We are born of people, and people are made of water. Our bodies are over sixty percent water. Jesus is a person too. He was and still is like us in every way that a person can be human. Fully God at all times but Jesus is also fully man at all times. Mysterious? Yes indeed.

Then there’s blood. By blood: same as above. Christ was fully God but fully man who fully bled when He was tortured to death. Blood contains physical life; life cannot be sustained without blood. When Jesus was hurt, he bled. In ancient times, blood was shed to sacrifice to God, offering our very lives as a commitment to Him. So it was with Jesus.

By blood: in Holy Communion, the element of wine is transubstantiated into the actual blood of Christ. You taste the wine but you’re partaking of the blood. It’s another mystery, and it’s another symbol we need, an encouragement Jesus left for us from which to draw strength.

Finally, there are the Spirit and the truth. People are spiritual beings who seek the truth. No matter who we are or where we are from, all people crave a sense that there is something more to life than just flesh, water and blood. We crave meaning; we crave knowledge; we crave a contented spirit. God provides all those things, and the more we find who He is, the more we see His Spirit imparting the ultimate truth.

That truth is reminded to us by both the physical nature and the symbolic meanings of water, blood, and the truth to which they testify.

Real Jesus, you’re truth, blood and water. Thank you for these, and for your sacrifice.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 15 May 2013

For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. 1 John 5, verses 7 and 8.

Continuing from yesterday, I'll ask you to note something: the word "are." Not is. Not was. Not were. Are.

'Are' is active, present tense, alive, now. "There are" doesn't mean 'there were at the time this was written 2000 years ago.' It doesn't mean 'I'm speaking figuratively.' It means here, now, in the present tense, now, and today. 'Are' is in your life.

Don't overlook the astounding nature of this tiny word and the miracle behind it. It means that the three elements that testify to the life of Jesus, the fact of Jesus, ARE here and now, in your present, in our time, as we write and read. Homer's words are a story about events long ago. Shakespeare's words are plays, sonnets, and poems about events in the 1500s. News stories are about what has already happened. The three elements that testify to the here and now of Jesus ARE the Spirit, the water, and the blood because He IS. Not was. Not were. Is, because it says 'are.'

This isn't some king who was. These words testify to the King who IS.

What's more, the signs, the reminders, the elements: they work together. They are in agreement. The water washes away the sin because of the blood and the power of God's Spirit. The blood is the atoning sacrifice for those washed clean with the identifying water by the Spirit. The Spirit is the soul and power of Jesus, who washed clean believers through the waters of baptism and the sacrifice of His blood.

These aren't word games; I'm not that clever. These are three elements, one being the very essence of God Himself, that we have been given here and now, in our not-so-advanced twenty-first century. They were first shared with prophets and pilgrims thousands of years ago; people who witnessed Him as He lived among them. Yet even with the millennia that transpired, they still are. They are still active, powerful, and bold for us here today, just as they were for John, Peter, James and the others centuries before.

It is the power of God Himself that makes this possible. Not me. Not you. Not these words, this blog, or anything we've done. It's Him. He reaches across the eternity and imparts His Spirit – the Spirit of love and true wisdom – to us in ways we can grasp. He does it using water and blood. He did it years ago. He's doing it still for you as you read this. They are. He is.

Hold onto that miracle today. It means more than the world.

Miracle Jesus, I'm in awe of how you act through your Spirit, water, and blood. You are. Be with me today.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 16 May 2013

We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. 1 John 5, verse 9.

In times like these, we need to know that the knowledge of Jesus being God is sufficient unto itself because there's great comfort in it. My last few weeks have been great; GREAT, actually, with a capital G. I got a small promotion, my project is kicking into high gear and I'm privileged to be finally executing program plans that I've been formulating for a year. In my personal life, my wife and I are buying land to plant a vineyard, my first book is being published, and my kids are doing quite, quite well. Great news abounds. For good times like these, I really, really need to know the comfort of the Savior so that I don't let pride set me up for a fall. I've always struggled with arrogant pride, and I find that the good times are almost universally ripe soil for a crop of sin. When things are good, I desperately need to know that Jesus is King and that I'm not. I need to cling to that because good times don't last in our fallen world.

