

## JOHN 1

My name is John Immel. I'm really no one from nowhere. But this is not altruism. I'm not known. But I've been around Christianity for the better part of thirty years. I got born again when I was fifteen. It's been a long time. I've been through the United States' various flavors of Christianity, from the Midwest to the West to the East Coast.

I was listening to the radio the other day, and a song by one of our modern philosophers came on. And the lyrics to the song are, "There's something wrong with the world today. I don't know what it is. Something is wrong with our eyes. We're seeing things in a different way. And God knows it ain't His. It sure ain't no surprise." It goes on to tell us that we can't help from falling. This is from a song by Aerosmith, "Living on the Edge." There is something world with the world today. But actually, it isn't inevitable that we fall.

Over the course of the last fifteen years of my life as I was being involved in various flavors of Christianity, I continually find myself running up against the same interaction over and over and over. And, of course, for the longest time, the easy criticism is "It's you. You're the problem." And there are a lot of doctrines within Christianity that affirm, that yeah, it's probably you. If there is a problem, you are probably the problem. But then I began to realize, wait a minute. The same problem exists whether I'm involved in this dynamic or not. How is that possible? How is it possible that I can go from denomination to denomination to denomination, from word of faith to charismatic to Baptist to Methodist, and it didn't matter? How is that possible?

Well, my contribution to the world is I love to think about these kinds of things. I like to think about these kinds of things a lot, which is probably what's mostly got me in trouble with Christianity in general. So the

Gospel According to John Immel, chapter 3:1-3 here's what I came up with. Here was my beginning understanding of what the real issue is in all this world. All people act logically from their assumptions. It does not matter how inconsistent the ideas or insane the rationale. They will act until that logic is fulfilled. Therefore, when you see masses of people taking the same destructive actions, if you find the assumptions, you will find the cause.

Now when I use the word "logic" in this verse, I mean the consistent progression of a given set of ideas. I'm not saying that it is specifically logical or it's accurate thinking. I am talking about how idea A through idea Z go together to create an entire perspective. Yes? Understand? So what I begin to realize, the same people taking the same action produces the same outcome. That's when I realized I understood the dynamic that was at hand.

Let me break this down to section. Verse 1 says assumptions plus logic equals action. Verse 2 says faulty logic or erroneous rationalizations are still ideas that flow from one to the next to the next. Verse 3, mass action plus destructive outcomes equals common premise.

Something is wrong with the world today. But for all of the world history, it's actually been based in the same fundamental assumptions. When you look back through history and you see men taking the exact same steps, coming to the exact same conclusions generation after generation, millennia after millennia, the thing that we had, I decided I had to look up was what was their root assumption? What did they expect of man? What did they expect of life?

The standard reaction when I start talking like this is, "Well, people just need Jesus." That's nice. It's a nice sentiment. Well, other people say, "Well, people just need Buddha." And still other say, "Well, you know, if Islam ruled the world, all the problems would go away." Everybody

assumes that their specific answer is the bromide that fixes the problem without ever addressing the underlying issue that's driving the problem.

Now the issue with faith is people tend to take their faith very personally and very seriously. And they don't really care to evaluate what that means. They tend to assume that faith equals a license to subjectivity, that they're entitled to what that means merely because they happen to believe it. And so the challenge that I have forever run up against is when I start talking about digging into the roots of our assumptions, people say, "You know what? That's complicated. That requires me to think. And I don't really care to do that too terribly much." And I'm sympathetic on many levels to that frustration. Because we would like to say to ourselves, "You know what? The declaration of God's love is so simple. Why on earth does this have to be complicated? Why is it necessarily complicated?" I feel that pain. And that isn't Bill Clinton. I wasn't trying to do a Bill Clinton imitation. I do feel that pain. I do understand that frustration. It seems as if something that is so simple, the process of believing, should be left to that simplicity. But here's the challenge. I contend that it really isn't that simple. Thinking is at no point simple.

And so I was trying to think of a very good metaphor to illustrate the complexity. And here is what I came up with. Throwing a ball seems like a very rudimentary process. You let it go. It goes from point A to point B. But here's the thing. It consistently drops to the earth. So I said to myself, "Self, why does a ball always hit the ground?" Well, I had some very smart people put together the physics of throwing a ball.  $D$  equals distance,  $t$  equals time,  $A$  equals acceleration,  $h$  equals initial height,  $V_0$  equals initial velocity. You can see action formula for what it takes to identify the factors in throwing the ball. Now I'm no math wizard. Math is hard, okay? Two plus two, I get it most of the time. This, I couldn't begin to explain it to you. That's okay. I don't have to. But I want you to understand that the picture of the little guy throwing a football on the beach is actually engaging in exactly that formula right there. That is the

level of complexity that is really involved in throwing a ball from point A to point B.

Well, here's my metaphor with ideas. Thinking is hard because thinking is complex. It is just as complex, if not more complex, than throwing a ball. Because thinking is the mechanics of human action. This is where we get our energy to take action in life. From the time when we are old enough to recognize our own consciousness, to start motivating ourselves through life, the thing that dominates that action every waking moment of our day are the thoughts that we specifically put into action.

