

True Children of God

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Preacher: Andy Gemmill

[0 : 00] I'd like you to turn to our Bible reading for the day. The first letter of John, chapter 2, page 1022 in the Church Bibles, 1 John, chapter 2.

This is our final morning in this short series in 1 John, and this is a very important passage. 1 John, chapter 2, verse 28. And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears, we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.

If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God, and so we are.

The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared, but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

[1 : 32] And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness.

Sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning. No one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.

Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he's been born of God.

By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

[2 : 39] For this is the message that you've heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother.

And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteousness. This is the word of the Lord, and we praise him for it.

In the mid-1980s, there was a famous television newspaper ad.

You can catch it on YouTube if you can't remember it. It was a series of videos with a voiceover, and it went like this.

We saw a street and a skinhead, combat trousers, big boots, bomber jacket, looking dead hard. He glances down the road.

[3 : 47] In the foreground, there's a woman standing in the doorway. He runs towards her. The voiceover goes, an event seen from one point of view gives one impression.

The camera angle switches. Now we see him from behind. He runs past the woman in the doorway and on down the street where an old man holding a briefcase is crossing the road.

He runs up to the old man and wrestles with him for the briefcase. And as the voiceover goes, seen from another point of view, it gives a different impression.

And then just as we think we've seen the whole picture, suddenly the scene zooms out. And we see that above the two struggling figures is a pallet of building materials being lifted by a crane, wobbling.

And as it falls, the skinhead manages finally to shift the elderly man out of its pathway to safety. And the voiceover goes, but it's only when you get the whole picture you can fully understand what's going on.

[4 : 56] And then the whole thing is rather spoiled by the words, the guardian, which come up in front of you. The point, however, is brilliantly made. But viewing things from the right perspective makes all the difference.

Something can seem to be totally different from the way that it really is if you view it wrongly. Now, depending on your perspective, this passage that we're looking at in the Bible this morning, turn to it if you're not there already, is either one of the most discouraging passages in the whole Bible or one of the most encouraging passages in the whole Bible.

It's that different depending how you look at it. Let me show you just how discouraging this passage might be made to look. Let's forget the big picture for a moment and zoom in on one of the details. Let's look, for example, at verse 4. Now, I'm going to read this little section slightly more literally than your translation has it so that you can get the full force of potential discouragement that there is here.

Everyone who does sin also does lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.

[6 : 23] Everyone who abides in him does not sin, says the original. No one who sins has either seen him or known him.

Let me just read that again. Everyone who abides in him does not sin. No one who sins has either seen him or known him.

Look on to verse 8. Similar note, different subject. Whoever sins is from the devil. Now, let me ask you, how encouraged are you feeling right now?

Everyone who abides in him does not sin. Are you feeling confident that you're abiding in him? No one who sins has either seen him or known him.

Are you feeling confident now that you know God? Whoever sins is from the devil. Well, where are you from then? If we were to shut the Bible right now and all go home, every real Christian in the room would feel that this morning's teaching had really spoiled their lunch.

[7 : 33] Christian, do you find sin a presence in your life? Yeah, you do. From a zoomed in on perspective, this is not an encouraging passage.

However, there is a whole picture perspective here that makes all the difference in the world to how you understand this passage. If you're feeling gloomy now, stay with it for in 25 minutes time when we've got the big picture in view, your sadness, I think, will be turning to joy.

This is a magnificently encouraging passage for a real believer. So I want you to park that gloom and discouragement and difficulty for a moment.

And let me begin to introduce you to the bigger picture. Let's zoom out a little and see where we are. I started reading at verse 28. Little children abide in him.

But what if I'd started reading at verse 26? I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you receive from him abides in you and you've no need that anyone should teach you.

[8 : 49] But as his anointing teaches you about everything and is true and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him. And now, little children, abide in him so that when he appears, we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.

