

A study of John's Epistle: The Life That Is Real

An Introduction

DATE: Uncertain. Probably A.D. 85-90.

There is no mention of the persecution under the Emperor Domitian in A.D. 95, so the letter most likely was written before that date. It is thought that the three epistles were written about the same time. Some even feel that 2 John and 3 John were written and sent at the same time as 1 John. If both 2 John and 3 John are personal letters to individuals, they could have easily accompanied the letter of 1 John to the church.

TO WHOM WRITTEN: To the church at large. Note: there is no greeting, farewell, or personal references that would reveal the recipients. This means a most wonderful thing: each local church can look upon 1 John as though the letter has been personally written to it.

Tradition says that all three epistles were written from Ephesus where John ministered during the latter years of his life.

A PERSONAL LETTER AND ITS BACKGROUND

First John is entitled a letter but it has no opening address nor closing greetings such as the letters of Paul have. And yet no one can read it without feeling its intensely personal character.

John Stott points out that all three epistles are found in the earliest Greek manuscripts. There has never been any question about their being Scripture. The earliest reference to the three epistles was by Polycarp (about A.D. 155 in his letter to the Philippians, Phil. 7). But there are what seem to be quotations from the epistles made by earlier writers (Clement of Rome, the Didache, and the Epistle to Diogenetus).

(1) The author as eyewitness to Christ:

The introduction or prologue, 1:1-4, repeatedly emphasizes the eyewitness nature of the testimony contained in the letter. 1 John 1:1, in particular, places special emphasis on what the writer himself has heard, seen, gazed upon, and touched.

(2) The authoritative tone of the letter:

The remainder of the letter appears to be written with an attitude of assumed authority. Obedience to what the author has written is clearly assumed (1 John 4:6). There is to be no compromise with the error of the adversaries, which is condemned outright (2:18-19, 4:1-3). The tone set by the epistle as a whole is certainly one of apostolic authority, and this would be consistent with the assignment of authorship to John the Apostle.

(3) The assumed familiarity with the readers:

It is clear from the author's repeated use of terms of endearment like "little children" to refer to his readers (2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21) that he is well known to them, and this may well explain the omission of the author's name: he was so well known to the readers that no introduction was necessary.

THE FALLING AWAY

By A.D. 100 certain things had almost inevitably happened within the Church, especially in a place like Ephesus.

(i) Many were now second or even third generation Christians. The thrill of the first days had, to some extent at least, passed away. Wordsworth said of one of the great moments of modern history: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive."

In the first days of Christianity there was a glory and a splendour, but now Christianity had become a thing of habit, "traditional, half-hearted, nominal." Men had grown used to it and something of the wonder was lost. Jesus knew men and he had said: "Most men's love will grow cold" (*Matthew* 24:12). John was writing at a time when, for some at least, the first thrill was gone and the flame of devotion had died to a flicker.

(ii) One result was that there were members of the Church who found the standards which Christianity demanded a burden and a weariness. They did not want to be *saints* in the New Testament sense of the term. The New Testament word for *saint* is *hagios*, which is also commonly translated *holy*. Its basic meaning is *different*. The Temple was *hagios* because it was *different* from other buildings; the Sabbath was *hagios* because it was *different* from other days; the Jewish nation

was *hagios* because it was *different* from other peoples; and the Christian was called to be *hagios* because he was called to be *different* from other men.

There was always a distinct cleavage between the Christian and the world. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus says: *"If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you"* (John 15:19).

"I have given them thy word," said Jesus in his prayer to God, "and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14).

All this involved an ethical demand. It demanded a new standard of moral purity, a new kindness, a new service, a new forgiveness-and it was difficult. And once the first thrill and enthusiasm were gone it became harder and harder to stand out against the world and to refuse to conform to the generally accepted standards and practices of the age.

(iii) It is to be noted that *First John* shows no signs that the Church to which it was written was being persecuted. The peril, as it has been put, was not persecution but seduction; it came from within.

That, too, Jesus had foreseen. *"Many false prophets," he said, "will arise, and lead many astray"* (Matthew 24:11).

This was a danger of which Paul had warned the leaders of this very Church of Ephesus when he made his farewell address to them.

"I know," he said, "that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves will arise men, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29, 30).

The trouble which *First John* seeks to combat did not come from men out to destroy the Christian faith but from men who thought they were improving it. It came from men whose aim was to make Christianity intellectually respectable.

They knew the intellectual tendencies and currents of the day and felt that the time had come for Christianity to come to terms with secular philosophy and contemporary thought.

THE CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

What, then, was this contemporary thought and philosophy with which the false prophets and mistaken teachers wished to align the Christian faith? Throughout the Greek world there was a tendency of thought to which the general name of Gnosticism is given. The basic belief of all Gnostic thought was that only spirit was good and matter was essentially evil.

The Gnostic, therefore, inevitably despised the world since it was matter. In particular he despised the body which, being matter, was necessarily evil. Imprisoned within this body was the spirit of man.

That spirit was a seed of God, who was altogether good. So, then, the aim of life must be to release this heavenly seed imprisoned in the evil of the body. That could be done only by a secret knowledge and elaborate ritual which only the true Gnostic could supply.

THE FALSE TEACHERS

With that in our minds let us turn to *First John* and gather the evidence as to who these false teachers were and what they taught. They had been within the Church but they had seceded from it.

"They went out from us, but they were not of us" (1 John 2:19). They were men of influence for they claimed to be prophets. *"Many false prophets have gone out into the world"* (1 John 4:1).

THE DENIAL OF JESUS'S MESSIAHSHIP

At least some of these false teachers denied that Jesus was the Messiah. *"Who is a liar," demands John, "but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?"* (1 John 2:22).

It is most likely that these false teachers were not Gnostics proper, but Jews. Things had always been difficult for Jewish Christians, but the events of history made them doubly so. It was very difficult for a Jew to come to believe in a crucified Messiah. But suppose he had begun so to believe, his difficulties were by no means finished.

The Christians believed that Jesus would return quickly to vindicate his people. Clearly that would be a hope that would be specially dear to the heart of the Jews.

Then in A.D. 70 Jerusalem was captured by the Romans, who were so infuriated with the long intransigence and the suicidal resistance of the Jews that they tore the Holy City stone from stone and drew a plough across the midst of it.

In view of that, how could any Jew easily accept the hope that Jesus would come and save his people? The Holy City was desolate; the Jews were dispersed throughout the world. In face of that how could it be true that the Messiah had come?

THE DENIAL OF THE INCARNATION

There was something even more serious than that. There was false teaching which came directly from an attempt from within the church to bring Christianity into line with Gnosticism.

We must remember the Gnostic point of view that spirit alone was good and matter utterly evil. *Given that point of view any real incarnation is impossible.* Since the heathen thinkers believed in the essential evil of matter and therefore the essential evil of the body, that was one thing they could never say.

In the early Church this refusal to admit the reality of the incarnation took, broadly speaking, two forms.

(i) In its most radical and wholesale form it was called *Docetism*, which Goodspeed suggests might be translated *Seemism*. The Greek verb *dokein* means *to seem*; and the Docetists taught that Jesus only *seemed* to have a body. They insisted that he was a purely spiritual being who had nothing but the appearance of having a body.

One of the apocryphal books written from this point of view is the *Acts of John*, which dates from about A.D. 160. In it John is made to say that sometimes when he touched Jesus he seemed to meet with a material body but at other times "the substance was immaterial, as if it did not exist at all," and also that when Jesus walked he never left any footprint upon the ground. The simplest form of Docetism is the complete denial that Jesus ever had a physical body.

(ii) There was a more subtle, and perhaps more dangerous, variant of this theory connected with the name of Cerinthus. In tradition John and Cerinthus were sworn enemies. Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 4:14.6) hands down a story which tells how John went to the public bathhouse in Ephesus to bathe. He saw Cerinthus inside and refused even to enter the building. "Let us flee," he said, "lest even the bathhouse fall, because Cerinthus the enemy of truth is within."

Cerinthus drew a definite distinction between the human Jesus and the divine Christ. He said that Jesus was a man, born in a perfectly natural way. He lived in special obedience to God, and after his baptism the Christ in the shape of a dove descended upon him, from that power which is above all powers, and then he brought to men news of the Father who had been as yet unknown.

Cerinthus did not stop there. He said that at the end of Jesus's life, the Christ again withdrew from him so that the Christ never suffered at all. It was the human Jesus who suffered, died and rose again.

This teaching of Cerinthus is also rebuked in *First John*. John writes of Jesus: "*This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and the blood*" (1 John 5:6).

The point of that verse is that the Gnostic teachers would have agreed that the divine Christ came by *water*, that is, at the baptism of Jesus; but they would have denied that he came by *blood*, that is, by the Cross, for they insisted that the divine Christ left the human Jesus before his crucifixion.

The great danger of this heresy is that it comes from what can only be called a mistaken reverence. It is afraid to ascribe to Jesus full humanity. It regards it as irreverent to think that he had a truly physical body. It is a heresy which is by no means dead but is held to this day, usually quite unconsciously, by not a few devout Christians. But it must be remembered, as John so clearly saw, that man's salvation was dependent on the full identification of Jesus Christ with him. As one of the great early fathers unforgettably put it: "He became what we are to make us what he is."

(iii) This Gnostic belief had certain practical consequences in the lives of those who held it.

(a) The Gnostic attitude to matter and to all created things produced a certain attitude to the body and the things of the body. That attitude might take any one of three different forms.

(1) It might take the form of asceticism, with fasting and celibacy and rigid control, even deliberate ill-treatment, of the body. The view that celibacy is better than marriage and that sex is sin go back to Gnostic influence and belief-and this is a view which still lingers on in certain quarters. There is no trace of that view in this letter.

(2) It might take the form of a contention that the body did not matter and that, therefore, its appetites might be gratified without limit. Since the body was in any event evil, it made no difference what a man did with it. There are echoes of this in this letter. John condemns as a liar the man who says that he knows God and yet does not keep God's commandments; the man who says that he abides in Christ ought to walk as Christ walked (1 *John* 1:6; 2:4-6). There were clearly Gnostics in these communities who claimed special knowledge of God but whose conduct was far removed from the demand of the Christian ethic.

In certain quarters this Gnostic belief went even further. The Gnostic was the man who had *gnosis, knowledge*.

Some held that the real Gnostic must, therefore, know the best as well as the worst and must enter into every experience of life at its highest or at its deepest level, as the case may be. It might almost be said that such men held that it was an obligation to sin.

(3) There was a third kind of Gnostic belief. The true Gnostic regarded himself as an altogether spiritual man, as having shed all the material things of life and released his spirit from the bondage of matter. Such Gnostics held that they were so spiritual that they were above and beyond sin and had reached spiritual perfection. It is to them that John refers when he speaks of those who deceive themselves by saying that they have no sin (1 *John* 1:8-10).

Whichever of these three ways Gnostic belief took, its ethical consequences were perilous in the extreme; and it is clear that its last two were to be found in the society to which John wrote.

(b) Further, this Gnosticism issued in an attitude to men which was the necessary destruction of Christian fellowship. We have seen that the Gnostic aimed at the release of the spirit from the prison house of the evil body by means of an elaborate and esoteric knowledge. Clearly such a knowledge was not for every man. Ordinary people were too involved in the everyday life and work of the world ever to have time for the study and discipline necessary; and, even if they had had such time, many were intellectually incapable of grasping the involved speculations of Gnostic theosophy and philosophy so-called.

This produced an inevitable result. It divided men into two classes-those who were capable of a really spiritual life and those who were not.

The Gnostics produced a spiritual aristocracy who looked with contempt and even hatred on lesser men. The consequence was obviously the annihilation of Christian fellowship. That is why John insists all over his letter that the true test of Christianity is love for the brethren:

- If we really are walking in the light we have fellowship with one another (1:7).
- He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in fact in darkness (2:9-11).
- The proof that we have passed from dark to light is that we love the brethren (3:14-17).
- The marks of Christianity are belief in Christ and love for the brethren (3:23).
- God is love and he who does not love does not know God at all (4:7, 8).
- Because God loved us, we ought to love each other; it is when we love each other that God dwells in us (4:10-12).
- The commandments is that he who loves God must love his brother also, and who says he loves God and at the same time hates his brother is branded as a liar (4:20, 21).

THE IDEA OF GOD

John has two great things to say about God. God is light and in him there is no darkness at all (1:5). God is love and that made him love us before we loved him and made him send his son as a remedy for our sins (4:7-10, 16). John's conviction is that God is self-revealing and self-giving. He is light, and not darkness; he is love, and not hate.

THE IDEA OF JESUS

Because the main attack of the false teachers was on the person of Christ, this letter, which is concerned to answer them, is specially rich and helpful in what it has to say about him:

(i) Jesus is he who was from the beginning (1:1; 2:14). When a man is confronted with Jesus, he is confronted with the eternal.

(ii) Another way of putting this is to say that Jesus is the Son of God and for John it is essential to be convinced of that (4:15; 5:5). The relationship of Jesus to God is unique and in him is seen God's ever-seeking and ever-forgiving heart.

(iii) Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah (2:22; 5:1). That again for him is an essential article of belief. It may seem that here we come into a region of ideas which is much narrower and, in fact, specially Jewish. But there is something essential here. To say that Jesus is from the beginning and that he is the Son of God is to conserve his connection with *eternity*; to say that he is the Messiah, is to conserve his connection with *history*. It is to see his coming as the event towards which God's plan, working itself out in his chosen people, was moving.

(iv) Jesus was most truly and fully man. To deny that Jesus came in the flesh is to be moved by the spirit of Antichrist (4:2, 3). It is John's witness that Jesus was so truly man that he himself had known and touched and handled him (1:1, 3). No writer in the New Testament holds with greater intensity the full reality of the incarnation. Not only did he become man, he also suffered for men. It was by water and blood that he came (5:6); and he laid down his life for men (3:16).

(v) The coming of Jesus, his incarnation, his life, his death, his resurrection and his ascension all combine to deal with the sin of man. Jesus was without sin (3:5); and man is essentially a sinner, even though in his arrogance he may claim to be without sin (1:8-10); and yet the sinless one came to take away the sin of sinning men (3:5). In regard to man's sin Jesus is two things.

(a) He is our *advocate* with the Father (2:1). The word is *parakletos*. A *parakletos* is someone who is called in to help. The word could be used of a doctor; it was often used of a witness called in to give evidence in favour of someone on trial or of a defending lawyer called in to defend someone under accusation. Jesus pleads our case with God; he, the sinless one, is the defender of sinning men.

(b) But Jesus is more than that. Twice John calls him the *expiation* for our sins (2:2; 4:10). When a man sins, the relationship which should exist between him and God is broken. An expiatory sacrifice is one which restores that relationship or, rather, a sacrifice in virtue of which that relationship is restored. It is an *atonement* sacrifice, a sacrifice which once again makes man and God *at one*. So, then, through what Jesus was and did the relationship between God and man, broken by sin, is restored. Jesus does not only plead the case of the sinner; he sets him at one, with God. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin (1:7).

(vi) In consequence of all this, through Jesus Christ men who believe have life (4:9; 5:11, 12). This is true in a double sense. They have life in the sense that they are saved from death; and they have life in the sense that living has ceased to be mere existence and has become life indeed.

(vii) All this may be summed up by saying that Jesus is the Saviour of the world (4:14). Here we have something which has to be set out in full. "The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (4:14). We have already talked of Jesus as pleading men's case before God. If we were to leave that without addition, it might be argued that God wished to condemn men and was deflected from his dire purpose by the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But that is not so because for John, as for every writer in the New Testament, the whole initiative was with God. It was he who sent his son to be the Saviour of men.

Within the short compass of this letter the wonder and the glory and the grace of Christ are most fully set out.

Bulletin Article: The Fruit Of Fellowship With Christ

There are two of Jesus' disciples whom I would particularly like to have known in the days of their earthly life. One is Peter, and the other is John. I like these two men. I am especially impressed by the change that fellowship with the Lord Jesus produced in their lives. This is what intrigues me about these two.

Peter, as you know, was erratic, impulsive, brash. As someone has well said, "Whenever Peter enters a scene, it's always with a thud." He seems to have a gift for putting his foot in his mouth -- he suffered from hoof-in-mouth disease. Yet the Lord made him a steady, stable, dependable rock, as his name implies. He became a rallying point, a gathering point for the Christians in the days of the persecutions which broke out in the first century. It was only because he was with the Lord, and knew the Lord. Most of the change took place after the Lord's death and resurrection, however, so we do not need to feel that it was the personal presence of Jesus that changed these men. He changed them after he died and rose again, just as he can change us.

John was the other one who was dramatically changed by our Lord. He was a young man, the youngest of all the disciples. In fact, many scholars feel that he was a teenager when he first started to follow the Lord. Perhaps he was seventeen or eighteen years of age. Along with his brother, James, he was a hot-headed young man, given to sharp and impulsive utterances with a tendency toward blowing off steam. He was probably a loudmouth, because Jesus nicknamed him Son of Thunder. That was our Lord's gentle way of labeling John's problem. He just kept the thunder rolling all the time. So our Lord called both James and John Sons of Thunder.

But John became the apostle of love. He was noted for his gentleness and his graciousness and his goodness. He was called "The Virgin." As far as we know, he never married. There is no record that he ever did. But he was called "virgin" primarily because of the purity of his life. He became a man who was characterized by such an outstanding devotion and love for the Lord Jesus, that all his life he was singled out as the apostle of love.

Now it is this John who writes these letters to us. You may know that this first letter of John is possibly the last of the New Testament to be written. It may well have been written after the Gospel of John. It is perhaps, therefore, the last word we have from the apostles. It undoubtedly comes from near the close of the first century, perhaps even the year 100 A.D., as some scholars tell us. It was written from the city of Ephesus, where John spent the latter years of his life.

It was possibly written to the Christians in this city of Ephesus, who were facing -- as we are -- dangers and difficulties of living in a godless, pagan world, given over to the worship of sex and to licentious practices, lovers of human wisdom (as all these Greek cities were) and especially desirous of exalting man and his abilities.

Now that sounds very much like our modern western world, doesn't it? First John was written to people in this kind of situation then, and therefore it has a lot to say to us.

In one of the commentaries of First John, the author says, "The Epistle of First John defies outlining." For many years, I would have agreed with that statement. I thought John was kind of a rambler. He just wrote on and changed the subject frequently. It did not look as if there was any rhyme or reason to his letter. But as I preached through a series of thirty-five messages on this letter, I began to see its makeup.

John is concerned about one thing, primarily, and that is authentic Christianity! I suppose that even as early as the close of the first century, some of the dullness and deadness and drabness with which Christianity has sometimes been plagued, had begun to appear. The freshness, the vitality, the newness, the excitement, the drama of the Christian faith had begun to lose its glow and its glamor.

John, therefore, is led of God to call people back to the vital things, the things that make for real life. So he is concerned about an authentic Christian manifestation, and authentic Christianity is always made up of the same three elements.

The body of this letter of First John is an emphasis upon the three essential things that make Christianity genuinely Christian. They are truth, righteousness, and love. Those three, held in perfect balance, are a sign of genuine Christianity. These become, therefore, the marks that John emphasizes as proof to anyone that he or she is a Christian. The letter gives us a wonderful measuring stick whereby we can test our own lives. How are we doing? Do we fulfill the qualifications? Do we manifest truth, righteousness and love? There is a prelude that I will discuss in a minute, but beginning at verse eighteen of chapter two, and carrying on through chapter four, verse twenty-one, you have his emphasis on these three things: truth, righteousness and love.

But before he begins that, he gives us a prelude, which is really the key to the way truth, righteousness and love can be made manifest in your life. There is a relationship that is necessary. That relationship John terms *fellowship with Christ* -- oneness with him, an identification of your life with Jesus Christ. Now if you do not have that, you cannot produce righteousness, truth and love. It is impossible.

Someone has said that it is possible to search through all the writings of Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, Confucius and Buddha, and other great world leaders of moral and ethical thought, to find everything that is written in the New Testament that exhorts man as to what to do. In other words, if all you need is good advice, you do not need the Bible. You can get plenty of good advice from these other religions. But one thing these other leaders do not give you is the how. How! That is what John is talking about.

How do you follow this good advice? You know the Golden Rule is not found only in the New Testament. You find an expression of the Golden Rule, is always in a negative form, in other religions. Do not do to others as you do not want them to do to you. Ah, but in Christ you find the secret of how! It is by unity with him -- union with him; fellowship with the Lord Jesus; he dwelling in you and you dwelling in him. That is what John begins to talk about.