And here's the beauty, ideas are as calculable as the mechanics in throwing the ball. Now here's the challenge that I end up confronted with. We want simplicity. We've heard in the series of discussions about the issue of New Calvinism a resurgent Calvinism. A lot of people I think will probably take away from that that it's some kind of grand conspiracy, that if a few misled souls would just kind of getting on the right path, all will be well with the world. No. Conspiracy really does not satisfy the discussion of New Calvinism any more than resurgent move to liberation theology describes why we are treading down the path of Marxism in the United States of America, or why Marxism has tended to dominate the whole of the western world, or why Islam is on the rise throughout the globe.

And unfortunately, Christians, because they prefer conspiracy as a solution, they would rather hear people say the Illuminati or the Bilderbergers, some dastardly mastermind growing his mustache someplace, spending lots of money to compel people to do things and take mass action. We will prefer conspiracy and world masterminds. We will prefer this, because this is easy. Conspiracies are easy. Thinking is hard. We would prefer that it was the devil. The devil made me do it. Flip Wilson, master theology that he was. The devil made me do it. I contend no. The issue is ideas. And ideas are hard. And ideas demand any

individual that chooses to engage them a stunning amount of personal discipline. You must bring your A game every minute of every day that you intend to be about ideas.

So here is the specific problem with my metaphor. And that's the issue of gravity. When you throw a ball, of course, the ball at the end of its trajectory hits the ground. And the existence of gravity within that equation leads people to believe that the ball must hit the ground every time it's thrown. There's some truth to that. And because of that inevitability of that gravity, my metaphor tends to break down because in the grand scheme of ideas, I am overtly saying that we can control what we think. We can understand the progression and the mechanics of our thinking and arrive at a different outcome. And historically, the inevitability of the gravity of human action, the fact that man tends down the path of his own self-destruction over and over and over, that has been used as a case in point to say that man is in effect depraved. If he were not in fact depraved, he would not end up in the exact same place. So I was thinking about this.

How do I successfully navigate the path of my metaphor of the specific calculations of throwing a ball and the specific calculations of understanding human thought and then subsequent action. And then I realized that throwing a ball in fact does exactly the same thing. The explanation for throwing the ball is not that the ball is pervasively depraved. It's not an effort for the bourgeoisie to sell defective products to the proletariat. Ultimately, in the event with the right effort, with the right calculations, you can in fact throw a ball and it never lands. Now granted, it requires you to get into outer space. Still, you can escape the gravity that drives the ball back to earth. Yes? Therein lies the consistency with my metaphor. I contend, I submit, forgive me for being a little too hostile. I submit that ultimately, when you challenge the assumptions that have dominated the whole of the western world, you

can arrive at a new set of assumptions and those assumptions can defy the gravity that has driven men down the exact same spot.

So remember this? The Gospel According to John 3:1-3. All people act logically from their assumptions. It does not matter how inconsistent the idea is or insane the rationale. They will act until that logic is fulfilled. Therefore, when you see masses of people taking the same destructive actions, find the assumptions and you will find the cause. We're here in this specific session discussing - we are going to ultimately discuss the issue of Calvinism, New Calvinism, and the question is why within this emergent movement do we see such consistent actions, such consistent outcomes, such consistent stories of oppression and domination and coercion? Why from one congregation to the next do you see the exact same outcomes? This is it. But first to find the assumptions, we're going to have to do this.

We're going to have to take on our ideas. Ideas, it takes enormous effort to dissect one's thinking. Enormous effort. By dissect, I mean fully evaluate the content of ideas. This is the process of education and expertise. You can't come to this conversation knowing about half. You can't even come to this conversation knowing about two-thirds. It requires 90 percent commitment at minimum to get the scope of what's in issue. Be specifically aware of one's thoughts. This is the intentional consciousness that I was addressing earlier. From the time you're this big and you say, "I want a cookie," that is intentional consciousness. The day you actually read, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," and you chose to understand what that meant, that was intentional consciousness. And every day after that, if you crack open a book and you read an equation and you determine to understand what the variables within that equation meant, that is intentional consciousness. The moment you said to yourself, "I choose to value that human being over there and marry them," that is intentional

consciousness. It takes enormous discipline to order one's thinking. And by order, I mean to evaluate the progression from A to Z.

In the Gospel According to John Immel, I said it doesn't matter how irrational that progression is. In this instance, logic, real logic, is in fact the evaluation of non-contradictory thinking. Real reason is the determination to understand the overarching mechanics of your own individual consciousness. By order I mean that it's not contradictory, logic. When you say to yourself A plus B plus C plus D, and I do not find any inconsistency in that progression, it takes enormous self-definition. By self-definition, I mean an absolute trust in one's rational faculties. And this requires self-esteem. Bookmark this concept.

This conference opened with the discussion by Paul Dohse about the issue of human competence. We will find that ultimately, the crux of this issue actually resides in the issue of self-esteem. Now this particular term in American culture has been so utterly corrupted that I really cringe to use it. But it still ultimately captures what I'm after, an identification of the effectiveness of self. But you can't get to self-esteem by someone holding your hand and patting the back of your hand and telling them you're okay. You can't get that from here. You can only get to self-esteem by doing the work, overcoming challenges, and succeeding. That's the only way to get there. Everything else you know is fraud. The moment somebody looks at you and says, "You know what? You're really good." And then you look yourself in the mirror and go, "Uh, no, I'm not." You know better.

