

As we continue in our series on “The Summer of Love”, we are going to take a look at what it truly means to know that we love Jesus Christ. As you remember from last week, the believers were struggling with the idea of what it means to really know God.

As we get into 1 John, Let’s set the situation. John’s a pastor writing to a church body, and he’s going to compare and contrast two things.

He’s going to compare and contrast Christ followers and the world, and he’s going to denote three aspects of each. He will say that in the church that there are three types of Christians, and in the world, there are three types of temptation.

Obviously, this lends us to examining ourselves and saying, “Well, am I in the church or am I in the world? Do I love Jesus or not, and where am I at in as far as spiritual maturity goes and where are my greatest options for temptation to come into my life?”

So that’s what he’s wanting us to do. So as I get into this today, you’ll need to sort of look at your own life and say, “Where am I at?”

And he's going to indicate three different levels of spiritual maturity, and we'll deal with these in just a minute, but first, he talks about people that are newer Christians.

I would say there is a difference between an immature Christian and a new Christian. An immature Christian is a person that's been a Christian for a while, but hasn't grown up. They haven't learned. They haven't made progress. They're not very motivated to spiritual development.

A new Christian is someone that may not know a great deal, but they love the Lord, and their intentions are good, and they're moving forward, and the difference is this: One person we expect to have moved on, and the other person, we understand that that's their stage.

In the same way, if you saw a five-year-old with a diaper and a pacifier in their mouth, you would say, "Well, you know, they need to get out of that stage, but we understand it."

If you saw me with a diaper and a pacifier in my mouth and food all over my face, you'd probably tell me a number of things, but one of them would be "It's probably time to move on to the next stage," and that's kind of what happens.

Some people think that because they've been Christians for a long time, they're really mature, but not necessarily. He talks about people that are new Christians. These aren't immature people that are not growing up and not making spiritual progress.

They're brand new Christians. The interesting thing about a child, as well as a person that's just been born into the faith, is that they need someone to look after them.

When our children were small, we never left them alone, because if you leave a child alone, terrible things happen. Didn't you ever see the movie – "Home Alone"? Young children need oversight. They need some help.

Now you move onto another phase of life, both physically and spiritually where you become an adult. You take care of yourself. Hopefully, you get your own place, your own job, pay your own bills, and cook your own food.

What John's saying is that when we become a Christian, we're in this infancy stage, but we should, as quickly as possible, move on to a maturing stage of spiritual adulthood where we can take care of ourselves, and once we've lived in that season for a while, we come to this other phase of parenting where we're mature.

A child needs to be looked after. An adult looks after themselves, and a parent looks goes beyond themselves and looks after another. So, your goal is to get to the place where you're mature, where you can mentor people, encourage them, instruct them.

What John is saying is this: You have to look at your life and figure out where you are at in relation to your life with Jesus.

Am I a young, new Christian? Am I maturing, growing Christian or am I matured and strong and doing well. As we look at that, you'll be able to assess where you are, and then, we'll look at the temptations that come to those kinds of people through the world.

So we'll jump right in. We'll look at these three types of people. He mentions each of them twice and tells us a little bit about them. He says, "I write to you first, dear children."

These are the **New Christians**. I remember when I was a brand new Christian, age 20. I didn't know much.

I went to my first Bible study, They said, "Go to Titus." I'm going, "Titus? Who's Titus? I don't know who he is or what I should do when I find him."

And I'll tell you what. If you're a new Christian, if you're just starting to read the Bible and walk with Jesus, don't be shy or embarrassed, just be real, we've all been there, say, "It's all new to me. I'm learning," and seek out people who have been with Christ for a while and can show you how grow in your love for Jesus."

New Christians are the best because they've got all kinds of questions. They're motivated. Their intentions are good. They want to make progress, but they just don't know a ton, but they will very shortly if their attitude is good. He says, ***"I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name."***

That's the thing that every new Christian needs to hold on to is how do I get my sins forgiven? That's really the issue.

