

## ***122 Sin = Love rejected***

Sadly, I've had a spiritually dry and difficult Lent. Why? I stupidly decided to give up reading 'spiritual books' for Lent, and only read the Bible – that way I thought I'd get some sort of 'pure' view of my faith – just me and God. *Stupid boy!* It was compounded by lockdown, so that even the emergence from Lent into Easter didn't restore my joy. 'Which part of "*It's not good for man to be alone*" did you not understand, Paul!'

So I've joined an email-based Bible study on 1 John, and our Revd Phil has produced a superb set of notes and questions on 1 John, in which he's bubbling over with enthusiasm about the amazing love that God has for us – he just can't help himself. (Deliberate ambiguity: Did I mean Phil or John? Yes, both!)

Aided by Phil's notes, and as I did with my studies in Romans, I took what I call my drone-based view of the book, flying over the whole book – and I got very excited by the panorama!

The book was written to counter false teachings that were creeping into the church. In particular, they were watering down the seriousness of sin. ("*If we claim to be without sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*") If you view the whole text of 1 John, and highlight the words 'sin' and 'love', you will see that the two are intertwined throughout the whole book. (See page 3.) And that's what has got me so excited again.

Now, if we're to understand 1 John – well, any book in the Bible – we have to first work out how the original readers understood it – it's a letter written to some real people, after all.

The context has to be a Jewish one – Jesus was a Jew – and the Jews knew their history. They knew that, over the centuries, God had desperately tried to get his people to live in relationship with him – in covenant. Time and again, they turned away from God, going their own way rather than following God's loving instructions as to how to live in love with him.

Time and again, God allowed them to experience the exile (both spiritual and physical/actual) that follows from their having decided to live *outside* that loving covenant relationship. And time and again, God forgave them and drew them back into relationship, into covenant. If you read the Old Testament as a whole, it's amazing how forgiving God is, despite his people's wilfulness.

And that's how the people of Jesus' time, of John's time, saw sin: it was rejecting the loving, forgiving God who longed for you to return and, if you did return, he would wipe away that sin and give you a new start – again! How gracious God is! How amazing! What incredible love!

And that is the context into which John writes, that's why, throughout the book, love and sin are so intertwined: Sin is really, really serious, says John, because we're spitting in the face of God, the face of the God who loves us so desperately. Would you spit in the face of your wife or husband?! That's the seriousness of sin.

In the children's group I helped with at my former church, they said that SIN stood for "Shove off, God! **I**'m in charge! **N**o to your ways!"

And that's why the gospel – the good news of Jesus – is so amazingly wonderful! and you, like me, know how wonderful the love of Jesus really is, in dying for us on the cross to take away our sin. And you, like me, want to share that love with those you love – your friends, and the unbelieving members of your own family. So how are we going to do that? How are we going to draw them into that loving relationship with God?

If we believe what we've always been taught, this is what we have to do. We have to "tell them the gospel". And what is the gospel? Ask any well-educated Christian, and they'll tell you what your loved ones need to understand – something like this:

God is holy and perfect, but we are unholy and sinful; every day we think and say and do wrong things. So, clearly, we're not able to approach God – there's a vast gulf that we cannot cross. But God loves us **so much** that he came to the earth in Jesus, was tortured and killed to take the punishment that we deserve for our sins. He went through hell, so we don't have to. Because Jesus took the punishment, we can be set free. Hallelujah!

This is what we refer to as 'penal substitution', and some churches (many churches? most churches?) have this as their primary means of understanding the work of Jesus on the cross. But I wonder what the author of "the epistle of love" would think of that way of presenting "the gospel"? (I'll hand over now to John, and let him finish this article...)

*Your "penal substitution" idea is a new one to me, but it seems that it waters down sin: it turns it into a mere transgression against God's laws, rather than spitting in God's face.*

*Also, it seems to present God as needing to be appeased (like the 'gods' of the tribes around us). We all know that Yahweh – as all the Scriptures (= OT) make clear – is a loving, forgiving God, not a tyrant, needing someone to be punished!*

*No! On the cross, God in Jesus takes our spitting, self-centredness and triumphs over it, washing it away by his love.*

*After the resurrection, when Jesus spoke to Peter and asked if he really loved him. That was hard for him – really, really hard! Yes, of course he loved him, but ... well, you know ... it's so hard not to let selfishness overcome us – that's the **real** sin.*

*Our friend Jesus bore all that suffering for me, and yet, so often, I feel I couldn't be bothered. And when I'm like that, I'm saying that what he did for me wasn't really important; I'm spitting in my beloved friend's face. How could I DO that?! But that's the awfulness of sin. No! Let's be real here: If we claim to be without sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

Bless you all! Stay safe!

