

# The Source of Christian Joy

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Today's scripture reading is from 1 John, chapter 2, verses 1 to 14, as printed in the liturgy.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says, I know him, but does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

But whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him. Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

[ 1 : 16 ] Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.

Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness, and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, thank you for that scripture reading, Catherine. Good morning, Christ Church. My name is Andrew, one of the pastors here, and we're glad to be worshiping with you together this last Sunday of Easter, this Ascension Sunday.

[ 2 : 42 ] So before we get into God's word, will you join me in prayer? Lord God, we come before you looking to hear from you a fresh word about how to live in this broken world.

God, we come before you lamenting the wickedness that we continue to witness this 27th school shooting just this year in this country, God.

And you know that this is not the way things were meant to be. We know this is not the way things were meant to be, so we come before you and ask that you would show up, that you would make a difference, make a change.

And would you start with us, God? Would you start with us as we listen to what you have to say, as we consider our responsibility, our complicity with the darkness that we witness all around us?

Would you bring us to repentance, God? And as we repent, would we come to know the beautiful grace that you love to show us in Christ? And would we be messengers of that grace in this world that sorely needs it, that sorely needs your transformation and healing, God?

[ 4 : 07 ] We pray for the families who've lost so much this week and then the weeks before as well, God. We thank you that you're the God of all comfort, you're the God of hope, and you're the God of transformation.

Lord, make us a people who are about all that you are because that's what the world needs. So would you, even as we come before you with heavy hearts, impress upon us the importance of following you and listening to you and walking in your way because every other way is death, Lord.

And we want to live in your life, light, and love. Hear our prayers in the name of Jesus. Amen. Amen. Good morning, Christ Church. Again, I'm Andrew, and it's good to worship with you on this last Sunday of Easter.

You know, I was really proud of myself this past Monday. I usually don't start my sermon until like Wednesday or Thursday, but I was really proud of myself because this Monday, Monday night, I had my introduction done, I had my three points, we were ready to go.

Eric had his songs lined up, they were very celebratory, celebratory, and we were going to celebrate this last Sunday of Easter, this Ascension Sunday. We were going to continue our series in 1 John. I knew exactly what I was going to talk to us about.

[ 5 : 35 ] And then Tuesday happened, right? These tragic events on Tuesday. 22 people, right, made in the image of God, killed. 19 children, third and fourth graders, two elementary school teachers.

My sister's an elementary school teacher, and of course, the shooter himself, deeply troubled. And after the events of Tuesday, you know, I just couldn't read this text the same way.

And I knew I couldn't preach this text the same way. And we scrapped the songs that we were going to sing because we couldn't sing the song, we couldn't sing, oh, for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise, not because he's not praiseworthy, but just because that's not the moment.

This is not the moment for that. So I'm coming before you, having scrapped my sermon, started over on Wednesday, because I just couldn't read the text in the same way.

And you know, this text that Catherine read for us is a text about knowing God, and it's about knowing that we know God. And we're definitely going to touch upon that today, and especially as we go on in this letter, because that's a huge theme in the letter of 1 John.

[ 6 : 40 ] But today, I'm going to take it in a slightly different direction. And you know, in seminary, I'd probably get an F for how I'm about to handle this text. And I don't want to encourage us to just read the Bible however we want, right?

However it just makes us feel good, or makes it feel relevant to us. I want us to read the Bible as it calls us to read it. But I also believe that the Scriptures are infinitely rich, and full of applications that are worthy of pausing to explore, even in some of the minor details.

All right, so with that big caveat, I want to start by drawing our attention to verse 1, where it says, my little children. My little children.

I could not read that this week in the same way anymore. My little children. Now when we read that in verse 1, what do you sense? You hear the tenderness, right?

You hear the affection, a glimpse of the heart behind the writing of 1 John. There's this sense of a fatherly or a motherly responsibility that the apostles have extending beyond their own biological children.

[ 7 : 47 ] They see themselves as parents that long for all the people under their care to thrive. And while this was probably written in a church context where the writer felt parental responsibility for this particular community of faith comprised of all kinds of people, not just children, people of all ages calling them children though, I still think it's fair to draw a particular point of application and it's this.

