

Knowing the Father's Heart: Studies in First John To Believe in Jesus Christ I 1 John 5:1-12

David Ridenhour | Metrocrest Presbyterian Church | March 11, 2018

[Intro]

I make no illusions about the fact that the church believes some crazy things. And I am under no illusion that is immune to the changing circumstances around us, and that the work of the declaration of the gospel is seemingly getting harder, not easier, because people feel less pressure to appear religious. So what is my hope? Is it in a fancy new website that we just launched, or in a new staff pastor that we hope to hire?

Nah. Our hope is in the crazy stuff that we believe. That Jesus Christ is mighty to save. As one author put it, "Jesus is found where there is no hope and no sensible route of escape. Jesus is present to those who have no future, no Plan B, no other options but faith." The church exists to declare and demonstrate that Jesus came to rescue, redeem, and resurrect alienated and dead sinners. We in fact declare that truth when we say "Great is the mystery of the faith, Christ has died, Christ is Risen, Christ will come again."

So how do we get the faith to believe all of that? I want to talk about two things today; the Origin of Faith, and then the Choice we must make.

[1. The Origin of Faith (5:1-5)]

- Bill Yarbrough: Christian faith believes in the Jesus of 1 John: "the one with whom believers enjoy fellowship (1:3), the Righteous One, who makes intercession with the Father (2:1), the one whom the antichrist denies (2:22), the one in whose name (alone) people are commanded to trust (3:23), and the one who has come from God in the flesh (4:2)."
- Our faith is IN Jesus Christ. It isn't in a feeling, or in a thought. It is in a person. It is in the witness of the ones who walked with Christ and declared that this Jesus, the long awaited rescuer of God's people came in the flesh, bled and died, and rose in victory over sin and death for the salvation of God's people.
- But, where does faith exactly come from? Where does it originate from? I can tell you the wrong answer. I hear it as a pastor all the time.
- People beat themselves up for not having enough faith. Or they get told by supposed well-meaning Christians that they need to have more faith.
- And what I am about to tell you isn't just "one man's interpretation", but rather is based solely on the grammar of the text. 1 John 5:1 says that faith is birthed by God.
- The word born in the greek is in a tense that means a past action with present consequences. Believe is the present action.
- So John is saying that because of something that happened in the past (being born of God) we presently believe. Faith, then, is a result of our new birth. It is given to us by God.
- My friend Jim was in federal prison for some really bad choices that he made. While in prison, someone came doing prison ministry and shared the gospel with his cell-mate. Jim wasn't the one being talked to. And yet, it was God that did a work that night in Jim's heart and gave him new life in Christ. He gave him faith.
- Friends, you didn't conjure up faith. God created faith in you. God gave you new life by putting his spirit within you.

- I remember when I was younger hearing a pastor preach a sermon where he was mocking those who would ask if you were “born again.” And if you listen to how it is used in our day, it is used in a slightly pejorative way.
- It tends to refer to people who might be seen as unbalanced, naive, intolerant, fanatical, etc.
- So, the phrase may be unhelpful, but the underlying concept is rock-solid biblical. To be born of God means that God has changed your heart, given you faith, changed you from a God hater to a God lover. To be born of God is not to refer to a subset of Christianity. It is, in fact, the very essence of Christianity.
- This being born of God also changes how we view the commandments of God. No longer are the commandments of God burdensome, or to be rebelled against. Now, they are the track that guides our life to who and what we were designed to be. (3)
- Our obedience to God’s commands are not the basis of God’s for us, but rather a fruit of God’s love in us. We are motivated by grace, not by fear.
- The reason that we can feel the commands a burden is because there is indwelling sin still within us, and this makes us lose sight of the gospel... that we are fully known, fully accepted, and fully loved by God, and causes us rather to resort to fear... that somehow our imperfections will cause God to love us less, or not love us at all.
- But it is only through the constant reminder of the gospel... it is the LIGHT of God that causes him to not to be able to stand to look upon sin, and the LOVE of God that sent Jesus to STAND in our place... and that because he has done this we have received his perfect record of righteousness as our own. It is not just as if I had never sinned, but Just as If I Had Always Obeyed.
- The commands of God are for our good, because they represent the heart of God (which is good) and the design for which we were made (which is good).
- So what we see of people who have been “born from above” are that they believe in the Christ that the apostles bore witness to, have within them love for others, and are obedient to God’s commands.
- What is paramount to John, then, is what you believe, and then what you do.
- But we live in a world that would almost wish to silence what we believe, as long as what we DO serves the common good and does not make absolute claims about absolute truth.
- But to be a Christian, as one author put it, is this: faith that does not lead to love is meaningless, and love that is not based on faith is powerless.
- In vv4-5, we are reminded of the victory that is ours in Jesus... Christians don’t fight /for/ victory, but rather fight /from/ victory! Faith in God’s Son means that the victory is ours over the loveless world, its dictator the devil, and its deceivers the antichrists.