This abide in him in verse 28 comes in a particular setting. Now here I'm going to read between the lines a little, but I'm sure this is what's going on.

There are people, verse 26, trying to deceive these children of God. There are people, verse 27, who claim for themselves a special anointing from God and are saying that there's lots of stuff that the real children of God don't know yet and need to be taught.

It's possible that these people, verse 28, are making the real Christians feel unconfident and ashamed at what they have. There's a thing going on here.

Real children of God in danger of being deceived by people who are making them feel spiritually inferior, lacking in knowledge, unconfident, and ashamed.

[10 : 05] Now, if you've been with us in previous weeks, you'll know already that these spiritual-looking deceivers are in view all the way through this letter. They've left the church recently.

Their departure has caused huge upset. It's because of them that this letter has been written. Let's look at the other edge of our slightly zoomed-out picture.

Look at chapter 3, verse 11. This is the message that you've heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

We shouldn't be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. Why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.

We know that we've passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life living in him.

[11:01] At the beginning of this section, we find spiritual-looking people who are trying to deceive the brothers. At the end of this section, the same people are in view.

But the focus at the end is not on their deceptiveness, but their hatred. Verse 13. They might look like believers, but they belong to the world.

Not surprising that they're not being nice to you then. Don't be surprised when people like that hate you, says John. Verse 12. They might look as though they want to give you something more spiritual.

But in fact, they despise you because your deeds are righteous and theirs are evil. They might look spiritual and they do, but they're not spiritual. They might look down in you and they are doing that, but you've no need to be ashamed.

They've left the church. They want you to come with them. You're wondering if you ought to follow. But actually, says John, the reason that they've left is they can't bear to be with you guys anymore.

[11:59] And the reason you want to stay is because you love your brothers and you want to be with them. And you're the real thing because you love them. And they're not the real thing because they've left. Do you see how the letter works?

I wonder if you're beginning to get the feel of this letter. At every point, these deceptive people are in view. The things they've said, the things they've done, the way they've made the Christians feel, the uncertainty they've generated.

The letter is shot through with this. And all the time, John is trying on the one hand to expose what these people are really like, and on the other hand, to reassure the very discouraged but genuine believers that they are the real thing.

Now, with that bigger picture in mind, let's look at some of the detail in that light from that perspective. What I think we find in this section are two big truths, two things that are true of the true children of God.

First, the true children of God don't look all that special yet. And second, the true children of God don't depart from gospel living.

[13:12] Let's look at the first of those. The true children of God don't look all that special yet. It's a very important reality, this.

Do you notice the very positive note at the beginning of chapter 3? Verse 1. We are children of God now, says John.

Verse 2. We are God's children now. Verse 3. When he appears, when the Lord Jesus appears, we shall be like him.

See how positive that is? We are children. We are children. We shall be like him when he appears. Why does this need to be said? Well, it needs to be said because it is not obvious yet.

Just glance at your neighbor for a second. Just glance. You don't need to look long. How long would you have to spend in conversation with one of those before it became clear to you that they were not perfect yet?

[14:14] I mean, you can see it from a distance, can't you? The truth is, brothers and sisters, it's just obvious. The real people of God are not the fully developed Jesus-like people they will one day be.

Verse 2 says precisely that. We are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared. Those are three of the most encouraging words in the Bible. Not yet appeared. Real Christians don't look that good yet. It needs to be said because it's true.

And it needs to be said also because of verse 1. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

These spiritual-looking guys, they don't recognize you for who you are. The ones who've departed are making the real children of God who remain feel very inferior.

[15 : 19] If you were real Christian children, things would be better. If you were real children of God, you'd be more spiritual. If you were real children, you'd have greater power over sin, etc., etc. And John says, no, that's not the way things are at all.

In this world, the true children don't look all that good yet. In fact, the reason these guys don't recognize you as spiritual is not because you're not spiritual.

It's because of them. Verse 1. See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God? And so we are. The reason why the world doesn't know us is that it didn't know him.