Proof of that is everywhere. Just yesterday, my friend and mentor sent me a message that his grandson had been killed in a car accident. Death is always unexpected, but such a loss, especially of a child, screams out how we need Jesus' comfort. I'm thankful my friend is one of the strongest believers I know; his faith has been an example of steadfastness for me, so I believe that, even now, that faith must be an anchor of hope for him and his family. Yet there's no way to downplay grief because even Jesus wept for His friends when death came.

I have another friend who is living through an unexpected life threatening-illness. It came on him in just a few days. He, too, is a strong believer, and I marvel at how his faith is helping him deal proactively and decisively with the illness. At the start of the year, my friend never would have imagined how quickly his life could change, but now that the change has happened, I can't think of how he could have dealt otherwise but for living through the experience of faith in Jesus.

It is that faith that is testified by God Himself that makes success possible in good times and bad. Nobody wants unexpected death, or brain tumors, or IRS troubles, storm damage or any of the myriad plagues of the Earth. Jesus in all times makes enduring through the good and bad a matter of trust instead of simply a chore of self-reliance. Please keep my friends in your prayers.

Jesus, Your Spirit, Your Father, and You testify to your true love. Abide with me today in the good and bad things that await ahead of us.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 20 May 2013.

Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. 1 John 5, verse 10.

Witness testimony is persuasive. In a court of law, witness testimony is considered impeachable, unreliable, because two people have slightly different recollections of the same event. It all stems from how we perceive and process data. Yet whether it is considered reliable or not, witness testimony moves us. It persuades us to think about things differently.

So it is with God. God is the ultimate court of law with Jesus being the ultimate judge. He is truth, justice, honesty, testimony and sentence all in one. Yet even about Him there are multiple accounts. Thousands of people saw Him during His ministry here, and there are mentions of Him outside the four Gospels (in contemporary Roman accounts, in apocryphal scripture, and in the words of non-believers). Concerning those four Gospels – those four accounts of Good News – there are four eyewitness testimonies to the same ministry. Today's historians think that three of the four Gospels are actually taken from the same source (with Matthew and Luke being interpretations of Mark, while John stands on its own).

Sort of sounds like eyewitness testimony to me. Like I said, you and I might watch the same event, say a car accident, and while our words might agree on 90% of the things that happened before, during and after the accident, on that remaining 10% we might see things differently. You might catch details that I didn't, and I might have seen things from a different vantage. Our testimony matches, and my words don't contradict yours, yet together our witness paints a fuller picture.

So it is with God. Those four Gospels paint a fuller picture, made even more complete by the references and descriptions of Jesus made throughout the rest of the Bible. Most amazing – and testimonial – of all, though, is that, in Scripture, it is Jesus Himself who is speaking through the writers. God sent His Son to live and love among us. He wrote about Him for hundreds of years through psalmists, prophets and kings. He then recorded His earthly life for us to read about for the rest of human history, giving us all we need to know so that the proper introduction might be made.

Then, while God's word about Himself is all the proof we need, He constantly infuses us with love, hope, peace, faith, and good blessings that our testimony of Him might become believable to our contemporaries...just like Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, Jude, James and Barnabas: those writers who penned the New Testament.

Jesus, your words speak about You. Your history is THE history of the world and of our lives. Forgive our sins, boldly remake our hearts, and move us to serve You by serving our fellow man.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 21 May 2013

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 1 John 5, verse 11.

Why does this matter?

There's this friend of mine whose daughter is struggling with pregnancy and drug abuse. Her sisters and mother are all heavy users, and the place they call home is broken. They don't know God, and can't see much need for Him either. Far as I know, they could care less. In a world where all they know is hardship and anguish, do you think my friend, or his daughter, want to live forever?

And then there are the self-professed God-skeptics called 'atheists.' What happens when they are faced with crisis or death? A friend of mine is an atheist, yet more than once she has asked me to pray for her; I sincerely hope she can see God hasn't been inactive, that He's working through the addiction, crime, and sadness around her to tell her how much He cares. Do you think atheists want to live forever?