"God is holy. I sin. I'm unholy. I've sinned against God. How do I get my sins forgiven? Jesus is God, became a man, lived without sin, died for my sin, he rose from the dead. If I give him my sin, he'll forgive me. I can have my sins forgiven," and this is what fires up a new Christian.

"You're new Christians. You know that Jesus has forgiven your sin. You're fired up about that. You're motivated. You love Jesus and that's the perfect place to start."

He moves from these new Christians to **Mature Christians** in the next verse.

He says, “***I am writing to you, fathers***”. These are people that are in the church, and they’re like Moms and Dads.”

How many of you know somebody in your life that they love God? They’re really mature. They know the Bible, and they’re kind of like a Mom or Dad spiritually to you. You can ask them a question. They give you good counsel. They’re really helpful. You admire and respect them. I mean they’re not perfect, but they’re at a place of maturity that you can trust.

He says, “***I am writing to you, fathers, (you mature Christians) because you know him who is from the beginning.***”

What he says about these people is that they know God. Ever met somebody that knows God? Not just knows about God, but they know God.

And when they talk about God, it’s very personal, heartfelt, practical, and they see God involved in their lives and how good he is to them and all that he’s done for them. You can just see their love for Jesus pouring out of them.

He says, “You know, you people that are mature, you’ve been walking with God for a long time. You’re such a huge blessing to the church because you know him from the beginning. You’ve known him for a long time.”

We are a church that greatly values people that have known the Lord for a long time. If you’re older and you’ve walked with God faithfully for a lot of years, you are tremendous blessing to the church and you can play the role of a spiritual father or mother to younger folks in our church. This is such a great need and God has placed you here to fulfill that tremendous role.

Then, he writes to this other group. He’s talked about the new Christians, the mature Godly people that are the pillars of the church, and everybody needs them, and he says, “I write to you young men.”

These are the **Maturing Christians**. They’re not immature. They’re not mature yet. They’re maturing. They’re growing, making progress, learning, striving for Godliness.

He says, ***“I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.”***

Maturing Christians are ones who are seeing transformation in their life.

I wonder how many of you, when you look back, you say, “This time last year or few years ago, comparing where I was at spiritually then and where I’m at now.” I’ve seen progress.

Were there sins that you’ve stopped? Have you increased your Bible knowledge, your love for Jesus, your ministry service, your confidence in the Spirit’s work in your life?

This letter from John is not a letter of discipline, it is a letter of encouragement to help Christians affirm what they know about Christ is true and to act upon that truth.

If you’re making progress, I really want you to be encouraged. None of us is perfect, but we all have the opportunity for progress.

Now if you’re immature, and you say, “Well, I’m where I was a year or two or three or seven ago,” you should be convicted by that, and you should make some progress spiritually, but if you’re maturing and overcoming the evil one and you’re gaining some momentum in your spiritual life and you’re feeling excited, be encouraged.

He goes then back to this new Christian phase. He says, "***I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father.***"

New Christians, these are the people who just figured out who the Father is...

God's my Dad. God loves me. God made me. I sinned against him, but he sent Jesus to take away my sin through his death and resurrection.

Talk about your Happy Father's Day!

Take that in for a moment..."God's my Dad. He loves me. I can have a relationship with my heavenly Father. He adores me. He cares for me. He's with me. Do you know he's been involved in your life? Do you know he's taken away your sin?" The new Christian is in that phase, and he's told us two things about a new Christian.

They know who God is, and they know how their sins were forgiven. Those are the two most important things. You KNOW THESE TRUTHS.

You're on a forward track toward spiritual maturity. These people love God. They're fired up. They're motivated. They know their sins are forgiven. They know who God is, and they're excited to move to the next level.

He goes on. He says, "***I write to you fathers.*** (These are the spiritually mature) ***because you know him who is from the beginning.***" He repeats himself, and again, if you want to know anything, know who the Father is. Know who God is.

He goes on to say, "***I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.***"

Again, these are the maturing Christians, the people that aren't brand new Christians, but they're not at the place yet where John's calling them because he needs advice. They're not there yet. They're in the middle. He says, "I write to you because you're strong, because the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one."