The definition of human consciousness, the definition of self-esteem, comes from the ability to successfully prevail over challenges. And you will see ultimately this body of doctrine is designed to undermine this at its root. It's designed to undermine man at its most fundamental level. It is designed to eradicate his specific ethical egoistic self.

My last point on this slide, by self-definition, I mean an absolute trust in one's moral responsibility to think. Most people don't understand it that most of the arguments you encounter in almost every part of the doctrinal debate, I do not care whether it is the distinction between sanctification and justification, whether it is your moral right to keep the substance of what you have, these are all moral arguments. It is designed to condemn you at your root to prevent you from having the right to your own self and your moral responsibility for the sum and substance of your own life.

What I've been describing here is called philosophy. In the western world since Immanuel Kant, philosophy has been utterly corrupted for lots of reasons we won't address here. Most people think philosophy is this big academic banging around with beach balls, or they immediately, if you're a Christian, they immediately flip over to Paul's consternation with what you consider to be vain philosophies. Well, whatever Paul's consternation with philosophers and philosophies, here's the reality. It doesn't matter. But they're still here. You gotta figure out how to deal with vain philosophies, so you must necessarily have to understand what good philosophies are.

The content of philosophy is broken down into these four primary areas of study: metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and politics. People often say to me, "John, does that mean to be a good Christian, we have to understand all these words?" No. But here's the thing. I have to ask this question. I have to do my Dr. Phil imitation. How is it working out for us? How are the bromides working? We just need Jesus? How many times have we said that? How many times have we invited people to church? [UNINTELLIGIBLE] 00:20:58. They're not. We know better. We know we don't have anything to offer. That's why we're terrified. We're terrified that we are not successfully engaging the world at large, and we are not. We retreat to the four walls of the church because we're terrified that

some worldly ideas are going to sneak up and bite us in the butt, drag us all to hell. Oh, lions and tigers and tigers and bears. No.

Here's the reality, and here is my challenge. Here is the prevailing challenge before us. The ideas that we have encountered are no accident. This is not happenstance. The source of all world evil can be located in evil ideas. The outcomes of those ideas have been displayed over and over and over. We're confronted with the reality that the fix that we have been offering does not work. One more sermon, one more frothing in the mouth preacher, one more guy pounding his ESV. Whatever. I can tell you now it ain't gonna get any traction. Because at the root of this issue, we must ultimately have the courage to think, and not only just to think but to rethink.

Everything that follows in this conference is founded on this knife edge. Unless people are willing to turn on their minds and challenge their deepest held beliefs, they don't matter. Nothing will change. It won't matter how much we dissect sanctification and justification or the centrality of the cross. It won't matter how many scriptures we stack up in service to pet doctrines. It won't matter how much we rail against misplaced church government. Is it presbytery? Is it democracy? Is it papacy?

Ladies and gentlemen, that has already been done over and over and over, council after council, synod after synod, inter-Nicene fight after inter-Nicene fight. For the first time in history, men must rethink the historical fight from its roots. Mystic despotism, mystic despots have ruled the ruled with portents and disasters for those who dared to live life beyond mediocre. Tyrants can only succeed when men refuse to think. Autocrats rely on being able to compel outcomes because no one opposes their arguments.

And this is the challenge. This is the challenge that I have as a man who is passionate about thinking: to inspire people to engage in complex ideas that drive tyranny. So here's my challenge to those who are listening. Do not be seduced into believing that righteousness is retreat from the world. Do not be seduced into believing that spirituality is defined by weakness and that timid caution for fear of committing potential error is a reason to be quiet. Do not be intimidated by vague, hazy threats of failure. Do not let yourself believe that faith is a license to irrationality. I'm going to say that again to you. This is good. Do not let yourself believe that faith is a license to irrationality. Do not mistake the simple nature of God's love for a justification for simple-mindedness. Do not deceive yourself with the polite notion that you are above the fray, that your right to believe is sufficient to the cause of righteousness. There is no more stunning conceit. Do not pretend that your unwillingness to argue is the validation of truth.

Know this: Virtue in a vacuum is like the proverbial sound in the forest-- irrelevant without a witness. Character is no private deed. To retreat is nothing more than a man closing his eyes and shutting his mouth to injustice. Virtues are not estimates to be wafted gently against evil. Virtues are not to be withheld from view in the name of grace. Virtues are not to be politely swallowed in humble realization that we are all just sinners anyway. Love is not a moral blank check against the endless tide of indulgent action. Love is not blind to the cause and effect of reality. Love is not indifference to plunder and injustice and servitude. The time is now, you men of private virtue, to emerge from your fortress of solitude and demonstrate that you are worthy of a life that bears your name. The time is now, you men of private virtue, to answer Mick Jagger and all the nihilists that insist we are living on the edge and we cannot help but fall. It is time for you men of private virtue to take up the cause of human existence and think.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]