

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ

Acts 10:44–48

Psalm 98

1 John 5:1–6

John 15:9–17

Text: 1 John 5:1

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child.

Introduction

“My mind thinks I’m still 25. My body thinks my mind is an idiot.” Thus begins an opinion piece by Paul Adams, professor emeritus of social work at the University of Hawaii, titled *Minding the Body*. It was an article that probed how we regard the relationship between body and mind (or spirit or soul). Plato pictured the body as a cage in which the soul was entrapped to be released only by death. In some Eastern religions, it might be seen as a coat which one puts on or takes off but which has no life or meaning of its own.

Adams rightly noted that “mainstream Christian (as well as Jewish) tradition rejects this mind–body dualism. It sees the human person as a mind–body composite. It gave an important place to the body. It rejected the idea that the soul was good and the body bad. The human body was God’s creation and was good.” Christian teaching is informed and normed by the event that God becomes human in the man Jesus of Nazareth; he is raised bodily from the dead. While never reduced to his body, Jesus is never Jesus without his body.

What is sometimes described as “body-self dualism” is flourishing in our culture and its followers are legion. Whether in the courts, on campus, or at boardroom tables, it underwrites and shapes the expressive individualism that is culturally ascendant. It has become the new orthodoxy, central to woke ideology and identity politics.

The question of what it means to be human is the question that is at stake in our era. The answer we give has everything to do with how we help our children understand themselves and their lives. The Psalmist says of God, “with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.” (Psalm 36:9) When God comes among us in the human person Jesus of Nazareth it witnesses that the human, in all that comprises the human, is a fit vehicle for God. There is nothing wrong with being human; what went wrong was humans turned away from God. The fact that Jesus was born of a woman witnesses that motherhood belongs to the goodness that is God’s creation of the human.

1. “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God,” thus begins the fifth chapter of the letter of 1 John. Did you notice how the author speaks of Jesus? ‘Jesus is the Christ.’ Why would the Apostle John preach it this way? It is said this way to put the emphasis on Jesus. The man *Jesus* is the Christ (or Messiah). It is bedrock to Christian faith that the human person Jesus, God come in the flesh, is the Christ. Clearly, it is said this way to make an important point. When this letter is written some sixty years have come and gone since Jesus

walked the pathways of Galilee. It is apparent that the author senses the need that some clarification on this point was necessary.

The 'body-mind' or 'body-self' dualism was culturally dominant in the world these first Christians inhabited. They lived in a cultural milieu that was shaped by Plato's understanding of the body as a case for the soul. When converted to Christian faith they brought these often-unexamined assumptions with them. Our experience is different. The Judaeo-Christian understanding of the human as a composite that included the body—while who you are can never be reduced to your body you are nonetheless never without your body—profoundly informed western civilization. We now live in a time when this assumption of what it means to be human is receding in popular culture.

In the churches to which this letter of 1 John is addressed, this dualistic view of the human was infiltrating the church in what is known as Gnosticism. They taught that Jesus is not identical with the Christ. In their view, spirit or spiritual was good and body or physicality bad so the pure spirit of the Christ, they reasoned, could not have a body. The Christ, they said, entered Jesus at his Baptism but exited Jesus before the crucifixion. This is why John will say that Jesus Christ "came by water and blood;" meaning that Jesus Christ was baptized and is also the one who was crucified.

The Apostle John insists that our salvation hinges on the reality that the man Jesus is the Christ. "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God." This image of new birth is the one Jesus used to speak of the regenerating work of God to Nicodemus when he said 'you must be born from above.' We all need this new life given to us, according to the gospel, because we are dead in our trespasses and sins. John insists that this new birth is given us in relationship with Jesus; Jesus gives us salvation by giving us himself.

I underscore this point that Christian faith understands the human person to be a composite being that includes the body because of its implications for living life. What you are always includes your body. Think of a kiss. All kinds of spiritual/personal/self stuff is communicated between two people when they kiss. Messages are being sent and received. But there is no kiss unless the lips meet. A kiss on the cheek is very different than a kiss on the lips. My point to you is that according to the gospel your body is essential to being you. When the gospels describe Jesus' crucifixion, they don't say that the Romans crucified Jesus' body, rather they say the Romans crucified Jesus.

