

Course Corrections from 1 John

1 John 4:16b-5:5, esp. 5:3

June 24, 2018



Read 1 John 4:16-5:5, then watch the video link for “2012 LA Games – Dizzy Izzy.” Watch the first 1:15 minutes if you can at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZAdI_9OS5k It shows the game “Dizzy Izzy” which makes people spin around 10 times and then try to run in a straight line. I’ve entitled this sermon, “Course Corrections from 1 John.” Over time, it’s easy for any of us to get off course a little. Traveling in a straight line seems easy enough until we begin getting pulled in other directions.¹ I remember one time I was swimming with some friends in the Gulf of Mexico. It was crazy how strong that tide was. My background is WI and MN. We have some great lakes, but nothing quite like the ocean. Since we weren’t from the area, we had been urged by some local residents to make sure that we kept looking back to shore, as we waded out deeper and deeper, so that we wouldn’t lose track of where the rest of our group was. After wading and splashing around for 10 minutes or so, I remember looking back to shore and being shocked that we’d been pushed almost 200 feet to the right. We thought we were still right in front of the place where we’d left our towels and coolers, but we weren’t. The drift was subtle but powerful! Today, I’m suggesting that 1 John helps us with some spiritual course corrections for our personal faith.

But, before we jump into that, I also want us to consider the spiritual course that our church is on. I want to share a brief update on our Vision 2024. Vision 2024 is an effort to get all of us praying for our church as we approach our 100-year anniversary in the year 2024. Since today is June 24th, it seemed like a fitting time to talk a bit more about Vision 2024. Over time, even strong and healthy churches can get a little off course. This prayer effort comes from a desire to ask God to get us on track in any areas where we may have drifted and then to keep us on course with Him. One of my desires as Lead Pastor has been to find at least 100 people who will commit to pray each month. Pray that our church will remain on the course that God would have for us. Currently, we only have about 29 people who have officially joined this prayer effort. I think we need more; we need lots of people, all of us really, praying together for the ministry and future direction of our church. Here is a sample of our most recent prayer update for Vision 2024: “Dear Vision 2024 Prayer Team, please pray that our church will “Promote the Supremacy of Christ” for years to come! Let’s work and pray toward this vision for 2024: **1. Celebrating His love.** Pray that our worship and ministries will be spiritually vibrant. That our church will have a prayerful attitude of dependence on God. Pray that we will love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. That we will love one another deeply as a healthy and unified body of believers. **2. Obeying His Truth.** Pray that we will remain committed to the authority of God’s Word and that we will teach its full counsel. Pray for our commitment to our disciple-making mission to Win the lost, Build believers, Equip workers, and Multiply disciple-makers. Pray that we will provide quality small groups where God’s people can find encouragement, prayer, accountability, and an opportunity to dig into God’s Word. **3. Enlarging His kingdom.** Pray that we will make Jesus known in our community and world. That we’ll win new Christ-followers of all ages by reaching out “beyond our doors” with the gospel of grace. Pray we’ll reach all generations. Pray that we’ll effectively Equip/Multiply well-trained leaders; men and women, our paid staff and our many volunteers. **4. Stewarding His resources.** Pray that we’ll get caught up on our General Ministry Fund as well as our Global Partners Fund. Pray for God’s provision through current givers but also for new people to join in financially supporting what God is doing in and through our church. This is an invitation to pray on the 24th of each month. There is no meeting. Just sign up to receive an email from PastorJerry@efcbemidji.org once a month and then pray on your own.

Well, let’s get back to 1 John. 2 weeks ago, as I was finishing up preparing what I thought would be my final sermon on 1 John, I realized there were still a few things we should talk about. So today,

¹ Some obstacles to staying on course are internal. The classic hymn, “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” (#45 in our hymnal) has a powerful line in it, “prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.” Our own sin and our fallen world can sometimes pull us off course. Some obstacles to staying on course are external. The simple busyness of life, getting our work done, and having some fun on the weekend can knock us off course.

we're going to tie up a few loose ends and then next week we'll move on to a new sermon series on the life of King David. Let's focus on... 3 Course Corrections from 1 John:

1. Right beliefs & right actions must go hand in hand. Right beliefs matter. As we've learned over these past months, heresy was a big problem for John's readers. There were people teaching things about Jesus that just weren't true. And that was a big deal. Frankly, it's why John went on to write two more letters, 2nd and 3rd John. One of the key purposes of 1 John was to inform true Christ-followers about knowing right doctrine and practicing right living. John opens his letter by talking about his eyewitness account of Christ. Then, he clarifies in 1 John 2:24, "As for you, 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." In his letter, "John suggests that true believers will adhere to certain confessional statements and will live in accordance with the implications of those statements."² John tells them that right beliefs matter, but he also tells them that right actions matter. We cannot say we are a Christian and then just live any way we choose. We learned back in 1 John 1:6, "If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth."