Question, what is the father of the family like? Well, the father of the Christian family lavishes extraordinary love on undeserving children.

In fact, once they weren't his children at all. Once they were his enemies. Once, verse 8, they were enslaved to the power of evil. Members of the devil's family.

[16 : 27] But God has shown an amazing kind of love towards these people. The son of God has appeared. Verse 8. To destroy the devil's work.

To free the slaves of the devil. To forgive the sins of his own enemies. Jesus came into the world to do that. And says John, chapter 3, verse 1.

The reason there are some who won't recognize that you're proper children. Is that they belong to a world which refused to recognize Jesus.

When he came to the world. The reason why the world does not know us. Is that it did not know him. All over this world.

True children of God. Recognize true children of God. You'll have experienced this if you're a real Christian. And you've got around a bit.

[17 : 23] You meet people you've never met before. And you know in no time at all. That you share something deep and fundamental with them. You don't even have to speak the same language as them.

And it's not because they're perfect. True children don't look all that special yet. And it's not because they have a halo. True children don't look all that special yet.

And it's not because their faces glow in the dark. Or something weird like that. It's because they, like you, love the Father. Because he has loved them and forgiven them as he has you.

And that's instantly recognizable to you. If you're a true child of God. That's what the father of the family is like. He's amazingly kind. And his true children recognize one another.

And says John. When spiritual looking people. Don't recognize you for what you are. And make you feel unspiritual.

[18 : 25] And inferior. That communicates. Not that you're inadequate. True children do not look all that. All that special yet. It says something about them.

It says that they belong to the world. Now let's step back for a moment from this idea. The big headline application of this letter.

Is in chapter 2 verse 15. Turn back to 2.15. Do not love the world. Do not love the world. Or the things in the world.

If anyone loves the world. The love of the Father is not in him. That's John's big headline application in this letter. Why is that especially difficult for John's readers? Because on the one hand.

Because on the one hand. The world is in the church. There are spiritual looking people. In or around church. Who belong to the world. And on the other hand.

[19 : 25] Our passage today. The real children of God. Don't look all that impressive yet. Faced with the choice.

Who are you naturally going to gravitate towards? Think of it. Spiritual looking people. Who claim to be really spiritual.

Or the regular Christian. Who's not all that special looking yet. Which are you naturally going to be attracted by? Well naturally. We're going to be attracted to the more impressive looking ones.

We just are. John says no. Don't do that. Don't do that. They are the world. That's why they look impressive. You have to love the true children.

The ones who don't look all that good yet. This is the uncomfortable dynamic of this letter. And indeed of spiritual life. In this fading world.

[20 : 22] The world is in church. And looks seriously spiritual sometimes. And the real children of God. Don't look all that impressive in comparison.

And that makes ordinary Christians. Easy prey to falsehood. Because not only does the teacher of untruth. Nearly always offer you. More than is really on offer in this world.

Fuller knowledge of God. Fuller victory over sin. Fuller power over evil. You'd never. If they offered you less than that. You wouldn't be attracted to it. Not only that. But if it were really obvious.

That the true Christian was. The seriously spiritual one. You'd never be fooled by alternatives. Would you? Spiritual deception only works.

Because chapter 3 verse 2. Is the case. Real Christians. Don't look all that good yet.

[21 : 20] That's why we're easily deceived. Because we don't look all that good yet. We long for something that looks better. What we will be. Has not yet appeared.

Brothers and sisters. You cannot see yet. How totally different you are. Because of being joined to the Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot see it yet.

You cannot see the magnificent glorified being. That you will one day be. Because of the Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot see that yet.

You cannot see your perfected character. Finally freed forever. From any desire. Ever again. For self-centeredness. Or malice. Or cruelty.

Or greed. You can't see that yet. Can you? It's not your present experience. But that is what the ordinary believer in Jesus is going to be. Certainly.