"Lord I want to go to heaven, but I don't wanna go tonight." Joe Diffie sang that. "Everybody wanna go to heaven but nobody wanna go now." That one's from Kenny Chesney. No, I'm not equivocating corny country music with the holy gospel, though I do suspect God must like a steel guitar. But the thought sticks in my mind: we all want to go to heaven. We all want to live forever, even those who don't follow Jesus. Ask me if I want to go to heaven right this moment and I would have to tell you no. I'm ready, and I'm willing, and I'm prepared...but I don't want to go just yet. There are things that, God-willing, I'd like to do here on the third rock.

I'm not alone in that line of thinking. We all want to live forever because we all want our lives to have meaning that lasts beyond the time we live here. In the long line of human billions, we as individuals are relatively unimportant. But not to God. To Jesus, we matter very much. Each one of us has meaning, purpose, special status in His eyes. Because of Him we are destined ahead of time here to live with Him forever. God gave us life to have meaning, to know He matters.

Jesus is why it matters.

Jesus is why God testifies and why that matters in this world. He testifies because, in Jesus, we live forever. Our lives have purpose and meaning. We matter. It matters. It matters to the hounds in the media. It matters to my friends and their struggling children. And it matters to you and me. To Jesus, we matter and we are important and we are the reason why He stretched out His loving arms to die.

Lord, thank you for loving me. Help me to live my life in Your purpose, in ways that matter to You.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 22 May 2013

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. 1 John 5, verse 12.

This is for tomorrow. This is for here and now. This is for children, pastors, and grandparents: people we think will understand the subtle yet complex blessings of faith. This is for IT technicians, nurses, housewife volunteers, truck drivers, fast food workers, homeless veterans, friends on Facebook, and TV broadcasters: people unschooled in deep matters of faith.

This is for us.

It's for us because He died for us. He didn't die to save the whales, or cows, or Venus fly trap plants. Jesus didn't die so that we could just have something to talk about, or to try to get it right for once. He died for us.

He died for us so that we could live. And live we do.

I think I mentioned this before but mentioning it here works again. Years ago, my pastor said he would love to be known as a Jesus freak. Here he was, this formal, just-past-middle-aged man, with four kids, an uptight congregation, and a church council that he reluctantly led into consensus. Yet in this statement, he was spot-on. His ministry had begun in the early 1970s during the aftermath of the hippie movement. It's true that nothing very radical would ever happen, then or now, in the denomination to which we belonged. Yet there he was, my conservatively educated pastor, publicly declaring he would love to be known as a radical hippie Jesus freak.

Not a bad thing to want, I'd say. It's true because I look back on who I was 20 years ago, when I first heard him say this, and I wonder what in the world I was thinking. I was skeptical, but my pastor was right: he wanted more Jesus in his life, and he wanted people to understand he was out of his mind for Jesus. It wasn't peace, love and rock & roll; it wasn't the latest thing in topically-evangelical Colorado Springs. He was on to something.

Jesus is life. My pastor wanted to live. He wanted to experience the fullest possible life. He wanted to fire on all pistons, expand all knowledge, share the good news wherever and however he could. It didn't matter what the world thought: it mattered what the Lord thought.

It mattered because, without Jesus, life is just marking time between birth and death. Without Jesus, there is no life. Jesus said it Himself: "I am the Way and the truth and the life." He is the movement of the heart. He is the ultimate honesty. He is full life.

If you dig that, you're a Jesus freak, like my pastor, and me. You're a Jesus freak now...and tomorrow...and for eternal tomorrows after that. It was by Him, for us, and forever.

Jesus, let me be fanatical for you. Fill me with your life and love, and teach me to share them both.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 23 May 2013

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. 1 John 5, verse 13.

Why did John write these words? We don't know specifically when he wrote them, but there's speculation it was when he was old, after AD 90, when he was living in Ephesus. But why did he write them? He had already been tortured, ridiculed, shunned, imprisoned and persecuted. All this had happened because he followed Jesus and refused to stop talking about it. Would you or I do the same after those things happened to us? With everything to lose, why would John keep on writing about Jesus?