He says from the very beginning that he has a personal experience of this. "I saw him," he says. "I felt him. I heard him. I touched him. He was a real person; there was nothing phony or sham about him. In the fellowship of his life, I found it possible to begin to love, to walk in truth, in obedient righteousness with God," {1 Jn 1:1-2}. That is the heart and key to this letter, as he begins with this note of fellowship with Jesus Christ.

You will notice that all through this letter he emphasizes the fact that Jesus appeared in history. That is the first theme he talks about under the heading of truth. The truth about Jesus is that he is God and man. He is both -- the eternal God, linked with all the great revelations of the Old Testament that mark out the being and character of God -- and he is man; having come in the flesh, he lived among us, was a man, suffered as a man, died as a man. All this, so that we might share his life -- his divine nature.

Now this was opposed to a philosophy that was very current in John's day. It was what we call "gnosticism." The nearest thing to it today is Christian Science, which is almost pure gnosticism. Gnosticism taught that matter is evil and spirit is good. Therefore, the spirit of man is imprisoned in an evil body. The purpose of this life is to teach us how to somehow rise above the evil of our body and release the spirit from the evil, material body, thus achieving nirvana, or heaven, or whatever you want to call it.

Now you will notice that that is still very commonly accepted in many places. It is against that idea that John writes and says, "Now don't follow that," because Jesus has come in truth. The truth about Jesus is that he came as God -- became man -- and anybody who does not say that about Jesus Christ is a liar.

The problem was that there were many people back in those days who were wonderful. They gave the appearance of being suave and gentle and thoughtful and courteous. They were not out to destroy Christianity; they were out to improve upon it. So they just dropped out, de-emphasized some of the things that the New Testament says about Jesus and emphasized others that agreed with what they wanted to teach. Thus, they attempted to make Christianity intellectually respectable.

This process is still going on today. But John says that if you give way to this, if you succumb to this kind of delusion, you will find that you have been tricked and end up not a Christian at all. You will be following a lie and become a victim of a sham and a delusion. The results of that are terrible.

In the second section, the apostle emphasized righteousness. Christianity is not just signing the doctrine or creed. It is not just writing your name under a statement of belief -- "We believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ his Son, our Lord who suffered under Pontius Pilate and was crucified, dead and buried and on the third day..." and so on. It is not that.

It is more than truth. It is also righteousness. It means that your behavior changes. The emphasis of John, as with all the writers of the New Testament, is this: "Look," he says, "if you really have Jesus Christ living in you, you can't be the same person. You cannot go on living in sin, doing wrong things, lying and stealing, living in sexual immorality. You cannot do it."

You see, these Gnostics were saying, "Look, if spirit is good and matter is evil and our bodies are matter, then the only thing that counts is the spirit. What you do with your body doesn't make any difference. So if you want to indulge the lusts of it, go ahead. It won't affect your spiritual standing with God." As a result they were turning (as Jude puts it) the grace of God into licentiousness. People were being taught, Christians were being taught, that they could practice all the immorality of their day, and God would still treat them exactly the same. It would not change their relationship one whit.

But John says,

No one born of God commit sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God. {1 Jn 3:9 RSV}

The two are incompatible. You cannot have the Holy Spirit living in you and live an unholy life. If you live the unholy life and profess to be a Christian, you are a liar, says John. He is very blunt about it.

Yet, there is still a third thing. It is easy for Christians to say today, "Well, yes, this is true. We've got to teach the truth, obey the truth, and believe the truth about Christ. And of course, we've got to stop doing the things the world is doing." That is as far as they go. Have you heard Christians get up and testify along this line? They say, "I used to smoke and drink and dance and go to the movies and play cards and gamble and all these terrible things. But I don't do any of them any more. I believe in the Lord. I've stopped all these things." They leave the impression that it ought to make everyone become a Christian, to see such a tremendous change.

But what you discover, soon enough, is that people are not a bit impressed by what you have stopped doing. Not the least bit. Why, worldlings can stop doing these things if they have a good reason. And they do it. If that is the basis of your Christian testimony, you have got nothing more to say than they do. No, the world is not a bit impressed by stopping something.

What does impress them is seeing you do something they cannot do. That is love. That is why John says that the third mark of a genuine Christian is that he begins to love -- not those that love him (anybody can do that, is Jesus' remark) -- but beginning to love those who do not love you; to treat kindly those who mistreat you; to return good for evil and to pray for those who spitefully use you; to welcome and treat kindly those who are against you and are trying to hurt you. This is the mark, isn't it? You no longer treat those who have needs around you with callous indifference, but you respond to them and do not shut them out of your life. John says, "If a man comes to your door and says, 'I'm hungry, and I don't have anything to wear,' and you have what he needs, and you say to him, 'Well, that's all right brother. We'll pray for you. Go away and be filled and be warmed,' it is ridiculous to say that the love of God dwells in you. It is absurd. How can you say that? If you do not love your brother whom you can see, how can you say that you love God whom you don't see?" {1 Jn 4:20}. See how practical he gets in these matters?

So he emphasized that fellowship with the Lord Jesus, a oneness, a day-by-day walk with him, opening your heart to his word, letting his light shine upon you -- thus letting yourself be changed by the power of Christ -- will result in truth about Jesus righteousness in your personal behavior and love toward your brothers, your fellow members of the human race, as well as those fellow members of the church of God.

Then the final result, and the closing note of the letter, is assurance. You know things with a knowledge that is unshakable, which nobody can shatter, and no rational arguments will disturb. You know that what God has told you is true. You know that what he has revealed about the world is true. You have a continually growing certainty that underlies your life.

As we read in John's closing note:

We know that one born of God does not sin, but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. {1 Jn 5:18 RSV}

That is righteousness. We know, he says, that we are of God, the very nature and being of God -- the God who is love -- and that the whole world is in the power of the evil one. That is why they cannot love. They talk about it and they want it. They search for it, but they cannot find it -- because God is love.

We know that we are of God, he says,

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. {1 Jn 5:20 RSV}

What a declaration that is, in an age when everybody is telling us that you cannot know anything for sure, that nobody knows anything for certain. John says that we do. We know. We have been given an understanding.

Here is his final word and it is such an important one. One that I think ought to ring in our ears every day:
Little children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 Jn. 5:21)

Why? Well, because the first and great commandment is, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind," {Matt 22:37b}. That is the chief end of man. And idolatry is loving something else as God. What is an idol? It is a substitute God. Your God is what you get excited about. What you save your money for. What you spend it on. That is your God. What is important to you, that is your God.

Little children -- you who have found the true God -- keep yourselves from these secondary idols, these substitute gods that demand your attention. Give yourself, alone, to the One who can fulfill in you all your heart's desires. It is a great word, isn't it? The word that will lead us safely through all the difficulties along our path.

A study off John's Epistle: The Life That Is Real

“That which was from the beginning” – The Son of God Has Come...Really!

(1 John 1:1-4 NIV) That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. {2} The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. {3} We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. {4} We write this to make our joy complete.

Once upon a time. . . ." Remember how exciting those words used to be? They were the open door into an exciting world of make-believe, a dream world that helped you forget all the problems of childhood.

Then—*pow!* You turned a corner one day, and "Once upon a time" became kid stuff. You discovered that life is a battleground, not a playground, and fairy stories were no longer meaningful. You wanted something *real*.

The search for something real is not new. It has been going on since the beginning of history. Men have looked for reality and satisfaction in wealth, thrills, conquest, power, learning, and even in religion.

There is nothing really wrong with these experiences, except that *by themselves* they never really satisfy. *Wanting* something real and *finding* something real are two different things. Like a child eating cotton candy at the circus, many people who expect to bite into something real end up with a mouthful of nothing. They waste priceless years on empty substitutes for reality.

This is where the Apostle John's first epistle comes in. Written centuries ago, this letter deals with a theme that is forever up-to-date: *the life that is real*.

John had discovered that satisfying reality is not to be found in things or thrills, but in a Person—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Without wasting any time, he tells us about this "living reality" in the first paragraph of his letter.

When John was called he was found mending his nets. John is a mender. His written ministry comes in after the church has been in existence for several decades, and at a time when apostasy had begun to creep in. There was need of a voice to call people back to the original foundations and that is the ministry of the Apostle John. He calls men back to truth. When we begin to drift, when some false concept creeps into our thinking or into our actions, it is John who is ordained of the Lord to call us back, to mend the nets and to set things straight.

Three things are highlighted for us in this introduction: A relationship, a fellowship, and a joy that follows. But it must all begin with this matter of relationship, for John is concerned first about the family of God.

In all probability, John had been released from his imprisonment on the Isle of Patmos and was residing in Ephesus, where he wrote this Epistle. His first statement is extremely meaningful. As the elder statesman of believers, he had seen the diabolical effects of unbelief and heresy in the church. Due to the false teachers, much misunderstanding had resulted, especially among the young believers.

Frequently the illusion was heard, "What shall we believe?" There is only one message to believe: *"That which was from the beginning" (1:1).*

This is the message that proclaims Christ and all that pertains to Him: His miraculous birth, His spotless life, His divine power, His death, and His glorious resurrection.

This is what one must believe if he is to experience eternal life and all of its benefits. God's message must never be changed. While some believers are *"tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness"* (Ephesians 4: 14), those who would experience peace, blessing, and assurance must hold to *"that which was from the beginning."*

"The beginning" spoken of here is the same time referred to in John's Gospel: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God"* (John 1:1-2).

This is the beginning of creation, not the beginning of Christ, for He, the Father, and the Holy Spirit are without beginning. When God's creation began, Christ, with all of His attributes, was existent. In fact, the creation we enjoy is the work of the Son of God who existed eternally before the universe was created.

(Genesis 1:1-2 NIV) In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. {2} Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

(Colossians 1:15-20 NIV) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. {16} For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. {17} He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. {18} And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. {19} For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, {20} and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Thus, what we believe, as followers of Christ, is not new, or even several hundred years old. It is the age-old message of truth which had its derivation in *"the beginning."* It will continue to exist even after the heavens and the earth pass away.

The Apostle Paul had something to say about this message in his valuable treatise on the resurrection:

(1 Corinthians 15:1-5 NIV) Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. {2} By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. {3} For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance : that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, {4} that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, {5} and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

Nothing could be clearer; we *"are saved"* by believing in the crucified and resurrected Christ.

"That which was from the beginning" pointed to a Person. This he substantiated by actual experience: *"We have heard... we have seen. . . we have looked upon. . . and our hands have handled, of the Word of life."*

Doubtless this was written to refute the teachings of a group in the church known as Gnostics. The Gnostics were divided among the Docetics and the Cerinthians.

The errors they taught dealt primarily with the person of the Lord Jesus. The Docetic Gnostics denied the humanity of Christ, saying that He did not have an actual body; He only seemed to have a body.

The Cerinthian Gnostics denied the virgin birth, teaching that Jesus was born of human parents, but at His baptism Christ descended upon Him in the form of a dove, at which time He began to do the works of the Father until the cross, when the Christ departed again from Jesus.

Directed by the Holy Spirit, the apostle sought to combat these errors in his first Epistle. His initial argument is one that cannot be disproved easily, that of a personal relationship and experience. John *"heard"* Christ speak, not once, but innumerable times. Much of what he heard has been recorded for our benefit in the fourth Gospel.

Not only was it by his auditory nerves that John was made aware of the fact of Christ's humanity, but through his sense of vision, as well. He heard Christ speak many, many times, and he also saw Him. What John wrote was not the result of dreams or hallucinations. He actually saw the body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word used for "seeing" embodies more than a visual impression; it has to do with a mental perception.

John thoroughly understood what he saw. He realized without question that he looked upon the Son of God. In addition to hearing and sight, John had physical contact with Christ, having touched His actual body. What greater proof does one need?

One may believe that Jesus was simply a good man, while attempting to pattern his life after Christ's example. This will tend to lift one toward Heaven, but only as he submits to the Son of God as Savior and Lord will he be allowed to enter Heaven. We don't have the option that "Jesus was just a good man" because if that is all that is true, then He was the biggest phony and liar who has ever walked upon the face of the earth!

- *"That which was from the beginning"* is the message every human in the world needs to hear, for it is the message that provides deliverance from all the frustrations and fears of life resulting from the mixed up and chaotic world in which we live. How consoling is the truth that *"if the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed"* (John 8:36).
- It is the message that molds families together and keeps couples from the divorce court as they submit *"one to another in the fear of God"* (Ephesians 5:21).
- It is the message that can stabilize our educational system and train our youth for respectability and worthwhile endeavors, for *"the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding"* (Proverbs 9: 10).
- It is the message that can solve the economic problems of the world, enabling us to recognize where the true values of life really are.
- It will help us to understand that *"a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth"* (Luke 12: 15).
- It is the message that could bring warmth and value to the churches proclaiming the social gospel which is no gospel at all. God warns, *"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves"* (Matthew 7: 15).
- It is the message that could change the course of our civilization from its downward path of destruction to one of prosperity and blessing. It is axiomatic that *"righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people"* (Proverbs 14:34).
- Of course, to be effective, this message must be believed. To be believed, Christ must be received. To receive Christ is to respond to Him through faith with the desire ultimately to be immersed in water in order to receive forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Nothing else will do. There are no substitutes.

It is Christ we need; only as we heed the truth *"which was from the beginning"* can we know life, peace, and happiness.

Recall how Thomas laughed at the report he received from the other disciples of the resurrected Christ. Boldly he affirmed, *"Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe"* (John 20: 25).

Eight days later, as Christ appeared to him in the presence of the other disciples, he was invited by our Lord to reach out his hand and touch the scars. But for Thomas, this was not necessary; seeing was believing; he needed nothing beyond this. Convinced, he cried out, *"My Lord and my God"* (John 20:28).

John went further than Thomas. Not only did he hear and see Christ, he touched Him. There was no question in the apostle's mind about the Son of God being an actual human when He was on this earth. What is so important about the humanity of Christ?

Is it not enough that He is the Son of God? The humanity of Christ is of extreme importance to the child of God. Consider the consoling truths of Hebrews 4: 15-16: *"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."*

Because of His humanity, our Lord understands all about temptation. We have been tempted and have yielded many times. Always, when Christ faced temptation, He emerged victorious. As believers, we too can be victorious. As we unload our cares upon Him and trust Him for His power, we can be *"more than conquerors through Him"* (Romans 8:37).

John described the One he was writing about as "the Word of life." In his Gospel, he presented Christ as *"the Word"*: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth"* (John 1: 1,14).

John also revealed that not only is Christ *"the Word," He is the "life"*: *"In Him was life; and the life was the light of men"* (John 1:4).

In his first Epistle, he combined the two expressions, presenting Christ as the *"Word of life."* Probably no designation could describe Christ better than *"Word of life."*

The same Lord who purchased our forgiveness on the cross gives the victory we cannot accomplish ourselves, but receive by faith as we rely on Christ. Only as we allow Him to live in and through us can we possibly know victory and blessing in the Christian life.

The secret of Christian victory is not found in our fleshly efforts but in the enabling power of Jesus Christ.

Are you allowing Christ, the Word of life, to live through you or are you attempting to do "works of righteousness" in your own strength? Let Him do it.

Only He can, for He is *"the Word of life."* *"The life was manifested, and we have seen it."* God is the only source of eternal life. In His mercy, He *"manifested,"* that is, made this life available to everyone through His Son. This great fact was made known to the world at the incarnation when "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1: 14).

After one has "seen" Christ, he should *"bear witness,"* and show others the *"eternal life"* he has experienced. It is hard to understand how anyone who has entered into a personal relationship with the One who was identical "with the Father" in His deity and authority can overlook his obligation to tell others about Him.

In the fourth chapter of John's Gospel, we are told of one of the great women in the New Testament. She had come to draw water from the well. There she met Christ who spoke to her about the water of life. Profoundly interested, she drank of the water of life and experienced a new life through Christ. Overjoyed, she left her waterpot and hastily returned to the city shouting, *"Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"* (John 4:29)

This woman saw, and then bore witness. *"And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on Him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did"* (John 4:39).

Considering the countless number of new religious movements and cults that are springing up everywhere, it is more necessary than ever that God's people witness. Someone has suggested that there are at least two thousand new religious groups in the United States alone.

(i) He says that he has *heard* Christ. Long ago Zedekiah had said to Jeremiah: "Is there any word from the Lord?" (*Jeremiah 37:17*). What men are interested in is not someone's opinions and guesses but a word from the Lord. It was said of one great preacher that first he listened to God and then he spoke to men; and it was said of John Brown of Haddington that, when he preached, he paused ever and again, as if listening for a voice. The true teacher is the man who has a message from Jesus Christ because he has heard his voice.

(ii) He says that he has *seen* Christ. It is told of Alexander Whyte, the great Scottish preacher, that someone once said to him, "You preached today as if you had come straight from the presence." And Whyte answered, "Perhaps I did." We cannot see Christ in the flesh as John did; but we can still see him with the eye of faith.

(iii) He says that he has *gazed* on Christ. What, then, is the difference between *seeing* Christ and *gazing* upon him? In the Greek the verb for *to see* is *horan* and it means simply to see with physical sight. The verb for *to gaze* is *theasthai* and it means to gaze at someone or something until something has been grasped of the significance of that person or thing. So Jesus, speaking to the crowds of John the Baptist, asked: "What did you go out into the wilderness *to see* (*theasthai*)?" (*Luke 7:24*); and in that word he describes how the crowds flocked out to gaze at John and wonder who and what this man might be. Speaking of Jesus in the prologue to his gospel, John says, "We beheld his glory" (*John 1:14*). The verb is again *theasthai* and the idea is not that of a passing glance but of a steadfast searching gaze which seeks to discover something of the mystery of Christ.

(iv) He says that his hands actually *touched* Christ. Luke tells of how Jesus came back to his disciples, when he had risen from the dead, and said, "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see, for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have" (*Luke 24:39*). Here John is thinking of those people called the Docetists who were so spiritually-minded that they insisted that Jesus never at any time had a flesh and blood body but was only a phantom in human form. They refused to believe that God could ever soil himself by taking human flesh and blood upon himself. John here insists that the Jesus he had known was, in truth, a man amongst men; he felt there was nothing in all the world more dangerous-as we shall see-than to doubt that Jesus was fully man.

John's message is of Jesus Christ; and of Jesus he has three great things to say. First, he says that Jesus was *from the beginning*. That is to say, in him eternity entered time; in him the eternal God personally entered the world of men. Second, that entry into the world of men was a real entry, it was real manhood that God took upon himself. Third, through that action there came to men the word of life, the word which can change death into life and mere existence into real living. Again and again in the New Testament the gospel is called a word; and it is of the greatest interest to see the various connections in which this term is used.

(i) Oftener than anything else the gospel message is called the *word of God* (*Acts 4:31; 6:2, 7; 11:1; 13:5, 7, 44; 16:32; Philippians 1:14; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 13:7; Revelation 1:2, 9; 6:9; 20:4*). It is not a human discovery; it comes from God. It is news of God which man could not have discovered for himself.

(ii) Frequently the gospel message is called the *word of the Lord* (*Acts 8:25; 12:24; 13:49; 15:35; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; 2 Thessalonians 3:1*). It is not always certain whether the Lord is God or Jesus, but more often than not it is Jesus who is meant. The gospel is, therefore, the message which God could have sent to men in no other way than through his son.

(iii) Twice the gospel message is called the *word of hearing* (*logos akoes*) (*1 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 4:2*). That is to say, it depends on two things, on a voice ready to speak it and an ear ready to hear it.

(iv) The gospel message is the *word of the Kingdom* (*Matthew 13:19*). It is the announcement of the kingship of God and the summons to render to God the obedience which will make a man a citizen of that kingdom.

(v) The gospel message is the *word of the gospel* (*Acts 15:7; Colossians 1:5*). *Gospel* means *good news*; and the gospel is essentially good news to man about God.

(vi) The gospel is the *word of grace* (*Acts 14:3; 20:32*). It is the good news of God's generous and undeserved love for man; it is the news that man is not saddled with the impossible task of earning God's love but is freely offered it.

(vii) The gospel is the *word of salvation* (Acts 13:26). It is the offer of forgiveness for past sin and of power to overcome sin in the future.

(viii) The gospel is the *word of reconciliation* (2 Corinthians 5:19). It is the message that the lost relationship between man and God is restored in Jesus Christ who has broken down the barrier between man and God which sin had erected.

(ix) The gospel is the *word of the Cross* (1 Corinthians 1:18). At the heart of the gospel is the Cross on which is shown to man the final proof of the forgiving, sacrificing, seeking love of God.

(x) The gospel is the *word of truth* (2 Corinthians 6:7; Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5; 2 Timothy 2:15). With the coming of the gospel it is no longer necessary to guess and grope for Jesus Christ has brought to us the truth about God.