God's people ought to be marked by a concern for children who aren't our own. God's people ought to be marked by a concern for children who are not our own.

That's important to us here at Christ Church. That's why we've committed 12 grand to Harbor House this year to serve the children of Oakland. We're trying to serve them meals at their summer camp this summer.

This is why we love to partner with Foster the City and we have families in this church supporting foster families in the Bay Area. This is why Christ Church loves to, we've given thousands of dollars, committed lots of time to shopping and organizing and praying for and listening to other families trying to help them stay out of the foster system through our care portal ministry.

This is why many of us, what, we support Compassion International. We give and we support children, right? Even one of our elders, Karen Weslowski, is on the board of Compassion International. This is about, this is what we're about here.

[ 9 : 05 ] We love children but guess what, Christ Church, our work is not done. Our work is not done. On Tuesday's events have made it clear that there's still far more to do for the children of our society.

And I think we all intuitively felt that this past week when we heard the tragic news, right? Oh God, no, not the children, not our children.

See, we, the children of God, we must care about the children of our society who are not our own. both the overlooked children inside the womb and the rest of the children outside of the womb.

These children outside of the womb for whom firearms, not car accidents, not COVID, not illnesses, but guns are the leading cause of death in this country.

It is ridiculous. It is unacceptable. And we have got to care about this. And we have got to care in prayer as people on our knees saying, God, we are helpless and apart from you we can do no good thing.

[ 10 : 14 ] So help us because we and our world are in a hopeless downward spiral. We must care in prayer. We must also care in action, Christ Church.

Not just folding our hands in prayer, but extending our hands in care. Loving our neighbors in the name of Jesus and in his sacrificial manner. Giving our time, our talent, and our treasures.

Investing in the children of our society. Raising our voices in their silence. Stewarding our influence for their good. Building and modeling strong families and inviting those with no families into our own.

We must take civic responsibility. We must take our civic responsibility so seriously. We must study the intricacies of public policy and make informed votes. Not so easily swayed by the simplistic tribalistic partisanship that is tearing our nation apart.

And we must also not vote out of mere self-preservation or self-protection, but for the greater good of our communities. And then on a personal level, we also need to keep our eyes out for those amongst us.

[ 11 : 18 ] Those who are on the margins. Those who are at risk and unsupported. Possibly hurting more than we can see on the surface. We must pursue people with compassion and curiosity and interest.

The ministry of just being a friend. Because you know, it's not just the murdered children that came to my mind as I read this opening verse and contemplated the tenderness of this my little children.

I also thought about the shooter himself. Salvador Ramos, right? And I wondered who, if anyone, ever spoke to him so tenderly and with such affection.

Whoever took ownership of him as their beloved child. Yes, there are a ton of complex, multi-layered and interrelated dimensions to this tragedy, but I couldn't help notice the profile of this shooter who seemed not to have much of a fatherly presence in his life.

Whose family has a background of trauma and brokenness and drug use and felony. And it just made me wonder, you know, like, whoever spoke tenderly to him?

[ 12 : 27 ] Whoever called him their own? Whoever wrote him love letters, affectionate letters, longing for him to thrive, running to him in order that he might not sin? Verse 1, my little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

See, this thing that we do when we open up the scriptures, when we open up these letters, this letter here in 1 John, this opening up of God's word when we preach it, when we encourage you to dig into these Bible plans that we have, you know, I'm not saying that reading the Bible is some magic button that's gonna get rid of sin altogether, but could it be that when we open up these scriptures, when we look at a letter like 1 John, could it be that the stakes are higher than we realize when we open up God's word and it calls us away from sin?

Could it be that this repeated message we hear over and over and over again from the Bible to not sin, this super basic message, right? Could it be that that might actually be the voice of God trying to get our attention?

Yeah, okay, pastor, I know, I know I'm not supposed to sin, but do we really know? Do we really realize the stakes of sin?

No, even for myself, I normally am not stirred by a verse like this because it just seems so cliché, right? So cliché, oh, of the Bible telling me not to sin? Shocking, right?

[ 13 : 55 ] But then Tuesday happened, and I was like, maybe that we should not sin isn't so basic, isn't so common sense after all. Like thinking about this shooter, contemplating the reality of my own potential for egregious sin, that is in me as well.

