

Introduction

- In his letter, John was writing to those who were already Christians, but who were asking the question:
 - "what does a genuine Christian life look like?"
- A number of ways to take a passage like this, but let me suggest that John answers in three ways:
 - a genuine Christian life... is born of God; (beginning)
 - a genuine Christian life... grows in obedience to God (grows)
 - a genuine Christian life... receives the gift of eternal life (fulfillment, destiny)

A genuine Christian life... is born of God

- He is the instigator, the one who facilitates life, he is the Father
 - even our belief (v.1) in Jesus as the Christ is made possible by the Father life giving;
 - the way the Greek tenses work together in this sentence makes that clear!
- Birth into a loving family
 - love of parent for child (v.2; "by loving God...")
 - love of child for parent (v1; "loves the father...")
 - and love of child for child (v.1; "everyone who loves the father loves his child as well"; child here does not refer to Jesus)
- Reassurance that our status as children of God does not depend on our own behaviour or merits
 - it is God's work, and his alone; he has made us his children through the mysterious combination of divine sovereignty and human free will!!

Testimony (vs.6ff)

- Faith depends on testimony; coming to faith depends on hearing and trusting; three "testimonies" are identified here:
 - Water - Jesus' baptism - identification with us in our humanity and sin; historical event bearing witness to who Jesus is
 - Blood - Jesus' death - sanctification; historical event bearing witness to what Jesus has done
 - Spirit - Jesus' gift to us, the helper, the one who effects transformation in us! Inner testimony pointing us to encounter Jesus himself
- A genuine Christian life... is born of God

A genuine Christian life... grows in obedience to God

- Children grow up!
 - an amazing and disturbing process!!
- Another way of summarising John's teaching is to see throughout the letter three tests that mark out "what a genuine Christian life looks like":
 - test of obedience: a genuine Christian life will be marked by obedience to God's commands, eg v.3
 - test of love: a genuine Christian life will be marked by love for God and for His people, eg v.2
 - test of belief: a genuine Christian life will be marked by belief in Jesus as Saviour and Lord, eg v.5
- Each of these tests involves a degree of growth, of progress:
 - in life, you can't stand still;
 - you are always on the move, its just a matter of where to!!
- And so John's references, here and throughout the letter, to obedience, love and belief are not to just "binary tests" (am I in or am I not?), but pointer's to the direction chosen

- When someone joins the church the vows they take are:
 - do you believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and confess Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?
 - do you promise to join regularly with your fellow Christians in worship on the Lord's Day?
 - do you promise to be faithful in reading the Bible, and in prayer?
 - do you promise to give a fitting proportion of your time, talents and money for the Church's work in the world?
 - do you promise, depending on the grace of the God, to confess Christ before men, to serve him in your daily work, and to walk in His ways all the days of your life?
- Apart from Jesus himself, no-one has ever or will ever live up to that standard!
 - rather, those vows invite us to choose a direction in which to head, a direction that will lead to growth in faith
 - likewise John's tests of **obedience**, **love** and **belief** are all markers of a life directed to growing in faith
- **A genuine Christian life... grows in obedience to God**

A genuine Christian life... receives the gift of eternal life

- And a genuine Christian life is not merely for this life only:
 - Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:19: "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."
 - rather, here is a promise filled with hope
 - this is not a slot machine, "live up to the standard and you earn your wages"
 - rather, it is a promise founded on the present reality!
 - "*And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*" (v. 11)
- That life has already been given, we are already alive with the very life that will bear us to eternity with God!
 - its not a "pie in the sky when you die" situation, but rather a promise that what is will be fully realised into eternity!
- **A genuine Christian life... receives the gift of eternal life**

Conclusion

- A genuine Christian life... **is born of God**
- A genuine Christian life... **grows in obedience to God**
- A genuine Christian life... **receives the gift of eternal life**
- John is not looking to merely check whether we are "in or out", whether we are in the club or not
 - there is an element of discernment about that, certainly - in the context of a heretical split in the church
 - but rather his main burden is that his readers, his "dear children", would show evidence of a genuine Christian life in their lives
 - he is **spurring them on, challenging and encouraging them to grow**
 - **as he encourages us to grow....**