[22 : 18] Because of being joined to him by faith. You cannot see it yet. If you could get more than a glimpse of that. Wouldn't it change everything?

But. What you will be. Has not. Yet. Appeared. Big truth number one. The true children of God.

Don't look all that spiritual yet. Big truth number two. The true children of God.

Don't depart from gospel living. Now. Consider what we've learned so far. In this passing away world.

The false teacher. The false prophet. Often looks much more spiritual than the true. The question arises. How then do you tell the difference?

[23 : 15] Well that's one of the key questions in this letter. And it's one of the key questions in this section. Notice that this section is topped and tailed by things that help one to tell the difference.

Look at 229. If you know that he is righteous. You may be sure. That everyone who does righteousness has been born of him. That's how to know those who've been born of him.

The one who does righteous is the one who's been born of him. Similar idea at the end. Look at chapter 3 verse 10. By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil.

Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God. Nor is the one who doesn't love his brother. How do you tell who's who? Well the short and easy answer is. One lot practice righteousness and the other lot don't.

That's how to tell. Now at one level that's very helpful. Both in the New Testament and in life. False teaching is characteristically associated with moral license and with bad behavior.

[24 : 18] When you see that you know that something's wrong there. However there's a longer answer. And it involves difficulties. Let me read again from verse 6 more literally.

Here we get into the slightly tricky part of this letter. Actually let me just. Let's break for a second. Let's just draw breath. In, out. Concentrate your mind's focus.

Because you'll have to concentrate a bit for the next few minutes. Right. Back into it. Chapter 3 verse 6. Let me read this again more literally. Everyone who abides in him does not sin.

No one who sins has either seen him or known him. Now our translators have rendered that. Keeps on sinning. Did you notice that? No one abides in him.

Keeps on sinning. But that's an over translation. And they've done that for good reason however. Because of the apparent clash between this verse and chapter 1 verse 8.

[25 : 17] Just flip back to chapter 1 verse 8. We met this a few weeks ago. If we say we have no sin.

We deceive ourselves. And the truth is not in us. Claiming to be without sin is self-deception. And so the translators get to 3 verse 6.

And think to themselves. Well he can't mean. That no one who abides in Jesus sins at all in any way. For claiming to be without sin is self-deception.

So perhaps we'll find a way around by that. By saying well here we're talking about habitual sins. Keeping on sinning. Whereas in chapter 1 we're talking about occasional lapses into sin.

Falling into sin. Now it's possible that there's something in that. But let me say that the present tense here in 3.6 does not necessarily signify habitual action.

[26 : 17] It really doesn't. And one has to say that most people have not found this distinction. Between occasional sins. Chapter 1. And habitual sins.

Chapter 3. All that reassuring. In this distinction. Christians fall occasionally into sin. But not habitually.

Questions arise. How occasional is occasional? Many believers find their sins rather less occasional than is comfortable.

How habitual is habitual? Christian don't you find yourself falling into. The same sorts of sins regularly? Quite habitual aren't they?

Most of them. The ones you're aware of anyway. Now my own view is that that is not a satisfactory distinction. The distinction between chapter 1 and chapter 3 is not between occasional sins and habitual sins.

[27 : 21] I'm going to give you a suggestion. Let me say three things in advance. One, this is not an easy passage to negotiate. Two, we do not have time to explore all the intricacies and possible meanings.

And three, I've not yet found a solution that deals with absolutely every problem satisfactorily. But with that in mind, let me give you a suggestion. It is certainly true in the New Testament and in life that false teaching is associated with sinning in general.

And chapter 1 does mention sin in very general terms. But as this letter has progressed, John has put his finger on quite specific issues to do with sinfulness.

These false teachers are characterized by quite specific departures from the gospel pattern.

On the one hand, they do not obey the command of the Lord Jesus to love the brothers. That's been a big issue in this letter so far. And we'll see it in chapter 3 and verse 10 and 11 and 12 in this passage.