[2. The Choice we must Make (5:6-12)]

- [explain 6-9]
- So what is the deal in this text? This is the majority interpretation which I take to be the one that John intended... blood and water symbolize two events in Jesus’ incarnational ministry that summarize the totality of his ministry.
- In a courtroom, you would have to present eyewitness testimony from two or three witnesses in order to win your case. John is proceeding to present his witnesses.
- Jesus was baptized and at that baptism the Holy Spirit descended on him and the Father’s voice rang out saying: “and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”” (Matthew 3:17, ESV) [water]

- So what of the blood? Jesus was crucified for the sins of God's people. He bled and died to take away our sins, as the hymn loudly resounds. But not only was he the sacrifice who bled and died, but in GLORY he was raised, proving that the sacrifice was complete and acceptable.
- The spirit, then? The Spirit is who is at work in us, just as we spoke of a moment ago, giving us faith. God speaks further testimony to us through these three things, and prove beyond all doubt that Jesus is the Christ who sought us, saved us, and is sanctifying us.
- [Stephen Colbert/Bill Maher]
- Grandpa/Why I follow late night hosts/Carson/Leno
- Stephen Colbert has made no small bones about the fact that his faith is a deep and profound guiding influence. Just before taking the reigns of the Late Night show on CBS, he famously expressed this, that "to be a fool for Christ is to love."
- Via Dustin Messer (on this particular episode, this particular interaction): Bill Maher "The plain fact is religion must die for mankind to live. The hour is getting very late to be able to indulge in having key decisions made by religious people – by irrationalists – by those who would steer the ship of state, not by a compass, but by the equivalent of reading the entrails of a chicken."
- Messer, con't: Maher's sentiment is strong; he hedges no bets. Like many of the so called "new atheists," Maher does not want the religious and the irreligious to "play nice," or even go their separate ways. No, Maher sees religion as a malignant cancer in need of eradication. To be clear, it's not only those acts of violence committed in the name of religion which Maher decries, it's religion itself. Maher understands that religious beliefs cannot be contained—they cannot be hermetically sealed from the rest of one's thought and behavior. Religion, in Maher's estimation, is a menace to society precisely because it cannot be properly "private." Faith is inherently "public" because it claims to define truth, goodness, beauty, and indeed all of reality. Thus, we can't have people serving food, much less holding public office, who hold such convictions. After all, who knows when and where those beliefs might come out?
- And so on this particular episode, rather than laugh about the trivialities of religion or make a joke about a politician, Colbert doesn't shrink back... he invites his guest, an avowed atheist, back to the church.
- And in doing so he offers him Pascals wager.
- [pascals wager]
- Pascals wager is this... if God does not exist, the devout have enjoyed a lifetime of some embarrassment, but there is no real lasting effect. But if God does exist, those who would not acknowledge him and bow to him have nothing to gain in this life and everything to lose in the next.
- [John's point: 10-12] - Believe in Jesus or Forfeit Eternal Life
- Jesus doesn't fit on a co-exist bumper sticker. Jesus doesn't reside in the private recluses of a closeted faith. Bill Maher knows this, and this is why he is so dead set against it.
- This leaves us with having to know, today, what we believe. It is not sufficient to say, if we were to ask you who are married if you are married, "I think so." Either you are married or you are not.
- Likewise, it is not sufficient to say, when asked if you believe in Jesus, "I think so!" Jesus is an exclusivist. And he demands exclusive claims on your life, not just the check-box of your religious preferences.
- Jesus made radical claims about himself... he is the only way to God. Here, John joins in declaring that exclusivity.
- If Jesus does not have exclusivity over every part of your life, not just your religious identity, you make God out to be a liar (10) and you do not have life (12).

[3. CONCLUSION]

- Having vague faith will not save us. Having vacuous faith in a Jesus that appeals to us will not save us.
- Rather, it is only faith in the Jesus who was baptized in water and bled on Calvary that will save us.
- And friends. It is that faith in that Jesus that brings you life. Both life in the world to come and life enjoyed here and now. Everyone engages in Pascals wager. But God has shown us what the odds are. Do you know life? Do you know Christ? Let's pray.