

March 3, 2019

## 1 John 4:19-5:21

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

First John is written as a sermon with the key purpose to defend Christian communities against false prophets and to remind them that as children of God they are to live in the light and love one another. The distracting teaching is rooted in doxology: the ancient belief, common in Greco-Roman culture, in the superiority of everything that is “spiritual” over the “physical”. It led to much debate and division in the church over the nature of Jesus as God (leading to the adoption of first great Christian Creeds: The Apostle’s and Nicene Creeds). This worldview taught by these false prophets also seemed to imply that there is no connection between our spiritual-ity (beliefs) and physical actions (ethics). The pastoral author writes to counter that false teaching, reminding and encouraging them that if they trust in Jesus and love as he loved they are already the children of God. Love is more than a feeling, it’s a concrete action. Confessing belief in Christ and living rooted in God’s love is inseparable from loving as Christ loves: being willing to give one’s life for one in need, to lay aside our self-concern to choose to obey love.<sup>6</sup>

**LOVE:** throughout 1 John love is defined more as an action or activity than a word or idea. It’s not just a command of God, but the very nature and person of God. The logic drawn is that if God abides, or lives, in us, and we abide in God, then we will be like God: we will love as God loves.

v. 19 is often also translated as “Let us **LOVE** because he first **LOVED** us.” as more of an admonition, or invitation to act, than as a statement.

*world* is the contrast to what is of God, made flesh in Jesus and characterizes the people of God as opposed to the people of the *world*. This idea is never explained by the author, rather it’s assumed as the worldview of just “how things are.” “The *world* is the system of human society which rejects and opposes God and God’s commandments. As such it will normally try to keep the children of God from carrying out their loving obedience to God and God’s commandments to believe in Jesus and to love one another.”<sup>6</sup>

**God’s COMMANDMENTS:** as we’ve seen in 1 John this refers to the reciprocal dynamic relationships between the commandment to believe (or trust) in Jesus as the Christ and to love one another as God first loves us. The author implies that you cannot have one without the other.

**WATER AND BLOOD** This is hard, even for scholars. It points to the divisive belief of the “opponents” spoken of earlier, who believe Jesus was Christ only with water. That most likely is related to baptism John 1:32-34 the point when the spirit of God comes upon Jesus. Some believe in Adoptionism, that at his baptism the Divine Christ came upon Jesus. Which can be justified by John 19:30 when the spirit leaves Jesus. [<sup>32</sup> And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. <sup>33</sup> I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with **WATER** said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>34</sup> And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”] This is a belief in a Jesus that denies “that Jesus Christ came in the flesh” 1 John 4:2. **BLOOD** seems to refer to the death of Jesus in John 19:34-35. [<sup>34</sup> Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once **BLOOD** and water came out. <sup>35</sup> (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.)] Jesus is flesh and spirit. The true moment of his revelation and salvation is not at his baptism, but in his death: self-giving love that we are to emulate.

<sup>19</sup> We **LOVE** because he first **LOVED** us. <sup>20</sup> Those who say, “I **LOVE** God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not **LOVE** a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot **LOVE** God whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup> The **COMMANDMENT** we have from him is this: those who **LOVE** God must **LOVE** their brothers and sisters also.

**5** <sup>1</sup> Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who **LOVES** the parent **LOVES** the child. <sup>2</sup> By this we know that we **LOVE** the children of God, when we **LOVE** God and obey his **COMMANDMENTS**.

<sup>3</sup> For the **LOVE** of God is this, that we obey his **COMMANDMENTS**. And his **COMMANDMENTS** are not burdensome, <sup>4</sup> for whatever is born of God conquers the *world*. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. <sup>5</sup> Who is it that conquers the *world* but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

<sup>6</sup> This is the one who came by **WATER AND BLOOD**, Jesus Christ, not with the **WATER** only but with the **WATER** and the **BLOOD**. And the Spirit is

the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.<sup>7</sup> There are three that testify:<sup>8</sup> the Spirit and the WATER and the BLOOD, and these three agree.<sup>9</sup> If we LIFE receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son.<sup>10</sup> Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts. Those who do not believe in God have made him a liar by not believing in the testimony that God has given concerning his Son.<sup>11</sup> And this is the testimony: God gave us ETERNAL LIFE, and this LIFE is in his Son.<sup>12</sup> Whoever has the Son has LIFE; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have LIFE.

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.<sup>15</sup> And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him.<sup>16</sup> If you see your brother or sister committing what is not a mortal sin, you will ask, and God will give LIFE to such a one—to those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin that is mortal; I do not say that you should pray about that.<sup>17</sup> All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that is not mortal.

<sup>18</sup> We know that those who are born of God do not sin, but the one who was born of God protects them, and the evil one does not touch them.<sup>19</sup> We know that we are God's children, and that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one.<sup>20</sup> And we know 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, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and ETERNAL LIFE.

<sup>21</sup> Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

#### QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- What shimmers in your attention in this reading?
- How might you embrace idolatry in terms of love?
- How does the word of 1 John encourage you?; or us as a church today in 2019?

born of God : this notion of spiritual birth, or adoption as children of God in in John 1:10-18.

<sup>10</sup> [Jesus the Word] was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.<sup>11</sup> He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.<sup>12</sup> But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,<sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

Verse 13: The end of the letter echoes the end of the gospel of John in language, tone and conclusion: “<sup>3</sup>But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have LIFE in his name. John 20:31

**ETERNAL LIFE.** “means not only life that never ends but the ‘life of eternity.’ It refers not just to the quantity of life, but to its quality. It means a life that is characterized by eternity, by the world of God that transcends the present world. Eternal life is divine life, the very life of God. The ultimate testimony to the truth of the incarnation is eternal life, because ‘this life is in God’s son’”<sup>8</sup> and as we are born of God through faith in Christ Jesus then we too live from, abide in this dynamic quality of eternal life.

*mortal sin* quite confusing the language used here is quite different than that of the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the spirit in Mark 3:28-30. There is also no insinuation that there are degrees, or levels of sin. Rather this expression can be understood through the consistent teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures that worship of other gods or a deliberate rejection of God is beyond atonement. Number 15:27-31; Isaiah 22:12-14. So it could be idolatry: a life rooted in trust of a false god made by human hands, rather than life rooted in the life of the Son Jesus Christ.

*idols* false images of god, made by human hands. It's trust in a false god out of our self-gratification, self-will or self-justification.

<sup>8</sup> In my notes, I borrowed freely *The Epistles of John*. David Resenberg. Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.