Two things he says. Maturing Christians are marked by two effects in their life that is caused by one thing. One effect is they're strong.

Now maybe they used to be weak. They used to give in to sin and temptation and foolishness. They weren't very strong, but now they are. They have solid convictions. Their strength has come. They know who God is. They know what God's done. They love Jesus. They trust the Bible.

You know, they're strong in their convictions. They're strong in their commitment, they're devoted, and they have, he says, "overcome the evil one." They've got some victory in their life over Satan. They've resisted sin and temptation and childish self-centered behavior.

Because of that, their confidence is growing, not in themselves, but in their Bible and in Jesus and the truth of his teachings.

What has happened to cause these two effects? The word of God lives in them. I love how he summarizes this.

John says, "In the church, there's three kinds of people: The spiritually immature, the spiritual maturing, and the spiritually mature." You say, "Well, I would like to make progress. How do I make progress?" Well, you need to

overcome the evil one. You'll need to know who God is. You'll need to know how to get rid of your sin.

“Well, how do I do that?” “You have to read your Bible. That is the top priority for spiritual maturity.

If you want to love Jesus and go from immature to maturing to mature, the key is to be in the Scriptures and have the Scriptures in you, to be a person who's reading the Bible and studying the Bible and discussing the Bible and meditating on the Bible and just being shaped and formed and encouraged through Scripture.

Okay, the church is filled with three kinds of Christians: Immature, maturing, and mature. The main thing that causes the maturity is the amount of time in the Scriptures and the amount of Scriptures in the Christian.

He then contrasts that with the world. Here's the church and the world, and as there are three types of Christians in the church, there are three sources of temptation in the world, and so he jumps right in.

***“Do not love the world or anything in the world.”***

Here’s what the Bible means by world.

It means living without God, a system that’s opposed to God. These are people, nations, cultures, communities, organizations that totally neglect God. They don’t honor Jesus. They don’t factor God into any of their decision making or their values. There’s just no God involvement at all, basically just live as if God didn’t have anything to do with your life and you’re worldly.

They ask the question, “What would be the ideal world be for me?” And then, they try and create that world, but that world doesn’t have Jesus. It’s their own little heaven that they build apart from God.

These are people who take all their resources to build their own heaven. We’re going to have a good life. It’s going to be awesome for us, but no Jesus.”

So that’s what it means to be worldly, just living your life with something that is your heart’s desire rather than Jesus.

All your resources and passions goes to that thing. That's your God. That's what the Bible means by worldly, and he says, ***“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.”***

What he says is this: You either love the world or you love Jesus, you can't have both.

You have to choose, “Do I love the world or do I love Jesus? Do I live for me or do I live for Him? Do I worship this man-made God or the true God? Where's my heart? Where's my life going? Is it toward Jesus or not?”

And he goes on, talking a little more about the world in the next verse.

***“For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. ”***

He breaks down here the three sources of temptation. As I told you, there's three types of Christians, three sources of temptation, lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, boastful pride of life. The first thing that we see about this is this is a common pattern in how Satan works.

When he came to Adam and Even in the garden, he tempted their flesh, that the fruit would be good for taste. He tempted their eyes. It was pleasing to the eye and the boastful pride of life. It would make them as smart as God.

Same thing when Satan comes to tempt the Lord Jesus. He had been fasting for 40 days. First thing he does is he tempts the lust of the flesh, his body.

You know, "Make some bread." It's not a sin to make bread, but it is a sin to obey Satan.

He then tempts him with his eyes. He takes Jesus up and shows him the whole earth and says all of this can be yours. You can have all this. You see all this. You can have it, and then, he tempts Jesus in the boastful pride of life. "You can rule over the whole world, and you don't have to go to the cross. I'll give you a shortcut. Just bow down to me."

You and I are going to be continually tempted through these three portals:

Our desires of our physical body, our eyes, and our pride. We'll deal with each of those. First thing, I'll say is this: Is it a sin to be tempted? No. Will you ever reach the point where you're not tempted anymore? Yeah, it's

called heaven. Until then, you'll be tempted. You and I will continually be tempted.