The Genesis story tells us that God made everything good. Because everything God makes is good, Paul insists that the Christians in Corinth should "glorify God in their bodies". In other words, the human body is a fitting vehicle of the glory of God. The Gnostics, who were infiltrating the churches to which the letter of First John is sent, denied this. The human body is vile, they said. Not surprisingly, then, the Gnostics fell into two different patterns of behaviour, both of which are foreign to the Hebrew mind. One was a rigid asceticism. Pleasure of any kind was to be shunned. A second kind of behaviour rooted in the Gnostic contempt for the body was just the opposite. Since the body is bad, invariably bad, incurably bad, why not indulge it? Now if you give people a choice between rigid, pleasureless asceticism and gross self-indulgence, 90% are going to choose the latter. This is why John will underline obedience to God's

commands and also why, in Corinth, the Apostle Paul has to tell them that visiting the local brothels was out-of-bounds for Christians. (1 Corinthians 6:15-16)

2. I invite you to go with me in your imaginations to the night before our Lord gave up his life for us. According to the Apostle John the disciples are now on their way from the upper room to the Garden of Gethsemane. It is while they were walking and talking that Jesus reiterated his new command; “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” These were the same disciples who were arguing earlier before dinner that evening about who would be the greatest.

This command that believers love one another is a constant topic in the letter of 1 John. “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child.” When the Apostle John would say this in his preaching, ‘the child’ refers to ‘believers’—people who have been born of God. A clearer way of translating the Greek text here would be to say, “everyone who loves the one who bears (parent) loves the one who has been born (child) of God.

Go back again with me to Jesus on his way to giving up his life for us; “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love,” Jesus said to his disciples, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.” Again these themes of abiding in relationship with God (faith) and obeying his commands to love one another are staples of the Apostle John’s preaching that we read in this letter of 1 John.

If you were to read commentaries on the portion of 1 John we read today (1-6) you will hear the complaint that John seems to be going around in circles. The themes of love one another, obey God’s commands, faith that conquers the world repeat. Theologians prefer more linear reasoning. Somewhere in your education you were taught the difference between centripetal and centrifugal forces. Centripetal force is defined as, “the force that is necessary to keep an object moving in a curved path and that is directed inward toward the center of rotation,” while centrifugal force is defined as “the apparent force that is felt by an object moving in a curved path that acts outwardly away from the center of rotation.”

A way to understand John here is to try to see these things as he does. Belief, kinship with God and one another, love, obedience, the commandments of God, triumph over the world, and our faith are all elements encircling with each other, held in their orbit by the centripetal force—Jesus! These things that John speaks about in these first 5 verses of the fifth chapter of 1 John are bookended by two assertions about Jesus. Jesus is the Christ and Jesus is the Son of God. The person we meet in Jesus of Nazareth is both human and divine.

Again, go with me to overhear Jesus as he is heading with his disciples to the garden of Gethsemane. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.” When the Apostle John preaches he does so from this experience of Jesus stamped so indelibly in his being that he can’t help being there on that night walking along listening to Jesus. When he calls believers to love one another, repeating

what he heard from the lips of Jesus that night, he is motivated and shaped and informed by the drawing power of the love of the matchless One who lays his life down for his friends.

Everyone who loves the parent (God) loves the child (believers). Or put another way, if Jesus calls you his friend and Jesus calls me his friend that we are bound in friendship by him. The love we are to exhibit for one another as his followers requires at least two things of us. Firstly, I am to make myself loveable—in so far as I am able. We are to abandon prickly ways where we are just daring people to get close. Secondly, I am to treat you and your concerns as more important than me and my own. I am to make an effort for the other. Now, it is easy to imagine that a church full of people, reciprocally being for each other, is indeed a happy place, a safe place, a place where sadness is embraced. I love coming to church because your care of me is uplifting.

I want to underline the ‘one another’ aspect of the love our Lord calls from his followers. The church is to be the incubator for this love that is to spill over into the world and to be the drawing power for calling and sustaining of new believers. It also holds us in the Lord’s love throughout all we face in life. We are also to love the world that our Lord will not abandon. I point out to you that love for enemies is different in that we are not anticipating reciprocation. Love will be limited by that reality. An enemy is not a friend we haven’t met yet; even so, love of the enemy calls us not to treat them with disdain or seek their harm.

I have a picture that I love of one of my grandsons with his father. He is about two years of age and they are assembling the frame of his first big-boy bed; time to say goodbye to the crib. His father has a screwdriver in his hand attaching the sideboard to the headboard and my little grandson, sitting on the floor in front of his father, has a plastic screwdriver in his hand diligently working on something in the middle of this sideboard. Of course he believes he is helping to put his bed together. Why does a little boy want to mimic what his father is doing? You know why—he loves his Dad.

When I think about Jesus’ call to obey God’s commands, I am motivated more to think of obedience as a desire to mimic Jesus in how I live my life. I can’t help but go with John and hear my Saviour speak the words to me as he is on his way to give his life for me. I am compelled by the power of his love for me. What he calls me to obey is surely blessing for my life since he lays down his life to make me his friend. Not to obey is to slight this friendship. And the Apostle John, after years of following Jesus with all the challenges he faced including exile of wind-driven pile of rocks, could say, “and his commands are not burdensome.” And surely John is echoing what Jesus said that night—“I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God; may the joy of believing be yours and mine.