

CHRISTIANITY *(defined)*
A Study of 1 John
“Bull-dogmatic Truths”
1 John 5:18-21

Pastor David O. Dykes, Green Acres Church, Tyler, Texas, June 20, 2021

INTRODUCTION: On Father’s Day, I want to thank all of you dads who take seriously the job of being the spiritual leader of the family. Often the main thing you can do as the spiritual leader is to say, “We’re going to church on Sunday.” Growing up, one of the most influential things my dad did was to make sure we shined our shoes on Saturday night. It was his way of getting us ready to go to church on Sunday. At our house, there was never a question about whether we were going to church or not. I think I’ve told you before that as a child I had a drug problem. My folks drug me to church every time the doors were opened – and I’m so glad they did!

Let’s talk about truth. I heard about a pastor who went to start a new ministry at a large Bible-believing church. In his first message he said something that shocked the church members. He said, “Friends I want to tell you that as your pastor, I am not going to be dogmatic about the resurrection of Jesus. I’m not going to be dogmatic about the saving power of the blood of Jesus. And I’m not going to be dogmatic about the second coming of Jesus.” There was an audible gasp from the congregation and they began to murmur among themselves, “What kind of preacher have we called? Have we made a mistake?” Then the pastor said, “I’m not going to be dogmatic about these truths, I’m going to be bull-dogmatic about them and the other truths in the Word of God.”

It’s one thing to be dog-matic. It’s another thing to be bull-dogmatic. Someone has said that truth is a matter of perspective, and my truth may not be your truth. And in some areas of reality, truth is a matter of perspective.

There is an ancient fable from India about a group of blind men who were led by a young boy to experience an elephant for the first time. One man touched the elephant’s side and said, “An elephant is smooth and solid like a wall.” Another blind man touched the elephant’s trunk and

said, “You’re wrong. An elephant is soft and flexible like a snake.” The third man said felt the tusk and said, “I disagree, an elephant is sharp and dangerous like a spear.” One man touched the elephant’s ear, and said, “An elephant is large and thin like a fan.” As one man hugged a leg he said, “Not at all. An elephant is like a tree trunk.” The man holding the elephant’s tail said, “All of you are wrong, an elephant is just like a rope.” They were all right, but none of them were completely right. There are things that are open to different perspectives. A person looking at a six upside down will argue that it’s a nine. You can’t be dogmatic about something like that. We live in an argumentative culture where everyone wants to yell about how they are right and you are wrong unless you see things their way.

I saw a list of the top five silly things couples fight about. (1) Whether or not to rinse off dishes before putting them in the dishwasher. (2) Whether the toilet paper roll hangs over top or back. (3) Snoring. She claims he snores too loud. He claims he doesn’t snore. (4) What temp to set the thermostat on. (5) Disagreement over walking speed.

We can disagree on a lot of things. But there really are some rock-solid, immutable truths in the Bible. Jesus said that truth is something so profound that it will change your life. In John 8:32 Jesus said, **“You shall know the truth; and the truth shall set you free.”** Someone has said that the truth will make you mad before it sets you free.

Before I get into the text in 1 John, I want to give you a **bonus mini-message**. I want to share with you a list of five important basic truths that evangelical Christians embrace. About 100 years ago, liberal theology from Germany began to infiltrate American seminaries.

Theological liberalism denies the authority of the Bible and stresses the humanity of Jesus and denies His divinity. To combat this liberalism or modernism, as it was also called, in the early 20th Century, conservative, Bible-believing theologians began to define the basic theological beliefs of what would later become known as evangelical Christianity. I want to remind you of these bedrock truths again. Southern Baptists embrace all five of these fundamental beliefs: **(1) The inerrancy of scripture.** That means that all scripture is God-breathed and is without error in the original manuscripts. **(2) The virgin birth of Jesus.** This means that the

virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus who had God as His Father. **(3) The substitutionary atonement of Jesus.** This means that Jesus died as our sacrificial substitute on the cross. **(4) The bodily resurrection of Jesus.** Jesus literally came alive after His crucifixion. He wasn't just resurrected in the minds of His disciples. **(5) The literal return of Christ.** Evangelicals disagree on the details of the sequence of the return of Christ, but we believe Jesus will come again.

And now to our text. As John finishes this short letter, he uses the word "KNOW" three times. He is going to identify three bull-dogmatic truths. Let's read about these in 1 John 5:18-21: **"We KNOW that everyone who has been born of God does not sin, but the one who is born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. We KNOW that we are of God, and the whole world is under the sway of the evil one. And we KNOW that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may KNOW the true one. We are in the true one—that is, in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, guard yourselves from idols."**

We all know that there is a crisis of truth today. Many people say that there is no such thing as absolute truth. But to make the proposition: "There is no such thing as absolute truth" is a self-defeating statement. It is declaring an absolute while saying that absolutes don't exist.

One of my favorite Christian authors was **Vance Havner**. Once in Alabama Cindy and I drove over an hour to hear him preach before he died. He was a rather dull speaker, but his writings were powerful. Here's what he wrote about being dogmatic.