Some people think that if they're tempted, they've already sinned. So why not go ahead and do it anyways? That's a lie from Satan.

It says in the book of Hebrews that Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. He was tempted like we are, yet without sin. So it can't be a sin to be tempted because Jesus was tempted.

You and I will be tempted, but when tempted, we can't say God is tempting me, the Bible says, because God doesn't tempt us and God doesn't sin, but Paul says that every time we are tempted, God gives us a way out.

There's an exit door somewhere, and we can get out of our temptation. We don't have to give in to our temptation. So you're going to be tempted through your desires of your body, your eyes, and your pride.

The first one is the **lust of the flesh**.

These are the physical yearnings and desires. Is physical pleasure a sin? No, it's not. God made our bodies to enjoy things. That's why food tastes good. That's why physical touch with a loved one is enjoyable. God made our bodies to enjoy certain things, and that pleasure is not bad.

But if we make all our decisions solely based out of the desires of our physical body, we will end up taking everything to a destructive extreme.

- It's not just having a glass of wine; it's having a case of beer.
- It's not getting married and enjoying your spouse. It's being a sexual predator.
- It's not just enjoying a good meal; it's participating in gluttonous behavior.

So we have to watch the lust, the cravings of our flesh.

The second thing he says is our portal and opportunity for temptation is the **lust of the eyes**. We see things.

You think about it. How much of our world is filled with visual stimuli that is intended to get us to commit to something that we shouldn't? We deal with this every minute of every day, bombarded with messages.

Through the eye portal, we see something and all of a sudden, we're into it, and this is where coveting comes into as well. Some of us are coveters. We see somebody with someone or something and we think, "I need that." We end up spending money we don't have to buy stuff we don't need to impress people we don't like. That's the lust of the eyes.

So, lust of our flesh, pleasure; lust of your eyes, the desire to get more.

We just get more, and then, what happens when we get it?

The third temptation is the **Prideful boasting** of what we have.

The main reason why so many people have so much stuff is because they want to boast about what they have and what they do. "I work here. I'm this smart or talented. I have this thing. Is it a sin to have nice things? No, obviously not. Is it a sin to make money? Is it a sin to have a good job? Is it a sin to be successful? Is it a sin to do something? No, it's not, but it is a sin to take credit for all of God's grace in our lives, to boast. "Aren't I amazing?!"

James says, “**Every good and perfect gift comes from God.**” People who boast are taking credit for something. Even if they work for it, ultimately, the skills and opportunities that provided that thing were given them by the Lord. Boasting is a terrible sin. Pride is a terrible sin.

Our culture pitches it as a virtue. “You need to have pride!”

No, we need to have worship, which is glory to God. Pride is glory to me.

You see in the world, we’re God. We want to get everything we see. We want to do and have everything that feels good so that we can brag about all our conquests and our stuff and our success and our achievement.

In this Jesus’ kingdom, God gets the glory, not us, and in this, we enjoy and appreciate all the things that God has given, but we celebrate him rather than celebrating ourselves for all that we have and all we’ve done.

And what we see is that it’s humility that dominates Jesus’ world and it’s an arrogance that dominates this world.

That’s why he says, “You can’t love both. You can’t love these things and me because they are in complete opposition.”

There's no similarity there, and these things, this boasting and bragging, this continual competitiveness to have a better car or a nicer wardrobe or a hotter body or a promotion over someone else because we just can't celebrate the fact that some people have been blessed as well.

These attitudes don't come from a love for Jesus, but a love for the world.

So John says, "You know, you got to examine yourself."

- "Am I a Christian or not?"
- Is my decision making guided by Scripture or by my eyes, my pleasures, and my arrogance?
- Am I making spiritual progress or am I immature because I like to be in the church, but I live according to the world?"

Then, he closes on a positive note in Verse 17. "***The world and its desires pass away.***"

You know, there will be a day when there's no more lust, no more coveting, no more jealousy and no more boasting. There will be none of that.