(xi) The gospel is the *word of righteousness* (Hebrews 5:13). It is by the power of the gospel that a man is enabled to break from the power of evil and to rise to the righteousness which is pleasing in the sight of God.

(xii) The gospel is the *health-giving word* (2 Timothy 1:13; 2:8). It is the antidote which cures the poison of sin and the medicine which defeats the disease of evil.

(xiii) The gospel is the *word of life* (Philippians 2:16). It is through its power that a man is delivered from death and enabled to enter into life at its best.

LIFE WITH FATHER

You will remember that from Paul we learned it was the task of the apostles to lay the foundation of the church, the only foundation which men can lay, which is Jesus Christ. But each of the apostles has a specific function in laying this foundation. Paul does not do the same thing as John, Peter has a different task than Paul or John, and Jude is called to yet another ministry. They all have a very important task, but God commits something original to each of these men to be passed along to us.

Watchman Nee, in his very helpful book, *What Shall This Man Do?* suggests that these three ministries of John, Peter, and Paul can be distinguished by, and are characterized by, the tasks that each of these men were performing when they were called of God:

Peter, for instance, was called as a fisherman, and we are told in the Gospels that the moment of his call occurred when the Lord found him casting a net into the sea. That work of fishing for men is characteristic of the Apostle Peter. He is always beginning things, initiating new programs. To him was committed the keys of the kingdom by which he could open the door to the new things God was introducing. On the day of Pentecost he used one of those keys and as a result caught 3,000 fish in his gospel net. You find that characteristic of this man all through his written ministry.

To the Apostle Paul, however, was committed a different task. When Paul was called he was a tentmaker. He made things. He built things. This, then, was the ministry committed to the Apostle Paul. He is a builder. He not only lays the foundation, but he builds upon it. He calls himself "a wise master-builder" and to this man, this mighty apostle, was committed the task of building the great doctrinal foundation upon which the Christian faith rests.

But John is different than both of these. When John was called he was found mending his nets. John is a mender. His written ministry comes in after the church has been in existence for several decades, and at a time when apostasy had begun to creep in. There was need of a voice to call people back to the original foundations and that is the ministry of the Apostle John. He calls men back to truth. When we begin to drift, when some false concept creeps into our thinking or into our actions, it is John who is ordained of the Lord to call us back, to mend the nets and to set things straight. "

We will find that to be his ministry particularly in these letters. We shall read the first four verses, which constitute his introduction to this first letter:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life -- the life was made manifest and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us -- that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us, and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy [or, your joy] may be complete. {1 Jn 1:1-4 RSV}

Three things are highlighted for us in this introduction: A relationship, a fellowship, and a joy that follows. But it must all begin with this matter of relationship, for John is concerned first about the family of God. John and Peter and Paul all have different ministries, as I have suggested. It was Peter's task to talk about the kingdom of God, Paul about the church of God, but John is concerned with the family of God. These are all the same thing, but they are viewed from three different aspects. It is into the intimacy of the family circle, now, that the Apostle John takes us. Therefore this letter can be properly described as introducing us to life with the Father, the intimacy of the family circle of God.

If you read through the letter, as I hope you will many times while we are studying together, you will find there are four different reasons John gives for writing this letter: One is in the passage just read, Verse 4. "And we are writing this that your joy may be complete." Then in Chapter 2, Verse 1, he says, "My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin." And in Chapter 2, Verse 26, he gives us the third reason: "I write this to you about those who would deceive you." In Chapter 5, Verse 13, he gives us the fourth reason: "I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life."

If you think about these four reasons for a moment you will find something remarkable about them. He is first concerned about the joy of companionship which is, of course, the solution to the problem of loneliness. There is nothing more helpful in curing loneliness than a family circle. When you get lonely where do you want to go? Home, to the family! So John writes, "I write this that your joy may be full," answering the fear and problem of loneliness. Then he says, "I am writing this so that you may not sin." Here he is dealing with another great threat to human happiness, the problem of guilt. Again he says, "I write this to you about those who would deceive you." In other words he is writing to protect us, in order that we might be free from deception. Here is another great problem area of life: Where do we get answers? How do we know what is true? That is what this letter is written for, that we might be free from deception. Finally he says, "I am writing this to assure you" -- that you might find security, freedom from failure. Who of us is not concerned with that? How do you find your way through life successfully? How do we know we are not going to fail? John says, "I write this in order that you might have assurance," be secure, free from failure.

Now let us go back to these opening verses and see what he has to say. These are tremendously important verses. First, he is talking about a relationship:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life -- {1 Jn 1:1 RSV}

It is evident he is talking about a person, whom, he says is "from the beginning." This is one of the favorite phrases of the Apostle John "from the beginning." There are at least three "beginnings" in the Bible:

The Bible opens with the phrases, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," {Gen 1:1}. That is the beginning of the material creation, of matter. How far back it goes no one knows. That verse encompasses the very dawn of creation and it is impossible for us to tell how far back it is. Neither science nor Scripture answers. Science suggest it was millions of years ago, and Scripture is quite ready to accommodate that. As Dr. J. Vernon McGee puts it, "you can go back squillions of years and there is still ample room." The first beginning is the beginning of creation.

Now, in the Gospel of John there is another "beginning." That Gospel begins with these words, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," {John 1:1 RSV}. That beginning goes back before creation. That is the unbeginning beginning, the beginning that is eternal. That simply means at the starting point. We humans have to start somewhere in our thinking. We are finite creatures and we must always have a starting point. We have to start with **A** in order, eventually, to arrive at **Z**, and it is that **A** which John is describing in the Gospel. Before there was anything at all, there was the Word. That Word was a Person, and he was with God, and he was God. That is the farthest point backward that we can go.

But now, in this letter, there is still a third beginning, "that which was from the beginning." Here John does not mean either the time of creation or the unbeginning beginning, the timeless beginning. He is referring to a definite matter here for he uses this phrase many times. Note a few places where he uses it and you will see how he uses it:

In Chapter 2, Verse 7, he says "Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment which you had from the beginning." In Verse 14, he says, "I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning." In Verse 24, he says, "Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father." In Chapter 3, Verse 8, "He who commits sin is of the devil; for

the devil has sinned from the beginning." Verse 11, "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another."

It is difficult to locate this beginning, is it not? It seems to shift from time to time. It is what we might call the contemporary beginning, or, to use a very popular phrase these days that few really understand, the existential beginning. That simply means "the beginning I am experiencing right now." John is really referring to the continuous experience of the Christian life, which is contemporary all the time, new and fresh and vital, a continuous beginning which is eternal. It has been available for all time, but you only began it when you came to know Jesus Christ. The writers of the New Testament began it when they came to know him, and John began it when he first knew him. It relates to him who is from the beginning. Now that is about as far as we can go in understanding that, for this is a timeless beginning that is right now, an eternal now.

It is, however, important, for John warns all through this letter that we must cling only to that which is "from the beginning." If someone comes to you with something new, he says, don't believe it. It must be from the beginning. The cults today say, "Look, we have something different, additional, something that has come along much later in history than the Bible; we have an additional revelation to give you." Say to them, "Keep it. I want that which is from the beginning." John reminds us frequently, go back to that which is from the beginning.

Now he says this one from the beginning is a Person, and he has been seen and heard and handled. In other words, Christian faith rests upon great facts, the acts of a human being in history. We have stressed this before in the writings of the Apostle Paul. Our Christian faith does not rest simply on ideas, or doctrinal statements. That is why becoming a Christian is not simply a matter of joining a church, or believing a certain creed, or signing a doctrinal statement. That has nothing to do with becoming a Christian. John points out that becoming a Christian is to be related to a Person.

All of us are related to someone. We live in families. God delights 'to set the solitary in families.' Children are related to their parents, and parents to their children. Why? Because they share the same life. And that is what makes a Christian, to share the life of God by relationship to a Person, the only Person who has that life, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. At the close of this letter John tells us, "He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life," {1 Jn 5:12 RSV}. It is that simple. No matter how religious you may be, you do not have life if you do not have the Son, you are not a Christian. John makes this crystal clear at the beginning of his letter, calling us back to these fundamental things.

That which was from the beginning, he says, is a real Person. We looked at him, we heard him, we touched him, he actually appeared in history. He is an historical being. We knew him, we had fellowship with him, we lived with him, we ate with him, we slept with him, we heard his words, we have never forgotten them. This is the point to which all objections to Christianity are ultimately directed, an attempt to destroy this basis of fact. The forces which seek to overthrow Christian faith today try to undermine our confidence in the facts of Scripture, these great historical truths about a Person who appeared in time. That is why it is not at all unimportant that we should believe the story as it is recorded in the Gospels. We must believe these facts. We cannot believe merely in ideas, doctrinal statements. We must come down at last to factual things, facts, acts of God in history.

Now that is where John begins. He tells us what he himself experienced. We touched him, he says, we felt his warm, human flesh, we looked into his human eyes, we felt the beating of his human heart, and yet, as we did, we became aware that we were listening to the heartbeat of God, and in contact with the life of God. He took that life and laid it down in order that we might have it. He gave it to us through the cross and that life is what makes us part of the family.

Now he goes on to say, in Verse 2, that this life was made manifest, made visible. Twice he says it. What does he mean by it? He means that this eternal life was visible in the relationship of the Father and the Son. Jesus did not come to show us God, he came to show us man related to God. As you look at the life of Jesus you will see this secret relationship, this lost secret of humanity, this new way by which man is intended to live -- a continual dependence upon the life of the Father. Look at the earthly life of Jesus and this is exactly what you see. He keeps saying, "I don't do these things, it's not I who accomplishes these works, it is the Father who dwells in me," {cf, John 14:10}. He is continually reminding people that he says only what the Father is saying through him that they are not his words, he simply looked to God and trusted God to be working through him, leading him to think the thoughts and to say the things that God wanted him to say. In doing this he expressed exactly the mind of God. It is that life that John is talking about, a new way of living, a new way of reacting to situations in dependence upon God.

"This life was manifest," John says, "and we are going to tell you about it, we are going to proclaim it to you." Then he says that this life will result in two wonderful things: First, fellowship. Here John comes to the most beautiful thing about family life -- fellowship, companionship:

...that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us... {1 Jn 1:3a RSV}

What is fellowship? In the Navy we used to say it was two fellows on the same ship, and there is a sense in which that is true. They do have something in common -- the same ship. That is the basis of fellowship for essentially this word means "to have all things in common." When you have something in common with another you can have fellowship with him. If you have nothing in common, you have no fellowship.

We all have things in common. We share human life in common. Most of us share American citizenship in common. We have many things in common. But John is talking about that unique fellowship which is only the possession of those who share life in Jesus Christ together, who have this different kind of life, this new relationship. This makes them one and that is the basis for the appeal of Scripture to live together in tenderness and love toward one another. Not because we are inherently wonderful people or remarkable personalities, or that we are naturally gracious, kind, loving, and tender all the time -- for at times we are grouchy, scratchy, and irritating to others. But we are still to love one another. That is his point. Why? Because we share life together. We have something in common. We share the life of the Lord Jesus, and therefore we have fellowship with one another.

Ah, but that is not all, and it cannot be all. There is not only the horizontal relationship but that, in turn, depends upon a vertical one. He goes on, "and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." We shall discover, as we go on as Christians, that the horizontal relationship is directly related to the vertical one. If the vertical is not right, the horizontal one will be wrong, and, if it is wrong, it is because something is wrong between us and the Father. If we want to straighten out the horizontal relationship, that of getting along with our fellow Christians and fellow men, we must be sure that the vertical one is straight. Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Now fellowship there means exactly the same thing it means elsewhere. It means having things in common. Here we come to the most remarkable thing about Christian life, communion, or fellowship with Christ. It really takes two English words to bring out what this really means. There is, first of all, a partnership, i.e., the sharing of mutual interests, mutual resources, mutual labor together. God and I, working together, a partnership. All that I have is put at his disposal. Well, what do I have? I have me. I have my mind, my body. True, these are gifts of God, but they are put at my disposal to do with as I please. That is what I have, and now I put them at his disposal. When I do I discover something most remarkable. Everything that he is, is put at my disposal. Is that not marvelous? The greatness of God, the wisdom, the power, the glory of his might -- all is made available to me, when I make myself available to him. This is the great secret of fellowship.

This means that he makes available to me that which I desperately lack, wisdom and power, the ability to do. There are things I know I want to do, things I would like to do because it is his will, what he wants. But I can only do them as I make myself available to him, depending upon him to come through from his side, making himself available to me. Then I discover that I can do what I want to do. That is what Paul says: "I can do all things, through Christ who strengthens me," {cf, Phil 4:13}.

But it is not only partnership, there is also friendship. Friendship and partnership together spell fellowship. Have you ever thought of this, that God desires you to be his friend? What do you do with a friend? You tell him secrets. That is what friends are for. You tell them intimate things, secrets. And God wants to tell us secrets. Jesus said to his disciples, "I have not called you servants, but I have called you friends," {John 15:15}. He said this in a context in which he was attempting to impart to them the secrets of life. Now God will do this, he wants to do it. This is what that wonderful word, fellowship, means.

But it will be as you are able to bear these secrets. As you grow along with him you will discover that your eyes are continually being opened to things you never saw before. God will tell you secrets about yourself, about life, about others around you, about everything, imparting these to you because that is part of fellowship. That is what we are called to. The fellowship is based upon the relationship. You cannot have the fellowship until you first come to Christ and receive him. When you have the Son you are related to the Father, and when you are related to him, you can have fellowship with him.

Then, when you have fellowship, you have the third thing that John mentions. These things we are writing, he says, "that your joy may be full." I want to close on that note for that is where John closes his introduction, but I want to use a

different term than joy. In some ways it is not as descriptive and accurate a term as joy, for joy is compounded of many things. Joy is an excellent word here, but perhaps it will be more helpful for us to understand what John means if we use the word, excitement. "That your excitement may be complete." Joy is a kind of quiet inner excitement and this is what results when we really experience the fellowship that John is talking about.

When we discover that God is actually using us, it is the most exciting and joy-producing experience possible to men. I have seen it happen many, many times. I have seen young people get so excited over this that they literally jump up and down. There is a dear girl in this congregation that cannot relate what the Lord does without literally bouncing as she tells it. I have seen men, familiar with the world of high finance who work continually in the great marts of trade, get so excited over the fact that God was using them in some simple way that they literally trembled as they told it. I have known women who have discovered how exciting it is to have God at work in their neighborhood, using their kitchen, and their coffee pot, that they have not been able to sleep at night. They are overwrought with excitement, with joy. That is what John is talking about, life, as life was intended to be lived, filled with joy.

Oh yes, with many pressures! Do not make the mistake of thinking that the only way to have joy is to be free from pressures or problems. No, take all the pressures and the problems, but with them that wonderful feeling down inside that God is at work, and he is at work in you. You are a vital part of God's program. God is using you to do his eternal work. There is nothing more exciting than that. That is what John is writing about. That is worth listening to, is it not?

Once upon a time. . . ."

Remember how exciting those words used to be? They were the open door into an exciting world of make-believe, a dream world that helped you forget all the problems of childhood.

Then—*pow!* You turned a corner one day, and "Once upon a time" became kid stuff. You discovered that life is a battleground, not a playground, and fairy stories were no longer meaningful. You wanted something *real*.

The search for something real is not new. It has been going on since the beginning of history. Men have looked for reality and satisfaction in wealth, thrills, conquest, power, learning, and even in religion.

There is nothing really wrong with these experiences, except that *by themselves* they never really satisfy. *Wanting* something real and *finding* something real are two different things. Like a child eating cotton candy at the circus, many people who expect to bite into something real end up with a mouthful of nothing. They waste priceless years on empty substitutes for reality.

This is where the Apostle John's first epistle comes in. Written centuries ago, this letter deals with a theme that is forever up-to-date: *the life that is real*.

John had discovered that satisfying reality is not to be found in things or thrills, but in a Person—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Without wasting any time, he tells us about this "living reality" in the first paragraph of his letter.

1 John 1:1-5: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. {2} The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. {3} We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. {4} We write this to make our joy complete. {5} This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."

THIS LIFE IS REVEALED (1 JOHN 1:1)

As you read John's letter, you will discover that he enjoys using certain words, and that the word "manifest" is one of them. "And the life was manifested" (1 John 1:2), he says. This life was not hidden so that we have to search for it and find it. No, it was *manifested*—revealed openly!

If you were God, how would *you* go about revealing yourself to men? How could you tell them about, and give them, the kind of life you wanted them to enjoy?

God has revealed Himself in creation (Rom. 1:20), but creation alone could never tell us the story of God's love. God has also revealed Himself much more fully in His Word, the Bible. But God's final and most complete revelation is in His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Because Jesus is God's revelation of Himself, He has a very special name: "The Word of Life" (1 John 1:1).

This same title opens John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

Why does Jesus Christ have this name? Because Christ is to us what our words are to others. Our words reveal to others just what we think and how we feel. Christ reveals to us the mind and heart of God. He is the living means of communication between God and men. To know Jesus Christ is to know God!

John makes no mistake in his identification of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Son of the Father—the Son of God (1 John 1:3). John warns us several times in his letter not to listen to the false teachers who tell lies about Jesus Christ. "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?" (1 John 2:22) "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God" (1 John 4:2-3). If a man is wrong about Jesus Christ, he is wrong about God, because Jesus Christ is the final and complete revelation of God to men.

For example, there are those who tell us that Jesus was a man but was not God. John has no place for such teachers! One of the last things he writes in this letter is, "We are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is *the true God*, and eternal life" (1 John 5:20).

False teaching is so serious a matter that John wrote about it in his second letter too, warning believers not to invite false teachers into their homes (2 John 9-10). And he makes it plain that to deny that Jesus is God is to follow the lies of Antichrist (1 John 2:22-23).

This leads to a basic Bible doctrine that has puzzled many people—the doctrine of the Trinity.

John mentions in his letter the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. For example, he says, "By this know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God" (1 John 4:2, SCO). Here are references in one verse to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And in 1 John 4:13-15 is another statement that mentions the three Persons of the Trinity.

The word "Trinity" is a combination of *tri-*, meaning "three," and *unity*, meaning "one." A "trinity," then, is a three-in-one, or one-in-three. To be sure, the word "trinity" is not found in the Bible, but the truth is taught there (cf. also Matt. 28:19-20; John 14:16-17, 26; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6).

Christians do not believe that there are *three gods*. They believe that one God exists in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Nor do Christians believe merely that one God reveals Himself in three different ways, much as one man may be a husband, a father, and a son. No, the Bible teaches that God is *one* but that He exists in *three* Persons.

One teacher of doctrine used to say, "Try to explain the Trinity and you *may* lose your mind. But try to explain it away and you *will* lose your soul!" And the Apostle John says, "Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father" (1 John 2:23, NASB). No Person of the Trinity is expendable!

As you read the Gospel records of the life of Jesus, you see the wonderful kind of life God wants us to enjoy. But it is not by *imitating* Jesus, our Example, that we may share in this life. No, there is a far better way.

THIS LIFE IS EXPERIENCED (1 JOHN 1:2)

Read the first four verses of John's letter again, and you will notice that the apostle had a *personal encounter with Jesus Christ*. His was no secondhand "religious experience" inherited from somebody else or discovered in a book! No, John knew Jesus Christ face-to-face. He and the other Apostles heard Jesus speak. They watched Him as He lived with them. In fact, they studied Him carefully, and even touched His body. They knew that Jesus was *real*—not a phantom, not a vision, but God in human corporeal form.

Some twentieth-century student may say: “Yes, and this means that John had an advantage. He lived when Jesus walked on earth. He knew Jesus personally. But I was born twenty centuries too late!”

But this is where our student is wrong! It was not the Apostles’ *physical* nearness to Jesus Christ that made them what they were. It was their *spiritual* nearness. They had committed themselves to Him as their Saviour and their Lord. Jesus Christ was real and exciting to John and his colleagues because they had trusted Him. By trusting Christ, they had *experienced eternal life!*

Six times in this letter John uses the phrase “born of God.” This was not an idea John had invented; he had heard Jesus use these words. “Except a man be born again,” Jesus had said, “he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . . That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, ‘Ye must be born again’” (John 3:3, 6-7). We can experience this “real life” only after we have believed the Gospel, put our trust in Christ, and been “born of God.”

“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (1 John 5:1). Eternal life is not something we earn by good works or deserve because of good character. Eternal life, the life that is real, is a gift from God to those who trust His Son as their Saviour.

John wrote his Gospel to tell people how to receive this wonderful life (John 20:31). He wrote his first letter to tell people how to be sure they have really been born of God (1 John 5:9-13).

A college student returned to the campus after going home for a family funeral, and almost at once his grades began to go down. His counselor thought that the death of his grandmother had affected the boy, and that time would heal the wound, but the grades only became worse. Finally the boy confessed the real problem. While he was home, he happened to look into his grandmother’s old Bible, and there he discovered in the family record that he was an adopted son.

