

# What are You Doing?

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 12 August 2001

Preacher: Canon Dr. J.I. Packer

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Now we ask, gracious Father, that you will open your word to our hearts and open our hearts to your word, that we may receive the things belonging to our life, our joy, and our peace.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen. In this set of studies, we are seeking to focus and hear the message of the first letter of John, which is a message of God, a message of God the Father to the children in his royal family, a message of Jesus Christ through the Apostle John to his disciples, a message of the Holy Spirit through one of those 66 books which he inspired for our learning. And the message has its application to us, just as it had to those to whom John first wrote. And I've tried to point out something of that application by the questions round which I've hung these expositions.

And today's question, as you see from the program, is, what are you doing?

Which I suppose is a heavy question. It sounds heavy. It is heavy. It's a question that comes from authority.

[ 1 : 5 1 ] That's a question that would only ordinarily be asked by someone who has authority to say what we should be doing.

And it's against that background that he or she inquires what we are doing. Parents ask children, what are you doing?

Employers ask their employees, what are you doing? Schoolmasters ask the students, what are you doing?

Trainers and coaches ask the people who are learning the skills and the strokes, what are you doing? The question itself is a prelude to checking and probably correcting, as probably there's need to correct or the question would never have been asked.

Well, I don't apologize for the question, although I suppose its overtones may seem a little discouraging at first, because in this second chapter of John's first letter, the apostle is being heavy.

[ 3 : 0 6 ] He's writing as an apostle. And he's writing in terms of the expectations and hopes that apostles had in those whom they disciplined.

And I guess you remember things that happened in the church or churches to which John is addressing himself, which had shaken those who still remained.

There had been a massive exodus, you see. And some folk who had given their hearts to a different doctrine altogether from that which John had taught them, had decided to pack their bags and leave.

And John knows that those who stayed behind, the rump, we may call them, they've been shaken and they've been thrown into uncertainty.

And John is anxious about them. And so he writes this letter to settle them and stabilize them and make sure that their roots remained anchored where their roots should be.

[ 4 : 1 6 ] So you've got him reminding them of his expectations, reminding them of his teaching in past days, and saying to them in effect, I hope you are staying steady with all of this despite what's happened, and I hope you always will.

And that's the overtone of his question, what are you doing? Which question hangs over the whole of the chapter from beginning to end.

Well, let's look through it and see what there is here for us. I'm going to suggest that there are no less than seven expectations that John is appealing to in this chapter.

Four of them take the form, I hope you will keep saying yes to this. And three of them are taking the form, I hope you will always say no to that.

Look through with me and see this. I hope, says John first, that you will keep saying yes to holiness.

[ 5 : 41 ] I wonder if you know the name of Charles Simeon, the great evangelical leader of 200 years ago. Charles Simeon once said his purpose in preaching was always threefold.

To humble the sinner, to exalt the Savior, and to promote holiness. Well, in the very first verse of this second chapter, it's on page 221 if you want to check it up.

I'm sorry, it isn't. 222 is correct. Sorry about that. The very first words of the first verse of the chapter, which weren't read to us this morning.

My little children, I'm writing this to you so that you may not sin. And it's sufficient, I think, to say of that.

What indeed the New Testament also says, anything we know we ought not to do, and yet do, is sin.

[ 6 : 50 ] And anything that we know we ought to do, and yet fail to do, that's sin too.

There are sins of commission, and there are sins of omission. There are sins of doing, and sins of leaving undone. Well, says John, I'm writing to you in order that you may not sin.

And I suppose straight away, the question comes to our conscience, it certainly should. What does that mean for me?

And then second, keep saying yes, John says, to obedience.

Obedience as the way you understand your relation to Jesus Christ, your Savior and your Lord. Look at verse 3. By this we may be sure that we know him, that is, Jesus, our advocate with the Father, who shields us from the penalty of our sins.

[ 8 : 03 ] By this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. That's obedience. A friend of mine, a Presbyterian minister, I'd better say before I go any further, in his first posturate, flying solo as a very young man in a very rural community, was visited by his two elders who said, look, Walt, we like you, we like your preaching, we want you to stay.

But will you please stop telling us that we've got to change our lives? We like your ministry, but we don't like obedience.

That's what they were telling him. So he started looking around for another place to serve, where the word of God would be better heard. Well, you can see the point, can't you?