"So that you may know that you have eternal life."

John wrote them so that we, people he never dreamed even existed, would know what he knew. John didn't know us. He may not have even truly known the people in his immediate audience. John let Jesus guide his hand so that he could record those words: so that you may know that you have eternal life. How many of us live in real understanding of this?

Just yesterday, I read that members of the Westboro Baptist Church are planning to picket funerals for the people killed in the Oklahoma tornado. Like you, I'm repulsed by that. It's an uncaring, un-Christ-like, un-Baptist, unkind thing to do. But get ready because this is going to shock you.

You and me, we're like the folks from Westboro Baptist.

Yes, you read it right. I hope you never carry some offensive sign while protesting an innocent person's funeral. But the raw truth of things is that you and I protest God every day. We don't live knowing that we have eternal life. We don't always act like followers of Jesus. We don't live like we are thankful Jesus lived and died. Both of us, we protest God. We do it by cutting off the other guy in traffic, and by the lies we tell, and by our impure thoughts, and our pride, and our anger. Every sin has those things PLUS a subtle form of idolatry, insisting we are better than God. We may not carry signs that say God hates gay people, but we surely are like protestors who carry signs that say "I hate YOU Jesus" as evidenced by what we think, say and do.

And yet, despite all that, Jesus used the pen and paper of his friend John to speak with us, millennia later, so that we know He is with us. We won't have eternal life just when we die: we have it now. We are part of eternity now. Our place is being prepared hereafter while our lives are infused with Him now even while we're thick with sin. Why did John write the words? Because Jesus wants us to know we live forever, forgiven in Him.

Lord, bless me by living forever in You.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 24 May 2013

*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.
1 John 5, verse 14.*

For a long time I struggled with prayer. The Lutheran in me was trained to feel inadequate, like a worm, standing in front of God. He's God and I'm not. Because I'm a damn dirty sinner, all my best, most devout actions are, to God, like filthy rags. I'm just some created thing, some low being who isn't worthy to tell God what I'm feeling or thinking or want or just to chat.

And I was afraid to admit things about myself to God. I've done so many things in life that I'm ashamed of, that I really wish I could take back, or change, or even ignore. It's just that they're mine. It's not that I'm afraid of the consequences of my sins without Jesus. I know I'm forgiven. But I'm ashamed of them, wish I didn't have to admit my failings, my wrongs, my sins. I'm forgiven, but those sins seemed too big to overlook.

Brother, was I wrong!

You see, part of knowing I have eternal life here and now is knowing I can talk with Jesus about these things. It's just that it used to be difficult to find a way to do it without feeling like I'm talking to the air. A friend of mine took up walking last year, and he says he does a lot of praying when he walks. So, I followed his lead and found it really works well for me too. Sometimes I talk with God about what's on my mind: family, work, writing, politics; anything. Sometimes I walk for blocks just thanking Him for everything around me, even things like the walk itself, or trees, birds, air, shoes, the air in my lungs; again, anything. Sometimes I talk about my sins and my failings, asking His forgiveness. And sometimes I pray for others, everyone from my wife and kids to the president to strangers driving by on the road.

In my heart, not even very deep in my heart, I KNOW Jesus hears these things. I know it because He said so. Because He said so, He hears me and imparts peace. It's a cleansing peace, knowing I've connected with Him, offloaded some of my cares and concerns. "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" He said and I believe it. I believe it because carrying the yoke of prayer with Him relieves me. I feel better, cleansed, freed from things that bothered me.

All because He hears. All our prayers are heard. Whether we see it or not, and whether it's soon or not, all of them are answered as well, though sometimes not in the way we expect. Yet it's always for God's will and purpose which, in the end, is always for good.

Lord Jesus, hear my prayers and help me to always open my heart to You.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 28 May 2013

And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. 1 John 5, verse 15.

Be sure. I think we can sum up this one in that simple little affirmative command. Jesus makes promises that, whatever we ask in His Name, He will answer. We won't ask for frivolous things because His name isn't frivolity. Whatever we ask for in Him, it will be for good, and He will answer that and grant it. There isn't much more to say about this because we can simply be sure.

Jesus, I'm sure of You and that you hear and answer me. Blessed be your name.

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Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 29 May 2013

If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that. 1 John 5, verse 16.

This one is tough, both for deciphering what it means, as well as an application of it that I learned about just today.

You see, all sin leads to death. After reading multiple translations, the verse says we should pray for our brothers and sisters. Some things we do cause the physical action of death. While those are definitely important, they aren't specifically what the verse is alluding to. Instead, the verse is saying we should pray for believers and not-yet-believers alike because all sin can cause death: spiritual death. The ultimate penalty for our wrongdoing is eternal separation from God, from Jesus' love, and that's true death.

Which brings me to point number two. How do you pray for someone who you know hasn't accepted Jesus? A friend of mine has a family member who is dying. My friend says this person hasn't ever accepted Christ. Death is coming, and very soon. Death comes for unbelievers and believers in the same way. While only God can judge someone's heart, death comes to all of us because we are inheritors of sin. Yet you and I know people who reject this, good people who live good lives doing their best, but who reject Jesus. There are many reasons why they do this. In the end, it doesn't matter why someone rejects Christ: it only matters that they did.

Romans 3:23 says it: "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." All of us, even the people we love who have lived good lives but never said "I believe in Jesus." Yet don't forget verse 24, which immediately reminds us that "all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

What do we pray for when a loved one is dying but they haven't accepted Jesus? We pray for Jesus' mercy, comfort, and care. We pray for the promise of His hope. We pray that our loved one will use the last moments of their life to realize their need for Jesus and accept what He does. We love them the same way we always have, and let the love of Jesus show through. We listen and care and help. Finally, we remember yesterday's verse, which said, "and if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him." We KNOW that the hope of Jesus can extend to everyone, no matter where they find themselves in life.

Lord, I believe in you and ask you to hold me close. Help me to love others and be Your comfort to them.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 30 May 2013

All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death. 1 John 5, verse 17.

Just like yesterday, with this verse, it's important to know that all sin can lead to spiritual death. The adultery that starts in the heart, the deception that starts with good intentions, the white lie told to a friend, the envy felt over someone else's things: all of these are sin that, if unrepented, lead to spiritual death. It's agonizing, you know, because that kind of death isn't instantaneous. Instead, it's a lifetime of slow decay and consistent denial. "The problem isn't me. It's A, B or C." A lifetime of avoiding things for which we're responsible is a lifetime that misses out on the greatest joy possible. It's, then, a lifetime capped by the sad reality that, for those who deny Christ, there is no eternal peace. There is separation from God; punishment, and hell. We don't want to think of that, but it's true. It's backed up by numerous statements in Scripture.

And we know, too, that some rebellion, some actions we choose can lead to instant death. The fool who tries to dodge traffic on a busy road but is mowed down by a truck; the little child who disobeys and sticks a knife into an electrical socket; the thrill-chaser who swings out over the chasm without checking the integrity of the rope: all acts of brazen defiance that can lead to immediate demise.

Perhaps, though, the verse isn't talking about either of these. Instead, maybe we need to come at it from a different angle to understand what Jesus is telling us here. Here, perhaps He is saying that it is the unrepentance that makes the difference. Jesus atoned for ALL sin, both the immediately foolish and the long-term caustic. The difference is what we do with that information. We sin. Despite our best intentions, we sin. Billy Graham, Mother Theresa, John Paul II, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, your pastor: all bold heroes of faithful courage in our contemporary world. They're also all damn dirty sinners, filthy through and through with disgusting sin that separates them from a Holy Christ.

Just like you. Just like me.

They still sinned; those alive still do. The difference is contrition before Jesus. The difference is how Jesus moves in the heart, moving us to repent and turn from these awful choices we make, and to convey real sorrow for them. Not abject humiliation, but genuine sorrow and a true desire to turn and make better choices. To follow Jesus and live a life led by Him. We're still sinners, and even after initial repentance, we still make bad, sinful choices. But repentance through Christ leads to His better wisdom now, then life forever instead of death eternal. That's a difference worth choosing.