John clearly communicates a requirement that our beliefs and our actions must match up with each other. If we believe in the God of light but we walk in darkness, then there is an obvious hypocrisy that must be reconciled. There are 2 ways to reconcile this. 1) Repent. Right belief and right action will come into alignment as we repent and commit to life change. (1 John 1:9 talks about this.) 2) Reveal the false claim. If we refuse to repent and come into alignment, then we need to admit that our claim to fellowship with God is indeed a false claim. Right beliefs and right actions must go hand in hand. Therefore, a Christ-follower can't say "I have right beliefs, therefore my actions don't matter" nor can he/she say "I have right actions, therefore my beliefs don't matter." Bible commentator, Tom Thatcher, summarizes it this way: "Some believers emphasize doctrine over practice, being comfortable with the notion that those who accept the correct creeds find favor with God, whether or not they seriously attempt to obey God and love others; other Christians take the opposite approach and insist that doctrine is irrelevant as long as one follows the love command, making the church primarily an organ for social reform."³ 1 John gives this course correction, "a well-reasoned faith [should be] mixed with a passion for action."⁴ Whenever we make the mistake of placing belief over action or of placing action over belief, we need to correct our course. We need to realign ourselves with the truth of God's Word, which is that BOTH belief and action are of equal importance.⁵ The 2nd course correction from 1 John is related to the 1st...

2. Love & obedience only thrive when kept together. 1 John 1:3 begins, "In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands..." Tom Thatcher again notes that, "Many people would insist that, because 'God is love,' their own beliefs and behaviors are irrelevant to salvation. Judgment is considered to be foreign to God's character, and tolerance is elevated as the supreme ethical principle. John flatly rejects this notion by insisting that 'loving God' means keeping his commands."⁶ There is a strong message in our culture today that tolerance is indeed the supreme ethical principle. It's a "live and let live" way of thinking. Rather than trusting in God's design for marriage, tolerance seeks to circumvent it. The agenda is driven by questions like, "What right do you have to judge who should marry who?" If two people genuinely love each other, why should anyone have a problem with it? God's design for masculinity and femininity is circumvented by the teaching of tolerance. We could list other examples as well. If I choose to go out with some friends and get drunk, what's the big deal? As long as we have a designated driver, who am I hurting? If someone wants to view pornography in the privacy of their own home, that's none of God's business. Tolerance seeks to dethrone God and take away His right to justly decide what is right and what is wrong for human behavior. As Christ-followers, we embrace the wonderful love of God, and we also embrace obedience to His design and His will for

² Barker, Glenn W., *The Expositors Bible Commentary, Vol. 12; 1, 2, 3 John*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1981, p. 415.

³ Thatcher, Tom, *1, 2, 3 John, The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews-Revelation*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2006, p. 499.

⁴ Thatcher, p. 499.

⁵ Right beliefs and right actions cannot and should not be separated, nor should they be arranged in such a way that one supersedes or predominates the other. Consider Romans 10:1-2, "Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge."

⁶ Thatcher, Tom, *1, 2, 3 John, The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Hebrews-Revelation*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2006, p. 499.

mankind. It's not about what may feel right or seem right to us. It's not about what the current winds of society might embrace. We trust God's Word; we live how It says to live.