I'm afraid that in these days, not everybody who names the name of Christ has much of a conscience about obedience. But for John, it's primary in discipleship.

What are you doing? Are you obeying? That's the question he's pressing. And he develops it a little bit to make sure we'll feel the force of it.

[ 9 : 29 ] He who says, I know him, verse 4, but disobeys his commandment is a liar. Truth is not in him. Which is very forthright, very straight, very clear.

And verse 6, he who says he abides in him, Jesus Christ, the Lord, ought to walk, ought to behave in the same way in which he walked.

And he, you remember, over and over insisted that he was obeying his father in all that he did. He got across people.

He did things which surprised them, bewildered, upset them. But he was obeying his father. That's what I'm here to do, he said, over and over.

I do always those things that please him. So we really do need to ask ourselves seriously, what are we doing in the matter of obedience to Jesus our Lord?

[ 10 : 44 ] And then, John sweeps on to this further thought. Keep saying yes to love.

Love which isn't the same as liking. We have to like people whom sometimes we don't.

We have to love people whom sometimes we don't like. And actually, love isn't a feeling in essence at all. Love's a decision and a commitment.

Love, and here's my favorite definition of love, which some of you will have heard me use before. It's fine, I think.

It's not original to me. I don't feel I can ever use it too often. Love is the purpose of making the loved one great.

[ 11 : 41 ] That's love to God, whom we exalt and make great by our praises and thanksgiving and service, which we honor him.

And that's love to our neighbor, members of our family, those near and dear to us, and our closest friends, whom we seek to make great by serving them in the way that really is service to them in the name of Jesus our Master.

You see, love doesn't indulge the other person really out of indifference. They want it, oh let them have it. End of concern.

Love always asks the question, will this make my neighbor, my child, my friend, great?

Love is the central commandment, which we must always be laboring to obey. Love to God, love to our neighbor, love to our neighbor, and we are called to love. Love is the old commandment that's now become a new commandment because Jesus has promulgated it afresh and he's given us the Holy Spirit to enable us to keep it.

[ 13 : 00 ] Love is the central commandment which we must always be laboring to obey. Love to God, love to our neighbor. See John talking about this in verses 7 through 11.

We've heard them, but let me just read them, or nearly all of them anyway, so that you'll feel the force of them as I trust we all share. Dear loved, I'm not writing you a new commandment, but the old commandment which you had from the beginning, the word which you've heard.

And here it is in verse 9. He who says he's in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still. He who loves his brother and so fulfills the new commandment abides in the light, walks in the light as it was put, remember, in chapter 1.

And there's no cause for stumbling in him, or in it, meaning the way that he's going. But by contrast, verse 11, he who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and doesn't know where he's going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

[ 14 : 25 ] So I think what that means, blundering about in a cellar in total darkness. There are any number of things to fall over, and sooner or later you do start falling over them.

When you're walking in darkness, that's what always happens. Sooner or later you stumble and fall over something you've never seen.

The person in darkness can't see straight, indeed the person in darkness can't see at all. So he falls. Well now, says John, it's those who walk in love who are walking in the light and who are safe from stumbling.

Again, we have to ask ourselves, what are we doing in this matter of love to God and love to our neighbor? And then a fourth thing, which John deals with in the second part of the chapter, keep saying yes.

He says, to the Holy Spirit as your teacher. Now I'm interpreting when I say that, because John doesn't actually use the name Holy Spirit.

[ 15 : 46 ] What he does is talk about the anointing. Did you notice that as the passage was read to us? Verse 20, you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know.

You all have knowledge. So he's able to say in verse 21, I write to you not because you don't know the truth, but because you do know it, and you know that no lie is of the truth.

And you get the anointing appearing again in verse 27. The anointing which you received from Jesus abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you.

As his anointing teaches you about everything and is true and is no lie, just as it's taught you, abide in him.

So what's going on there? Well, it's John referring to the novel doctrine, false doctrine as in fact it was, that had been introduced to the churches, and which the people who'd left had embraced, and which they'd counted, shall we say, as real religion.

[ 17 : 08 ] Real religion, real Christianity, Christianity made modern, Christianity brought up to date, Christianity for our time, so on, so on, so on.

And when the people who'd left behind had said, no, this isn't what the apostles taught us, this isn't Christianity according to John, according to Jesus, according to Peter, Paul, they had said after a certain time, well, we are telling you and you won't receive what we're telling you, so we're saying goodbye to you.

