

Heart-Lessons to Help You Move Toward Holiness

John's books are called the love books, but don't let that lead you to think that they are soft-spoken, milk-toast, books that leave you feeling all ooey-gooey inside.

The books of 1, 2 and 3 John are a strong call to spiritual maturity.

Although John reminds us of the love of Christ, he boldly calls out those who despise or hate their brothers in Christ and who walk in habitual sin. Each chapter in the book of 1 John teaches us an important lesson about how we are to walk as children of God.

This is so important in today's Christian culture, because for the past several decades, the church has slowly pulled away from a strong message of holiness, calling it legalism. And to be fair, there were those who did distort the message of holiness.

But rather than bringing the message of holiness into balance, the pendulum swung to the opposite extreme of distortion.

- Tolerance of sin
- An avoidance of preaching the whole Scripture, so as not to offend
- Entertainment replaced the true presence of the Holy Spirit
- Decisions replaced true repentance

5 Important Lessons for Spiritual Maturity

As a result of decades of distortion in our pulpits, whether it be that your holiness and acceptance by God is based on what you do or don't do, or that you shouldn't be so preoccupied with holiness because grace covers all, we have

generations of Christians who haven't truly matured. Maturity in the life of a believer is contingent upon them reading, searching and *knowing* the Word of God.

How can you know God if you don't know the Word of God? How will your faith grow if you don't know the Word of God (Rom. 10:17)?

How will we be shaped into Christ's likeness if we don't even know the character of Christ? The only way we will know Christ and His character is by reading the Word, studying the Word, and allowing the Word to completely saturate our lives.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

1. God is light and in Him is no darkness—at all.

Light cancels out darkness, and darkness extinguishes light. The two absolutely cannot coexist. We know this.

The principle is the same for spiritual light and darkness. We walk in the light to the proportion of darkness we allow in our life.

- If we allow a lot of darkness in our life
- If we are prone to compromise
- If we regularly neglect time with the Lord
- If we are prone to overlooking sin in our life

We walk in darkness. We do not walk in the light, and we do not practice the truth.

2. God expects us to live free from habitual and intentional sin.

- John says this, "Whoever says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4).

There are those, even today, who want to minimize the importance of the Old Testament and the law. Taking Paul's words out of context, they claim that since we are not under the Law, we are not obligated to keep the 10 Commandments, and the first five books of the Bible do not apply to us today.

- But Jesus said this, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17).

John says here that if we don't keep His commandments, and yet claim to know God, we are liars and do not even have the ability to speak truth. Why?

Because when we truly know God, we want to obey Him. We want to please Him.

God has already told us how we can live pleasing to Him; He put it all in the book called the Bible. This is why it is vital to our spiritual growth that we consistently spend time in God's Word.

So we can walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6).

So we walk in love (1 John 2:9).

So we do not love the world (1 John 2:15).

So that we walk in truth (1 John 2:24).

3. God wants us to abide in Christ.

We cannot abide in Christ and love the world at the same time. We are either in Christ or we are not, but we can't abide in Christ and live in sin simultaneously any more than we can have both darkness and light existing in us simultaneously.

Abiding in Christ means walking free from sin.

Does this mean that we will never sin? Of course not. But what

it *does* mean is that we will not habitually and intentionally sin. It means we don't live in sin. It means that we simply do not do those things we know are wrong.

Intentional sin, by its very nature, is rebellion, and 1 Samuel tells us that rebellion is witchcraft. It is worship of Satan, because Satan is the first rebel.

- Abiding in Christ means knowing our identity in Christ; we are children of God (1 John 3:10).

Abiding in Christ means practicing righteousness (1 John 3:10).

Abiding in Christ means practicing love (1 John 3:16).

4. God calls us to love one another.

One of the greatest distinguishing characteristics of true born-again Christians and those who have never really allowed the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit to make them a whole new creation is love. John said, "Love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:7b-8).

From this we can conclude two things:

Loving with God's kind of love is a significant "tell" that we are truly born again.

- Those who do not love with God's kind of love have never come to know God.

To be certain, we can't give away something we don't already have. God loves us with His *agape* love, and that love is perfected in us. It takes that distorted, strings-attached love and perfects it. It makes it holy. It makes it *agape* love.

And here's the kicker: Love isn't optional. It is a command.

Just as worshiping God alone is a command.

Just as keeping His name holy is a command.

Just as staying faithful to our spouse is a command.

Just as “thou shalt not kill” is a command.

Love is a command. “We have this commandment from Him: Whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:21).

5. These things are written so that you know you have eternal life. Have you ever had moments where you questioned whether or not you are truly saved? Perhaps you have those doubts in your mind that you will really go to heaven if you die. John wrote the book of 1 John so that you could know you are really saved! It’s a quiz of sorts.

Read through the book and check off those things in your life that show whether you do or do not know God the way you ought to. Take the quiz and see what it tells you!

“I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13).

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. When we love God and keep His commands, the natural result is that we love the children of God. Those who are truly born of God will overcome the world through faith. Those who are truly born of God will not habitually sin. {eo}

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