

Light & Love

The Checklist

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: 1 John 5:1-21

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I like to think of myself as a goal-oriented person. I like to set goals and accomplish things. It gives me motivation, whether it's spiritual goals, fitness goals, financial goals, because I have found in my own life, if I don't set goals, then I can fall into a routine and just keep kind of doing the same thing over and over again in life with no real change. So one of the other things that I enjoy are checklists.

I like to make lists, whether it's on my phone or on a piece of paper, because I can get easily overwhelmed with all of the tasks that I want to accomplish. But when I make a checklist, it seems more manageable to me. I can just focus on one task at a time, get it done, and there's just something fulfilling about checking it off the list, making that check mark. But if I'm honest with you, usually when I check one thing off, I add two more to my list. It's a never-ending list.

It keeps filling up. You see, as we wrap up our series today in 1 John, which we have been in now for seven weeks, you're going to see that John is going to end his message with a checklist. He's going to kind of go back through everything that he has already said and just kind of highlight the main points of his message. And at the conclusion, he's going to leave the responsibility up to us as to where we stand in our relationship and in our understanding of Jesus Christ.

Now, John is going to follow the very famous pattern that many of us were taught in speech class. Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them so that they make sure that they get the message. So John is going to reiterate things that he has already talked about. And if you have missed any of his main points up to now, it's not because he wasn't clear. John is not confused about what he believes.

And you need to remember that John is not sharing this information or this message as hearsay. This is firsthand experience for him. He's not intentionally trying to offend people or hurt people with what he is saying, while at the same time, John is not afraid to speak the truth, even if it means there are consequences for him personally, which, of course, we know there would be. These beliefs have greatly changed John's life.

They have changed his worldview. And so they are important to him. As John is writing to the early church, he wants to address specific things that they are struggling with, many of which we still struggle with today. This early church, you need to be reminded, doesn't have the canon yet, meaning they don't have the scriptures as we have them. They don't have a Bible that they can open up to 1 John chapter 5, right? That's what he's writing. He's in the midst of that.

Now, granted, they have the Old Testament, but they don't have the New Testament put together. They don't have these foundational truths yet of their faith. They're being handed down by word of mouth, while at the same time, false teachers are also circulating messages and things that are not true. So you have to imagine

how difficult this was for the early church to have discernment. Can you imagine how confused some of the believers were? They didn't know what to believe.

They didn't know who to accept. They didn't know what was right and what was wrong. Another thing we need to remember about this time period is many of the people could not read or write anyway, even if they did have a Bible. Things were spoken orally. And so as John is repeating himself seemingly to us over and over, we need to recognize that he wanted to get the point across so that they could remember his message and share it with others.

That is how the message was going to spread. And so John is going to take a moment to set the record straight because he has the authority to do so. So we're going to wrap up today in 1 John chapter 5. So if you brought your Bibles, I encourage you to open up to 1 John chapter 5. It's near the end of the New Testament, near the end of your Bible. If you go 1 John, 2 John, 3rd John, there's a small book of Jude, and then Revelation. So it's really towards the end. If you don't have your Bible, you can just follow along on the screen behind me.

Let me pray, and then we will jump in. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You for the truths that it speaks. As always, I pray that we would hear from You this morning, not from me or my words or even what I think, but that we would hear from You. And God, that You would receive the praise, that we would take our next step towards You. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

1 John 5:1, John says this, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves his child as well. Now, if you haven't been here the last six weeks, this might sound new to you, but John has said this multiple times and in multiple different ways.

A core belief of Christianity, a core belief of following Jesus is believing that Jesus is the Christ." Many people I talk to when they're younger, it's always funny. And I say, "Okay, what was Jesus' last name?" And they say, "Christ," because we call him Jesus Christ, right? But that's not his last name. For those of you that don't know, Christ was a title that was given to him. It means the Messiah. It means Savior. It means Lord. It means the one who was to come.

John is saying, "If there's no Christ, there's no Christianity." If you don't believe that Jesus is the Christ, then you are not a follower of Jesus claiming Him as the Messiah. So he goes on, "This is how we know that we love the children of God by loving God and carrying out His commands." In fact, John says, "This is love for God. What is it to keep His commands?" How do we know if we love God?

How do we know if we believe in Him? John says, "Let me just make it as clear and as easy as I can. You know you love God when you obey His commands." Now, this is common sense, right? But sometimes we like to make things more difficult, and we're just not sure. Do I really love God? Do I not love God? Do I believe? Do I not believe? John says, "Look at your life. Are you obeying His commands? Are you following what He has asked us to do?" As I think about this in my own life, my kids will sometimes ask me, "Dad, how can we show you respect?