It made me think, what if this is exactly what we need to hear? And often, my little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

Like what if what we needed was someone lovingly calling us their own children and tenderly persuading us to not sin? Maybe that's exactly what we need after all, right?

Yeah, we all know the Ten Commandments, we all know, everyone knows, thou shalt not murder. Who needs to be told that, right? Well, apparently, we, our society, still very much needs that message.

See, Tuesday's tragic events should open up our eyes to see that a line like this, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. It isn't about just modifying some religious behavior.

[ 15 : 07 ] It isn't about restrictions on your pleasure, fun, and freedom. This is life and death stuff. Yes, some sin is more heinous than other sin. And not all sin leads to immediate death, but all sin does lead to eventual death in one way or another.

So we need to remember. We need to remember even as we think, we already know, okay, okay, okay, I know I'm not supposed to sin. We need to sober up and remember that these things aren't written to just get us to be better rule followers.

Goody two-shoes, these things are written because the way of sin is the way of death. The way of sin is the way of death. And the reality is that there is sin in each and every one of us.

Yeah, sure, there is definitely a lot of blame and fault that we can identify and cry out against outside of us. Yes, I'm going to admit that. We should hold people and institutions accountable.

And we can talk about how better gun control or red flag laws or law enforcement or healthy thriving families. We can talk about responsible parenthood and poverty relief and mental health services or even just friendship and kindness on the playground, right?

[ 16 : 20 ] We can talk about all the millions of factors that could have led and contributed to a far less tragic day this past Tuesday in Uvalde. But even as we seek to call out injustice in this world and even as we seek to demand that other people and other institutions change, Michael Jackson had it right.

We need to start with the man in the mirror. Our pursuit of justice, it needs to always include critical self- examination and a pursuit of justice and righteousness in our own hearts and in our own lives before our God.

It's true that we don't even have enough fingers. We don't even have enough fingers to point at all that went wrong, all the things that went wrong leading up to all the shootings in Buffalo and Laguna Woods and Uvalde.

But at the very least, let us not forget to use each of our two thumbs to consider our responsibility, our complicity in all the darkness and in all the tragedy in this world.

Salvador Ramos' sin is his sin for sure, but it is our nation's sin as well. It is mine and it is yours. And no, maybe it wasn't your mean, bullying words that put these specific shooters on their paths.

[ 17 : 45 ] Maybe it wasn't your prejudices that influenced them. Maybe it wasn't the drugs that you enjoyed in college that came from the same source as the source that got Ramos' mother hooked.

But imagine what kinds of toxic effects our many instances of unkindness and prejudice and reckless consumption may actually have had that we just have no idea about.

It's like dumping trash and pollution into the ocean, right? We may never know the full effects of our sin and our selfishness and our negligence on every sea creature.

We might not see that turtle that goes into that plastic thing that holds the cans, right? We might never see the turtle suffer from that. We might never see the rest of the world suffer because we threw some trash into the sea.

We may never know how much our unkind words have influenced our children and how they've harmed others on the playground. We may never know how much we've perpetuated toxic masculinity and the objectification and trafficking of human bodies when we view pornography.

[ 18 : 51 ] But God's word tells us that our sin is not without effect. Probably way more devastating, probably way more corrupting than we could imagine.

Even if they have not led to mass school shootings, our sins, our failure to live God's way and to love our neighbors has left our world drastically, drastically damaged.

And events like Tuesdays have to sober us up to this reality. We cannot be cool with sin. We cannot be cool with sin. To quote the 17th century Puritan theologian from Oxford, John Owen, we must be killing sin or sin will be killing us.

Because that's what we're witnessing happen in these shootings. Sin is killing us. This exhortation to not sin, this is not a religious game.

This is an exhortation to not participate in death. This is an invitation to life. I mean, so serious is sin, as it says in verse 2, it demands propitiation.

[ 19 : 59 ] It demands the satisfaction of justice and the appeasement of wrath against all that dishonors God and destroys this world. It is right to be furious at the evil that happened on Tuesday.

