



Looking Inwards (15 mins) Caring For Each Other

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) Concern For Others

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

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HG173 *Walking In The Light* True Faith

1 John 2:28 –3:24

Home Group Study Notes

28 October 2018 - James Van Cleef



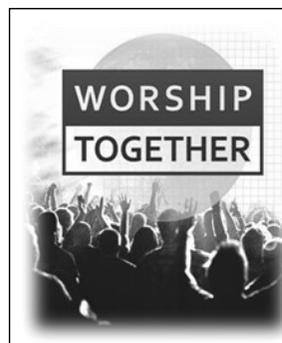
**PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!**

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful for your discussions.



Welcome (10 mins) Ice Breaker

A small group of hostile looking people approach you and want to know if you believe in Jesus. What do you do?



Looking Upwards (10 mins) Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



HG173 *Walking In The Light*
True Faith

1 John 2:28 –3:24

Home Group Sermon

28 October 2018 - James Van Cleef

Introduction

True faith is built on our knowledge of God. Our character proves our knowledge of God. Our character is seen through our actions. What we believe, in *whom* we believe, translates into *how* we behave.

Our knowledge of God comes from the revelation of Jesus Christ, made known to us by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. As we read the Scriptures, we are face-to-face with the presence and activity of God: his love, righteousness, holiness, mercy, patience, grace, judgment, discipline, forgiveness, restoration, and salvation. And when we see Jesus, we see the Father. So, we see in Jesus God's love, righteousness, holiness, mercy, patience, grace, judgment, discipline, forgiveness, restoration, and salvation. There is no division between God in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New.

1 John is a passionate pastoral letter to true believers with the intention of deepening their trust in Jesus by reaffirming the values that bound them together as a community. It is a call to know God, to avoid sin, to do right, to love one another, and to be wary of those opposed to Jesus. It is an affirmation of the life and death of Jesus, of the truth of the Cross, that we are children of God and anointed with his Spirit. So, it is no wonder that John appeals to all who are in Christ to remain in him, to practice love, to exhibit true faith.

True Faith

First, let's give these words some meaning. 'True' or 'truth' describes that which is so, a verifiable fact. Furthermore, the word also describes that which is unconcealed, something open as opposed to closed or deceptive. Additionally, it relates to virtue and character, integrity or trustworthiness.

In the context of our reading, truth relates to Jesus, and the reality of his existence, as well as the effect he has on us: we are transformed by him and our character now reflects his, and our new life is to be open and seen.

Faith is often understood as believing that something scientifically unprovable is true. But faith really is about our awareness of our obligations to others. We are to be faithful in our marriages, in our roles at work, in our commitments to organisations or societies joined, in our relationships. We have obligations to fulfil, and faith describes our constancy to others.

4. 'Love the sinner. Hate the sin.' Is it helpful to label people as sinners? Do we hate our sin as much as we hate the sins of others?

5. How can we ensure our community of faith is a safe place for us to deal with sin and temptation?

6. The world will hate us because of our commitment to Jesus. How do we respond to that?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. 'What we believe, in *whom* we believe, translates into *how* we behave.' How can we grow in Christlikeness? What are essential disciplines for growing into Christian maturity?

2. 'A poor understanding of sin leads to a poor understanding of God, and vice versa.' Do you agree or disagree?

3. 'We live in a culture that widely believes what I feel to be right is right.' Do you think this attitude influences the church? Is it negative or positive?

Again, in the context of our reading, faith is about our constancy to God because of the truth of his love shown to us. Faith is not about our feelings or our experiences. Perhaps it might help if when we see 'faith' we consider using 'trust' alongside it: trust requires an act of our will to fulfil our obligations to him. If we trust him, surely we will follow in his way. When John uses 'faith' he wants us to show confidence in God, for he has never failed us.

So, true faith is our visible commitment to God rooted in the transforming power of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. Our lights shine! But how do we show it in our lives?

True Faith in Practice

John writes to a community of believers who are threatened by wrong teaching about God, Jesus, the Cross, and sin. He uses the apostasy of people who formerly were part of the community and draws out the consequence of not abiding in Christ.

But to his community he encourages them to continue abiding in Christ. True faith matters, for their lives are to be a tangible witness to the majesty and beauty of God.

So, what does John teach his community—and by extension, us—about maintaining true faith?

Remain. Stay. Abide. In our reading, John uses the word 'abide' five times with reference to our being in Christ. As we abide in Christ, as we remain in him, we do so with a focus on sameness. In other words, we are with him because we want to be like him. And he wants us to be like him! Indeed, because we abide in him, we will have nothing to be ashamed of when he returns (2.28). As we abide in him, we are no longer following in the way of sin and death (3.6). Remarkably, as we abide in him we are told God abides in us, and has given us the promised gift of his Holy Spirit (3.9, 24).