[28 : 39] This is the message that you've heard from the beginning. We should love one another. We shouldn't be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. Verse 13, don't be surprised that the world hates you.

Love and hate are big issues in this letter and in this passage. These departed teachers hate the brothers.

The other thing that's been highlighted in this letter so far is that these people claim a relationship with the father while in some way denying the apostles' teaching about the son.

We see that, for example, in chapter 2, verse 23. No one who denies the son has the father.

Whoever confesses the son has the father also.

So these two issues, faithfulness to the apostles' teaching and love for the brothers, have been highlighted already in this letter.

[29 : 38] And these two things have been departed from by the people who've departed.

They've departed from the apostles' teaching about Jesus. And they have departed from love for the brothers. So let me suggest to you that by the time we get to chapter 3, John has already focused in on very particular areas of sin.

These two especially. Adherence to the apostles' teaching and love from the brothers. And I wonder, therefore, bearing all that in mind, if what he has in view in 3.6 is not precisely that.

But when John says 3.6, no one who abides in him sins, he doesn't mean nobody who abides in him sins in any way at all.

That would be to deny chapter 1, verse 8. He means no one who abides in him sins in the way these departed people have sinned. Namely, denying the apostles' teaching about Jesus and not abiding in love for the brothers.

[30 : 54] What does the child of the devil do? 3.10. He doesn't practice righteousness and he doesn't love his brother. What does the true child of God do?

The true child of God remains, abides in the apostles' teaching about Jesus. 2.28. Children, abide in him and loves the brothers.

In short, one lot depart from the apostles' teaching and don't love the brothers. The other lot remain in the apostles' teaching and do love the brothers.

I think that's what John's talking about here. Somebody has said of this letter, and though I think it may not quite be the whole story, that in 1 John there are two categories.

There are the sinners and the abiders. There are those who depart from the truth and depart from love for the brothers and those who remain in the truth and remain in love for the brothers.
[32 : 02] Sin, therefore, by chapter 3 is being used in a rather specific way. Now, can I say that that has some backing in John's gospel?

If you trace the theme of sin through John's gospel, you'll find it has a particular edge to it. Sometimes the word sin is used generally of any old kind of sin. But sometimes John uses the sin language in his gospel to refer to a particular sort of sin. Turn, for example, to John chapter 15 and verse 22.

John 15 verse 22. Here are the words of Jesus.

Let me read this verse. Now, what does Jesus mean here?

[33 : 23] Does he mean that until he came into the world, there was no sin and no guilt? No, he doesn't mean that. But what he is certainly suggesting is that there is a particular sinfulness attached to rejecting him now that he has come into the world.

We'll look on to John chapter 16 and verse 8. When the Holy Spirit comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.

Concerning sin because they do not believe in me. Do you see, in this gospel, sin has a particular Jesus-centeredness to it. Yes, of course, sin is a general thing that applies to people generally. But rejecting Jesus is particularly sinful. And also, obedience has a particular Jesus-centeredness to it in John's gospel.

Look at John 6, 28. John 6, 28. The people Jesus talking to ask him, what must we do to be doing the works of God?

[34 : 52] Jesus answered, this is the work of God that you believe in him who he has sent. You see, in John's gospel, obedience has a particular Jesus-centeredness to it.

Now, I think that's exactly the same in John's letters as well. It's not all there is to say about sin, but sin is significantly to do with denying Jesus.

And obedience is significantly to do with accepting Jesus. And I think that's precisely what's being talked about in 1 John chapter 3. No one who abides in him sins.

No one who abides in him denies him. No one who abides in him hates the brothers, disobeys the love command. No one who abides in Jesus does what these departed people have done.

I think that's also borne out by a thing in chapter 5. Just flip over to 1 John chapter 5. Here, John distinguishes between kinds of sins.

[35 : 58] Verse 16. If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will give him life. To those who commit sins that do not lead to death.