It is in alignment with the heart of God whose wrath burns against injustice. But guess what? There is a wrath against each of our sins too.

For all the havoc that our sins have wreaked upon this world that God made and that God loves. So as we go through this letter, 1 John, for the rest of the summer, please, Christ Church, please hear these words and take them to heart.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if you're like me, you're like, oh shoot, well too late, right?

I already did. I already do. And I know I will again. Well then hear the rest of the verse in 1 and verse 1 and 2. Because this is the gospel. It says, But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous.

[ 21 : 06 ] He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And this is the good news of redemption in Christ. Like honestly, and I don't mean to over-psychologize, I admit I have no idea what was going on in that deranged mind of the shooter in Texas.

But I do wonder, what if he had known this? After shooting his grandmother in the face, what if he had known that even for him, even for a sin so wicked as shooting the grandmother who is housing you in the face, what if he had known that there was still someone willing to advocate for him?

Someone willing to pay the price of propitiation for all the wrath he'd begun to stir up against himself? Might this truth about Christ as advocate and propitiation, might it have freed him from feeling like he might as well just go all the way, give himself completely to the way of death and visit Robb Elementary School?

See, I'm not up here trying to convince you of a religion. I'm not trying to modify behavior up here. I'm not here to just share a mythological feel-good story.

This is real-life stuff. This is divinely inspired truth that has the power to transform and change the world and to save lives both now and into eternity.

[ 22 : 34 ] All right. I hope I've made clear the seriousness of sin and the glory of God's grace in Jesus Christ. And I hope you can see that if this is all true, then it is of the utmost importance that we know this God, that we know this Jesus person as our advocate and as our propitiation, that there's nothing more important than knowing Jesus in this personal way, nothing more important than being, as it says in verse 5, in him.

There's nothing more important than being united with Jesus. And you know, 1 John is written to help people discern whether they really did know Jesus, whether they really did belong to him.

It was written to help people know whether or not they really had an advocate, whether or not they really had propitiation for their sins. It was written to show them what it looks like to know God.

See, one thing that you need to know about this letter, 1 John, is that it's written to a Christian community that's seen some attrition. In chapter 2, verse 19, the letter refers to some people who it says, went out from us, but they were not of us.

For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us, but they went out that it might become plain that they all are not of us. So what 1 John is, is a letter to those who have remained but are sad and hurt and confused because of all the losses they've seen in their community.

- [ 23 : 56 ] Especially because those who left were saying and teaching and believing things quite different from what these readers were taught from the beginning. Those who had left believed different things about who Jesus was.

Those who had left believed different things about what was sin and darkness and about what was righteousness and light. And so you can imagine all the seeds of confusion and distraction and doubt sown among this church.

So a big theme in this letter, 1 John, the purpose of this letter, as we'll see throughout, is what does it look like to really know God? How do I know that I am in a right and proper relationship with Him?

How do I know that Jesus is actually advocating for me and that His blood is the propitiation for my sins too? 1 John wants to make clear how we can know that we know God.

And here's the answer in verse 3. And by this we know that we have come to know Him, drum roll, if we keep His commandments. If we keep His commandments.

- [ 24 : 57 ] We know Him if we keep His commandments. If we do not sin. Verse 4. Whoever says, I know Him, but does not keep His commandments, is a liar. And the truth is not in him.

But whoever keeps His word, in Him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in Him. Whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked.

We know that we know God when we walk in His way, when we obey His commandments. Now there are two things I want to say about that though. First, we need to be clear what this is not saying.

This is not saying that you need to obey God perfectly in order to have a real relationship with Him. This is not saying that obedience is the grounds for union with God.

No. Obedience to God's commandments, keeping His word, and walking in the same way as Jesus are not what establish our relationship with God. They are evidences of our relationship with God.

- [ 25 : 54 ] They are not the cause but the effects that demonstrate we actually know Him. So he's not saying obey so that you can have a relationship with God. He's saying obey because you already have a relationship with God.

Look at verses 12 to 14. He says, I'm writing to you not to sin because your sins have been forgiven. Because you already know God, the Father who is from the beginning. Because God's word is already in you and in Christ and by His Spirit you've already overcome the evil and the victory is already yours.