“I don’t know who I belong to,” he told his counselor. “I don’t know where I came from!”

The assurance that we are in God’s family—that we have been “born of God”—is vitally important to all of us. Certain characteristics are true of all God’s children. A person who is born of God lives a righteous life (1 John 2:29). A child of God does not *practice* sin (which is the meaning of the *King James* word “commit,” 1 John 3:9). A believer will occasionally *commit* sin (cf. 1 John 1:8-2:2), but he will not make it a habit to sin.

God’s children also love each other and their Heavenly Father (cf. 1 John 4:7; 5:1). They have no love for the world system around them (1 John 2:15-17), and because of this the world hates them (1 John 3:13). Instead of being overcome by the pressures of this world, and swept off balance, the children of God overcome the world (1 John 5:4). This is another mark of true children of God.

Why is it so important that we *know* that we have been born of God? John gives us the answer: if you are not a child of God, you a “child of wrath” (Eph. 2:1-3) and may become a “child of the devil” (1 John 3:10; and see Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). A “child of the devil” is a counterfeit Christian who acts “saved” but has not been born again. Jesus called the Pharisees “children of the devil” (John 8:44) and they were very religious.

A counterfeit Christian—and they are common—is something like a counterfeit ten-dollar bill.

Suppose you have a counterfeit bill and actually think it is genuine. You use it to pay for a tank of gas. The gas station manager uses the bill to buy supplies. The supplier uses the bill to pay the grocer. The grocer bundles the bill up with forty-nine other ten-dollar bills and takes it to the bank. And the teller says, “I’m sorry, but *this* bill is a counterfeit.”

That ten-dollar bill may have done a lot of good while it was in circulation, but when it arrived at the bank it was exposed for what it *really* was, and put out of circulation.

So with a counterfeit Christian. He may do many good things in this life, but when he faces the final judgment he will be rejected. “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name have cast

out demons? And in Thy name done many wonderful works?' And then will I profess unto them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity'" (Matt. 7:22-23, SCO).

Each of us must ask himself honestly, "Am I a true child of God or am I a counterfeit Christian? Have I truly been born of God?"

If you have not experienced eternal life, this *real* life, you *can* experience it right now! Read 1 John 5:9-15 carefully. God has "gone on record" in His Word. He offers you the gift of eternal life. Believe His promise and ask Him for His gift. "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13).

We have discovered two important facts about "the life that is real": it is revealed in Jesus Christ and it is experienced when we put our trust in Him as our Saviour. But John does not stop here!

(1:1-5) John jumps right into the great subject he wants to cover. There is no greeting and no salutation. What he has to say is of unparalleled importance; he must get right to the point: God's Son has come to earth. God is not living off in outer space someplace like so many people think and say; God has not forgotten the earth. God is not unconcerned and disinterested in the world. The very opposite is true. God loves and cares for us and He has proven it in the most supreme way possible: God has sent His Son into the world.

This is the glorious testimony of John: God's Son has come into the world and His name is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

1. Jesus Christ has always existed (v.1).
2. Jesus Christ has proven who He is (v.1).
3. Jesus Christ has revealed who He is: the Word of Life (v.1-2).
4. Jesus Christ came to earth for the most glorious purpose (v.3-4).
5. Jesus Christ preached the most wonderful message (v.5).

(1:1) **Jesus Christ, Son of God—Eternal—Pre-existent:** Jesus Christ has always existed. This is what is meant by the words "that which was from the beginning." Jesus Christ was existing before the world was ever created. He was living and had always been living. He possessed life—the energy, the force, the power of life. He was the very being and essence of life, the very embodiment of life. Life was wrapped up in Him, for He was the very energy and force of life itself.

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The point is clear: from the beginning Jesus Christ was already there. He did not have a beginning; He was not created. He "was from the beginning with God." Our Lord and Savior knows what the other world is all about, for He has come from there. Therefore, all that He told us is true. We can trust His Word.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Psalm 90:2).

"I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was" (Proverbs 8:23).

(1:1) **Jesus Christ, Deity; Revelation, Proof of—John, Testimony of:** Jesus Christ proved who He is. How? By partaking of human flesh, by becoming a man and letting people hear, see, look upon, and handle him.

1. John and the early believers *heard the Son of God*. The Son of God actually partook of flesh and blood and became a man and *spoke to men* (cp. Hebrews 2:14-15). They heard Him teach and share the glorious news that God loves man, that man can be delivered from sin and death and live forever with God. The twelve apostles and thousands of others not only *heard about Him*, they actually *heard Him* proclaim the words of life. They heard Him deal with individuals and heard Him teach audiences of thousands. They themselves spoke to Him and heard Him speak to them. For three years John and the apostles and many others were in constant conversation with Him, listening and hanging on to every word He said.

One of the great needs of man is a Word from God—a Word that tells us the truth about God and about life—who we are, why we are here, and where we are going.

2. John and the early believers *saw the Son of God with their eyes*. The Son of God actually became a man. Men saw Him in the flesh just as they see all other men. Note: John says they saw Him *with their eyes*. He wants us to know that Jesus Christ was not a phantom, ghost, or spirit. He was real; He had actually partaken of flesh and blood and become a man. He and the others saw Him with their eyes. They were as Matthew Henry says, "Eyewitnesses as well as ear-witnesses" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary*, Vol.6, p.1061).

□ They were witnesses of His life upon earth for three years, from His baptism by John the Baptist to His resurrection from the dead. They saw all his wonderful works: the healings and miracles and good deeds that He ministered to people. They saw the most wonderful event of all, His resurrection and conquest of death for man.

"Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:16-17).

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

□ They were eyewitnesses of His majesty and they declare the truth to us.

"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).

3. John and the early believers *looked upon the Son of God*. This means more than just seeing Jesus Christ in a human body. The Greek word for "looked upon" (etheasametha) means to gaze and look upon for a long time in order to study and understand and grasp. It means to look intensely and earnestly; it means to grasp the meaning and significance of a person. John is testifying that he and the other apostles and believers looked and gazed upon Jesus Christ in order...

□ to study and understand Him.

□ to seek and grasp the meaning and significance of His person.

A person will never see and understand who Christ is by just glancing at Him. If a person wants to know Christ, he has to look intently and seriously; he has to seek to understand if Christ really is who John and other believers claim He is.

4. John and the early believers *handled* Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The word "handled" (epselaphesan) means more than just touching. It means to grope and grasp after in order to understand; to handle in order to examine closely (John RW Stott. *The Epistles of John*. "Tyndale New Testament Commentary," p.60). A.T. Robertson, the Greek scholar, says that it is a graphic word, the very same word that Jesus used to prove that He was not a spirit after His resurrection (*Word Pictures In The New Testament*, Vol.6, p.205).

The Son of God came to earth; He partook of flesh and blood and became a Man just like all other men. He is called Jesus Christ or Jesus the Messiah, the Savior of the world. He was heard, seen, intently looked upon and handled by John and the other apostles and by many others who believed and followed Him. Jesus Christ did everything He could to show man that the Son of God had come to earth—that He had come to save man, to deliver man from this corruptible world of sin and death—that He had come to give man life eternal, the glorious privilege of living in heaven with God forever and ever.

(1:1-2) **Jesus Christ, Person—Revelation—Word, The:** Jesus Christ revealed who He was, the *Word of Life*. This means two things:

□ First, Jesus Christ Himself is *the Word*. Remember what a word is: it is the expression of an idea, a thought, an image in the mind of a person. A word describes what is in the mind of a person. John is saying this: in the life of Jesus Christ, God was speaking to the world, speaking and demonstrating just what He wanted to say to man. This means the most wonderful thing. It means that God has given us much more than mere words in the Holy Scriptures. God has given us Jesus Christ, *The Word*. As *The Word*, Jesus Christ was the picture, the expression, the pattern, the very image of what God wished to say to man. The very image within God's mind of the *Ideal Man* was demonstrated in the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was the perfect expression of all that God wishes man to be. Jesus Christ was God's utterance, God's speech, *God's Word* to man. Jesus Christ was the *Word of life who came to earth to show us that the very energy, force, power, and essence of life is in God and in God alone. Therefore, if a person wants life, he must trust and depend upon God for life. For life in all of its energy and force and being exists only in God.*

□ Second, Jesus Christ Himself is *the Word of life*, the very message of life, the good news (gospel) of life. He is the very embodiment of life, the energy and force of life; therefore, when He came to earth, He brought the Word of life to man. Jesus Christ—His life, His acts, His teaching—tells men how to live. In Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ alone is the Word of life, the Word that tells man how to conquer death and to live abundantly both now and eternally. Jesus Christ is the *Word of life*. This is the great thing that He revealed to man. But note: How did He reveal this great message to man? 1 John 1:2 tells us in clear language. The verse is here given just as it reads in the Greek text:

"(And the life was revealed, and we have seen and bear witness, and report to you the life, the eternal, which was with the Father, and was revealed to us)."

1. Jesus Christ *manifested* or *revealed* the life to us (1 John 1:2). That is, He came to earth and showed us the life that was in Him. He showed us what life is...

- that it is the very energy and force of living forever just as God Himself lives. Life never dies and never ceases to be.
- that it is the very energy and force of living abundantly, of experiencing love, joy, and peace just as God experiences. Life never lacks and never ceases to experience the fulness of life to the ultimate.

The point is this. Jesus Christ revealed who He was; He came to earth and showed us life—showed us that life is in God and in God alone. Therefore, if man wants to really live, he has to put his life into the hands of God, for life exists only in God. God alone can give man life.

2. But Jesus Christ did a second thing: He identified with man. He gave men the opportunity to see Him and the life which He was bringing to man. As covered in 1 John 1:1, men heard, saw, looked upon, and touched Christ. He made Himself available to men, allowed them to use all their physical senses in order to prove that He was indeed the Son of God, the very embodiment of life eternal. He allowed men to use all their physical senses so they could have perfect proof and never be able to question that the Son of God had come to earth, not if they were honest and willing to study and know the truth.

Note the testimony of John: "we have seen and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested to us" (1 John 1:2). There is compulsion here: the witnesses to the Son of God must proclaim the truth. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, has come to earth. He came to bring the glorious message of the Word of life. Men do not have to live in sin and the dread of corruption and death; men can live in the abundance of love, joy, and peace with God, both now and eternally.

False teaching is so serious a matter that John wrote about it in his second letter too, warning believers not to invite false teachers into their homes (2 John 9-10). And he makes it plain that to deny that Jesus is God is to follow the lies of Antichrist (1 John 2:22-23).

This leads to a basic Bible doctrine that has puzzled many people—the doctrine of the Trinity. John mentions in his letter the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. For example, he says, "By this know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God" (1 John 4:2, sco). Here are references in one verse to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And in 1 John 4:13-15 is another statement that mentions the three Persons of the Trinity.

The word "Trinity" is a combination of *tri-*, meaning "three," and *unity*, meaning "one." A "trinity," then, is a three-in-one, or one-in-three. To be sure, the word "trinity" is not found in the Bible, but the truth is taught there (cf. also Matt. 28:19-20; John 14:16-17, 26; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6).

Christians do not believe that there are *three gods*. They believe that one God exists in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Nor do Christians believe merely that one God reveals Himself in three different ways, much as one man may be a husband, a father, and a son. No, the Bible teaches that God is *one* but that He exists in *three* Persons.

One teacher of doctrine used to say, "Try to explain the Trinity and you *may* lose your mind. But try to explain it away and you *will* lose your soul!" And the Apostle John says, "Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father" (1 John 2:23, nasb). No Person of the Trinity is expendable!

As you read the Gospel records of the life of Jesus, you see the wonderful kind of life God wants us to enjoy. But it is not by *imitating* Jesus, our Example, that we may share in this life. No, there is a far better way.

Read the first four verses of John's letter again, and you will notice that the apostle had a *personal encounter with Jesus Christ*. His was no secondhand "religious experience" inherited from somebody else or discovered in a book! No, John knew Jesus Christ face-to-face. He and the other Apostles heard Jesus speak. They watched Him as He lived with them. In fact, they studied Him carefully, and even touched His body. They knew that Jesus was *real*—not a phantom, not a vision, but God in human corporeal form.

Some twentieth-century student may say: "Yes, and this means that John had an advantage. He lived when Jesus walked on earth. He knew Jesus personally. But I was born twenty centuries too late!"

But this is where our student is wrong! It was not the Apostles' *physical* nearness to Jesus Christ that made them what they were. It was their *spiritual* nearness. They had committed themselves to Him as their Saviour and their Lord. Jesus Christ was real and exciting to John and his colleagues because they had trusted Him. By trusting Christ, they had *experienced eternal life!*

Six times in this letter John uses the phrase "born of God." This was not an idea John had invented; he had heard Jesus use these words. "Except a man be born again," Jesus had said, "he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . . That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, 'Ye must be born again'" (John 3:3, 6-7). We can experience this "real life" only after we have believed the Gospel, put our trust in Christ, and been "born of God."

"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1). Eternal life is not something we earn by good works or deserve because of good character. Eternal life, the life that is real, is a gift from God to those who trust His Son and are baptized into Christ.

John wrote his Gospel to tell people how to receive this wonderful life (John 20:31). He wrote his first letter to tell people how to be sure they have really been born of God (1 John 5:9-13).

A college student returned to the campus after going home for a family funeral, and almost at once his grades began to go down. His counselor thought that the death of his grandmother had affected the boy, and that time would heal the wound, but the grades only became worse. Finally the boy confessed the real problem. While he was home, he happened to look into his grandmother's old Bible, and there he discovered in the family record that he was an adopted son.

"I don't know who I belong to," he told his counselor. "I don't know where I came from!"

The assurance that we are in God's family—that we have been "born of God"—is vitally important to all of us. Certain characteristics are true of all God's children. A person who is born of God lives a righteous life (1 John 2:29). A child of God does not *practice* sin (which is the meaning of the *King James* word "commit," 1 John 3:9). A believer will occasionally *commit* sin (cf. 1 John 1:8-2:2), but he will not make it a habit to sin.

God's children also love each other and their Heavenly Father (cf. 1 John 4:7; 5:1). They have no love for the world system around them (1 John 2:15-17), and because of this the world hates them (1 John 3:13). Instead of being overcome by the pressures of this world, and swept off balance, the children of God overcome the world (1 John 5:4). This is another mark of true children of God.

Why is it so important that we *know* that we have been born of God? John gives us the answer: if you are not a child of God, you a "child of wrath" (Eph. 2:1-3) and may become a "child of the devil" (1 John 3:10; and see Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). A "child of the devil" is a counterfeit Christian who acts "saved" but has not been born again. Jesus called the Pharisees "children of the devil" (John 8:44) and they were very religious.

A counterfeit Christian—and they are common—is something like a counterfeit ten-dollar bill.

Suppose you have a counterfeit bill and actually think it is genuine. You use it to pay for a tank of gas. The gas station manager uses the bill to buy supplies. The supplier uses the bill to pay the grocer. The grocer bundles the bill up with forty-nine other ten-dollar bills and takes it to the bank. And the teller says, "I'm sorry, but *this* bill is a counterfeit."

That ten-dollar bill may have done a lot of good while it was in circulation, but when it arrived at the bank it was exposed for what it *really* was, and put out of circulation.

So with a counterfeit Christian. He may do many good things in this life, but when he faces the final judgment he will be rejected. "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name have cast out demons? And in Thy name done many wonderful works?' And then will I profess unto them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity'" (Matt. 7:22-23). Each of us must ask himself honestly, "Am I a true child of God or am I a counterfeit Christian? Have I truly been born of God?"

Declaration -- 1 John 1:3-4

(1 John 1:3-4 NIV) We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. {4} We write this to make our joy complete.

John knew Christ personally. Having walked with Him, talked with Him, and worked with Him, he was motivated by a loving concern to declare to everyone possible "*That which we have seen and heard.*" And once you have experienced this exciting life that is real, you will want to share it with other people, just as John wanted to "declare" it to all his readers in the first century.

Many people (including some Christians) have the idea that "witnessing" means wrangling over the differences in religious beliefs, or sitting down and comparing churches.

That isn't what John had in mind! He tells us that witnessing means sharing our spiritual experiences with others—both by the lives that we live and by the words that we speak.

John wrote this letter to share Christ with us. This word *fellowship* is an important one in the vocabulary of a Christian. It simply means "to have in common." As sinners, men have nothing in common with the holy God. But God in His grace sent Christ to have something in common with men. Christ took on Himself a human body and became a man. Then He

went to the cross and took on that body the sins of the world (1 Peter 2:24). Because He paid the price for our sins, the way is open for God to forgive us and take us into His family.

When we trust Christ through baptism to receive forgiveness off sins, we become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). The term translated “partakers” in Peter’s epistle is from the same Greek root that is translated “fellowship” in 1 John 1:3.

What a thrilling miracle! Jesus Christ took on Himself the nature of man that by faith we may receive the very nature of God!

The Christian life begins with "seeing" and "hearing" Christ. As one realizes who Christ is and humbly submits to His lordship, untold blessing will result. This is our only approach to eternal life. One may be a worthy church member, a helpful citizen, and in the eyes of his peers, a "good man," but until he receives salvation through the Son of God, spiritual truth will be meaningless to him. The moment he believes, the situation will change. That which was of little or no value suddenly becomes understandable and satisfying.

Paul tells of this transforming experience: *(Ephesians 2:1-5 NIV) As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, {2} in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. {3} All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. {4} But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, {5} made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.*

When God saves a person, He goes to the source of the problem, the sinful heart. The repentant believer is changed by the power of God from the inside out.

Spurgeon used to say, "I have gone into my garden, and I have seen a great number of trees that have new branches which have been grafted into them, but I never yet saw a tree get a new heart. I have seen it get new bark, and many changes have happened to it, but it cannot change its heart."

No human can change his sinful heart. He may change his outward appearance, but his heart will remain the same. Unlike the tree, however, God can change a person's heart. When one trusts in Christ, God performs a mighty miracle and the heart of the repentant believer is transformed. The Lord is doing this constantly. Those who come to Him receive new motives, new desires, and new habits. Paul described this wonderful experience: *(2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

The new life is not merely for our enjoyment; it is to be shared with others. *"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."* God never intended that redemption be kept a secret. Those who are truly saved find a happiness such as they have never known before. But happiness is not the basic purpose for which we are saved; it is simply one of the by-products of salvation. We are saved to tell others so they, too, might enter into the joys of everlasting life.

Who of us could receive an inheritance of a million dollars without sharing this news with our friends? Who would be unreasonable enough, after being cured of cancer, to refuse to reveal the name of the surgeon or remedy? Why is it that in the lesser experiences of life we are ready to talk for hours with gratitude and pleasure? Why do we not with the same enthusiasm share Christ with those who need Him? If "we have seen and heard" Christ, we should "declare" Him.

Was our salvation experience real? Were we really "plucked out of the burning" (Amos 4:11)? Or was ours merely an emotional stirring unrelated to the truth of God? It is easy for one to be stirred by the fervor of a zealous preacher in the midst of the excitement of the hour. Perhaps this is the reason why some professed believers do not last. Their profession was shallow and empty, not grounded in God's Word.

A worthy test of one's personal experience with the Lord is what happens afterward. Is there an earnest desire to bring others to the light? Is the heart burdened to lead friends and neighbors to Christ? God says, *"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so"* (Psalm 107: 2). The believer should grasp every opportunity to "declare" Christ.

God assures us that if we have this kind of concern for the lost our efforts will not be in vain, for *"He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.* (Psalms 126:6 NIV)

One of the reasons why we should declare Christ is that the lost "may have fellowship with us." What an amazing fellowship this is! No club, organization, or lodge is comparable to the fellowship of believers in Christ Jesus. Like everyone else, Christians have their weaknesses. They get tired and fussy. They become nervous and irritable at times. But when they are Spirit led and Spirit-controlled, their fellowship is unparalleled.

As true friends, they are always ready and willing to help each other in any time of need. They pray for each other and share each other's burdens. There is a common bond of love among them as the result of their relationship through Christ. Because of His blood, shed at Calvary, Christians are one in Him, regardless of color, social status, or ability.

The fellowship of believers is so unique and wonderful because *"our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."*

It is more than several people gathering together with a common interest to sing hymns and hear a sermon. For those who have not truly been born again, church attendance seems boring and dull. But to those who have truly come to know the Lord, worship with the people of God is most meaningful, for Christ is there. Whether it is in a mud hut in the South Pacific, a crude building in the hollow, or a cathedral on Fifth Avenue, if those worshipping are gathered in the name of Jesus Christ, He is there.