There is a sin that leads to death. I don't say that one should pray for that. Do you see how he distinguishes between sins? Yeah, there are sins in general, but there is a particular sin that leads to death.

And I take it in the context of this letter. The sin that leads to death is denying the apostles' teaching and departing from love for the brothers. That combination. Do you see what I mean?

Then, by 1 John chapter 3, we're thinking about a particular constellation of sinful behavior. That the true child of God never does.

The true child of God never departs from the apostles' teaching of Jesus. And the true child of God stays in love with their brothers and sisters. Despite pressure to do otherwise.

[36 : 58] Now, time to summarize and draw some implications out. Well done for concentrating through that. Let me just draw some of these things together. Let me summarize.

Two big truths here about the true children. One, the true children don't look all that special yet. And two, they don't depart from gospel living.

One, the true teacher doesn't look all that good yet.

That makes life for the real Christian very hard. For we are constantly forced to make the choice between the real thing, which doesn't look all that good yet, and false things, which look much more impressive now.

That is the big issue in this letter. Let me say three things by way of conclusion. First, we must get used to the idea that the real believer's life has not yet appeared.

[38 : 15] Brothers and sisters, we must embrace that idea, encourage ourselves to believe it, encourage one another to believe it. What we are has not yet appeared.

If we do not embrace that reality, we will find ourselves, on the one hand, constantly disappointed by our spiritual lives, and on the other hand, constantly longing for false spiritualities that actually hold out more to us than can be had in this age.

Chapter 3, verse 2, what we will be has not yet appeared. So if you look at your life and find that it doesn't look all that spiritual yet, well, don't panic.

We must get used to this idea. We must get used to this idea for our evangelism, how difficult it is in this world not to offer to a world which has so many things, a version of the Christian message which is just a world when they're dressed up in spiritual clothes.

If you come to Jesus, you'll straighten your life out, you'll have more money, better sex, a bigger car, all that kind of stuff. We must get used to that.

[39 : 41] We must get used to the not yet appeared idea. It is the way things are, so we better get used to it. Second, we must learn to smell a rat.

We must learn to smell a rat. Learning to smell a rat is very important in the Christian life.

Everything about this letter suggests that it's really hard for true believers, faced with impressive looking untruth, to work out whether it's really untrue or not, to work out who to listen to.

It is very important that we learn to smell a rat, that we learn to get a feel for when something deceptive and manipulative has crossed our path.

I think the way to know when that is happening is to listen to your gut. You'll feel it at gut level before you get it at intellectual level.

People like the people in this letter influence Christians by making them feel inferior. And I think one of the keys to this is when you find yourself feeling spiritually inferior, pay attention to that.

[41 : 05] I don't mean feeling convicted of sin or feeling you need to repent and seek God's forgiveness. Those are normal things. I mean feeling inferior because there's something you lack, somebody is saying.

Or there's something being offered that would be better that you're resisting. I can think of three examples of my life when I was made to feel inferior big time spiritually. First, because I hadn't spoken in tongues on one occasion.

Second, because I had been baptized in a particular way. And third, because I'd sent my children to a regular school rather than homeschooling them or Christian schooling them.

And in each case, looking back on it, I'm absolutely convinced there was a big manipulative agenda going on. But it was not all that obvious at the time.

What was obvious was that I felt seriously inferior as a regular person who trusted in Jesus. Listen to your gut.

[42 : 06] When people who believe in Jesus are being made to feel inferior, being made to feel that they haven't got the whole package, though they believe in him, that's the time to start sniffing the air.

The dangerous errors hit you at gut level long before you can pinpoint precisely what's wrong at intellectual level.

It's because they're hard to spot that they're dangerous. When an ordinary Christian, a Christian who trusts Jesus, the eternal life from the Father is made to feel inferior, something seriously dodgy is going on there.

And if you've smelt a rat, there are some further questions based on 1 John that you might want to ask. These will take a little longer to work out.