VANCE HAVNER: "It's almost the unpardonable sin to be dogmatic today. When I go to a doctor, I want a dogmatic doctor. I don't want him to say, 'Well, it could be this and it could be that. We'll give you these pills and if they don't kill you, we'll try these.' When I get on a plane, I want a dogmatic pilot. I don't want him to say, 'I believe we're going to try something new today.' When I go to church, I don't want to hear an expert in the art of almost saying something. I don't want to come away feeling

like I'd been out to a steak dinner where they didn't serve anything to chew on but Cool Whip."

So now, let's turn our attention to our text. John gives us the bulldogmatic truth about three important spiritual realities.

1. THE TRUTH ABOUT SIN: Children of God want to sin less.

First John has a lot to say about sin. If you remember in chapter one, verse eight, it says, **"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. And the truth is not in us."** Anytime somebody wants to come waltzing along and say, "You know, I'm perfect. I don't have any sin. I've got life all figured out. I don't sin."—you will know that they are deceiving themselves and they are a liar.

We're all sinners. Then 1 John 1:9 says, **"But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness."** First John chapter three, verse nine, says, **"He who is born of God does not continue in sin, for God's seed remains in him. And he cannot continue to sin."**

And then here again at the end of his letter John addresses sin again. He writes in 1 John 5:18 says, **"We know that everyone who has been born of God does not sin, but the one who is born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him."** 1 John 5:18 in the Message paraphrase explains it this way: **"We know that none of the God-born makes a practice of sin—fatal sin. The God-born are also the God-protected."**

And as I've told you before, a Christian may fall into sin. He may stumble into sin when he's tempted, but a true child of God will not continually practice sin. Now here's the cycle. A Christian is walking in the Spirit and temptation comes from the devil or from the world. Our flesh opens the door to temptation. Now, when you are tempted, you can do one of two things: you can succumb to the temptation, or you can flee the temptation. First Corinthians 10:13 says, **"...for there is no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man. But God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape that you may be able to bear it."**

In other words, anytime you're tempted, there's a doorway into sin, and there's a doorway to escape sin. You're the one who decides which door you walk through. I want to remind you that temptation is not sin. Billy Graham said that you can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair. You can't keep tempting thoughts from running through your mind. But you can keep them from staying there.

The sentence structure in verse 18 is a little confusing in English. We don't keep ourselves. God keeps us from sin. Jesus keeps you. You don't keep yourself. You are protected by Jesus Christ, if you choose to dwell under the umbrella of his protection.

Verse 18 says the **“evil one does not touch him.”** The comedian Flip Wilson always said, “The devil made me do it.” But the devil never makes you do anything. Did you know that he has no power to touch you? You are protected.

In the book of job, the Bible says that God was looking over his creation when the devil appeared before him. And God said, “Have you looked at my servant job? What a great man he is! And the devil said, “Well, sure, you've blessed him so much. You have put a hedge of protection around him.” Did you know that God is still putting hedges of protection around his children? And those are things you can pray for. That's what I pray for my family. That's what I pray for my wife. I pray that God will put a hedge of protection around them.

God allowed Satan to penetrate that hedge of protection. I believe that Satan cannot even touch you without the permission of a Holy God. You are protected.

You say, “What's my problem then? I keep sinning.” The problem is not the devil. The problem is your flesh—that lower sinful nature that opens the door to the devil and says for him to come on in. But as far as the devil making you do something; he cannot make you do anything.

Which leads us to the next bull-dogmatic truth.

2. THE TRUTH ABOUT SATAN: He rules over a failing world system that is passing away. Notice in verse 19 John writes that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. “I thought God was in control,” you say. “Isn't God on the throne?” He is.

I heard a true story of a church that put the song “Our God Reigns” in their order of worship. But they misprinted in the bulletin, “Our God Resigns.” God hasn't resigned! He is reigning over the universe, but we live in a fallen world. And when it says that the whole world is under the evil one's control, we're not talking about the planet. We're talking about that word “cosmos,” from which we get our word “cosmopolitan” and “cosmetics.” It means “order.” Ladies, when you put on cosmetics, you're putting your face in order. That's what cosmetic means: giving some order to the chaos.

The word “world” here means an “order of philosophy, a mindset, a world order.” And yes, the devil is in control of that. I do firmly believe that he's in control of the drug trade in this world. I think he's in control of a lot of the gambling in this world; a lot of the evil biases are really under his control.

In Matthew chapter four, the Bible says the devil took Jesus to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms and the riches of this world. And he said that if Jesus would just bow to him, all that he saw could be his. And Jesus didn't say, “Well, Satan, it's not yours to give.” You know why? Because it was his and it is his. Much of what this world is hustling for—money, position, and advancement—is under the control of the evil one. And that's why we live in a different world. We live by a different standard, not the standard of the evil one.

When you plug your life into God's Kingdom, you're part of an eternal world. 1 John 2:17 tells us what is happening to this present world: **“And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.”**

Satan is a defeated foe who was mortally wounded at the cross. Jesus met Satan and refused to use His deity to destroy him. Instead, Jesus defeated the devil by quoting three verses from Deuteronomy. Just think about the authority we have against Satan since we have the entire New Testament to quote when He comes to tempt us.