Our Lord said, *"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Matthew 18 :20). Christ is not in one corner or the other. He is not in the pulpit. He is "in the midst." Because He is "in the midst," He is the same to every believer. He *"is no respecter of persons"* (Acts 10:34). All of us are loved equally. No child of God is any more important to Him than another. Whether it is the mill worker, the truck driver, the medical doctor, the chemist, the homemaker, the minister or whatever: we are all one in Christ.

We enjoy fellowship with each other and with Jesus, our Lord. If you have been born of the Holy Spirit, John's words are meaningful to you: *"Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."*

Can one be absolutely certain that he is a part of this fellowship? Maybe you feel that you are, or hope that you are, but there are doubts at times. If you have truly received Christ, there need be no doubts. As you read God's Word and wait on Him, He will give you the confidence that you belong to Him.

If you are wondering how you will know when you are saved, the answer is very simple: "You will know." When one turns to Christ sincerely and invites Him to become Lord of his life through baptism for remission of sins, God enters and the fellowship is established for eternity.

The Holy Spirit will give an awareness of salvation and doubts will be banished. Even though the child of God may stumble and falter at times, Christ is always unchanging in His provision and care. He promises, *"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"* (Hebrews 13:5).

A saintly woman lay dying. Her loved ones were gathered around her bed. Believing she was unable to hear, one of the relatives said quietly, "She's sinking fast." But the aged saint, half opening her eyes, shook her head feebly and whispered, "Oh, no, I am not sinking. You can't sink through a Rock."

Christ is the believer's Rock. If we know Him, we are secure. We may depend upon Him for everything. His sufficiency is adequate. We are His, and He is ours.

At no time will He forget us because *"truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."*

Are you enjoying this fellowship? Do you truly know Christ? I don't mean, do you know about him. Have you entered into a personal relationship with Him, so you can say, "Thank God I am in fellowship with Him. He is my Saviour and Lord."

Don't dissipate the life God gave you. Live it the way He intended, in fellowship with Jesus, the Son of God. That is the happy life. Anything less than this is misery and defeat.

The apostle is concerned that believers do more than enter into fellowship with Christ. He wants them to enjoy the fullness of the blessing of being children of God: *"And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."* There are some believers who possess the assurance of salvation, yet are devoid of the fullness of joy which is theirs in Christ. The fact that some believers possess more joy than others is not that God is more favorable to some. It is a matter of submission to the Lord's control. The more yielded one is to Christ, the greater will be his enjoyment of the things of the Spirit.

This is not to suggest that he will be kept from toil or hardship. It is possible to live in extremely difficult circumstances, yet enjoy peace and confidence unknown to the unyielded life. Satan realizes this. Thus, after he loses one of his possessions to God through the redeeming power of Christ, he does all he can, by way of temptation, to upset the equilibrium of a well-balanced Christian life. This is why the Lord Jesus said, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation" (Luke 22:40). This does not mean that we are to pray that we shall not be tempted or tested. Not only is testing important, it is essential for Christian maturity. We should pray for strength through Christ to be victorious when tempted, for yielding to temptation will rob the believer of the treasure of God's joy.

God never intended that His people be of a sour or doleful disposition. He wants us to "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (I Peter 1 :8). After speaking of the value of abiding in Him and all that is involved in this harmonious relationship, Old Lord said to His own, "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15: 1 I). Consequently, if you are not experiencing this fullness of joy, something is wrong-not with God, but with you.

Fellowship is Christ's answer to the loneliness of life. Joy is His answer to the emptiness, the hollowness of life.

There may be some sin in your life-something which may appear to you to be insignificant. This could be the culprit. By the grace of God, claim victory through Christ and get it out of your life. Adverse feelings you have toward some of your friends will change. Dislike for your employment will disappear. Even disinterest in your daily routine will be remedied.

Where there is resentment, there will be love. Where there is a lack of interest, there will be enthusiasm. Where there is rebellion, there will be submission. You will discover, as never before, that "the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8: 10). Life will take on a whole new dimension. Everyone around you will be aware that something tremendous has happened.

There are many Christians who have never entered into this fullness of joy in Christ. They are saved but always struggling. Instead of living above their circumstances, they are bogged down by them. They are given to worry and frequent complaining. Occasionally they are joyful, but not very often. God would have us to understand that fullness of joy can be ours, regardless of our surroundings.

Paul and Silas were on their second missionary journey. While at Troas, Paul had a vision in which he saw a man in Macedonia praying that Paul might come and proclaim the truth. Confident that this was the leading of the Lord, Paul and Silas departed for Macedonia. Upon reaching Philippi, they were used of the Lord to lead a prominent businesswoman to Christ. Following her conversion, Lydia's whole household came to the Saviour.

Next, Paul and Silas delivered from demonism a woman who had been used as a tool for fortune-telling by her wicked masters. Following her deliverance, she could no longer be used for selfish gain. Angered by this, the men had Paul and Silas arrested, accusing them falsely: "These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans" (Acts 16: 20-21).

God's servants were judged to be guilty and after being severely beaten, they were imprisoned. But even worse, they were thought to be dangerous criminals and were placed in the inner prison with their feet locked in stocks, with no chance of escape. The situation could not have been worse for Paul and Silas. They could have pitied themselves, asking, "Where did we fail? Did we make a mistake in coming to Philippi?" But there was none of that. "At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God." In the midst of those horrible surroundings, with beaten and aching bodies, they

rejoiced. How could they do it? Their joy was "full." They were yielded completely to Jesus Christ. He was in perfect control.

One reason John wrote his first Epistle was that God's people might know the fullness of His joy. If your joy is not full, Christ is ready to do something about it, if you are. Remember, all sin must be dealt with; only then can one know the blessing of the fullness of His joy.

(1:3-4) **Jesus Christ, Purpose—Fellowship:** Jesus Christ came to earth for the greatest of purposes.

1. Jesus Christ came that men might have fellowship with God and with His Son Jesus Christ and with one another. This is the most wonderful declaration, for it means that God is not far off in outer space someplace. God is not disinterested and uncaring about what happens to man. God has not left us to fend for ourselves upon earth with nothing but death and the grave to look forward to. The very opposite is true: God has revealed Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ and has shown us that He deeply loves and cares for us and that He wants to fellowship with us. Imagine! Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth to show us that we can know God personally and fellowship with Him.

We can know both God and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, know them personally just like all the above describes. And we can experience fullness of life with all other believers who truly give their lives to follow Christ. We can all have fellowship together, the kind of fellowship that exists within the greatest of all families—the family of God Himself.

2. Jesus Christ came that our joy might be full.

This word *fellowship* is an important one in the vocabulary of a Christian. It simply means "to have in common." As sinners, men have nothing in common with the holy God. But God in His grace sent Christ to have something in common with men. Christ took on Himself a human body and became a man. Then He went to the cross and took on that body the sins of the world (1 Peter 2:24). Because He paid the price for our sins, the way is open for God to forgive us and take us into His family. When we trust Christ, we become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). The term translated "partakers" in Peter's epistle is from the same Greek root that is translated "fellowship" in 1 John 1:3.

What a thrilling miracle! Jesus Christ took on Himself the nature of man that by faith we may receive the very nature of God!

A famous British writer was leaving Liverpool by ship. He noticed that the other passengers were waving to friends on the dock. He rushed down to the dock and stopped a little boy. "Would you wave to me if I paid you?" he asked the lad, and of course the boy agreed. The writer rushed back on board and leaned over the rail, glad for someone to wave to. And sure enough, there was the boy waving back to him!

A foolish story? Perhaps—but it reminds us that *man hates loneliness*. All of us want to be wanted. The life that is *real* helps to solve the basic problem of loneliness, for Christians have genuine fellowship with God and with one another. Jesus promised, "Lo, I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20). In his letter, John explains the secret of fellowship with God and with other Christians. This is the first purpose John mentions for the writing of his letter—the sharing of his experience of eternal life.

Fellowship is Christ's answer to the loneliness of life. Joy is His answer to the emptiness, the hollowness of life.

John, in his epistle, uses the word "joy" only once, but the idea of joy runs through the entire letter. Joy is not something that we manufacture for ourselves; joy is a wonderful by-product of our fellowship with God. David knew the joy which John mentions; he said, "In Thy presence is fullness of joy" (Ps. 16:11).

Basically, sin is the cause of the unhappiness that overwhelms our world today. Sin promises joy but it always produces sorrow. The pleasures of sin are temporary—they are only for a season (Heb. 11:25). God's pleasures last eternally—they are forevermore (Ps. 16:11).

The life that is real produces a joy that is real—not some limp substitute. Jesus said, the night before He was crucified, "Your joy no man taketh from you" (John 16:22). "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11).

Karl Marx wrote, "The first requisite for the people's happiness is the abolition of religion." But the Apostle John writes, in effect, "Faith in Jesus Christ gives you a joy that can never be duplicated by the world. I have experienced this joy myself, and I want to share it with you."

(1:4) **Joy** (chara): an inner gladness; a deep seated pleasure. It is a depth of assurance and confidence that ignites a cheerful heart. It is a cheerful heart that leads to cheerful behavior.

Several things need to be said about the believer's joy.

1. Joy is divine. It is possessed and given only by God. Its roots are not in earthly or material things or cheap triumphs. It is the joy of the Holy Spirit, a joy based in the Lord. It is His very own joy (John 15:11; Acts 13:52; Romans 14:17; Galatians 5:22; 1 Thes. 1:6).

2. Joy does not depend on circumstances or happiness. Happiness depends upon happenings, but the joy that God implants in the believer's heart overrides all, even the matters of life and death (Psalm 5:11; 2 Cor. 6:10; 2 Cor. 7:4).

3. Joy springs from faith (Romans 15:13; Phil. 1:25; 2 Tim. 1:4; cp. Matthew 2:10).

4. Joy of future reward makes and keeps one faithful (Matthew 25:21, 23; Acts 20:24; Hebrews 12:2).

The source of the believer's joy is several fold.

1. The fellowship of the Father and His Son brings joy (1 John 1:3-4).

2. Victory over sin, death, and hell brings joy (John 14:28; John 16:20-22).

3. Repentance brings joy (Luke 15:7, 10).

4. The hope of glory brings joy (Romans 14:17; Hebrews 12:2; 1 Peter 4:13).

5. The Lord's Word—the revelations, commandments, and promises which He made—brings joy (John 15:11).

6. The commandments of Christ and the will of God bring joy. Obeying and doing a good job stirs joy within the believer's heart (John 15:11; John 17:13; Acts 13:52).

7. Prayer brings joy (John 16:24).

8. The presence and fellowship of believers brings joy (1 John 1:3-4).

9. Converts bring joy (Luke 15:5; Phil. 4:1; 1 Thes. 2:19-20).

10. Hearing that others walk in the truth brings joy (3 John 4).

11. Giving brings joy (2 Cor. 8:2; Hebrews 10:34).

DESCRIPTION

This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1: 5-7).

The believer's fellowship in Christ is one of the greatest experiences in life. Not only is it fellowship with those of "like precious faith," but most importantly "with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." When one enters into this fellowship, he discovers "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8).

The Apostle John gives a description of the message he and his fellow workers had been declaring: "This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." Obviously it is the antinomian heresy that is in mind here. The teaching that one could be a Christian while continuing to live in sin had become quite popular. The truth of God was being disregarded, which resulted in widespread disobedience among professed believers. This teaching also identified evil with God and created serious problems in the church.

John sought to combat their error by describing God's true nature: "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." Throughout the Scriptures, light is used as a symbol of purity and holiness while darkness represents sin and wickedness. It is not possible for the Lord Jehovah to be associated with sin, for "God is light." This means that He is holy in every respect of His being.

Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets proclaimed the Lord as the "Holy One." Isaiah used this description some thirty times. The Psalmist said, with rapturous praise, "Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy" (Psalm 99: 9). It is impossible for God to participate in any way with evil, for such would oppose His nature. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Habakkuk 1: 13).

Being righteous, God created a holy universe. Later, He created a man and woman who were also holy. Adam and Eve and all of nature prospered in the holiness of God. This happy state was interrupted by a catastrophe. Endowed with free will, Adam and Eve were tempted and chose to disobey God. The sorrowful result was that "sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5: 12).

God did not create Adam and Eve to be puppets. Providing them with freedom of choice, He created them holy. But not satisfied with God's best, Adam and Eve chose evil, and all of civilization has suffered ever since.

The choice our first parents made did not thwart God's intention for man's holiness. He sent His holy and sinless Son into the world to die for unholy and sinful mankind. Those who believe on the Son are forgiven of their sins and become the recipients of God's righteousness. "For [God] hath made [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Because of the failure of the first man, unredeemed men have "loved darkness rather than light" (John 3: 19). But God's concern is that they come to the light. To bridge the gap between light and darkness, there had to be One who was perfect in His deity as well as sinless in His humanity. Only such a One could approach the Father in Heaven and humans on the earth. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was that One. "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Timothy 2:5).

Because of the divine provision of Jesus Christ as the Sin-bearer, any human may experience the holiness of God. If he sincerely repents and receives Jesus Christ into his life, he will become a "new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:24). It must be understood, however, that it is impossible for anyone to be a "new man" apart from receiving Jesus Christ into his life.

Millions in the world are attempting to produce holiness in the energy of the flesh. Ignoring the claims of Christ, they live carelessly day after day, disregarding the truth of Scripture, trying to provide their own way of salvation. But God's Word declares that salvation is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to [God's] mercy" (Titus 3:5). What man does can never blot out his sin. The best person in the world is condemned to hell until he receives Christ, for his dead works can never produce holiness.

It is said that the architect and builder of Saint Paul's Cathedral in London ran short of funds during the construction. Huge columns were needed to support the roof. In an attempt to avert a financial loss, he made them hollow and filled them with rubbish.

During the ensuing years, the many thousands of visitors and worshipers were unaware that the great pillars were not solid. No one was told. In time, however, the roof began to sag, and it was obvious that something was wrong. An extensive investigation revealed the reason: the columns were not strong enough to bear the weight of the massive roof.

Many a life, which outwardly appears to be pleasing in the eyes of men because of good motives and worthy ambitions, falls far short of God's standard, which is perfection. Since no human is perfect, his only hope is to trust in the Holy One, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." In Christ, victory over sin is won and the holiness of God is experienced.

If one has received Christ into his life, he will evidence this by faithful obedience. If, on the other hand, he claims to be a follower of Christ while continuing in the old paths of sin, it is clear that his profession is unreal. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth."

Those who have entered into a personal relationship with the Father through the Son should reveal the holiness of God. "Ye shall be holy; for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44). "I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8: 1 2). It is the normal experience for the believer to show forth the holiness of God.

If one professes Christ and does not live for the Lord, all his talk and activity for God are meaningless. Paul wrote, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him" (Colossians 2:6). "Christ died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15 :3), not merely to make an atonement for them, but to deliver us from them. God's people are saved from the darkness of sin to walk in the light. "For Thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not Thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?" (Psalm 56: 13) It would be well for all who are in Christ to consider, "Is the life I am now living worth the price Christ paid for it?" It is not always easy to live victoriously, but anyone who has been delivered from darkness knows that the Christ-controlled life is the only satisfying life to live.

Jim Vaus discovered this truth a number of years ago. A big job was coming up for him. By tapping wires and delaying teletype messages, Jim and the syndicate could make thousands of dollars at the Saint Louis racetrack. With his electronic devices, their win was sure. Vaus would get a big share of the money won.

Midway in his probable success, Jim quit the job. The crime ring was stunned. No man with the inside knowledge of crime Vaus had was allowed to quit and live.

It wasn't long until Jim's boss phoned. "Remember this: No one quits on Andy, see?" Andy threatened to kill Vaus as he had killed others.

Jim could face this threat with confidence and peace because, a few nights before, his life had been changed by turning it over to Christ. Now he was called upon to face the first big test of the Lord's sufficiency.

A few days after the phone call, Jim happened to look out the window. A big black car turned into his driveway and several men got out. Andy was in the lead. As they spread out to block any attempt to escape, Vaus went out to meet them. Immediately he began telling them of his decision to follow Christ. After speaking at length, he invited Andy and his men to leave their life of sin. Unwilling, they climbed back into the car and drove away.

Jim Vaus had some difficult days following his conversion. Not only did the syndicate leaders threaten to kill him, but in repaying his debts, caused by crime, he went bankrupt. Without money or a job, he lost his beautiful home. But the Lord never failed His servant. Jim has been used in a mighty way to touch untold numbers of lives for Christ and to see them walk in the holiness of God.

How important that we ask ourselves frequently, "Am I real, or am I only pretending?" Do we really know Christ? "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." Truth must not only be spoken, but lived. The situation becomes extremely distressing as we see the way some of our church people live. In the singing of hymns they confess their submission to Christ, but in their living they deny Him by what they say and do. To hear some of them talk, you would think they are really yielded to Christ's control; but to watch them, you wonder.

What if one of the players on a basketball team did everything he could to help the opposing team? He would not be left in the game very long. The coach would have him on the bench in a matter of minutes. Yet, think of those in the game of life, who profess to be followers of Christ while helping Satan and his cause by their inconsistent living. They claim to "have fellowship with God," but "walk in darkness." John says they are lying. Of course, they are not deceiving God; they are deceiving themselves.

Judas was such an example. Doubtless, he talked in the same manner as the other disciples in his appreciation for Jesus. But Judas was different. It is noticeable that whenever he addressed the Saviour directly he never called Jesus Lord. This is certainly in keeping with 1 Corinthians 12: 3 where Paul tells us "that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." It is evident that Judas had never really come to know the Lord.

Even though Judas was able to deceive the other disciples into thinking that he was one of them, Christ knew differently. Our Lord said, "Woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born" (Matthew 26:24). On another occasion, He said, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:70) At the last supper, as our Lord told of His forthcoming crucifixion, Satan entered into Judas (John 13:27). It is impossible for Satan to enter the life of one born of the Holy Spirit. In His high priestly prayer, our Lord stated, "Those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition" (John 17: 12). The climax to Judas's wasted, hypocritical life came by suicide. What a tragedy, to live each day posing as a follower of God.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus chose Judas to be one of His disciples? Did He not know what Judas would do and what he would be like? Of course He did. He knew all about Judas. Why then did He allow him to pretend to be a true disciple? He did it for the same reason that He allows people to pretend in our day: He loves them and is concerned about them. He is desirous that they will forsake their hypocrisy and enter into the reality of a heart-belief. In mercy, He gives them every opportunity possible to repent of their sin and believe. In the example of Judas, God has allowed us to see how close one might be to the truth and yet miss it altogether. Let none of us fall into the same error.

As the believer lives in obedience to God, he enjoys the blessing of God. Disobedience always produces disharmony. Sin disrupts, while righteousness results in peace and happiness. "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." Though it is true that when believers are right with the Lord, they enjoy happy fellowship together, in I John I: 7 John has in mind the ultimate fellowship he had written about in verse 3: "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." This blessed fellowship with the Lord will enable the child of God to experience God's peace in spite of hardships and trials. Paul suffered much in his quest to make Christ known, but he could say, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Corinthians 12: 10). His trials made him weak, but his fellowship with God made him strong, enabling him to face the severest conflicts.

How does the believer sustain his fellowship with the Lord? John says, "Walk in the light, as He is in the light." We are to obey God and do His will. We must seek to follow His leading in everything. We cannot afford to choose our own paths and follow our own ways; such never provides happiness. Daily we must pray, "Teach me Thy way, O LORD" (Psalm 27: 11). God's way is always best, for it is the way of holiness, the way of "light."

It is easy to distinguish the devil's way from God's, for sin is always part of the devil's way. Never is this the case when "we walk in the light, as He is in the light." God's way is without lying, cheating, immorality, unkindness, or sin of any kind. This is the way of blessing.

The real motive to "walk in the light, as [God] is in the light," is that we might have fellowship with God. Some have thought erroneously that the reason Christians no longer do the things they used to do is because of the fear of being punished by God. Not only does one receive victory to refrain from former sins following conversion, even more, he has a desire to please the Lord. This is born out of love, not fear.

While refusing to do wrong, a little boy was taunted by his friend, "You are afraid that your dad will hurt you." "Not really," said the boy. "I am afraid that I will hurt him."

Born-again believers are in fellowship with God Almighty. Because of this, they are not fearful of being punished by God; their punishment was absorbed by Christ at the cross. They "walk in the light" that they might please the Lord and do His will. True believers know the joy of obedience.

If the child of God yields to temptation, God has made a provision: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." The blood is always efficacious.

It is without meaning to the hypocrite, but to the one who is sincere before God, there is continual forgiveness at any time and at any place. Christ's blood keeps on cleansing from sin. It never stops.