How can we show you respect?" Now, of course, that's because I've asked for respect, right? They don't just randomly ask that. That's not what kids do. And I said, "Okay, if you want to show me respect," or they'll say, "How can we help you? How can we help you, dad?" And my answer is the same as what John says here. "If you want to respect me, do what I ask," right? If you want to respect me, simply do what I ask. And if you would do it the first time, that would be great, right? How do we know if we love God?

We obey His commands, John says. It just makes sense. We understand that. And he wants to go on in the second part of verse 3 to let us know, but also just so you know, 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. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

One of the interesting things that I find when I talk with individuals about faith and about their belief in Jesus is this fear that if I truly submit to Him and I submit to His authority, it means my life is over. Everything that is fun

is going to be taken away. Everything that I enjoy is going to be gone. Life is just going to be boring. And we're going to go to church and we're going to chant and we're going to sing songs and listen to people talk.

And John says, "No, you're not understanding this. The commands of God don't take away life. They give life. His commands don't trap us. They actually free us. His commands allow us to have victory over the temptations of the world that often lead to addiction and pain. I try to understand this again with an analogy about children. I think of a child who looks at a fire from a distance.

I think about all the campfires that I've had with my children when we're going camping or just in the backyard, and a child will look at the fire, and it's interesting. It's something new to them, especially as they're young and they want to play with it. They want to get close to it. They want to experience it. Now, of course, as a loving parent, I say, "No, don't go close to the fire. It's going to burn you. It's going to hurt." Now, what if that child said, "Well, Dad, you just take away all my fun?" That wouldn't make any sense, would it? We all know. If you touch the fire, it's going to hurt.

But that's what sometimes we do with God. He says, "I want you to stay away from this not because it's bad, but I have parameters for it so that you can enjoy it within this setting. But if it leaves this setting, you're going to get burned. It's going to hurt. I'm not trying to take away fun. I'm trying to take away pain." John says, "This is how we overcome the world. We overcome the world by gaining insight and wisdom from someone who knows more than we do." Our Heavenly Father created us.

He created the world. He knows what brings eternal joy, and He knows what brings, at the very best, only temporary happiness. And He doesn't want just temporary happiness. He wants us to have eternal joy. So John says His commands are not burdensome. He goes on in verse 6, "This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood.

And it is the Spirit who testifies because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify. John is laying the foundation for why he believes Jesus is the Christ. And those three things are the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and the three are in agreement. I remember reading this for the first time and thinking, "This is just a little weird. What is John talking about?" Theologians have debated over the years what exactly John is talking about, but I will confirm to you that most theologians have come to the same conclusion.

John is making this statement as to why he so firmly believes that Jesus is the Christ. He's making this first checklist to say, "Listen, this is how I came to the conclusion that Jesus is the Messiah. The first thing was the water," which he was referring to the baptism of Jesus. John says, "Speaking of John the Baptist," not the same John who wrote this, it would be a little less confusing if they had different names, but they don't.

So John the Baptist baptizes Jesus, and John is there experiencing this. And John the Baptist shares, "Listen, when I baptized Jesus, I saw a dove that came and descended on Him. And while I was baptizing, I heard a voice from heaven say, 'This is my son whom I love. With Him, I am well pleased.'" And John would later share, "Listen, I need to tell you, when I started my ministry, when I started doing baptism, God told me that the person on whom I saw the Spirit rest would be the Son of God." That was the confirmation.

And so he shares this. He says, "So we have the baptizer's testimony about Jesus." Then he talks about the blood, referring to the death and the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus fulfilled all of the prophecies about the Messiah that were written about Him in the Old Testament, right down to the way he would die being hung on a tree, on a cross. And John shares with us because one of the false truths that was going around was that Jesus was either fully man or he was fully God, but He wasn't both.

And John says, "Listen, I was there. I saw the blood that fell from Him for us. I saw the sacrifice. I touched Jesus. I know He was real. And only real flesh and blood can bleed. And only a true Messiah can come back to life. I also saw the resurrected Jesus. So I have the testimony of the water. I have the testimony of the blood. I also have the testimony of the Spirit. What is John talking about?"

The final piece of the puzzle for John would come in on the day of Pentecost. There he is sitting in the upper room in the book of Acts, we're told, with the other followers of Jesus who are scared and don't know what's going to happen. Their leader has just been killed in their minds. The Messiah was going to come and be a ruler. He was going to be a military leader that was going to bring Jerusalem and Israel back to prominence. And now he's dead. And they might be next. And so they're hiding in this upper room.

And according to Acts, all of a sudden, the Spirit enters the room, and it looks like tongues of fire that come to rest on each of them. And so they have this experience where they receive the Holy Spirit. And some people will say to me, "Well, Pastor, that's great, but they're just making up that whole story. Nothing happened." John obviously believes something happened. And if you don't believe something happened, it's very, very hard to explain what Peter did because he's hiding in that upper room, afraid for his life, acting like a little child.