Paul Bev. 30.4.20

# This text is actually my discussion with Jesus in John 21, plus my first epistle. Jx.

John 21

1 Afterwards Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way:

2 Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.

3 "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus.

5 He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered.

6 He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

7 Then the disciple whom Jesus **love**d said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water.

8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.

9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

11 Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn.

12 Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.

13 Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.

14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly **love** me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I **love** you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly **love** me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I **love** you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you **love** me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you **love** me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I **love** you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

18 I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted, but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."

19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus **love**d was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?")

21 When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

22 Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."

23 Because of this, the rumor spread among the brethren that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"

24 This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

25 Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

1 John 1

1 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 <sup>19</sup> this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

2 This 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.

3 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.

4 We write this to make our joy complete.

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

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

7 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**.

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

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

10 If we claim to have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

1 John 2

1 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 <sup>19</sup> Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

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

3 We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.

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

5 But if anyone obeys his word, God's **love** is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him:

6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

7 Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard.

8 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).

9 Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness.

10 Whoever **love**s his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.

11 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.

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

13 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.

14 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.

15 Do not **love** the world or anything in the world. If anyone **love**s the world, the **love** of the Father is not in him.

16 For everything in the world <sup>19</sup> the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does <sup>20</sup> comes not from the Father but from the world.

17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives for ever.

18 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:

19 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.

20 The one who deceives is the one who denies that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. Such a man is the antichrist <sup>19</sup> he denies the Father and the Son.

21 No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

22 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.

23 And this is what he promised us <sup>19</sup> even eternal life.

24 I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.

25 As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. That anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit <sup>19</sup> just as it has taught you, remains in him.

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

27 If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

1 John 3

1 How great is the **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.

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

3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

4 Everyone who **sins** breaks the law; in fact, **sin** is lawlessness

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8 That you know that he appeared so that he might take away our **sins**. And in him is no **sin**

6 No one who lives in him keeps on **sinning**. No one who continues to **sin** has either seen him or knows him.

7 Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, but he is not righteous.

8 He 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.

9 No one who is born of God will continue to **sin**, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on **sinning**, because he has been born of God.

10 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 a child of God; nor is anyone who does not **love** his brother.

11 This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should **love** one another.

12 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.

13 Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.

14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we **love** our brothers. Anyone who does not **love** remains in death.

15 Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

16 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.

17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the **love** of God be in him?

18 Dear children, let us not **love** with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

19 This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we can put our hearts at rest in his presence: 20 whatever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God.

22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

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

24 Those who obey his commands live in him, and he is in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gives us.

1 John 4

1 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.

2 This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,

3 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.

4 Yes, 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.

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

6 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 recognise the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

7 Dear friends, let us **love** one another, for **love** comes from God. Everyone who **love**s has been born of God and knows God.

8 Whoever does not **love** does not know God, because God is **love**.

9 This is how God showed his **love** among us: The son his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

10 This is **love**: not that we **love**d God, but that he **love**d us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our **sins**.

11 Dear friends, since God so **love**d us, we also ought to **love** one another.

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.

13 We know that we live in him and he is in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world.

15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he is in God.

16 And so we know and rely on the **love** God has for us. God is **love**. Whoever lives in **love** lives in God, and God is in him.

17 In this way, **love** is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him.

18 There is no fear in **love**; the perfect **love** drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in **love**.

19 We **love** because he first **love**d us.

20 If anyone says, "I **love** God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not **love** his brother, whom he has seen, cannot **love** God, whom he has not seen.

21 And he has given us this command: Whoever **love**s God must also **love** his brother.

1 John 5

1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who **love**s the Father **love**s his child as well.

2 This is how we know that we **love** the children of God: by **loving** God and carrying out his commands.

3 This is **love** for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,

4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

6 This is the one who came by water and blood <sup>19</sup> 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.

7 For there are three that testify (in heaven: the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one.)

8 And there are three that testify on earth: (the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.)

9 We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son.

10 Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.

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

12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

13 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.

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

15 And if we know that he hears us <sup>19</sup> whatever we ask <sup>20</sup> we know that we have what we asked of him.

16 If anyone sees his brother commit a **sin** that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him 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 he should pray about that.

17 All wrongdoing is **sin**, and there is **sin** that does not lead to death.

18 We know that anyone born of God does not continue to **sin**; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.

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

20 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 <sup>19</sup> even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

<sup>20</sup> Please do not think I am writing this to you as a letter.