Christ's blood is sufficient for "all sin," whether it be the sin of the repentant soul turning to Jesus for salvation, or the sin which is the result of daily defilement in the life of the believer.

God promises, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." Would you have fellowship with the eternal God? Then, "walk in the light, as He is in the light," allowing Him to keep you clean through the blood, as you confess all sin to Him. Let Him live through you as you seek by His grace daily to obey and please Him in everything.

(1:5) **Jesus Christ, Message of—God, Nature—Light**: Jesus Christ preached the most wonderful message. It included two wonderful things.

1. *God is light*. What does this mean? It means several things.

a. God is light by nature and character. Light is what God is within Himself, within His being, essence, nature, and character. God dwells in the splendor, glory, and brilliance of light. Wherever He is, the splendor, glory, and brilliance of

light shines out of His being. In fact, there is not even a need for the sun when God's glory is present. The glory of His presence just beams forth the most brilliant light imaginable, so brilliant and glorious that it would consume human flesh.

b. God is light in that He reveals the light of all things, the truth of all things.

☐ Jesus, the Light, tells us that God is holy, righteous, and pure. Light is the symbol of purity and holiness. Light means the absence of darkness and blindness; it has no spots of darkness and blackness, of sin and shame.

☐ Jesus, the Light, reveals. His light shows clearly the nature, the meaning, and the destiny of all things. His light beams in, spots, opens up, identifies, illuminates, and shows things as they really are. The light of Jesus Christ shows the truth about the world and man and God. The light of Christ reveals that God loves and cares for man and wants man to love and care for Him.

☐ Jesus, the Light, guides. His light allows a man to walk out of darkness. Man no longer has to grope, grasp, and stumble about trying to find his way through life. The path of life can now be clearly seen.

☐ Jesus, the Light, does away with darkness and with chaos. His light routs, wipes out, strips away and erases the darkness. The empty chaos of creation was routed by the light given by God (Genesis 1:3). Jesus Christ is the Light that can save man from chaos (John 14:1, 17; John 12:46; John 16:33).

A man's own character will necessarily be determined by the character of the god whom he worships; and, therefore, John begins by laying down the nature of the God and Father of Jesus Christ whom Christians worship. God, he says, is light, and there is no darkness in him. What does this statement tell us about God?

(i) It tells us that he is splendour and glory. There is nothing so glorious as a blaze of light piercing the darkness. To say that God is light tells us of his sheer splendour.

(ii) It tells us that God is self-revealing. Above all things light is seen; and it illumines the darkness round about it. To say that God is light is to say that there is nothing secretive or furtive about him. He wishes to be seen and to be known by men.

(iii) It tells us of God's purity and holiness. There is none of the darkness which cloaks hidden evil in God. That he is light speaks to us of his white purity and stainless holiness.

(iv) It tells us of the guidance of God. It is one of the great functions of light to show the way. The road that is lit is the road that is plain. To say that God is light is to say that he offers his guidance for the footsteps of men.

(v) It tells us of the revealing quality in the presence of God. Light is the great revealer. Flaws and stains which are hidden in the shade are obvious in the light. Light reveals the imperfections in any piece of workmanship or material. So the imperfections of life are seen in the presence of God. Whittier wrote:

"Our thoughts lie open to thy sight;
And naked to thy glance;
Our secret sins are in the light
Of thy pure countenance."

We can never know either the depth to which life has fallen or the height to which it may rise until we see it in the revealing light of God.

2. In God, says John, there is no darkness at all. Throughout the New Testament darkness stands for the very opposite of the Christian life.

(i). Darkness stands for the Christless life. It represents the life that a man lived before he met Christ or the life that he lives if he strays away from him. John writes to his people that, now that Christ has come, the darkness is past and the true light shines (1 *John* 2:8). Paul writes to his Christian friends that once they were darkness but now they are light in the Lord (*Ephesians* 5:8). God has delivered us from the power of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of his dear Son (*Colossians* 1:13).

Christians are not in darkness, for they are children of the day (1 *Thessalonians* 5:4, 5). Those who follow Christ shall not walk in darkness, as others must, but they will have the light of life (*John* 8:12). God has called the Christians out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 *Peter* 2:9).

(ii) The dark is hostile to the light. In the prologue to his gospel John writes that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (*John* 1:5). It is a picture of the darkness seeking to obliterate the light-but unable to overpower it. The dark and the light are natural enemies.

(iii) The darkness stands for the ignorance of life apart from Christ. Jesus summons his friends to walk in the light lest the darkness come upon them, for the man who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going (*John* 12:35). Jesus is the light, and he has come that those who believe in him should not walk in darkness (*John* 12:46). The dark stands for the essential lostness of life without Christ.

(iv) The darkness stands for the chaos of life without God. God, says Paul, thinking of the first act of creation, commanded his light to shine out of the darkness (2 *Corinthians* 4:6). Without God's light the world is a chaos, in which life has neither order nor sense.

(v) The darkness stands for the immorality of the Christless life. It is Paul's appeal to men that they should cast off the works of darkness (*Romans* 13:12). Men, because their deeds were evil, loved the darkness rather than the light (*John* 3:19). The darkness stands for the way that the Christless life is filled with things which seek the shadows because they cannot stand the light.

(vi) The darkness is characteristically unfruitful. Paul speaks of the unfruitful works of darkness (*Ephesians* 5:11). If growing things are despoiled of the light, their growth is arrested. The darkness is the Christless atmosphere in which no fruit of the Spirit will ever grow.

(vii) The darkness is connected with lovelessness and hate. If a man hates his brother, it is a sign that he walks in darkness (1 *John* 2:9-11). Love is sunshine and hatred is the dark.

(viii) The dark is the abode of the enemies of Christ and the final goal of those who will not accept him. The struggle of the Christian and of Christ is against the hostile rulers of the darkness of this world (*Ephesians* 6:12). Consistent and rebellious sinners are those for whom the mist of darkness is reserved (2 *Peter* 2:9; *Jude* 13). The darkness is the life which is separated from God.

GOD IS LIGHT

We are continuing our studies of the great letter from the hand of the Apostle John -- John the Mender -- the man who was called to follow Christ as a teenager when he was mending his nets. That act became symbolic of the ministry of this man, the one who mends things, who calls us back to fundamental matters. As we saw in the last message, John began by presenting to us a life, a life which appeared in history in the form of a person, a person who was touched and seen and heard and handled. He was, therefore, no mere figment of the imagination. He was not an invented person, a composite of the longings and desires of men, projected by their wishful thinking upon a being who never really lived. He is a man who lived, and walked among us, John said. We touched him, we saw him, we heard him, we handled him.

The great and exciting message he has to declare to us is that there is a way to share this wonderful life today. There is a way that you can have this person, and he can have you, and the two of you can live together.

When you do, John says, you will experience two wonderful things:

First, fellowship: The experience of having everything in common, with all that means in view of the One with whom you are sharing life, One who is God himself, dwelling in you. This, in turn, will result in joy -- that secret, quiet excitement within that is not subject to circumstances, but burns like a steady flame, keeping life interesting, free from boredom, lending richness and color to every experience you go through. These are not just hopeful words, these are real facts. This is what John says he is writing to us about. All this will occur as we come to know this living Lord.

Now, going on, he says that this life was also a message. Jesus said, and is yet saying to the world, a very badly needed thing; his life is a message. We know how a man's life can become a single message. The life of Adolf Hitler, for instance,

has become a message to the world, a message which all have read, how pride, pursued to the full, opens the door to demonic powers, and terrible, frightening things can follow.

In contrast to that, I have just read the life of that amazing American, George Washington Carver, the dedicated scientist who, though born into slavery, became one of the greatest scientists this nation has ever produced and whose discoveries have blessed the whole world. What is the message of his life? It is that true humility is the open door to learning. If you are humble enough there is nothing you cannot learn. It is exactly the opposite of the message of Adolf Hitler.

Now the whole life of Jesus Christ is also a message. What was the message? John goes on to tell us in one verse:

That is the message of the life of Jesus. That is what he came to tell us, and what he imparts to us as we learn to know him. "God is light and in him is no darkness at all."

It is put positively and negatively and it is easy to see how that message was incorporated and fulfilled in the life of Jesus. John opens his Gospel with the words: "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in darkness, and the darkness can never put it out," {cf, John 1:4-5}. That is the glory of this life. Our Lord himself said, "I am the light of the world. If any man follow me, he shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life," {cf, John 8:12}. There it is again, a life that is light. Again, he said, "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world and men love darkness and will not come to the light because their deeds are evil," {John 3:19 KJV}.

What, exactly, does this message mean, "God is light"? Obviously the Apostle John expects us to think about this a bit, for he says this is the sum, this is the meaning, of all that Jesus came to do and to be. It is imperative that we understand this, for this is the meaning of the life of Jesus, whether it is his life lived in history, or the life he will live in us right now. It will all come out here, "God is light and in him is no darkness at all." Notice something else. John does not say, "Light is God." It is, "God is light." You cannot reverse that. If it were, "Light is God," then, of course, the Indians who greet the rising sun with arms outstretched and burn incense to it are truer worshippers of God than we. No, it does not say "Light is God," but "God is light."

That means that what light is, on a physical plane, God is on every level of human experience. If you want to understand the character of God, then observe what light is. What light does, God does. What light accomplishes, God can accomplish in your life. Well, then, what does light do?

In this enlightened 20th century we feel we have learned a great deal about light, much more than men knew fifty or a hundred years ago. We have analyzed it, broken it down into its spectrum; we can take fractional parts of it and use them for various purposes; we have timed it, measured its speed; we know that it is the fastest thing known in the universe; we have managed to produce x-rays and laser beams which do amazing and phenomenal things. But after all this we have really learned nothing essentially new about light. That is the humiliating thing about it. We have not learned anything really important about it. The great functions of light are universally known and have been known ever since the beginning of history. In the earliest dawn of humanity men experienced what light could do as equally and fully as modern men do today. We have not learned one thing of any real importance.

Now what does light do? Basically, it is three-fold: First, the most characteristic thing about light, the thing we are enjoying at this very moment and probably the first discoverable fact about light, is that light reveals. I can see you because there is light in this room; and you are unfortunate enough to see me for the same reason. Light reveals. If there were no light I could hear you but I could not see you. Darkness conceals, but light reveals.

It enables us to see things that have been there all the time but which we could never see till the light shines. That is exactly what John means. God, also, does that. God reveals reality. God, through Christ, opens up the eyes of the heart and life comes into focus and we see clearly, without distortion. It does not all happen in one amazing transformation. Often, it is a gradual process for we would not be able to take the full revelation at once. But the purpose of God's entering into human hearts is that we might see reality. Light reveals, and so does God. The enigmas of life will gradually unfold, the great mysteries will become clear, illusions will be seen for what they are, deceiving phantasmata that disappear as the light shines upon them.

This time of the year always makes me remember the days when, as a young man, I was entering college for the first time. That was a critical period in my life. Like so many young men facing college, I was not at all sure about what I was getting into. I had an outward appearance of confidence and the ability to handle anything that came, but within I had a

deep sense of uncertainty. I was aware that I really did not know the ground rules of life. I pretended I did but I didn't, and inside I knew it. It was like trying to play a game when you didn't know the rules, but were trying to guess them as you went along. It was rough. I was baffled, as all young people are baffled, by the great questions of life. What am I here for? What is it really all about?

What really is worthwhile about life, and how do you tell? How do you fit death into this whole picture? How can I understand and control myself so as to handle rightly what comes? The more I learned about life the more baffled I became until I met Jesus Christ and began to understand the message of his life, the message revealed in his Word. Bit by bit things began to come clear. First the answers to some of the greater issues: What is life all about? What happens after death? Where do we go from here? Then details began to filter through the fog and little by little things became much clearer. I confess to you that much remains, but I am no longer confused. The road ahead is clear.

Out of my darkness one fact became increasingly clearer to me. A great mystery was cleared up that impinged upon every other question of my life. I discovered that it was the key to many things. It was the fact that the solution to most of my troubles lay within me. The problems were not outside of me, as I once thought -- the way other people acted -- but it was me. I was the big problem. As I began to see that, I saw what it was in me that was creating the problems. Little by little I began to understand myself. The mystery of self was revealed by the light as it shone upon me from the word of the only One who knows what is in man. I began then, to see the answers to the problems of life.

There is some undefinable, unknown factor in our problems that eludes us. We cannot get our fingers on whatever it is that makes everything turn out so differently than we expect. That always indicates that we, ourselves, are the problem. We need the light to shine upon the mystery of darkness in our own lives. That is what God does. God is light and light reveals.

But that is not light's only quality. It also measures. Did you ever watch a man pick up a stick of lumber, hold it up, and sight along it? What is he doing? He is trying to see if it is crooked or not. What reveals that? A beam of light. He is measuring it against a ray of light, because light is straight and anything that does not correspond to the light is crooked. Light is the most common measuring stick in the universe. We measure whether things are straight or crooked by light. Surveyors use light to measure distances and angles, to see whether they are up or down, high or low, right or left. They have a little instrument they sight through with a small telescope on it. How does it work? It uses light as a measurement. In the vast, illimitable reaches of space today the only adequate measuring stick is light years, the distance measured by the speed of light.

That is what light does, and that is what God does. God is a measuring stick, a point of reference. You can use God to measure everything else. Men are forever seeking to solve the puzzles of life on every level around us. In economic life, political life, social life, scientific life, psychological life, whatever it may be, we are confronted with mysteries and puzzles wherever we turn. As men seek to ferret out the solutions to these puzzles they come up with many proposed solutions. Some are contradictory, some are supplementary to each other, some are absurd, some are stupid, some are very appealing and practical. Every one of us, facing this welter of advice, are constantly asking ourselves the question, how do I know which one is right? How do I know who has the real answers? Where do I get a measuring stick that can be applied to these voices I hear? That is where God comes in.

I'm now reading a very interesting book on the great economic philosophers of the past, men who have analyzed the social and economic structure of life and have tried to explain what happens to the market that makes it rise and fall and thus men lose their shirts or become rich overnight. It discusses the theories of men like Adam Smith, Karl Marx, John Keynes and others. It is an interesting book because it reveals that no one can really put their finger on the secret of economic management in society. The reason is that none of the thinkers sees man as God sees him. None of them sees man as he is. Each of them approach the matter on one plane or another but they do not see man in the totality of his being, and therefore they miss the point. But God sees man according to the truth, according to the light and all the conflicting voices that we hear today can be sorted out and measured by his revelation of what man is.

Now that is very practical. Is your marriage working out? Do you get all kinds of advice on how to make it work? Well, the light that shines from God's word about marriage is the full truth about what makes marriages work. If you measure the advice you get by that, you can see what to believe. It is the only measure there is. When you fall in love with another woman or another man, and your own home looks dull and hopeless, and you are drawn by the temptation to forget it all and run off with the other person and start all over again, because it all looks so lusciously attractive. But then you measure it against God's Word and there you learn the unpleasant truth that may be quite unpalatable to you at the

moment, that your dream will not work, it will only increase your misery, it will hurt and destroy everyone involved. Because you see that and have learned to trust the light a bit, you say "All right, even though I want to do this, I won't." Later on, the blindness passes and you are so grateful, so eternally thankful, that God's light stopped you from going on into darkness. "The light shines in darkness," John says, "and the darkness cannot put it out," {John 1:5 RSV}.

Light not only reveals and measures, but light energizes too. That is the most dramatic quality about light. It imparts life, it activates, it quickens. Some years ago I ran across a most eloquent description in one of the sermons of Philip Brookes along this line. He says, "When the sun rose this morning it found the world in darkness, torpid and heavy and asleep, with powers all wrapped up in sluggishness; with life that was hardly better or more alive than death.

"The sun found this great sleeping world and woke it. It bade it to be itself. It quickened every slow and sluggish faculty. It called to the dull streams and said, 'Be quick;' to the dull birds and bade them sing; to the dull fields and made them grow; to the dull men and bade them think and talk and work.

"It flashed electric invitations to the whole mass of sleeping power which really was the world and summoned it to action. It did not make the world. It did not start another set of processes unlike those which had been sluggishly moving in the darkness. It poured strength into the essential processes which belonged to the very nature of the earth. It glorified, intensified, fulfilled the earth."

That happens every morning. That is what God does. God is light and God intensifies, fulfills, and glorifies our essential humanity. He does not destroy it. He takes it and leads it on through the darkness into an ever-growing experience of life and vitality and productivity. Many all over the earth have lost this vision, and for them life has become dead and dull and meaningless, filled with increasing despair. I recently read an excerpt from one of the papers of Frankfurt, Germany, and this sentence stood out: "Newspapers and reports are mentioning the phenomenon of the beatnik which is spreading throughout all European countries. Young people, whose life consists of idleness and complete senselessness. They are lying for hours -- as dead persons -- in the parks and public places. One of them summarizes the content of his life as follows: 'Eat every day, evacuate your bowels every day, go to bed every day. That's all.'"

That kind of a low-voltage substitute for life cries out for light, and God is light. We all recall the testimony of a young man in our midst who was trained as a scientist and had an exciting job exploring the frontiers of the universe with radio telescopes, but his life was empty, hollow, dead, unattractive. Then the light came and he found Christ. Now his life is filled with constant excitement and he is a challenge to young people up and down the whole of the West Coast. God is greatly using him to convey to others that electric sense of vitality that has come from knowing Christ.

Right here at this point someone asks the often unspoken question, "All right, I grant you this happens to a few, but why only to a few? What's the matter with the rest of the Christians? Why is it that all Christians are not this way? Why are they not alert and informed, stable and dependable, alive and attractive? Why is it that the Christians I meet are so untrustworthy, so critical, so harsh, repelling, and negative? If God is light and he can do this, why does it only seem to happen to a few?"

That is the question the world is asking, is it not? And that is right where John begins next. He goes on to point out that which will be the subject of our examination in several messages; three conditions that are like umbrellas that we Christians erect to shut out the healing, cleansing, glorifying, fulfilling light so that though it is shining it does not change us. Those three conditions will be very revealing to some. God is light and he does reveal truth, he does measure life, he does give us a reference point by which the false can be separated from the true. Best of all, he fulfills, he glorifies, he energizes, he vitalizes. But he does so only as we learn to take down the umbrellas that hide the light from us.

(1:5) **Darkness** (skotos, skotia): the word darkness describes both the state and works of a person. It symbolizes evil and sin, everything that life should not be and everything that a person should not do.

1. The darkness means that man is ignorant of God.

□ The darkness means that a person is vain in his imaginations about God and foolish in his thoughts about God.

"Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Romans 1:21).

□ The darkness means that a person does not live and walk in the light of God and Christ.

"Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

☐ The darkness means that a person is blind to the light of Christ and stumbles about through life.

"Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him" (John 11:9-10).

☐ The darkness means that a person does not understand the light and is powerless to extinguish the light.

"And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not [does not understand or extinguish it]" (John 1:5).

☐ The darkness means that a person does not see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

2. The darkness means evil behavior and deeds.

☐ The darkness means that a person's deeds are evil and that he hates the light.

"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God" (John 3:19-21).

☐ The darkness means that a person walks in the darkness of hate and antagonism against others.

"He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes" (1 John 2:9-11).

☐ The darkness means that a person lives a secretive life, a life that is gripped by the hidden things of darkness, that cannot bear the light.

"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall ever man have praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5).

3. The darkness means man's nature, that his nature is darkness.

☐ The darkness means that a person is the very embodiment of darkness, that his very nature and character are that of darkness.

"For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Ephes. 5:8).

☐ The darkness means that a person's eye is focused upon evil; therefore, his whole being is full of darkness or evil.

"The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:22-23).

☐ The darkness means that a person is an unbeliever and has communion with darkness.

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14).

4. The darkness means that man is unfruitful in life.

"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Ephes. 5:11).

5. The darkness means that man dwells in darkness.

☐ The darkness means that a person dwells in darkness and is blind to the glorious day of salvation and of the Lord's return.

"But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness" (1 Thes. 5:4-5).

☐ The darkness means that a person has rejected the call of God and still dwells in darkness.

"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: but chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities" (2 Peter 2:9-10).

6. The darkness means the influence and power of Satan.

□ The darkness means that a person is under the power of Satan and is guilty of sin; that his sins are not forgiven.

"To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:18).

7. The darkness means the place of punishment and hell, the pit of darkness.

□ The darkness means the place of punishment and hell where all the ungodly shall be cast in the final judgment.

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephes. 6:12).

"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Peter 2:9).

"Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever" (Jude 13).

Misconception 1: Man Can Fellowship with God and Still Walk in Sin, 1:6-7

1 John 1:6-7: "If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. {7} But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

Every form of life has its enemies. Insects have to watch out for hungry birds, and birds must keep an eye on hungry cats and dogs. Even human beings have to dodge automobiles and fight off germs.