And then moments later, after John says he received the Spirit, Peter is standing up before a group of thousands of men and women proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ. Something happened in that room. Something changed, and John says it was the outpouring of the Spirit. And so he says with complete confidence, these three experiences solidify my belief that Jesus is the Christ. He goes on in verse 9.

He says, "We readily accept human testimony in the court of law and back in their society as well, but God's testimony is greater because it's the testimony of God which He has given about His Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar because they have not believed the testimony God has given about His Son.

John just asks the logical question, "If you'll believe the testimony of man, if you're listening to a story and somebody's sharing something that happened and you will believe them, why wouldn't you believe the testimony of God?" What is different? God has named Jesus as His Son. He goes on in verse 11, "And this is the testimony. God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." The testimony of God is that eternal life comes only through Jesus.

John makes the very clear point. If you receive Jesus, you receive life. If you reject Him, then you get death. He tries to make it as very clear as possible. Verse 12, "Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. He's writing to the church.

He's writing to us, to those who believe, "I'm writing so that you will be confident in your faith." This is the confidence we have in approaching God, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked of Him. John again is writing to us so that we may know we have eternal life. We can cross it off the checklist.

We can approach God with confidence through the water, through the blood, through the Spirit of Jesus as we proclaim Jesus is the Messiah. Verse 16, "If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life." I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. For John says there is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that.

All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death. Now, of course, he's talking spiritually here, not physically, because the results of all of our sin equals physical death. But the next checklist that John is kind of going through that he wants to conclude his message with is how we treat each other, not just other believers, not just other brothers and sisters in Christ, but even how we treat those outside of the church, outside of our faith.

John says, "We are to love them, to pray for them, to pray for salvation, to pray that they would experience God, that you would allow the Spirit to transform you so that you see others how He sees others." He's talked about this throughout his entire message. It's one of the main points. As followers of Jesus, allowing the Spirit to come into us, we are transformed and we will love others in a way that the world does not understand.

This is what it means to follow Jesus. Verse 18, "We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin. The one who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them. We know that we are children of God and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one." The next checklist item that he has been mentioning over and over again is that if you have been born of God and you have invited Jesus into your life, as He has knocked on the door of your heart, you will not continue to intentionally sin.

I went on a tangent during First Service at this point in the message, and I think I'm going to repeat it. All right? It's not in my notes. As I talk with people about this idea that John is saying, "Listen, if you are a follower of Christ, you will not live intentionally in sin." What does that mean, pastor? So I feel like I have to give you an example. And I know that this potentially will offend some people. And so it's not my goal.

If you're watching online or listening on the radio, it's not my goal to offend you. But let me try to give you an example. We all understand from personal experience that even after we have given our life to Christ and we have professed Him as our Savior, we are not perfect. We make mistakes. We have errors. We sin, as Scripture calls it, and so we repent of that sin because we are convicted by the Spirit inside of us. And there's not a single one of us who professes Christ as our Savior that wants to take advantage of what Jesus did on the cross.

I don't continue to live in sin knowing, "Eh, I can just ask for forgiveness later." That idea is foreign to us. So what is an example of continually living in sin? As a young pastor, I remember at the age of 21, I had to kind of make some standards for my life of what I would do and what I wouldn't do. And one of those comes with the idea of performing marriage ceremonies. Who will you perform marriage ceremonies for?

It's a question that you have to ask. And so you look at Scripture and you try to come to some conclusions. And so I made three standards that said, "Here's the three things that have to be checked off the list before I will perform a marriage ceremony for a couple. Number one, I will marry a believer and a believer, and I will marry a non-believer and a non-believer, but I will not marry a believer and a non-believer because Scripture says you should not be unequally yoked." And so I just refuse to do marriage ceremonies where one person is a confessing believer, and the other one is not because Scripture says, but also because their life's going to be miserable.

And I don't want to sign off on that. All right? Number two, I say if I'm going to perform a marriage ceremony, I require some type of premarital counseling. So it doesn't have to be with me. You can meet with another person, but you need to go and learn about this thing called marriage because I find that most of us, myself included, who think you know what marriage is, have no idea until you get into it, right? And so I want them to learn about it.

The third requirement that I have before I will perform a marriage ceremony is that I will not marry couples who are living together before they're married. This is the gasp now, right? This is amazing to me. Our culture certainly has believed this to be normal, to believe this to be accepted, to believe this to be even good or necessary to find out if you are compatible.

And I have to tell you, it was extremely difficult as a 25-year-old pastor or however old I was to have 40-year-olds sitting in my office and for me to tell them, "I would love to perform your marriage ceremony, but you have to promise me you'll live in separate bedrooms until you're married." you know I wish I could share with you the looks that I received from some people sharing that. Now, of course, you all know I am not saying that living under the same roof is somehow sinful.