We can err the other direction as well though. We can push so hard for obedience to God's commands, that we lose sight of the love relationship. Obedience flows from and through a loving relationship with our Heavenly Father.⁷ Unhappy Christians, who grudgingly trudge their way through life, obeying God solely out of fear or duty, have missed the joy and intimacy of a relationship with God. This is the course correction we need, an equal measure of love and obedience. If we love God, we will obey Him. We will not tolerate sin or evil in our lives. If we obey God, it is motivated and fueled by our love and devotion to Him and from Him. It shows that we trust His decisions and the limits that are set by His good and loving commands. To put it another way, obeying God's commands is a protection against just thinking of love as an emotional feeling.⁸ For Christ-followers, love/obedience are inseparably intertwined. They are like a good epoxy; once you mix the 2 components, you'll never get them apart. Google defines an epoxy this way, "Epoxy is created by polymerizing a mixture of two starting compounds, the resin and the hardener. When resin is mixed with a specified catalyst, curing is initiated. Curing is the process by which molecular chains react at chemically active sites, resulting in an exothermic reaction."⁹ Here's how I would say it. You buy this stuff at Ace Hardware. It's packaged in 2 different tubes and when you mix them together it makes things stick together really well. (As I tell my children, "I'm totally into science.") Love/obedience to God are like a good epoxy, they only thrive when kept together. A genuine faith in Christ begins a love relationship, which then motivates and empowers us for obedience.¹⁰ A 3rd course correction from 1 John is that...

3. God's commands are not burdensome. For those with faith in Christ, 1 John 5:3-4 goes on to say, "...his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."¹¹ Here are 2 key reasons why God's commands are not burdensome. The first reason is right in this text of 1 John 5.

1) Our faith overcomes the world! Faith give us spiritual power within us and then God's commands are not a burden. We could never obey them on our own strength, but we aren't meant to. Now, if we haven't been born of God, then we don't have spiritual life within us. Therefore, we can't overcome the world and we will find the commands of God a terrible burden.¹² When John writes that God's commands are not burdensome, he doesn't mean to say that they are particularly simple or easy to obey, but rather that those with faith in Christ have an inner, spiritual strength. God's commands are not burdensome because our faith empowers us for victory.¹³ Another reason why God's commands are not burdensome is found in the broader context of Scripture.

2) God's commands are good! As Christ-followers, we understand that God's commandments are not only intrinsically good because they come from a good God, but they are good for us. They are good for us because our Heavenly Father is good to us. Like any good parent, He sets boundaries for OUR good.¹⁴ Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. Do you know how many verses it has? 176 verses! And, every single verse points us to the goodness of God's commands! Psalm 119:35 says, "Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight." Psalm 119:129 says, "Your statutes are wonderful; therefore I obey them."¹⁵ In no sense does Scripture ever describe God's commands as burdensome for believers.¹⁶

So many people today promote this idea, this lie, that "sinning is way more fun than living God's way." The lie is that obedience to God is so burdensome. It robs us of so much joy and pleasure and

⁷ Consider Romans 2:4b.

⁸ Barker, p. 349.

⁹ https://www.google.com/search?safe=active&ei=yBkQW5LjM8TP5qLG1aTYCA&q=how+does+an+epoxy+work&oq=how+does+an+epoxy+work&gs_l=psy-ab..0j0i22i30k1l9.146381.150161.0.150490.19.16.1.0.0.0.320.2530.0j5j6j1.12.0....0...1c.1.64.psy-ab..9.10.1899...0i7i30k1j0i13k1j0i67k1j0i8i7i30k1j0i13i30k1j0i20i263k1j0i30k1j0i8i30k1.0.Eb32tZSHm4g

¹⁰ See John 14:15, 21 – If you love me, obey my commands.

¹¹ John Piper has an interesting message on these verses at <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/his-commandments-are-not-burdensome>

¹² Consider Matthew 5:6 and 11:28-30. One of the roles of the Holy Spirit within the believer is to empower us for victorious Christian living. Anyone's efforts to do this, before finding faith in Christ, will only lead to frustration and failure.

¹³ Consider 1 John 2:15-17 on not loving the world.

¹⁴ Consider James 1:16-17.

¹⁵ Even back in the OT, with the nation of Israel, God's commands were intended for their own good. Check out Deuteronomy 10:12-13.

¹⁶ Consider Jesus statement "my yoke is easy and my burden is light" from Matthew 11:28-30

happiness. God is such a killjoy! It's easier and more satisfying to disobey God than to obey Him. But the fact is, there is great joy in walking in God's truth.¹⁷ Yet, we live in a culture that is driven by its lust for unrighteous pleasures. Our culture shouts it from the rooftops that there are "50 Shades of Grey" and you should explore and demoralize yourself in every one of them.¹⁸ The provocative and indiscreet nature of today's overly sexualized culture, can cause us to overreact as Christ followers. We might go so far as to say that "all pleasure is wrong and sinful; that pleasure of a sexual nature, or of any other kind for that matter, should be completely avoided by a good Christian."¹⁹

But here's a course correction. Delighting in God doesn't mean we turn off all our pleasure centers.²⁰ We need to keep in mind verses like John 10:10 where Jesus proclaims, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."²¹ Christianity is certainly not a call to wild and crazy licentious living, but neither is it a call to stern asceticism that strictly forbids all fun and pleasure. There are extremes on each side. When we begin to drift toward either extreme, we need a course correction. It's honorable to live life in moderation, but as Christ-followers, let's keep things in a balanced perspective. After all, God is the one who designed our bodies with a nervous system, with things like taste buds and pleasure receptors in the brain. It was his plan from the beginning for food to taste delicious and for sex to feel good. We shouldn't abandon all fun and all desire and all pleasure and then think we've found the beauty and goodness of the Christian life.²² The delightful designs of God are so much better than unrighteous pleasures of this world.²³ So don't ever fall for the lie that God's commands are burdensome!

I really enjoy walking in the woods. Occasionally I wander through a section of forest that I don't know as well. I try to keep a compass with me and I'll often use the technique where I get a compass bearing, let's say for due north, and then I find a tall tree in the distance that's straight north of me. Then, I put my compass back in my pocket and begin walking toward that tree. As you walk through the woods though, you often run into a low spot or a dense section of trees or a waterway. Any one of these can make it necessary to either walk around it or to go through a spot with less visibility. Oftentimes, by the time you go around it or through it, you've lost your bearing on exactly which direction you were heading. You lose sight of where that tall tree was. You have a choice, you can take your compass back out and correct your course again, or you can hope you are basically still headed in the right direction. A wise and seasoned hiker takes consistent compass headings. As God's people, may we continually look to God's Word, to His good and loving commands to keep us on course. May God's Word be our compass!

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¹⁷ Faith gives us a hunger for righteousness. Matthew 5:6 says that, "Blessed (happy) are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." Blessed means happy. Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

¹⁸ Consider what the *NKJV* calls a "flood of dissipation" in 1 Peter 4:3-5, "For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."

¹⁹ Some Christians might say that, "Anything that feels good, well, it must be sin." Some might even go so far as to say that the best way to avoid sin is to make sure you are never having too much fun or feeling too much pleasure. I once heard Pastor David Johnson from Church of the Open Door make his preaching point by suggesting that the best way for humans not to sin is to be dead, to be a corpse, because corpses don't sin... He then went on to make his actual point. Corpses don't sin but they also don't have life! Is that God's design for humans? That we be spiritual zombies with no feeling at all? Cut off my arm, no problem, I've lost all sensation of pain or pleasure. Is this what our good and loving God has designed for us? I don't think so.

²⁰ Consider also the Old Testament book, "Song of Songs."

²¹ We also find a very interesting statement in 1 Timothy 6:17 says, "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in **God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.**" **What an interesting thing for us to read in the Bible right?** To be clear, Paul goes on to say in verse 18 that those who are rich should do good and be rich in good deeds and be generous, willing to share. God's will is not that we live in greedy excess and gluttony. But the Bible does say that God richly provides us with everything for our ENJOYMENT!

²² Thirst, passion, and desire are good things; things that are included in the abundant life God calls us to. The problem is when we try to satisfy our human appetites and longings outside of God's planned design.

²³ It's worth noting how often we hear of stories in the news about powerful politicians, musicians, and movie stars who chose to live as though "sinning is much more fun." (Consider Billy Joel's song, "Only the Good Die Young." What an ironic use of the word "good.") Tragically, many of them end up very depressed by their misguided spiritual poverty. We hear so many riches to rags stories of people who seemed so happy and successful who end up strung out on drugs or ending their own lives. Apparently, delighting in the riches of sin isn't as great as it's advertised to be. The promised pleasures of this world have proven themselves over and over again to be empty promises, but still many of us run after them. (Consider 1 John 2:15-17.) They don't deliver the satisfaction that the human soul needs.