The life that is real also has an enemy, and we read about it in this section. This enemy is *sin*. Nine times in these verses John mentions sin, so the subject is obviously not unimportant. John illustrates his theme by using the contrast between light and darkness: God is light; sin is darkness.

But there is another contrast here too—the contrast between *saying* and *doing*. Four times John writes, "If we say" or "He that saith" (1 John 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4). It is clear that our Christian life is to amount to more than mere "talk"; we must also "walk," or *live*, what we believe. If we are in fellowship with God (if we are "walking in the light"), our lives will back up what our lips are saying. But if we are living in sin ("walking in darkness"), then our lives will contradict what our lips are saying, making us hypocrites.

The New Testament calls the Christian life a "walk." This *walk* begins with a step of faith when we trust Christ as our Saviour. But salvation is not the end—it's only the beginning—of spiritual life. "Walking" involves progress, and Christians are supposed to advance in the spiritual life. Just as a child must learn to walk and must overcome many difficulties in doing so, a Christian must learn to "walk in the light." And the fundamental difficulty involved here is this matter of *sin*.

Of course, sin is not simply outward disobedience; sin is also inner rebellion or desire. For example, we are warned about the desires of the flesh and of the eyes and about the pride of life (1 John 2:16), all of which are sinful. Sin is also transgression of the Law (1 John 3:4), or literally, "lawlessness." Sin is refusal to submit to the Law of God. Lawlessness, or independence of the Law, is the very essence of sin. If a believer decides to live an independent life, how can he possibly walk in fellowship with God? "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3)

Neither in the Old Testament nor in the New does the Bible whitewash the sins of the saints. In escaping a famine, Abraham became weak in his faith and went down to Egypt and lied to Pharaoh (Gen. 12). Later, the patriarch tried to "help God" by marrying Hagar and begetting a son (Gen. 16). In both cases, God forgave Abraham his sin, but Abraham had to reap what he had sowed. God can and will cleanse the record, but He does not change the results. No one can unscramble an egg.

Peter denied the Lord three times and tried to kill a man in the Garden when Jesus was arrested. Satan is a liar and a murderer (John 8:44), and Peter was playing right into his hands! Christ forgave Peter (cf. John 21), of course, but what Peter had done hurt his testimony greatly and hindered the Lord's work.

The fact that Christians sin bothers some people—especially new Christians. They forget that their receiving the new nature does not quickly eliminate the past. Sinning saints are not mentioned in the Bible to discourage us, but to warn us. All of us, therefore, must deal with our sins if we are to enjoy the life that is real.

THE MAN WHO IGNORES LIGHT

We have learned from the Apostle John that life without fellowship with God is like being shut away from the light; it is dark and cold, depressing and filled with illusions. God is light. This is the message of the life of our Lord Jesus, John declares. This is what he came to tell us and to show us. As light, he warms, fills, and fulfills us and unveils reality to us by showing up the false.

But, evidently, not to everyone. This is the problem which we now must face. Why is it that some Christians seem to be transformed by contact with Jesus Christ -- their lives are perceptibly different -- but others are not? Some Christians, even Christians of long standing, seem still to be very much conformed to the world around them, even deformed in their views and outlooks. Yet all of them stoutly assert that they are Christians, that they, too, have been born again by faith in Jesus Christ. It is not strange that the world asks, what is wrong, why is this condition true? The secret, John says, is fellowship. The reason he writes this letter is that we might understand that.

Verse 3 tells us,

...that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. {1 Jn 1:3 RSV}

So the key is fellowship. We must distinguish and understand very clearly the difference between relationship and fellowship. Relationship is becoming a member of the family of God, by faith in Jesus Christ. It is established by asking him to come into your life and heart. John makes that clear at the end of this letter. "He who has the Son has life [that is relationship]; but he who has not the Son of God has not life [he does not have a relationship]," {1 Jn 5:12 RSV}.

The Christian life starts right there with this matter of relationship. But fellowship is experiencing Christ. Relationship is accepting Christ; fellowship is experiencing him. You can never have fellowship until you have established relationship, but you can certainly have relationship without fellowship. This is what this letter emphasizes for us. Relationship puts us into the family of God, but fellowship permits the life of that family to shine out through us. That is what marks the difference between Christians. Relationship is to be "in the Lord" but fellowship is to be "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," {Eph 6:10 KJV}, as Paul so beautifully expresses it in his letter to the Ephesians.

Relationship means that all God has is potentially yours, but fellowship means you are actually drawing upon that, and his resources are visible in your experience. Relationship is you possessing God; fellowship is God, possessing you. Fellowship, then, is the key to vital Christianity. That is why this letter, which calls us back to fundamental issues, focuses first on that. The important question is, as a Christian are you enjoying fellowship with the Father and with his Son, experiencing all things in common together?

Now John sees three ways by which Christians miss out on fellowship. If you look at the first chapter of John's letter, you will see three times he uses the phrase, *if we say*: Verse 6, "If we say we have fellowship," Verse 8, "If we say we have no sin," and Verse 10, "If we say we have not sinned." Three times a profession is indicated, but the condition or possession that follows belies the profession. We shall spend our time now with that first one, taking these one by one because they are so important.

In this first instance, John says,

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. {1 Jn 1:6-7 RSV}

What is the problem here? This is a very common condition. Perhaps many of us here are suffering from this very condition at the present moment. Here is a Christian, John says, who has established a relationship with God, he has come

into the family of God by faith in Christ. Perhaps that relationship has actually been established for years. The man has been a Christian for a long time and he says that he has fellowship with God. That means that he is experiencing the full flow of the life in the Spirit, the life of God. He claims that the life of Jesus Christ is his in experience as well as in potential.

Ah, but, John says, there is no sign of it in his life. He lies. He does not live in a way that accords with his claim. He does not live according to the truth. His life is harsh, perhaps, and loveless; critical and demanding of others. Or perhaps it is intemperate, frivolous and flippant, lived solely on the surface; shallow and superficial. Or perhaps it is gossipy and sharp-tongued, or resentful and filled with bitterness.

Well, what is wrong? Nothing is wrong with the relationship. It is no good talking to this person about *becoming* a Christian, he *is* a Christian. He knows what it means to know Jesus Christ. Well, what is wrong? John analyzes it. The problem is, he says, he is walking in darkness. Do we not greatly misunderstand this phrase? Most of us mentally read this as though it refers to having fallen into sin, what was once called "a backslidden condition," to having turned aside into willfulness, or wickedness.

It is the opposite, of course, of walking in the light. The opposite of that would be walking in darkness, that is, not behaving the way we ought. But if we view this phrase that way we are confusing cause with results. The fact is, we sin because we are walking in darkness! Walking in darkness is not an equivalent term to sinning. We are sinning because we walk in darkness. That is the problem.

Well, then, what is darkness? We must answer that first on the physical level. How would you go about getting this room dark? It is now filled with light. Would you somehow have to scoop out the light and shovel in the darkness? Of course not, we need only to turn off the light. Darkness is simply the absence of light. Wherever there is no light there is darkness, because darkness is the absence of light. That is precisely what John means here. To walk in darkness means to walk as though there were no God, for God is light. It is to be a practical atheist. Not an actual one, of course. We believe there is a God, we know he exists, but we live as though there were none. We do not expose ourselves to him. That is walking in darkness.

This is what John is describing here. It is possible to be a Christian and yet walk in darkness by turning God off. When you turn off the light the darkness comes flooding in, instantly. As I suggested, this is not a rare condition at all. John starts with this problem because it is one of the most wide-spread and commonplace of problems. It is evident on every side. You can miss the benefits of God's presence in your heart and life by ignoring the light. This is the case he brings before us.

How do you do this? I wish to be very practical about this. I have discovered that sometimes these Biblical terms are so familiar to us they fall on our ears without meaning. We really do not know what they describe, and, therefore, it is sometimes very helpful to put them in other ways. How, then, do people actually do this, turn off the light and walk in darkness? Well, there are some very obvious ways in which it is done.

Some people stop coming to church. That is one way. The Word of God, if it is proclaimed from a pulpit like this, is a channel of God's light. The Word itself is light. It penetrates and searches, it seeks out our inner life and exposes it to our view. If we stop coming to church we escape the light that way. We are no longer made uncomfortable by the Word. We discover that, if we stay away, we do not experience the pricking of our conscience which the light awakens. The writer of Hebrews warns us that there would be a tendency to do this as we draw near the close of the age.

He says, "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is, and all the more as you see the Day approaching," {cf, Heb 10:25 KJV}. The delusions of the age are such that they tend to make us want to stay away from the light. It is more comfortable to sit around in the old slippers of the flesh and enjoy oneself at home. That is one way to turn off the light.

Another way is to stop reading the Scriptures. There are many who do this. An amazing number of Christians have simply turned off the light by ceasing to read the Scriptures. They seldom open the Bible. They only hear a verse now and then, and are content with what they get in church or Sunday School, but they seldom open it for themselves. Underneath all the excuses that are given for this -- no time, lots of pressures, etc., -- there is really a desire to escape the light. The Word is

light, but we want to walk in darkness. As Mark Twain put it, "It isn't the parts of Scripture that I don't understand that bother me, it's the parts I do."

Now there are other, more subtle ways, to walk in darkness. One is never to take a long look at yourself. Never examine yourself. Nod your head at the right places when the sermon is being expounded, but never apply it or ask questions of yourself about what is being said. This is an almost certain way of walking in the darkness, and one of the commonest evasions of our day. I would suggest to you that perhaps the greatest cause of weakness among evangelical Christians is this, we seldom stop to examine ourselves. We never ask ourselves searching questions as to where we are in the Christian life.

The Apostle Paul says, "Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith!" {2 Cor 13:5 KJV}. He urges this kind of activity upon us. He says, in effect, don't go on taking it for granted that because you are hearing the truth you are obeying it, Ask yourself, "Where am I?" John says, "try the spirits whether they be of God," {1 Jn 4:1 KJV}. Examine what you are listening to and how you are thinking, and lay it alongside the Scriptures. Put to yourself life's most basic question: "Where am I?" Do it periodically and frequently:

What kind of Christian am I? Am I better than I was six months ago? Am I easier to live with? Am I a more gracious, compassionate, outgoing kind of person than I was a year ago?

That is walking in the light, and to avoid it is to walk in darkness. Put on what I call "moral cosmetics." Did you ever see a lady making up her face? She examines it first and then she applies a bit of color here and a bit there, a touch of blue here and brown there, pats it and arranges it to make her face up as she would like it to be. This is a rather harmless matter when it occurs only with the physical, for the physical is somewhat remote from us, but the closer we get to the real us the more deadly this kind of a practice becomes. We can not only do it on the physical, but we can do it on the soulish and spiritual level as well. We make ourselves up when we go out among others into the kind of image we want them to believe we are. That practice is absolutely guaranteed to halt abruptly all Christian growth: If you appear to be mature when you are not, then you cannot be seen as needing anything.

So, when you are out with other Christians, you must always appear that you already have everything: You cannot listen, you cannot really seek for anything yourself, you cannot admit any need. If you are already fully grown, of course, you cannot appear to need any food and so you do not grow. You cannot grow, and you will never grow.

This is why the Lord Jesus said,

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled," {Matt 5:6 KJV}

This results in what the world likes to call 'gamemanship' -- games people play to keep from telling as little of the truth about themselves as they possibly can. And the great tragedy is that Christians go right along with it and adopt these clever little games, pretending to be something they are not.

Is it not very instructive that the first miracle of judgment in the New Testament occurred shortly after the Day of Pentecost when Ananias and Sapphira were judged for pretending to be what they were not, pretending to have a holiness that they did not actually possess? See how destructive this is. The Holy Spirit is trying to arrest our attention by that dramatic scene when these two fell down dead, thus indicating the deadliness of pretense.

Furthermore, this kind of pretense makes it impossible for you ever to help a younger Christian, even the younger Christians in your own home. They are helped by seeing you overcome the problems of life by the reaction of faith. If you do not admit there are problems, if you never talk about them or never appear to have them, then your image to them is simply one of achieved perfection, and it is the most discouraging thing they can ever run into.

A woman this summer took me aside and for two and a half hours poured into my ear a tragic tale. As a young Christian, she admired another Christian woman. This woman appeared to her to be the acme of Christian perfection. She longed to be like her, but she confessed that whenever she was with her she came away totally depressed. She found the standard apparently set before her was impossible for her to achieve in her immature Christian relationship. But one day she discovered a terribly serious flaw in the other person, who immediately tried to cover it up. All the delusions of years came crashing down around this young woman's head. She realized that the other had been pretending all the time. It

resulted in a terrible crisis in the first person's experience. She was overwhelmed with feelings of bitterness and resentment, and cried out to me, "Oh, if she had just admitted some need, what a help it would have been to me!"

One of the most serious problems among Christians is that we never admit that anything is going wrong, or that we have problems, or times when our faith is tested. We never tell anyone about these. Therefore we walk in darkness.

Remember, that darkness is the absence of light. To walk in the light is to have everything open, exposed to God, or to anyone else that is interested. But to walk in darkness is to talk about love and joy and power, but to live a lie. It is from fellowship, the sharing of the life of Christ, that there comes strength. To ignore light is to choose weakness. Now what is the answer?

John says, "walk in the light," that is the answer. In other words, not behaving perfectly, but examining ourselves, being willing to look at ourselves, listen seriously to what others say about us and ask ourselves how much truth is there in it, and not immediately grow defensive. If we take down our fences and our facades and open up to others, tell them what we are going through and encourage them to open up to us, admit our faults, this is walking in the light. As James puts it, "confess your faults, and pray one for another," {cf, Jas 5:16 KJV}.

If we share these and ask for prayer about them, well, then what? John says, "you have fellowship one with another," you and Christ. You immediately have fellowship, that is the important thing, is it not? You immediately discover that when you are willing to look, to listen, and to examine, that the light is shining on you. If you walk in the light it does not matter what your actual condition is, immediately you will have fellowship with the Son of God. You hold everything in common with him. What that can mean in terms of power, love, joy, glory and excitement in your life, you need only to listen to the testimony of those who are experiencing it to know.

But not only that, John says, our fellowship is also with one another. Fellowship with other humans will surely follow. In other words, you become approachable, sympathetic and uncritical. You lose your blaming, demanding, critical spirit. You give up your perfectionism, your demand that everyone else measure up. You become human, and oh, so much easier to live with.

But that is not all. There is more, and it goes much deeper. Listen to this, "and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." Why does he put that in there? Is it not extraneous? Is not that introducing some other idea into this? We have been talking about fellowship and now suddenly he talks about cleansing. Well, of course, it is not out of place. Nothing in God's Word is out of place.

This belongs right here because the inevitable accompaniment of evading light is guilt. You cannot walk in darkness without being guilty, feeling guilty. Guilt is the underlying cause of Christian depression; it is the thing that creates that somber, wet-blanket approach that so many Christians demonstrate. It is because they are suffering from suppressed guilt and they are trying to make up for it in a rigid, demanding code to sort of punish themselves for not being what they know they ought to be. And it also results, as we have seen before in other messages, in actual physical afflictions, such as insomnia, obesity, nervous habits, and even in asthma, and ulcers, aphasia, and other afflictions.

You see, to walk in the light means to hide nothing, to defend yourself neither from the light of God nor in any way try to appear something that you are not. It means to come instantly, without defensiveness, to the light and deal with it before God. If you see something wrong, say so. You are not going to lose face. You are not going to lose status. You discover the amazing thing is your friends still love you. In fact, they love you more when you begin to admit there are things wrong. You will discover that you are far more approachable, far more human. Your family begins to be comfortable around you instead of being uncomfortable. And there comes the sweet relief of the cleansing grace of God that always accompanies walking in the light. It is almost automatic. If we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus Christ is continuously cleansing us from all sin. It is the present tense there, it is done instantly, continuously, all the time.

You could walk through a great dark cloud of soot, and if it were dark enough and thick enough you would come out completely covered with black, face, hands, everything, except for two spots that would be clear -- your eyeballs. Why? Because your body has a continuous cleansing action that goes on all the time that keeps the eyes clear. And this is the provision God has made in Christ.

If we walk in the light, if we try to deceive ourselves and play games, pretending we are something we are not, the blood of Jesus Christ is continually cleansing us so that the problems of the immediate past as well as the distant past are taken care of in the cleansing, forgiving grace accomplished in the death of Jesus Christ, the blood of Christ poured out for us.

Now, many have confessed to me that they have been Christians for years, they knew they were Christians, they knew they had a relationship, but they never experienced fellowship, because they had been walking in darkness. They had been doing some of these things we have talked about. But, oh, I have a long list of memories of those who have come to me and said: "What joy, what relief, what sheer, dramatic relief it has been to get rid of all this posturing, this pretending, and admit they have problems, and to have people pray for them even though they have been Christians for years, and to feel the burden of pretense roll away so that they are just free to be what they are."

It is a glorious sense, the cleansing grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, that is the first area, walking in the light. Light, as we saw, is: First, revealing, and then it is a measuring stick by which we can measure and evaluate. And, finally, it is energizing, vitalizing, imparting strength to us. But it must always be confronted first on that matter of revealing. Let the light shine on you. Listen to the voice of the Spirit. Do not hide, come out into the open with others as well as with God, and the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, will cleanse you from all sin, and you will know the glory of the intended life for a Christian -- fellowship, shared life with the Son of God. Let us bow together in prayer.

(1:6-7) **Man, Unbelief:** the Son of God has come to earth. This is the great testimony of John the Apostle. He came to earth so that man can have *fellowship with God and with His Son Jesus Christ*.

"But wait," man shouts. "We already have fellowship with God. We already worship God and feel safe and acceptable in our religion. We do not need someone else to show us how to become acceptable to God. We can reach God on our own; we can secure His approval by ourselves. We don't need someone else telling us how to approach God and how we should worship God and secure His approval."

This is the great subject of this particular section (1 John 1:6-2:2). Man objects to the idea that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He is truly God's very own Son. Man objects to the idea...

- that the way he worships is wrong.
- that he has no merit with God.
- that he is unacceptable to God.

This is the reason many reject John's declaration: "the Son of God has come to earth." Jesus Christ came so that man can have *true* fellowship with God. But man objects to the idea that he needs help in reaching God. He feels sufficient within himself. He objects to the idea that he cannot reach God on his own. This passage strikes at these objections and exposes their fallacies.

The first misconception is the subject of the present passage. The other two misconceptions are discussed in the next two studies. Note that the first misconception strikes at the belief that is held by most people on earth. Most people believe that they can *fellowship with God even while they walk in darkness and sin*.

1. We can fellowship with God and walk in darkness (v.6).

- a. This is a lie.
- b. This is not the truth.

2. The truth: we must walk in the light (v.7).

- a. Then we have fellowship.
- b. Then we are cleansed from sin.

(1:6) **Fellowship—Darkness—Man—Salvation**: first, why does man object to the deity of Jesus Christ? To the Son of God coming to earth? That it was *necessary* for Him to come? Because they believe that man can fellowship with God and walk in darkness at the same time. What does it mean to walk in darkness?

It means that the world is in the dark about God. Man cannot see God nor talk face to face with God. Man cannot hear God nor touch God. How then can man know that God really exists? Man and his world are in the dark about God.

□ It means that man does not know exactly how God wants him to live: how moral and pure, how righteous and just. Man cannot talk with God; he has no way to communicate with God, for he cannot see God and he does not know where God is so that he can set up communication with Him. Therefore, man has no way to discover God nor to find out how God wants him to live.

Note four significant facts.

1. First, the world is in the dark about God. When it comes to God, man is in darkness, for he cannot see God nor talk with God. He cannot even be sure that God exists, not absolutely sure. Why? Because man's physical senses and flesh can know only the things of the physical and material world. If there is a God, if there is a spiritual world, man has absolutely no way to penetrate it. Man can take all his technology and science, all his intellectual and creative reasoning, and he will never be able to penetrate the spiritual world, not with his physical and material nature. The physical and material world cannot and never will be able to penetrate and cross over into the spiritual world. Man and his world are completely in the dark about God. No matter what any person claims, no matter how religious or how much a spiritist the person may be, no person from the physical world can cross over and enter into the spiritual world to find out if God exists, much less fellowship with God.

2. Second, how then can man ever know God and fellowship with God? There is only one way: God has to leave the spiritual world and dimension and enter the physical world and dimension. God has to come to earth and reveal Himself to us. This is the only conceivable way man could ever fellowship with God. This is the glorious gospel: this is exactly what John declares: that the Son of God has come to earth. He came to reveal God to us.

3. Third, note the foolishness of man: man rejects the Son of God and declares..."We [can] have fellowship with God and walk in darkness."