You all understand what I'm talking about, right, when I say they're living together before marriage. So I have and I unashamedly will tell you, I have performed marriage ceremonies where the couples are living together, but they have promised me from the point they asked me to do the wedding because that's the first they found out about it that they will live in separate bedrooms until the wedding night. And I have had some people that have said yes to that. And I've had many others that have just laughed at me and walked out. And so I don't perform their wedding ceremony. Why do I share that with you?

As we talk about this idea of intentional sin, there are some decisions that we make in life that we have forethought with them. They're premeditated. We know what it is. Now, I'm not judging anybody. If you've lived together before you're married, we've all made mistakes. We've all sinned. But when I can tell you in my own life, when I do something that grieves the Spirit, I cannot continue to live in that. I must repent.

I must turn. I must change. I can't continue to do that thing that I know God frowns upon and still say, "I love you, God." Remember what John said? Those who love God will do what he commands. It's not always easy. It's not always fun. But the benefits are always good. And so there's this idea. Now, let me just give you one because I don't want you to think I'm picking on that person. The last thing I want to do is make a checklist of you're a follower of Jesus if you do this, this, and this.

And you don't love Jesus if you do this, this, and this. I am never going to stand out at the front doors with a checklist you know on a piece of paper and say, "Oh, you did that. Sorry. You're not welcome to come in." We're all sinners saved by grace. Please know I understand that fully. But this would be similar to the person that every single weekend knowingly goes to Meyer and buys a 24-pack of Budweiser and gets drunk every weekend and does it intentionally, knowing, "On Monday, I'll ask for forgiveness." That doesn't make sense to me.

I would think that that person would go, "Man, it's an addiction. I'm trying to stop." That's totally different. I'm trying to stop. I've been convicted. It's wrong. And I'm trying to stop. But sometimes, oh, I just make a mistake. That shows a heart change. But the person who says, "Ah, I can continue to do that, and Jesus is going to forgive me and love me anyway," those are the people John saying, "You really need to double-check what's going on inside your heart." The follower of Jesus will not intentionally, continually live in sin.

All right. Now that I've offended everybody, let's wrap up 1 John, chapter 5. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true by being in His Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God, and He is eternal life. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. This is the final checklist. If you are a believer, John says you will gain understanding.

He's not saying everything will make sense. There's still going to be a lot of questions for which you don't have answers, but you are going to see the world through a different lens. There is going to be a truth there that is foundational to everything you are that is going to say, "You know what? That is truth. I don't care what else is going on. That is truth." So let me wrap up since I went on a tangent here. Followers of Jesus, number one, John says, "Followers of Jesus will believe that Jesus is 100% man and 100% God at the same time.

I can't explain it to you. Don't ask me to. I don't know. I just know it to be true because that's what Scripture says. And it has to be true or the rest of the salvation message doesn't make sense. Number two, followers of Jesus will obey His commands. They will want to obey His commands. I'm not saying they're going to be perfect, but they will want to obey His commands. Number three, John says, "Followers of Jesus will love others. Not just brothers and sisters in Christ. They will love everybody. They will love all of those people.

There is no judgment for those that are outside of the church that are living life a certain way. They will still love them. Even those that they strongly disagree with, they will love. Number four, followers of Jesus will not intentionally live a life of sin, intentionally live a life of sin. And finally, number five, followers of Jesus will gain insight and understanding. So this is where John leaves it in our court. He says, "Are you a follower of Jesus? Are you proclaiming Him to be the Christ?"

And if so, let's look at this checklist. How does your life line up with your words and what you are saying?" He also wants to share with us that it's logical to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. He's laid the foundation. There's the testimony of the baptism, the testimony of the cross, and the testimony of the Spirit, amongst many other things, including miracles and the resurrection and everything else. John encourages us, don't fall into the trap of false teachers. Question what others say, get into the Word of God.

Allow that to be your truth. If there's ever anything that I say that you kind of go, "I don't know that I really follow that," line it up with Scripture. Let's have a conversation. I'm okay with that. Scripture is our guide. It is

the Word of God, and we call it that for a reason. Today, we are going to celebrate five lives that are saying, "I want to proclaim publicly that Jesus is the Christ in my life." And it is a beautiful, beautiful thing that we get to participate in.

Every single one of us, sinners saved by grace, looking at God who continues to change lives and give him praise. Let me close in prayer. Heavenly Father, again, if I have spoken or said anything that is not of you, I pray that you would just clear that from our minds. But those words that are truly from you speaking to us, I pray that we would take them to heart.

I pray that as John has asked that we should love others, not live intentionally in sin, gain insight, all of these things that we would do our best to obey your commands so that you would receive praise. Thank you for loving us where we are at. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.