This fallen and messed up world is just passing away. It's under God's righteous judgment and it's being demolished.

What John is saying is, "Don't put your heart here. Don't attach yourself to this world. Don't attach yourself to this world because it's in the process of dying.

He says, "***but whoever does the will of God lives forever.***"

This is the person who lives by Biblical virtues, not the world's virtues.

Here's the sad thing, some of you are not Christians or some of you have been living as if you were not. The sad thing is that many people live according to the values of the world, and they don't know there is any alternative.

- They don't know that you don't have to be proud. Humility is better.
- They don't know that you don't need to be a sexual deviant. You can love your spouse.

- They don't know that you don't need to get your identity out of what you have and what you do. You can get your identity out of a loving heavenly Father and what he's done for you and the Lord Jesus.
- They don't know that there is a reality of grace and hope with God that's available to them.

They don't know. But, the more you read the Bible, the more you will be aware that that is available to all who turn from their sin and trust in Jesus, who loves them so deeply.

We need to understand, that we as the church have been called to redeem all that God made good and that has been taken and made bad by the evil one.

Our choice is very simple: The world or Jesus.

There are really only two options. You can't have your cake and eat it too.

As John, a pastor writes to this church and in some translations, calls them his beloved, I call out to you today with all my heart... I want Jesus for you!

But to do that, you're going to need to make that choice. With our Bibles open, examining ourselves, and moving forward in our relationship with God at different levels of maturity.

For some, it is becoming a Christian today saying, "I've been living a worldly life. A life opposed to the life of Jesus. I want to become a person who loves Jesus with all, not some of my heart." You do that by turning from sin, trusting in him. He died for your sin. He will love and forgive you. Jesus is God. That's how you get your sins forgiven.

Some of you are immature. You need to apologize to God and you need to repent. You need to open your Bible and you need to grow up, take responsibility for yourself and stop expecting everyone else to keep an eye on you and to stop making excuses to God for your behavior.

Some of you are mature and you're growing, and you should just spend some time thanking God because you're seeing progress and fruit, and you're doing the will of God.

John wrote this letter that the church may have confidence in the knowledge of Jesus and what he has done for them.

My friends, may you know that...

- We don't need to live in the world. We can the fullness of life in Jesus.
- We don't need to live in the shadow of death. We can have life.
- We don't need to be in bondage to sin. We have an advocate in Christ before God that gives us freedom.
- We don't need to live in the darkness. We can live in the light.

And so today, may we begin by examining ourselves and asking the question: Do I really love Jesus?

I can't think of a better way to begin this summer of love, than by affirming our commitment and allegiance to the one is worthy to be loved – Jesus Christ.

Lord Jesus, we do love you. We thank you for an opportunity to study. God, some of us are just worldly. We're not Christians. We have values and attitudes and actions and reactions that are just not wise. They're not Biblical. They're not right.

God, some of us are immature. Maybe we're people that should know better, but we just don't have any discipline or we don't have any consistency. We pray you give us the grace to make some progress.

Some of us, God, are brand new Christians. We're fired up. We're excited. We're hopeful. We just got to keep learning, keep growing. We pray, Lord God, that you who have begun that good work in us would just continue and see it through to completion.

God, there's a lot of people in this room that I know personally that are growing. They're maturing. They're making progress. Their lives are coming together. Their hearts are in the right place and they love you.

They're strong, which is a good thing, and they're in the process of overcoming the evil one. God, I pray you would really encourage them today. I pray you let them look back on the few years and just see all the good things that you've empowered them to resist and to overcome and to accomplish, and God, some are mature, and I pray that they wouldn't denote themselves that way in pride, but simply just recognizing that they do love you.

They've walked with you for a lot of years. They know the Bible, and they know you, and they have good things to say, and they have good ways to lead, and they have good life to share. God, we invite them to step forward and to help others because they are a tremendous gift to us all.

Jesus, we love you. We thank you that we don't have to be in the world, and we pray that as we study the Scriptures that it would live in us and that it would help us move forward, closer to being with you and because of your grace, ultimately, to be like you.