

LIVING FOR GOD IN AN

UPSIDE

A STUDY IN THE EPISTLE OF I JOHN

DOWN

WORLD

Christ

Baptist

Church

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Lesson 7
"Distended
Reality"

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There is a popular colloquialism “keeping it real” which speaks to being true to oneself and their values and not being fake or influenced by things which are counter to them

- Also stated as “keeping it 100 – *1 hunnit*” – meaning 100%

How strange it is to talk about ‘**not frontin**’ or inhibiting oneself from pretending to be something they’re not – while staying true to a principled you.



I say it is strange because of the mysterious and mystical character we assign to our heroes

- When I recall: “Faster than a speeding bullet. More powerful than a locomotive. ***Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound.***” “Look! Up in the sky!”.
- Superheroes were born in the United States in the late 1930s as a rebuttal to the misery of the Depression and the rise of European fascism.

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They presented a figure to look up to that was different than the people in power around the world.

- There was a need for an ideal that would not disappoint and so fantasy became the source

What the many fantasy hero fans seem to celebrate is the ability of these characters to transcend the limitations imposed on normal man, be it gravity, social norms, or the law.

Superheroes are beings who see beyond what's possible; and even though they are killed in the end, all they endured makes the whole struggle of humanity worthwhile.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1817 in his writing *Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*, coined the phrase “suspension of disbelief,” depicting an allowance for one to believe something is true even though it seems impossible.

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In this vein, fans argue without conclusion which was the more potent whether *Superman* could beat *Batman* or *Iron man* was stronger than *Man of Steel*.

Or there is the unanswered questions like: **Should Superman Have Killed Zod In Man Of Steel?**



Then there is **DC-Marvel**
--superhero trinity
Competition.
DC Comics Superman,
Wonder Woman, Batman
Marvel's Iron Man,
Captain America and Thor



These characters and many more have been instrumental in advancing a *distended reality* with storylines such as Marvels “**Days of Future Past.**”

- Living in an Up-Side Down World, reality is replaced with a **false notion of truth**

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It would be an injustice to end this introduction without highlighting just one more super-hero, whom most of Non-Nubian descent cannot appreciate his major cabalistic impact – “Black Panther.”

Lando Calrissian, a character in the *Star Wars* sequel *The Empire Strikes Back*, ran his own city, but did not have any superpowers

- Calrissian as a complicated human being who, after all is said, did the right thing, yet he did not have the authority of T'Challa

In the midst of a regressive cultural and political moment fueled in part by the white-nativist movement, the very existence of *Black Panther* feels like **good resistance**.

The theme of Black Panther challenge institutional bias, with its' characters taking unobvious digs at oppressors, and its narrative includes favorable perspectives on black life, tradition, authority and technological advancement.

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Black Panther proved to be an excellent medium to elevate the pride in origin of a suppressed people and became a threat to oppressive ideals.

Just think of it, a fictional African King with the technological war power to destroy anyone and even possessed the wealth to buy whatever his heart desired.

This Super-hero *is* emblematic of the most productive responses to bigotry and rather than propelling the hearts and minds its' populace into racism, it celebrates what those who choose to prohibit equal representation could not overtake.

- This time the Chieftain did not trade his resources for personal gain.

That was part of Johns fellowship admonition in I John 2:15-17 Don't set the affections of your heart on this world or in loving the things of the world. The love of the Father and the love of the world are incompatible. ¹⁶For all that the world can offer us—the gratification of our flesh, the allurements of the things of the world, and the obsession with status and importance—none of these things come from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷This world and its desires are in the process of passing away, but those who *love to* do the will of God live forever (TPT).

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Philosophers like Plato believed that their nature could be transformed toward that of the divine by simply contemplating the divine or vision of the mind.

Jewish philosopher Philo agreed that one attained the vision of God mystically, because he affirmed that God was transcendent; and he believed that God endowed Israel and especially the prophets with this vision.

He taught that this vision was preceded by virtue and purity of soul, and that the vision would be made complete when one was perfected.

- Similar teachings appear in other mystical Palestinian Jewish texts
 - Mysticism interweaves biblical, liturgical, and spiritual understanding into one
- Thus forming the triplet of false teaching: legalism, mysticism, and asceticism.
- Legalism focuses on the adherence to rule and regulations more than trust in God
 - Mysticism elevates subjective experience over biblical revelation
 - Asceticism seeks acceptance from God to a higher state of holiness through self-denial

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The false teachers of John's day seem to have held that knowledge was all-important and that conduct was a minor matter.

But John insisted that whenever one sins and continue in that behavior, it is evidence of a wrong relationship to and with God.

In fact, John sees sin as lawlessness, where the Greek construction implies that the two words are inter-changeable.

- The law here is the law of God and the essence of sin is disregard for that law of God.

It is the assertion of human will and ways against God's revealed way, and advances the preference for self over the service of God.

- And this manner of life is not that demonstrated by anyone who expects Jesus to return

Therefore, in the pericope of I John 3:4-9, he gives three motives for obedience:

- **I John 3:4-9** Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

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⁵And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.

⁶ Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.