Savior Jesus, I repent and turn from the things I've done, the things of which I'm ashamed. Forgive me, heal me, remake me, and lead me.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 31 May 2013

We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them. 1 John 5, verse 18.

Ok, so this is going to be tough, and understanding it hinges on finer points of Scripture. You see, we are all still sinners, and we all still sin...yet we don't. If you've ever received communion but then cursed or been angry afterwards, you're guilty of sin. I've done those things; you probably have too.

This verse is talking about faith.

And I'll say I have strong faith, but sometimes my faith gets weak. Sometimes, in my weak moments, I slip back into patterns I had turned from like smoking, foul language while doing home improvements, or holding onto grudges that don't matter, or letting my arrogant self take over to get the last word. I'm a sinner, even though I cling to faith in Jesus.

This verse is talking about the penalty for sin.

Now, I know where I'll spend eternity. If you and I confess that Jesus is the only Son of God, that only He is the path to heaven, that He forgave all sin once and for all, and that we believe in that, then we're on a one-way trip to heaven. We're part of a heavenly eternity now, even as we live out the rest of our lives here in the fallen world. Because we're in that fallen world, we're constantly tempted to do wrong, even new wrongs that didn't plague us before we said we believed.

This verse is talking about our very nature being changed.

The apostle tells us – because Jesus told him – that anyone who has become part of the body of Christ is changed, removed from the inclination to sin. When your conscience pricks you for thoughts, things you've done, or things you're tempted to do, be glad! Rejoice, because that conscience may just be Jesus' Spirit working on you, reminding you that He paid for you, redeemed you, bought you back from death. It's reminding you that He has better plans for you, and those plans are in progress with the choices we make. We don't have to be angry or get the last word. We don't have to be miserable. We don't have to be damned. In fact, NOTHING that Satan, his minions, or the government can do can take away the very true reality that Christ clings to us and has marked us as His. Nobody can take it away; nothing that anybody else says or does can change it, and nothing in the world is more powerful than this. Even as we're still caught up in sin, our faith in Jesus speaks of how He changed us, reminds us of our need for Him, and constantly teaches us that there are always better choices and always a better way.

Lord, I need you. Forgive me and remind me when things are rough.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 3 June 2013

We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. 1 John 5, verse 19.

This verse is the second of three statements that conclude 1 John by affirming what we know. If you remember from last time, the first was that we know that Jesus changed us and our nature by His death and life. Now comes an affirmation how, understanding that we're changed, we're still living in a world plagued by sin.

Most of this is ground you've covered before. If you believe in Jesus, you accept that you're of God and that the world is a sinful place; yep, I get it, been there done that. Consider that phrase, though: "the whole world is under the control of the evil one." That means everything. EVERYTHING.

Everything you know and think is good is under the control of Satan. It pleases him, quite obviously, to frustrate God by hurting us. Satan has been given the freedom to do with creation whatever he pleases. Everything from the elements of nature to the inclinations of our hearts is under his influence. Tornados, earthquakes, fires, droughts; Wall Street panics, government incompetence, wars, street protests: all of these are tools that the evil one uses to hurt us. And why does he hurt us? To put himself above God. We are nothing but pawns in the devil's selfish struggle to paint himself as number one.

But it goes deeper than nature. ALL the things we think are good are under Satan's control as well. Sleeping babies, good times with family, monetary success, liberty and advancing freedom, good religion, happiness and falling in love, Thanksgiving dinner and cold Christmas mornings by the fireplace: ALL under Satan's control. All of these things can be twisted to his advantage and our detriment. Everything that humanity holds dear can be twisted by the evil one. Why? Again, to put himself above God.

My wife and I were talking about Job. If you aren't familiar with his story, Job was wealthy, wise and happy. Satan asks to test Job so that the devil might make God look bad. God allows it, and in a very short time Job loses everything, everyone he loves, and even his health. At his lowest, Job refuses to curse God but is moved to ask Him "why." God's response? "You have no standing, Job, because I'm God and I love you." When Job is of the world, everything he has is under the control of the evil one. When he comes back to God, however, he realizes that everything is nothing while nothing but God is everything.