The devil is not in hell wearing a red suit with pointy ears and a pointed tail, shoveling coals into a furnace. He's not there. That's where we imagine him. We get that idea from *Dante's Inferno*, but not from the word of God. The devil, the Bible says, is the accuser of the brethren.

And right now he has access to us. But one day he is going to be cast into the bottomless pit. Jesus said that's why God even created hell. It's prepared for the devil and his angels. But the devil is trying to drag down everybody he can in the process.

Do not ascribe to Satan the attributes of God. He is not omnipresent. He is not omniscient. He is a fallen angel. He doesn't know everything. And Satan is not omnipotent. When you think of Satan as some "lesser god" you give him too much credit. The Bible says in James 4:7, **"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you; resist the devil and He will flee from you."**

3. THE TRUTH ABOUT SALVATION: True salvation is knowing Jesus.

Salvation begins with Jesus, and it ends with Jesus. That's why the Bible says that Jesus is the **author and the finisher** of our faith. You know what that means? He's the one that writes it, creates it, designed it. He's the one that follows through. And he's the one who finishes it.

In 1 John 5:20 the Bible says, **"And we KNOW that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may KNOW the true one. We are in the true one—that is, in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life."**

Jesus Christ has come and given us understanding. There's a double meaning to that. He has come, number one, into the world. That's the incarnational truth that 2000 years ago, the Son of God came. But there's another truth, not only an incarnational truth, but an individual truth, because we also know that the Son of God has come into our hearts. Jesus was born in Bethlehem almost 2000 years ago. But has he been born in your heart? Has he been made alive in your life? What is the object of salvation? Why did God save you? In the second part of verse 20 we find the answer: **"that we may KNOW the true One."** That's Jesus.

Salvation isn't obeying a lot of rules or living by a bunch of religious rituals. It is knowing Jesus personally. In Philippians 3, Paul wrote about how religious he was as a Jewish Pharisee. He was circumcised. He kept the law. He was of the tribe of Benjamin. He had a list a mile long of all the religious things he had accomplished. But then something changed

all that. He met Jesus. He came to know Jesus. He then wrote, “All these things that I once considered to be valuable, I now consider them to be manure – compared with the priceless joy of knowing Jesus Christ.”

Now, why do you think John ends the whole book with verse 21: **“keep yourself from idols”**? It's almost like that doesn't relate to anything else. But it does. What is an idol? We think of an idol as a statue, as a totem pole, as some shrine that people bow down before. But do you know what an idol is? An idol is any substitute for the real thing.

Many people have set up different idols/substitutes for God. They know about God. But they have substituted some kind of religious ritual and religious activity. They've substituted baptism. They substituted giving money to the church. They've substituted a lot of works. Those are all like idols.

In Colossians 3:5, Paul warns about covetousness, which is also idolatry. What does that mean? For some people in this world, making money at any cost is so important that they have set it up like an idol. Some even use their church activities as a boost to try to get more money. Idolatry is a sin. When we set up a substitute for Jesus, it is a sin.

Have you ever heard somebody say that it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you're sincere? That's not true. You can be sincere, and you can be sincerely wrong.

I once read about a tragic story of a person who was being operated on. In the middle of the procedure, the anesthesiologist had to switch oxygen tanks. He switched over to a tank that was labeled Oxygen, but the tank was mislabeled and it contained carbon dioxide. The patient died on the operating table. The doctor sincerely believed it was oxygen but he was sincerely wrong. Many people have sincere beliefs but they can be sincerely wrong.

CONCLUSION: Truth is important to us here at Green Acres. It's part of our vision statement. We are united to Transforming lives with the TRUTH of Jesus. The good news is that Jesus is still transforming people every day with His truth.

I read a true story recently that reminded me of the power of the Gospel. A pastor of a small church was having some minor construction done at his church building. The city building inspector came out to inspect the

work. After she completed her inspection she was about to leave. The pastor realized that he hadn't spoken to her about Christ, so he grabbed a copy of the little booklet *The Four Spiritual Laws* and handed it to her and said, "Read this." He meant for her to read it later when she returned home. But to his surprise, she opened it and began to read it out loud.

1. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. John 3:16.

2. Because we are filled with sin, we can't experience this wonderful life God has planned for us. Romans 3:23. 3. Through Jesus Christ we can have our sins forgiven and we can be restored to a right relationship with God. Romans 5:8. 4. We must place our faith in Jesus Christ in order to receive the gift of eternal life to know God's wonderful plan for our life. John 1:12.

The pastor said by this time the city inspector got to this point, she had tears in her eyes. Then she read out loud the prayer of repentance and led herself to faith in Jesus Christ. **"God, I know that I have sinned against you and deserve punishment. But Jesus Christ took the punishment that I deserve so that through faith in Him I could be forgiven. I place my trust in You for salvation. Thank You for Your wonderful grace and forgiveness - the gift of eternal life! Amen!"**

The Pastor said that this city inspector was totally transformed that day and became a faithful church member. That's one of the few examples I've ever heard of someone leading themselves to faith in Jesus.

The greatest bull-dogmatic truth you'll ever know is that Jesus is still transforming lives with His truth!