⁷Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. ⁸ He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

Motive 1: Christ's Death on the Cross (3:4–8)—John states Christ was manifest to:

(1) reveal the Father and enable us to fellowship with Him (1:2–3)

(2) take away our sins (3:4–5)

(3) destroy (annul) the works of the devil (3:8)

(4) reveal God's love and bestow God's life (4:9)

The reality that sin resulted in Christ's suffering and death, should serve as sufficient reason for the Christian to hate sin (transgressing the law)

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The Christian who **abides in Christ** (i.e, the fellowship of chaps. 1–2) will not deliberately break God’s law.

The teaching of the Gospel of John, chapter 15 is replete with the notion of abiding or remaining in the spiritual relationship with God and the Christ.

- Over 12 times the word *menō* appears translated as abide, remain and continue
- Abiding in God and His life standards rules out mystical or ecstatic identity

Now to be sure, every Christian sins, perhaps without even knowing it (Psl. 19:12); but no true Christian will deliberately and repeatedly defy God’s Word and disobey Him.

- V 6 ought to read, “Whosoever **abides** in Him does not habitually **sin**” (present tense)
- Eph. 2:1–3 makes it clear that the unsaved sin constantly because they live in the flesh and for the devil.
- But the Christian is no longer Satan’s slave because of his new nature within

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1 John 3:9-18 Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰ In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor *is* he who does not love his brother. ¹¹ For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, ¹² not as Cain *who* was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. ¹³ Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother abides in death. ¹⁵ Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. ¹⁶ By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

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Motive 2: The New Nature Within (3:9–18)

- So the key thought of Ch. 3–5 is “sonship,” which extends out of the new nature within the believer.
- God does not destroy or eradicate the old nature; rather, He implants a new nature that gives the believer a desire for spiritual things.
- V 9 declares that the new nature in the believer cannot sin, but anyone who yields to the old nature will stumble and fall (Gal. 6:1-2)

John draws a stark contrasts between the children of God and the children of the devil, using Cain and Abel as examples.

- Abel had faith and was accepted; Cain tried to be accepted by works which failed him (Gen. 4).

Also note, Cain was a liar and a murderer, like the devil (John 8:44); he murdered his brother, then lied about it to God.

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- Genesis 3:15 states that Satan's seed (children) will oppose God's seed.
- Ultimately, this will finally culminate in Christ's battle with the Antichrist in the last days.
- But please note that Satan's children are "religious." Cain worshiped at an altar, and the Pharisees were the most religious people of their day.

But it is not religion, but a relationship bound by true love for God and God's children, which is the test of our devotion to God.

- True Christians do not hate and murder; instead, they show love and try to help others.
- The new nature that is implanted at the new birth is responsible for this change.

I John 3:19-24 And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. ²⁰ For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. ²² And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. ²³ And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. ²⁴ Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

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Motive 3: The Witness of the Spirit (3:19–24)

- True Christianity is a matter of the heart, not the tongue.
- Believers have the witness of the Spirit in their hearts that they are God's children (Rom. 8:14–16).
- Of course, v. 19 should be tied in with 2:28 “And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.
- When Christ returns, the believers with assurance in their hearts will not be ashamed

Christians can cultivate their assurance as Peter wrote in II Pet. 1:10 “Make your calling and election sure.

- v. 19 assures us that as we sincerely love the brethren, we belong to the truth and are saved (see also 3:14).
- Unsaved people may like some Christians because of their personable qualities, but only a born-again Christian loves even a total stranger when he or she discovers the stranger is a Christian.

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- This is the message of Rom. 5:5, but sadly, our hearts (consciences) do condemn us because we know we have not always loved the brethren as we should.
- But John helps us by pointing away from our feelings to the God who knows us.
- Thank God salvation and assurance are not based on the feelings of the heart!

The two results of our being able to “assure our hearts before Him” (I John 3:19), and of “our heart condemning us not” (due to insincerity as to *the truth*, and as to LOVE in particular) are: (1) **confidence toward God** (2) **a sure answer to our prayers**

- V 21 promises Christians can have an assured heart can pray with boldness (confidence)
- If there is sin in our hearts, then we cannot pray with confidence (Psl. 66:18–19).
- But the Holy Spirit within convicts me of this sin, and I may confess it and get back into fellowship with the Father.
- What a tremendous revelation: whenever a Christian is out of fellowship with another Christian, he or she cannot pray as one should.

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I Peter 3:1–7 declares the impact of this disfellowship in the Christian home:

¹Wives, likewise, *be* submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, ²when they observe your chaste conduct *accompanied* by fear. ³Do not let your adornment be *merely* outward--arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on *fine* apparel-- ⁴rather *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible *beauty* of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. ⁵For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, ⁶as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror. ⁷Husbands, likewise, dwell with *them* with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as *being* heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

The secret of answered prayer is obeying God and seeking to please Him; and by doing so we abide in Him, and when we abide in Him, we may pray with power (John 15:7).

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John declares that faith and love go together (v. 23) and if we trust God, we love one another.

- We love the saints because we are all one in Christ and because we seek to please the Father.
- The indwelling Holy Spirit yearns to unite all believers in a wonderful fellowship of love, the kind of spiritual unity Christ prayed for in John 17:20–21.

God abides in us by His Spirit; therefore we ought to abide in Him by yielding to the Spirit and obeying the Word.

People who claim to be born of God, but who repeatedly disobey the Word and have no desire to please God, ought to examine themselves to see if they are really born of God.

- There is no clearer sign of failed Sonship than disobedience to the Father

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