Job found out that the cure for the common sin is Jesus. The way to overcome the control of the evil one is by surrendering to Jesus. Against Him, even the most powerful of evil attacks is powerless.

Lord, abide with me to overcome evil in my way today.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 4 June 2013

We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. 1 John 5, verse 20.

This is the third concluding statement of 1 John. Remember that the first two statements talked about how we are changed by God while still faced with sin, then how we are children of God always under attack by the evil one. This last statement gives power to the first two, showing how Jesus overcomes our failings and shortcomings.

Three years ago I started writing these proverbial blogs as a way to seek God's wisdom during a time when I felt lost. I was lost because of terrible things I had done. Back then I failed to understand something that, thank God, He gave me understanding to see later.

Jesus never leaves us.

Never. Leaves. Us. As long as we have breath in our lungs, He is with us, fighting for us, working to encourage us and build us up, providing for and caring for us, interceding for us. He does this because, as the verse says, He is true God and eternal life.

Once the Son of God comes into your life, He imparts His understanding through His Spirit. Sometimes, the voices of the world drown out the voice of His Spirit, but it's always there, always working to try to convince us to make better choices, be better, and to surrender everything to Him. He seeks us out when we are hurting most, even when we don't see Him.

In the days when I felt apart from God, I believe now that it was both the guilt from realizing what I had done and the attacks of the very real enemy designed to drown out that quiet Spirit. My wife saved me. The words and gestures of good people who refused to give up on me saved me. My kids saved me. All of these people saved me because Jesus worked His way through them. On the other side of it was when I felt privileged to understand that He was working to help me all along, and that His wisdom was stronger than anything I did, or anything I may or may not write about.

Years later, I hope you gain perspective from reading these words, and I'm so grateful and pleased that you do. If something good can come of my years of choices, then you are blessed too. Even better is when you can share how He helps you with someone else. Just remember, it isn't me, and it isn't you, and it isn't even the good people around us. It's Jesus, never giving up on us and always building us up to understand and share Him more.

Jesus, abide with me. Seek me, forgive me, nurture me, so I may follow You.

Daily Proverbial, from 1 John, 5 June 2013

Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. 1 John 5, verse 21.

How do you end a letter? Do you sign it “sincerely,” then your name? Or “love,” and the same? If you were an English teacher, would you give the Apostle John a good grade for proper literary form? Or, if you were writing a business letter, would you rewrite this one because it doesn't bring the correspondence to a proper conclusion?

Yeah. Same here. For a closing, this one seems odd at first. Yet, in these last six words of the book of 1 John, perhaps the apostle did better than either you or me. Perhaps he remembered an important lesson.

Put first principles first.

I've said it before but not before Jesus' friend, John. Every sin is a form of idolatry. Sin has duality, and not just in the way it can seem enticing while masking its deviant nature. Instead, every sin is coupled with the sin of idolatry; every sin is a way of putting ourselves before God, our choices before His. When you lie, you're both telling a falsehood and putting your choice to lie above truth (which comes from Jesus). When we murder, we are both taking a life and putting ourselves in the place of God, who is the only person with the right to end a life. When we steal, we are both depriving someone of their property and putting our disrespect for God above our respect for His wisdom.

We aren't keeping ourselves from idols.

Somehow, I think that's why the First Commandment is the exhortation to revere only God. It's the most important first principle. Perhaps it's why John ended his first epistle this way. Jesus is speaking through him to remind us that, as His children, we should remember that First Commandment. It should be the first thing we think of in the morning and the last thing at night. In other words, it should be our first principle. That's what makes it a proper conclusion to the book of 1 John.

The more you read the book, the more this makes sense because, as you'll remember the themes of the book are Jesus being incarnate God, how He is light, that we are children of God made new in Jesus, and that (because of these things) we live in a tough world plagued with sin. Knowing all of them, it makes sense that John should remind us to cling first to Jesus in all we do. We should keep ourselves away from anything that we can use to take the place of God.

If that's good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for me.

Lord, thank you for your servant, John, and for the wise words You wrote through him. Help me to remember to put You first in all things at all times.