

LOVE FIRST: 2012 Summer Messages from 1 John

July 22: "Confidence Before God" I John 3:21-4:6: When you are confident before God you can be even more confident before other people.

Intro: It rained on my tent in the backyard. How do I dry it out in this weather?

In *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer penned the words, "Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate" (1959:47). Cheap grace means living as though God ignores or condones our sins (IVP commentary on 1 John).

This is how we have confidence before God:

I. THERE IS NO CONFIDENCE WITHOUT OBEDIENCE: *We have confidence before God because we obey his commands and do what pleases him* (1 John 3:22).

A. Obey his commands AND do what pleases him: Are these phrases two ways of saying the same thing? Maybe not. The commands of 1 John center on Jesus himself.

1. The commands (*entolei*) are explicit orders, injunctions, charges, and instructions. We receive them from the Father and we seek to abide by them every day.

2. The command to "believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another" summarizes the content of the "commands."

3. Another command: "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did" (2:6). Another: "Remain in him" (2:27).

4. What is this? Are these supposed to be specifics? The answer lies in what the Father is truly seeking from us:

B. The Father is not so much looking for "deeds of a certain nature" as he is "people of a certain kind," or as C.S. Lewis wrote, "**We might think that God wanted simply obedience to a set of rules; whereas He really wants people of a particular sort.**"

***One student, looking for the A, asked the teacher, "Do you want us to just memorize this, or do we need to understand it?"

1. The Apostle John does not mention the 10 commandments or any other list. Instead, he writes as if we already know the commands of God, that our issue is not knowledge but obedience.

2. He is right, of course. We do not need more specifics on the commands. We just need to start doing what we already know.

C. "Do what please him" is indeed an example of the John the Hebrew following the example of "parallelism" and reiterating in a second phrase what he has said in the first. It is nuanced this way:

1. The slave just follows orders.

2. The son seeks to please the Father. Any Father would rather have a son who seeks to please him. Jesus, God's One and Only Son, pleased the Father in every way. In fact, the Father announced his pleasure in his Son at his baptism: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well-pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

3. The Father is looking for children like this, who walk as Jesus walked, seeking to please him in every word and deed.

D. THERE IS NO CONFIDENCE WITHOUT OBEDIENCE: *Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them* (1 John 3:24).

1. I John 2:3: *We know that have come to know him if we obey his commands.*

2. As long as we insist on being Master of our own destiny we refuse to allow God to be God in our lives and we forfeit any confidence before him.

II. THERE IS NO CONFIDENCE WITHOUT THE SPIRIT: *And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us* (1 John 3:24).

A. John has not mentioned the Spirit up to now in this letter. This is the first instance of the word. From here on out he will use the word "spirit" (Greek *pneuma*) a dozen times. Half of these refer to the Spirit of God and half to other spirits in the world including the spirit of antichrist.

1. The word *pneuma* may refer to a disembodied but rational and moral entity such as an angel or demon.

2. The word may also refer to "**the power by which the human being thinks, feels, and decides.**"

3. Reading through John's use of "spirit" in this letter, I think he is referring both to the Holy Spirit, noted by the translators when the word is capitalized, and the power by which we live our lives and set our course. In our time we use the word "spirituality" to describe this dimension of human existence.

B. Do not believe every spirit.

***An article on the front page of the T-P Monday (July 16, 2012) declared, "Many in U.S. losing faith in religion." The article says that organized religion continues to fall (now 44%) in the confidence it inspires in citizens, though not nearly so far as the U.S. Congress (13%). However, only 5% of the U.S. population is atheistic. 95% believe in God, and a vast majority consider their spirituality of great importance to their lives.

1. Not every "spirituality" is good. Some are in error. Some are evil. Many "false prophets" have gone out into the world, John says here. So the world is full of falsehood in regard to prophesy and spiritual matters.

2. Some spirits are not from God. They come from the minds of other humans. Some come from the Devil, the Evil One.

C. Test the spirits.

1. The word "test" means to "examine, scrutinize, prove." It is the process of CSI, Christian Spiritual Inspection. We are not judges, but we are fruit-inspectors. We are not judges, but we are the people of God, chosen for himself.

2. You should not be accepting as true what everyone or anyone says around you as a spiritual observation or truth. Not all prophecies are true. Not all prophets are true. Not all spiritual claims are true. Some are false. Some are immoral. Some are ugly.

3. If you do not learn to test the spirits, you are setting yourself up for delusion, for abuse, and for deception. You are going to be conned. Many spiritual con artists are out there in the world. They are there for purpose to access your mind, your soul, and your money.

D. All false spirits come down to SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS. In one way or another that preach and teach a works salvation, that you get to heaven and make yourself right with God by being good and doing good. And that is all that matters.

E. The spirit not from God is the spirit of the antichrist. This rational, intellectual, and moral perspective on the world insists that Christ is not the answer. It purports to achieve the highest plane of human living WITHOUT the intervention of God in Christ.

F. Our LITMUS TEST for truth and falsehood is Jesus Christ. That is what it means to follow Christ and be a Christian, be a believer. We are all about Jesus as the Promised One from God.

G. The key is this: Jesus of Nazareth, the human being born of Mary in Bethlehem, is the Christ, the Promised One of God, and he has come IN THE FLESH. He came to this planet and lived among us humans.

1. John insists on this because he knew Jesus of Nazareth intimately. He saw him, heard him, and touched him.

2. John witnessed the empty tomb. He went inside of it on the third day. He saw the risen Christ in all his glory. He was an eyewitness to the entire story.

3. For John, believing in Jesus as Savior and Lord, as God made flesh, is the key to truth, to life, and to human peace and purpose on this planet. Nothing else matters. The same was true for Peter who said, "Through him (Jesus) you believe in God who raised him from the dead, and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God" (I Peter 1:21).

4. Even the belief in God is dependent for Peter and John upon the reality of God's incarnation in Jesus Christ.

H. This reality of God becoming flesh is how you discern the truth and falsehood of what another person is saying to you. If, when you speak of God infleshed in Christ, they will not listen to you (v5), you know they are not from God.

1. This does not mean that they have no truth. Truth exists wherever you find it.

2. It does mean that they are not anchored in the fundamental truth which is Christ and him crucified.

3. They have a perspective—from the world. The world listens to them. They may have wide acceptance and acclaim in the world. But we know that without a Savior to rescue us from our sins we are just rearranging seats on the deck of the Titanic. It is all going down, and we along with it, and nothing will endure. If Christ is not risen from the dead, then death is the ultimate reality and everything else is just decoration.

Conclusion: