

Article of the Month – August 2013

Missiological Observations in the NT (17) – 1 John

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What God do we preach?¹ Is it Him in Whom there is no darkness at all and Who has our best interests at heart? Or do we mix in thoughts of an angry ruler, a critical schoolmaster, a cynical potentate who considers our wrongs and plans revenge? Many struggle with such polluted God-images. In order to understand Who God is we need to look at Jesus:² kind, compassionate, patient, willing and powerful to heal, comfort, deliver and teach. He hates hypocrisy,³ because it masks sin and chooses to pretend what it is

not.⁴

The unique salvation power of the Gospel is stressed:⁵ there is no salvation outside Christ, Who is the only way to the Father⁶ and to eternal life.⁷

The old apostle understood that he could not go on teaching the churches forever. Therefore he taught his disciples to depend on the anointing of the Holy Spirit, when there are no human teachers.⁸ Missionaries need to do the same: teach disciples to read the Bible themselves and apply it to their situations, under the Spirit's direction.

The exhortation to continue in Him⁹ urges us, with Christ's Return in view, that Christian life is not only about *beginning* well, but also about *ending* well. This makes us confident and unashamed.

Laying down our lives for our brothers like Jesus did¹⁰ does not *only* mean physical death, but also: to *live* our lives, serving our brothers in an attitude of sacrificial love, esteeming them higher than ourselves. But how far do we go? Will we also sacrifice homes, careers, jobs and salaries to reach unbelievers? Jesus did that: He came as a Missionary¹¹ and died for us when we were still sinners.¹² Thus, faith should translate into action.¹³

¹ 1 John 1:5

² John 14:8-10

³ Hypocrisy was one of the worst characteristics of the spiritual leaders of His time, see e.g. Matt. 23:1-30

⁴ 1 John 1:6; 2:9

⁵ 2:23

⁶ John 14:6

⁷ 1 John 2:25

⁸ 2:20,27

⁹ 2:28

¹⁰ 3:16

¹¹ Philip. 2:5-11

¹² Rom. 5:8

¹³ 1 John 3:17,18

Testing the spirits¹⁴ is easy for upright people. The question is not: *can* we discern them, but will we *abandon* them once we know they are false? Jesus said that His Spirit will guide us into all truth.¹⁵ Therefore, as soon as we ask Him we will know.

John writes ‘Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God’.¹⁶ Although love expresses itself through acts of kindness, we cannot consider unbelievers who act kindly as ‘born of God’ merely because of their social concern. There is no ‘way of good works’ that saves people from sin; only faith in Christ can. James also states that true faith expresses itself through acts of love, but the latter cannot replace the former. The real meaning of ‘love’ can best be rendered as ‘everyone who loves [God more than anyone or anything] is born of God’ (my insert). The social concern we call ‘love’ may not be love at all but actions, defiled by selfish motives. John qualifies his statement by attaching love to godly nature.¹⁷

Another way of discerning true love is absence of fear for punishment.¹⁸ Whoever is secure in God’s love does not fear His punishment, whatever way we interpret our suffering. We all need discipline,¹⁹ but our punishment God laid on Jesus.²⁰ If we believe in Him we don’t need to fear God’s wrath. That is the good news that missionaries should present: peace with God²¹ through Christ, never to fear anything, ever again.²²

Next, John exposes false religions. Many say they serve ‘god’, but ‘god’ can have different faces. The key is how one thinks about God’s Son, Jesus.²³ Although He loved the world enough to give His life for it, it hates Him. Hating Jesus, denying His existence or separating the Man from His deity, means hating God. Some missionaries fear that confrontation with adherents of hostile religions may cost them their lives. End-time missionaries need a martyr’s spirit to reach the unreached people groups!

A characteristic of genuine Christianity is assurance of salvation.²⁴ Nobody has to do with less because God sticks to His *conditions* (‘believe the Lord Jesus’) and His *promises* (‘and you shall be saved’).²⁵ He keeps His part of the deal, regardless of our doubts, which result from poor Bible knowledge. Missionaries cannot *assume* that their disciples have that assurance; *we* must teach them the parts of God’s Word that speak about it.

One reason that some lack assurance of salvation is, that they think they have committed the unpardonable sin.²⁶ Jesus mentioned only one such sin which was committed by the Pharisees when they deliberately ascribed Jesus’ works, done by God’s Spirit, to the devil. It is called ‘blasphemy against the Holy Spirit’,²⁷ the only sin for which there will be no forgiveness because it is a calculated and repeated rejection of truth, committed not by *believers* but by

¹⁴ 4:16

¹⁵ John 16:13

¹⁶ 1 John 4:7

¹⁷ 4:8-10

¹⁸ 4:18

¹⁹ Heb. 12:5-11

²⁰ Is. 53:4-8

²¹ Rom. 5:1

²² Rom. 8:31-39

²³ 1 John 5:1

²⁴ 5:10-13,19a

²⁵ Also: 4:14-17; John 3:16,17; Acts 2:38;16:31; Heb. 10:19-22 etc.

²⁶ 1 John 5:16b

²⁷ Matt. 9:34; 12:22-32

declared *unbelievers*. They have deliberately sinned against their consciences and ‘loved darkness rather than light’.²⁸ This is unpardonable because it is an unrepentant hardening.

²⁸ John 3:18-20