We can't wait around for you. We can't wait around for you. Tuck in the mud. You can't see wisdom when it's dangled under your nose, so we're leaving you behind.

Well, that sort of talk, with which we are, I'm sure, all of us familiar in these days, that's very unsettling.

And it's the unsettling that they've experienced that John is speaking to, when he talks about the anointing, which has taught them, and which has taught them the truth, and which they must stay with.

[ 18 : 26 ] What is that truth? What is that truth? It's the real truth about Jesus Christ. Real truth that he is God, and he is man.

God become man. God become man, 100% divine and 100% human, as he now is. And he came to earth and was incarnate in order to die on the cross for our salvation.

That was the goal for which the Father sent him. And it's through him alone that we have access to God as our Father. And it's through his risen life and power that we can truly say, well, he's still alive.

He's still for real. He's still the Christ with whom we have fellowship. He's still the Christ to whom we've given our hearts. And that is what the Holy Spirit has taught you, says John.

Don't forget that teaching. That's the real thing. If Jesus Christ has begun now to haunt your heart, so that you know he's real, and you know he's with you, and you know you should be abiding in him, and you know he's with you.

[ 19 : 54 ] Well, thank God for that. That's the Holy Spirit. This alternative teaching, which has been offered you, doesn't give you that Savior.

It takes him away from you. It impoverishes the rich. It's ruinous to your souls. It would be idiocy for you to take up with it.

And if you consult your hearts, you'll find that the Holy Spirit is still pointing you to Christ in the way that he does. Because that, of course, is what the Holy Spirit is in the world for.

To point us to Christ through the word of the gospel. To fulfill, again, some of you have heard me say this before, a floodlight ministry, showing the beauty and the glory of Christ to our minds.

And to fulfill a matchmaker ministry, drawing us to Christ in faith, in trust, in reliance, in fellowship, in joy, and in love.

[ 21 : 04 ] And that's what the anointing has given you, says John. Hold on to it. Keep saying yes to the anointing, and the truth that the anointing has brought.

And that means, says John, that I want you to say no to three other things. Say no, first, to letting the world rule your heart.

That's in verses 12 through, sorry, verses 14 through 17. Where there's a lot more than we have time to look at this morning.

But you look at verses 14 through 17, and 15 through 17, and you see John saying, Don't love the world or the things in the world.

If anyone loves the world, love for the Father should come first in our lives, remember. Love for the Father is not in him.

[ 22 : 15 ] What is the world? Well, it's society organized without God. And so it's a value system that leaves God out.

Don't love the world and its ways. Don't let the world's values become your values.

Don't follow the world in forgetting your God. Well, we'll have to leave it there. I wish I had time to dwell on what John goes on to say.

That the spirit of the world is what he calls the lust of the eyes. Sorry, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life.

It's really the spirit of, I want and I boast of what I have. The spirit of lust of the spirit of lust of the spirit.

[ 23 : 22 ] The spirit of lust of the spirit. That's the way of the world. And good gracious, just think. Surround us the whole time. Don't conform to the world. Says John, don't love it, don't let it rule your mind.

And then, don't let antichrist rule your mind. Antichrist? Well, yes, it's a word that John uses freely and nobody is going to misunderstand it.

Antichrist is anybody who is against Christ. And John introduces the word in verse 18.

He says that antichrist is coming. Well, now many antichrists have come. Many people who are against Christ. And John is talking about being against Christ in a particular way.

And he makes clear what that way is in verse 22. Who is the liar, he says, for clarity.

[ 24 : 37 ] He keeps using the contrast between truth and lie. Truth telling and truth believing. And lying, being a liar as the alternative.

I know they're unhandsome words, yes, but you'll agree. They do make the issue plain, don't they?

There is a difference between truth and falsehood. And falsehood is only shown up in its true ugliness when you call it the lie.

Well, that's what John does. And so here we are in verse 22. Who is he, sorry, who is the liar? But he who denies that Jesus is the Christ.

This is the antichrist. Anyone who denies the Father and the Son. Then verse 23.

No one who denies the Son has the Father. I hope it's familiar teaching to us. The people who had left the church had denied the incarnation.

[ 25 : 47 ] Jesus Christ, or whatever else you think of him, was an outstanding man, but he wasn't God come in the flesh. And as a result, they had denied the meaning of the cross, the atonement as we call it.