John also reminds us that if we do not love as God loves, and if we close our hearts to those in need, we are abiding in death (3.14, 15, 17). In other words, by not loving we remain in death. Do we truly wish to become like death? For those with true faith, absolutely not, for our focus is on Jesus!

Practice. When John says you are practicing something, he doesn't mean improving your golf swing or your piano playing. He means you are active in bringing something about, that you are carrying out a responsibility or obligation to something. In our reading, John poses two possibilities: we either practice, or bring about righteousness, or sin (2.29, 3.4, 7-10).

If we abide in Christ, and know him, our lives are transformed, and our actions, our practices, reflect the Light of the World. That's why Jesus says, '*You are the light of the world.*' We are because he is! And so in our life with Christ, we are active in bringing about his righteousness, we are obliged to love as he loved! We can do this! Do you find that to be incredible?

Anti-Faith

Now, one of the issues John faced was that there were some claiming they knew God, but denied the truth of Jesus, denied he came in the flesh, and believed his sacrificial death to be unnecessary. As a result, their lives were contrary to the way of Jesus, marked by sin and lawlessness.

Sin. Today, sin is downplayed, or explained away. For some, it is a religious word that describes all the fun things we shouldn't do because God is a killjoy. For others, it is simply a mistake: 'Oh dear, I've just defrauded employees from their pensions. My bad!' Sin becomes a rationalised wrongdoing we explain away. And some hold that there is no sin, for we live in a culture that widely believes what I feel to be right is right.

However, the biblical teaching about sin is a million miles away from those ideas. First, sin is missing the mark; the standard is Jesus, and we, on our own, will never reach that standard. Second, sin is also being alongside instead of on the same path—think of it as a course deviation. We might look as if we're heading the same way, but ultimately we end up as far away as we can imagine. Finally, sin is an act that creates a liability: our actions have consequences, and the choices we make not only can wreck other's lives, but ours, too. It is destructive, taking us as far away from God as is possible. It destroys relationship with God. Thus, without a Saviour who once for all dealt with sin and death, we would be forever gripped by sin and death.

Lawlessness. When John warns his community about lawlessness, had film and cinema existed he may have brought to mind Clint Eastwood in *High Plains Drifter*. What he is conveying, though, is more than just breaking God's laws; he is thinking about being opposed to God, of doing the exact opposite of all God says, all God is. For John, to say 'sin is lawlessness' is to say 'sin is anti-Kingdom.' You cannot be at the same time for Christ and against Christ. If you abide in Christ you purify yourself; if you abide in sin you are anti-Kingdom. If you practice righteousness you do so because Jesus is righteous; if you practice sinning you are of the devil...

This is pretty strong stuff, but lest we think that these ideas relate more to religious fanaticism, and have no place in 21st century Christianity, let us not forget that to Peter Jesus said, '*Get behind me Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man*' (Mark 8.33).

A poor understanding of sin leads to a poor understanding of God, and vice versa. If sin is nothing to worry about, why bother about the holiness of God? Why worry if we are offending him? If God is ever so kind, certainly he will overlook my errant ways. But if sin kills and leads to being anti-God—and it does—then what can we do? What hope do we have? For this reason, John passionately calls his fellow believers to abide in Christ. That is their hope. That is our hope, too!

True Faith. Visible Trust.

True faith is built on our knowledge of God. Our character proves our knowledge of God. Our character is seen through our actions. What we believe, in *whom* we believe, translates into *how* we behave. This is the essence of what John writes in 1 John 2.28-3.24.

John's first letter is as relevant today as it was when written. The culture is different, but the same anti-God, anti-Kingdom spirit is prevalent. We are called to witness to God today against a backdrop of gross materialism and greed, pseudo-spirituality and narcissism, libertine immorality, and the percussive cadence of tolerance and relativism. And in this contemporary chaos, true faith matters, for we are to be a tangible witness to the majesty and beauty of God.

Here are some ways our lives become a real witness to God today:

Love. We know we love if we 'lay down our lives for the brothers' as Jesus did. Our love is to be sacrificial, unconditional, unrelenting, and unequivocal. But it does not mean we change our faith for what is trending or for what will make us more acceptable in the world's eyes.

Live as communities of interdependence. Didn't Jesus say, '*Freely you have received, freely give*'? We are to keep our hearts in God so that we do not succumb to meanness; generosity begets generosity, and all that we have comes from God. '*The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof...*'

Live as communities of grace. Doesn't the Scripture say, '*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ*'? We need to ensure that our communities of faith are safe places for people to deal with their sins and temptations as they grow into the likeness of Christ.

Worship in spirit and truth. This includes constant reading of the Word, of practicing prayer, of being thankful, and blessing God for his goodness in the whole of our lives. These practices are non-negotiable if we are to abide in Christ.

A brief word of warning: Our real witness to God will not necessarily be liked. People hated Jesus then, and now. And they will hate us. Yet, our witness is not about getting likes, or being acceptable. It is always about our constancy to Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, bringing glory to the Father. Amen.