He's already said it is finished. We do not earn a relationship with God through obedience. We live out our relationship with God through obedience. Alright, but now the second thing I want to say is that while the grounds of our union with God is faith alone.

A genuine faith is never alone. A genuine faith is always accompanied by the pursuit of obedience. For how can we say we know God in a personal and intimate way as the maker and sustainer and redeemer of the world and not walk in His way and have no desire to submit to Him?

How can we say we know Jesus and abide in Him and admire Him as the way and the truth and life and yet not walk in His way of life? Now the Spirit of God who united us with Christ in the first place and who continues to dwell within us, He is too powerful and He is too loving to allow for such dissonance.

[ 27 : 19 ] And I know that this talk about obedience, right, it might seem like so dutiful, right, and so unromantic, so far from how we understand love. But I want to challenge us to think about it.

Because if you think about it, there is no such thing as real love apart from covenantal commitment and submission. There's no such thing as real love apart from covenantal commitment and submission.

Think about marriage. If I say that I know and I love my wife and that I'm invested in my union with her, does that mean I should have no duty or obligation to consider what she desires and asks of me?

No, in fact, it is because I love her that even when she asks me to clean the toilets and change the diapers, in a truly loving relationship, fulfilling my duty to her and doing things I don't want to do is beautifully transformed into delight.

And that's the thing that grows love. And I think Jesus Himself understood this and He wanted this for us when He said, If you love me, you will obey my commandments. That's what Jesus said.

[ 28 : 29 ] If you love me, you will obey my commandments. So 1 John is unambiguous. If we know and love God, we will obey God. If we are united with Jesus, we will walk in His way and we will keep His word.

And thus God's love, which brought us to Himself in the first place, God's love will continue to work itself out in us unto the perfection of all that we were meant to be.

And this is good news. This is good news because this is the very process by which God is making us people of love, people who walk in life, light, and love. And this brings me to verses 7 through 11.

God wants us to be people of love. 1 John makes explicit what the way of Jesus is and what the ultimate command is that evidences our relationship with God. Verse 7. Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning.

The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

[ 29 : 38 ] Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

How do we know we know God? What does it look like to walk in the light? What is the command we must obey that demonstrates our union with Christ? Well, it's the old command we've known from the beginning that we must love our neighbors as ourselves.

An old command and a new command, finally fulfilled and freshly mandated in Christ, who is the light of the world, who came into our darkened dwelling to love his neighbors, even us.

Not simply through charity or random acts of kindness or in some kind of fleeting romantic way, but with his whole life poured out for us unto death on a cross to be our advocate and to be our propitiation.

See, in Jesus, this old and crusty and hard to obey command of loving our neighbors as ourselves, it becomes fresh and it becomes new and it becomes inspiring for us to obey.

[ 30 : 53 ] First John will later say, we love because he first loved us. We love because he first loved us. So Christ Church, the question for us is, will we?



Will we love? Will we love or will we walk in darkness, blind and having no real idea where we are going, stumbling around to our own destruction and the destruction of others?

Do we believe that we've been loved first by a God who so loved the world that he gave us his only son? Do we believe in a heavenly father who voluntarily opted to identify with a pain and an anguish, not unlike those 22 grieving families in Uvalde, a God who did so in order to redeem this world?

And if we believe that he loved us at this great a cost, well then how then can we do anything but love him and our neighbors? And what effect might that have on this broken world?

Christ Church, how will we love this week? How will we love this week and so prove to be Christ's disciples? How will we love this week and thus bear witness to the power of God's love for us and for our world?

[ 32 : 15 ] May we see his love perfected in us and in every object of the love we pour out in his precious name. Will you pray with me? Amen. Lord God, we want to be these people of love that you called us to be.

We find it hard though because mostly we just love ourselves. So would you place before us, would you cause us to behold the love of Christ?

The one who loved us, who gave himself for us, the one who showed us the greatest act of love.

And would that change us? Would that change and transform us in such a way that changes and transforms the world around us, this world that is so devoid of love?

Start with us, Lord. Start with us gazing upon the Savior. And transform us into the people of life, light, and love that you want us to be.

[ 33 : 29 ] For your glory and for the good of our world, we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.