Jesus as the propitiation for our sins. We're going to hear it indeed in this service before we're through. Jesus Christ, or even if we're through, we're not as a man of sin, but the cross is irrelevant. So the cross is irrelevant to the real Christian message, said these teachers. And Jesus, well Jesus doesn't go on, he isn't the risen Lord, he isn't the one with whom we have fellowship now.

He's simply a figure of history who gave some important teaching, and it's the teaching that we must focus on in these days. That's what these novelty mongers were saying.

And there's John, that's the teaching of Antichrist. It calls itself modern, it calls itself progressive, it's actually ruinous to so.

[ 27 : 07 ] Deconstructing Christianity that way, not the way to go. So again, we have to ask ourselves in the day when so many strange ideas about what Christianity really is are flying to and fro.

What are we doing with our minds? Are we using our minds to get clear about and hold on to the old, original gospel?

Or are we letting our minds puffed up with something? And then the third thing. The way, the climactic thing.

I want you, says John, to go on saying no to letting Jesus Christ, Jesus himself, slip out of your life, letting him go, not abiding in him, or remaining in him, the way that I taught you to.

Those of us who have dogs know the importance of the command, stay. Stay put. Stay there. Don't move.

[ 28 : 32 ] And for the Christian disciple, that phrase, abide in Christ, calling on us to stay.

Maintain the relationship of trust and obedience, and not move. Stay put. In Christ. And John comes to that with great emphasis when, at the end of the chapter, he says, verse 27 again, as Christ's anointing teaches you about everything and is true and is no lie, just as it has taught you, just as I and others speaking in the name of Jesus have taught you, so says John.

Abide. Remain. Stay put in him. And verse 28, now little children, abide in him.

Repetition is for emphasis in the Bible, just as it is in ordinary life. John says it twice to make sure that we shan't miss his meaning or imagine that he's saying something not very important.

Well, it's all pretty fierce stuff, you will agree. But there is in this chapter, right at the heart of it, words of encouragement, as well as admonitions based on John's expectation of how real disciples will behave.

[ 30 : 20 ] Just let me refer to that word of encouragement as I close. Look at your track record, says John, to these folk to whom he's writing.

I'm writing, in verse 12, I'm writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his sake. That's where you are. Don't slip away from that.

I'm writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. You know God already. Don't slip away from that. I'm writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one.

You've recognized that there's evil abroad in the world, evil in the realm of ideas as well as in the realm of ethics, and the devil is behind it, and you've fought him, and you've won so far.

Don't stop fighting. Don't slip away. Overcome the evil one. Stand your ground. Commentators argue, you know, as to whether when John says, first little children, and then fathers, and then children, young men, and then children, and fathers, and young men again.

[ 31 : 41 ] Whether he's separating out his readers into different classes, or whether he isn't rather, as I confess, I think, being a bit whimsical, and saying that everybody, in their different relationships, come in all three categories.

little children, in relation to the apostle, who gives them instruction, as to his own family. Fathers, in relation to other people, whom the Lord has given us to disciple, and try to help forward, in the

Christian life.

Our children, and our friends, and so on. And young men, yes, because the Christian life is a fight, and it's young men who fight best.

I think it's John being whimsical in that way. I can't prove it, but that's what I find in it, and what I share with you, because it does me good to think in those terms.

Then there's the repetition. John says it again, for emphasis. So here you see, in this chapter, you've got expectations. Expectations about the future, where you go from here, coupled with the encouragements, based on John's knowledge, of how his readers got here.

[ 33 : 16 ] How it's been for you, as Christians, thus far. And I think you'll agree, John's a wise pastor, to set it out that way. If the questions, what are you doing, are you getting it right, in this, that, the other department, of your discipleship, if the questions, frighten us, and make us feel, a little cool, in relation to John, and the Bible, we'll balance that, by the encouragement, that John's other words, give us.

Here is John saying, remember how the Lord, has brought you thus far. You've known God. You've got his word, dwelling in you.

You've overcome, the evil one, already, in battle, after battle. Stay with it, says John. Stay put in Christ, so that more, of that triumphant experience, will be yours.

And that's how it may be, brothers and sisters, for you and me. Part of the message, of our Holy Communion service. The message, come home, with great power, to our hearts.

Right now. God bless you. Thank you.

[ 34 : 44 ] See you. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.

Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.