You can't assess these things in one sitting. You might want to ask about the content of the teaching. And specifically, you might want to ask, where is the problem of sin and God's judgment?

[43 : 15] Why did Jesus come into the world in these people's teaching? Because in this passage, the problem of sin is right in the middle, verse 8. Jesus came into the world to destroy the works of the devil.

So if you find people not really talking about sin or only talking about it in terms of its horizontal effects, not of God's judgment about it, that's a problem.

You might want to ask about the effects of the teaching. Are Christians being made to feel they lack something in this teaching? Or are they being encouraged that in Christ they have everything?

Those are such different things. Christians being made to feel that they lack something. Or Christians being encouraged that in Christ they have everything. They are poles apart, those.

And of course, if Christians are being encouraged that in Christ they have everything, the teaching will be making them look forward to his appearing.

[44 : 18] And if Christians are being told that they lack something, the teaching will tend to make them focus on the present, on the visible, not the invisible, on their performance, not Jesus' work.

Third, you might want to ask about the place of the teacher in the teaching. In 1 John, John's characteristic name for these false teachers is Antichrist.

They're instead of Christ people. And I think the question to ask here is, is this ministry turning me towards Jesus, or is it turning me towards the teacher?

Quite different things. Is Jesus the center of the ministry? Or is the teacher the center of the ministry? Is Jesus becoming more indispensable? Or is the teacher becoming more indispensable? Am I thinking more about him? Or am I thinking more about them? Do I fear him? Or do I fear them? The best teachers are the ones that you love most and miss least.

[45 : 24] You love them most because they pointed you to Jesus when they were there. You miss them least because they pointed you to Jesus. When they go, you still got him. They didn't make themselves indispensable in your life.

Learn to smell a rat. Listen to your gut and then ask some questions, which will help you work it out. Third, brothers and sisters, learn to love these words, not yet appeared.

There is a real challenge here. Look at 3, verse 2 and 3. Beloved, we're God's children now, and what we will be is not yet appeared, but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is.

And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. There's a real challenge here. Is the future appearing of Jesus having an impact at present in my life?

That's a question worth asking. Is there anything I'm changing now because I know what I will be one day? That's a question worth asking. But there is also great reassurance here.

[46 : 41] All it will take to render you perfect forever is to see Jesus as he really is.

That's all it will take. Your faith now so joins you to him, even though you can't see it much of the time, hardly at all really, your faith now so joins you to him that the minute you see him as he is, bang, transformation.

Isn't that an amazing idea? You can't see him now. You can't see your life now. But when you see him, you'll be instantly transformed in the sort of person he is. Not yet appeared.

These words are pregnant with anticipation. What will it take for you to be free forever of all those things that so dog your life now?

Sin, doubt, despair, all gone in an instant when Jesus appears. Learn to love those words.

[47 : 52] Not yet appeared. Let's pray together. Let's just have a few moments in the quiet to reflect on what we've learned from this letter and maybe to respond to God ourselves to what he's said to us.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, but what we will be is not yet appeared. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. We thank you, Heavenly Father, for this magnificent letter and for the apostles' passionate concern that these real Christians should be confident, should hold on to Jesus, should keep loving one another, should not be set off course by these spiritual-looking ones who've departed from the congregation.

And Heavenly Father, we pray that we might heed his words, take them to heart, believe them for the truth that they are.

[50 : 02] We thank you that in Christ, what we will be has not yet appeared. And so we pray that you'd help us not to be dismayed by the way we are now, not to lose hope, not to look for more attractive-looking options, but rather to keep looking forward to his appearing and to that day when we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

We pray that you'd help us to hold on to the apostles' teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that you'd help us to keep loving the brothers. Help us to abide in him so that when he appears, we will have confidence and not shrink from him in shame.

Thank you that in Christ this is possible for all those who've trusted him. Help us to be among those. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.