□ Man declares that he can find God on his own, that he can relate to God and be good enough to fellowship with God and to secure God's approval by himself.

□ Man believes that he can use his own mind and reasonings and find out enough about God to become acceptable to Him and to fellowship with Him.

□ Man believes that he can use his own hands and energy and do enough to please God and to receive His approval.

Man thinks this: if he believes in God and does half-way right, then his belief and good deeds will put God in debt to him. God will never reject him; God will accept him. Therefore, man concludes that he can reject Jesus Christ as the Son of God. He concludes that he can fellowship and become acceptable to God by believing that God exists and by doing enough good to please God.

4. Fourth, note what the Scripture says to any of us who say this: we lie and do not the truth. No matter how great our minds and thoughts imagine God to be—no matter how many good works we do—we are not doing the truth. And note: a thinking and honest person knows this, for no person can cross over into the spiritual world. If we are ever to know God, God Himself has to come to us. It would not even be enough for some lesser spiritual being to come, for he would not be God.

The only way we can ever hope to *know God* and to *know Him accurately* is for God Himself to come to earth. Therefore, to profess that "we can fellowship with God and walk in darkness" is a lie. Whatever we do—all the approaches to God that men use—they are not the truth. By taking any approach to God other than by the Son of God, we do not take the true approach; we take a false approach.

The Word of God is strong. It says this: if a person says that he is saved, and then lives in the darkness of this world, he lies. God is light; therefore, if a person walks in darkness, he does not know God. He is not fellowshiping with God. Light and darkness cannot dwell together. A person has to choose in which he wants to live: he has to choose to live in either the light of God or in the darkness of the world.

(1:7) **Light—Fellowship—Forgiveness of Sin**: man cannot fellowship with God and walk in darkness. The truth is that man must walk in the light if he is to fellowship with God. What is the light of God?

□ The light of God is the revelation of God Himself. The Lord Jesus Christ came to earth to reveal God. Jesus Christ has the very nature of God; therefore, He was able to show us exactly what God is like.

☐ The light of God is the revelation of just how God wants us to live while upon earth. When the Son of God came to earth He told us and showed us exactly how to live, exactly what God expects of us.

Therefore, to walk in the light means to believe in the Son of God who came to earth and to follow Him. If we walk upon earth believing in Jesus Christ and doing exactly what He said to do, then we are in the light just "as he is in the light." Note: this is exactly what this verse says: we are to "walk in the light, as he is in the light."

This means two most wonderful things.

1. If we walk in the light of Christ, then we have fellowship with Christ and with God and with all other believers. Jesus Christ is the Son of God; therefore, when He was upon earth, He was in constant fellowship with God. He is the One who shows us how to relate to and fellowship with God. Therefore, when we walk in the light of Christ, we do what Christ did. We approach God through Christ and fellowship with God just as Christ showed us. The result is glorious. It means that we have true fellowship—that we actually know God and fellowship with God, that we actually know and fellowship with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and with all who believe and walk in His light.

Note: God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. Few if any persons would deny this. But note this: it is impossible to walk in both light and darkness at the same time. Therefore, if we walk in darkness, we are not walking and fellowshiping with God. As stated, it is totally impossible.

2. If we walk in the light of Christ, then the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. This is a critical point to note. It was not enough for God's Son to come to earth and reveal God to man. Man is sinful; he has transgressed God's law. Man has chosen to live like he wants to live upon earth, to do his own thing.

Man is guilty of offending God and of transgressing God's law. Therefore, just as with any law, when the law is broken, the penalty has to be paid. The lawbreaker has to pay or else someone has to step forward to pay the penalty for him. This is just what Jesus Christ did. He not only came to reveal God to us, He came to take our sins and transgressions upon Himself—all the guilt of them. Jesus Christ died for our sins.

☐ He faced the judgment for us.

☐ He suffered the punishment for us.

☐ He bore the condemnation for us.

The blood of Jesus Christ was shed upon the cross for us. Therefore, to walk in the light of Christ means that we walk believing that Christ died for us. It means that we believe His blood cleanses us from sin, that He actually paid the penalty for our sins, that we are thereby freed from the guilt of sin. When we walk in the light of Christ, God sees our sins covered by the blood of Christ. He accepts us in Christ. Our sins are forgiven by the blood of God's Son.

But note: the word "cleanses" is in the present tense. This means...

☐ that the blood of Christ *continually cleanses* us from sin.

☐ that if we are walking in the light of Jesus Christ, then His blood is *always cleansing* us from our sins.

☐ that if we walk in fellowship with Jesus Christ we are *constantly confessing* our sins, we are living in *open confession* before Him.

The believer is to walk in fellowship with Christ *all day long every day*. He is to walk acknowledging God in *all His ways*, praying, praising, and confessing his shortcomings and sins *all day long*. The believer who walks in fellowship with Jesus Christ like this is being *constantly cleansed* by the blood of Jesus Christ.

This is the point so often missed by man: he cannot erase the sins of his past. He has no way to pay the penalty and judgment of his sins, and they have already been committed. Therefore, the penalty has to be paid. And note: the payment has to be made by Someone who is perfect, for God is perfect. Only perfect sacrifices can be acceptable to God. And this is the terrible problem that man faces, for who is perfect other than God? No man is; only the Son of God is perfect. This is the reason the Son of God had to come to earth. He had to come to sacrifice Himself for man. He had to take man's sins upon Himself and become man's substitute in death. He had to die for man. It is His death, the sacrifice of the blood of God's Son, that covers our sins. No person is ever acceptable to God unless he is free of sin, unless his sins are cleansed and forgiven by the blood of Christ.

Here John is writing to counteract one heretical way of thought. There were those who claimed to be specially intellectually and spiritually advanced, but whose lives showed no sign of it. They claimed to have advanced so far along the road of knowledge and of spirituality that for them sin had ceased to matter and the laws had ceased to exist. Napoleon once said that laws were made for ordinary people, but were never meant for the like of him. So these heretics claimed to be so far on that, even if they did sin, it was of no importance whatsoever. In later days Clement of Alexandria tells us that there were heretics who said that it made no difference how a man lived. Irenaeus tells us that they declared that a truly spiritual man was quite incapable of ever incurring any pollution, no matter what kind of deeds he did.

In answer John insists on certain things.

(i) He insists that to have fellowship with the God who is light a man must walk in the light and that, if he is still walking in the moral and ethical darkness of the Christless life, he can not have that fellowship. This is precisely what the Old Testament had said centuries before. God said, "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am Holy" (*Leviticus* 19:2; cp. 20:7, 26). He who would find fellowship with God is committed to a life of goodness which reflects God's goodness. C. H. Dodd writes: "The Church is a society of people who, believing in a God of pure goodness, accept the obligation to be good like him." This does not mean that a man must be perfect before he can have fellowship with God; if that were the case, all of us would be shut out. But it does mean that he will spend his whole life in the awareness of his obligations, in the effort to fulfill them and in penitence when he fails. It will mean that he will never think that sin does not matter; it will mean that the nearer he comes to God, the more terrible sin will be to him.

(ii) He insists that these mistaken thinkers have the wrong idea of truth. He says that, if people who claim to be specially advanced still walk in darkness, they are not *doing* the truth. Exactly the same phrase is used in the Fourth Gospel, when it speaks of him, who does the truth (*John* 3:21). This means that for the Christian truth is never only intellectual; it is always moral. It is not something which exercises only the mind; it is something which exercises the whole personality. Truth is not only the discovery of abstract things; it is concrete living. It is not only thinking; it is also acting. The words which the New Testament uses along with *truth* are significant. It speaks of *obeying* the truth (*Romans* 2:8; *Galatians* 3:7); *following* the truth (*Galatians* 2:14; 3 *John* 4); of *opposing* the truth (2 *Timothy* 3:8); of *wandering from* the truth (*James* 5:19). There is such a thing as might be called "discussion circle Christianity." It is possible to look on Christianity as a series of intellectual problems to be solved and on the Bible as a book about which illuminating information is to be amassed. But Christianity is something to be followed and the Bible a book to be obeyed. It is possible for intellectual eminence and moral failure to go hand in hand. For the Christian the truth is something first to be discovered and then to be obeyed.

As John sees it, there are two great tests of truth.

(i) Truth is the creator of fellowship. If men are really walking in the light, they have fellowship one with another. No belief can be fully Christian if it separates a man from his fellow-men. No Church can be exclusive and still be the Church of Christ. That which destroys fellowship cannot be true.

(ii) He who really knows the truth is daily more and more cleansed from sin by the blood of Jesus. The Revised Standard Version is correct enough here but it can very easily be misunderstood. It runs: "The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." That can be read as a statement of a general principle. But it is a statement of what ought to be happening in the individual life. The meaning is that all the time, day by day, constantly and consistently, the blood of Jesus Christ ought to be carrying out a cleansing process in the life of the individual Christian.

The Greek for *to cleanse* is *katharizein* which was originally a ritual word, describing the ceremonies and washings and so on which qualified a man to approach his gods. But the word as religion developed, came to have a moral sense; and it describes the goodness which enables a man to enter into the presence of God. So what John is saying is, "If you really know what the sacrifice of Christ has done and are really experiencing its power, day by day you will be adding holiness to your life and becoming more fit to enter the presence of God."

Here indeed is a great conception. It looks on the sacrifice of Christ as something which not only atones for past sin but equips a man in holiness day by day.

True religion is that by which every day a man comes closer to his fellow-men and closer to God. It produces fellowship with God and fellowship with men-and we can never have the one without the other.

(i) Those who claim to have fellowship with the God who is altogether light and who yet walk in the dark are lying (verse 6). A little later he repeats this charge in a slightly different way. The man who says that he knows God and yet does not keep God's commandments is a liar (1 *John* 2:4). John is laying down the blunt truth that the man who says one thing with his lips and another thing with his life is a liar. He is not thinking of the man who tries his hardest and yet often fails. "A man," said H. G. Wells, "may be a very bad musician, and may yet be passionately in love with music"; and a man may be very conscious of his failures and yet be passionately in love with Christ and the way of Christ. John is thinking of the man who makes the highest possible claims to knowledge, to intellectual eminence and to spirituality, and who yet allows himself things which he well knows are forbidden. The man who professes to love Christ and deliberately disobeys him, is guilty of a lie.

(ii) The man who denies that Jesus is the Christ is a liar (1 *John* 2:22). Here is something which runs through the whole New Testament. The ultimate test of any man is his reaction to Jesus. The ultimate question which Jesus asks every man is: "Who do you say that I am?" (*Matthew* 16:13). A man confronted with Christ cannot but see the greatness that is there; and, if he denies it, he is a liar.

(iii) The man who says that he loves God and at the same time hates his brother is a liar (1 *John* 4:20). Love of God and hatred of man cannot exist in the same person. If there is bitterness in a man's heart towards any other, that is proof that he does not really love God. All our protestations of love to God are useless if there is hatred in our hearts towards any man.

Agreeing With God...About Sin 1 *John* 1:8—2:2

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. {9} If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. {10} If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

*My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. {2} He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 *John* 1:8--2:2)*

Every form of life has its enemies. Insects have to watch out for hungry birds, and birds must keep an eye on hungry cats and dogs. Even human beings have to dodge automobiles and fight off germs.

The life that is real also has an enemy, and we read about it in this section. This enemy is *sin*. Seven times in these verses John mentions sin, so the subject is obviously not unimportant. John illustrates his theme by using the contrast between light and darkness: God is light; sin is darkness.

But there is another contrast here too—the contrast between *saying* and *doing*. Four times John writes, "If we say" (1 *John* 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4). It is clear that our Christian life is to amount to more than mere "talk"; we must also "walk," or *live*, what we believe. If we are in fellowship with God (if we are "walking in the light"), our lives will back up what our lips are saying. But if we are living in sin ("walking in darkness"), then our lives will contradict what our lips are saying, making us hypocrites.

As long as the believer reveals the light of Christ, he enjoys fellowship with God. Should he sin, cleansing is available immediately on the basis of Christ's blood that was shed at Calvary.

Sinning saints are not mentioned in the Bible to discourage us, but to warn us

Neither in the Old Testament nor in the New does the Bible whitewash the sins of the saints. In escaping a famine, Abraham became weak in his faith and went down to Egypt and lied to Pharaoh (Gen. 12). Later, the patriarch tried to "help God" by marrying Hagar and begetting a son (Gen. 16). In both cases, God forgave Abraham his sin, but Abraham had to reap what he had sowed. God can and will cleanse the record, but He does not change the results. No one can unscramble an egg.

Peter denied the Lord three times and tried to kill a man in the Garden when Jesus was arrested. Satan is a liar and a murderer (John 8:44), and Peter was playing right into his hands!

The fact that Christians sin bothers some people—especially new Christians. They forget that their receiving the new nature does not eliminate the old nature they were born with. The old nature (which has its origin in our physical birth) fights against the new nature which we receive when we are born again (Gal. 5:16-26).

No amount of self-discipline, no set of man-made rules and regulations, can control this old nature. Only the Holy Spirit of God can enable us to “put to death” the old nature (Rom. 8:12-13) and produce the Spirit’s fruit (Gal. 5:22-23) in us through the new nature.

How do Christians try to cover up their sins? *By telling lies!* First, we tell lies to *others* (1 John 1:6). We want our Christian friends to think we are “spiritual,” so we lie about our lives and try to make a favorable impression on them. We want them to think that we are walking in the light, though in reality we are walking in the darkness.

Once one begins to lie to others, he will sooner or later lie to *himself*, and our passage deals with this (1 John 1:8). The problem now is not deceiving others, but deceiving ourselves. It is possible for a believer to live in sin yet convince himself that everything is fine in his relationship to the Lord.

Perhaps the classic example of this is King David (2 Sam. 11-12). First David lusted after Bathsheba. Then he actually committed adultery. Instead of openly admitting what he had done, he tried to cover his sin. He tried to deceive Bathsheba’s husband, made him drunk, and had him killed. He lied to himself and tried to carry on his royal duties in the usual way. When the prophet Nathan confronted him with a similar hypothetical situation, David condemned the other man, though he felt no condemnation at all for himself. Once we begin to lie to others, it may not be long before we actually *believe* our lie.

But the spiritual decline becomes still worse: the next step is trying to lie *to God* (1 John 1:10). We have made ourselves liars; now we try to make God a liar! We contradict His Word, which says that “*all* have sinned,” and we maintain that we are exceptions to the rule.

We apply God’s Word to others but not to ourselves. We sit through church services or Bible studies and are not touched by the Bible’s teachings. Believers who have reached this low level are usually highly critical of other Christians, but they strongly resist applying the Word to their own lives.

The Holy Spirit’s inspired picture of the human heart is devastating indeed! A believer lies about *his fellowship* (1 John 1:6); about *his nature*—“*I could never do a thing like that!*” (1 John 1:8) and about *his actions* (1 John 1:10).

Sin has a deadly way of spreading, doesn’t it?

At this point we must discuss an extremely important factor in our experience of the life that is real. That factor is *honesty*. We must be honest with ourselves, honest with others, and honest with God. Our passage describes a believer who is living a dishonest life: he is a phony. He is playing a role and acting a part, but is not living a genuine life. He is insincere. What losses does this kind of person experience?

For one thing, he loses *the Word*. He stops “doing the truth” (1 John 1:6); then the truth is no longer in him (1 John 1:8); and then he turns the truth into lies! (1 John 1:10) “Thy Word is truth” (John 17:17) said Jesus; but a person who lives a lie loses the Word.

But a dishonest person loses something else: he loses his fellowship with God and with God’s people (1 John 1:6-7). As a result, prayer becomes an empty form to him. Worship is dull routine. He becomes critical of other Christians and starts staying away from church: “*What communion hath light with darkness?*” (2 Cor. 6:14)

One problem with dishonesty is that just keeping a record of our lies and pretenses is a full-time job! Abraham Lincoln used to say that if a man is going to be a liar, he had better have a good memory! When a person uses up all his energy in *pretending*, he has nothing left for *living*; and life becomes shallow and tasteless. A person who pretends not only robs himself of reality, but he keeps himself from growing: his true self is smothered under the false self.

There is possible deception: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." This appears to be an attack on an error advanced by the deluded Gnostics who taught that, though matter was sinful, the soul was without sin. They also believed that one could reach such a mature state in their walk of faith that they would reach a point when they would not sin.

Such teaching was a denial of what the Lord Jesus taught: *(Mark 7:21-23 NIV) For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, {22} greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. {23} All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'*"

The various forms of wickedness listed here are the fruits of man's sinful nature. If anyone says that he has no sin, he deceives himself.

This error was existent not only in John's day; it has continued to the present. There are those who teach that a Christian can reach a state of sanctification whereby the flesh is eradicated completely, allowing him to live in a state of sinless perfection. Anyone who believes this is deceiving himself, but only himself; those who observe him know that he is not perfect.

Even if one appeared to be sinless, there would still be a problem:

(1 Samuel 16:7 NIV) But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

The Bible makes it clear that the old nature continues, even after conversion. Though one's sins are forgiven, the flesh must be kept constantly under Christ's control. Let no one think he can jump the hurdle of sin once for all. Paul was aware of this. Even though he was a mature saint, he confessed, *(Romans 7:21-24 NIV) So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. {22} For in my inner being I delight in God's law; {23} but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. {24} What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?*

Who of us has not, at some time, sensed this same defeat in the conflict of the old and new natures? The apostle knew who could give him victory over his flesh: *"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Romans 7:25). Though the pull of sin was strong at all times, Paul realized that, as he relied completely on Christ, he could enjoy lasting victory over sin.

As it pertains to personal sin, any believer who will be honest with himself will admit freely that he, too, belongs in the nursery department. This is why we must depend on Christ constantly. He is the only perfect One. It is He who gives Himself to us to enable us to overcome the temptations to our sinful natures. David declared, *"Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth"* (Psalm 124:8).

When Daniel W. Whittle read the words of the hymn entitled, "I Need Thee Every Hour," he said, "That is not enough for me. I need Him every moment." Immediately, he sat down and wrote the words of the inspiring hymn: Moment by moment I'm kept in His love; Moment by moment I've life from above; Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine; Moment by moment, O Lord, I am Thine.

Victorious and fruitful living is a moment-by-moment experience. As we depend on Christ entirely, He provides the strength and power we need. Our only victory over sin is in Him, never in ourselves.

What are some negative consequences of perfectionism?

- **Low self-esteem.** Because a perfectionist never feels "good enough" about personal performance, feelings of being a "failure" or a "loser" with a lessening of self-confidence and self-esteem may result.
- **Lack of belief in self.** Knowing that one will never be able to achieve an idyllic goal can lead a perfectionist to lose the belief that he will ever be able to improve his life significantly.
- **Guilt.** Because a perfectionist never feels good about the way responsibility has been handled in life (by himself or others) a sense of shame, self recrimination, and guilt may result.

- **Pessimism.** Since a perfectionist is convinced that it will be extremely difficult to achieve an "ideal goal," he can easily become discouraged, fatalistic, disheartened, and pessimistic about future efforts to reach a goal.
- **Depression.** Needing always to be "perfect," yet recognizing that it is impossible to achieve such a goal, a perfectionist runs the risk of feeling down, blue, and depressed.
- **Obsessiveness.** Being in need of an excessive amount of order, pattern, or structure in life can lead a perfectionistic person to become nit-picky, finicky, or obsessive in an effort to maintain a certain order.
- **Compulsive behavior.** Over-indulgence or the compulsive use of alcohol, drugs, gambling, food, shopping, sex, smoking, risk-taking, or novelty, is often used to medicate a perfectionist who feels like a failure or loser for never being able to be "good enough" in life.
- **Lack of motivation.** Believing that the goal of "change" will never be able to be ideally or perfectly achieved can often give a perfectionist a lack of motivation to attempt change in the first place, or to persevere if change has already begun.
- **Immobilization.** Because a perfectionist is often burdened with an extreme fear of failure, the person can become immobilized. With no energy, effort or creative juices applied to rectify, improve, or change the problem behavior in the person's life, he becomes stagnant.

In contrast to those who say they have no sin, sincere believers can maintain a happy and right relationship to God on the basis of confession.

At the moment of conversion, God forgives all sin: past, present, and future. But something further must be done about daily defilement. All of us are plagued by evil thoughts and actions: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Here is a tremendous promise.

When a believer has done the wrong thing, does he lose his salvation? Not at all. He has, however, broken fellowship with God. As a result, he is out of harmony with the Lord. But he need not remain in this state for he can "confess" to the Lord and be restored to fellowship immediately.

The verb tenses in 1 John 1 also demonstrate this. A literal rendering of verse 7 reads, "The blood of Jesus His Son keeps cleansing us from all sin." And the verb tense in verse 9 also denotes continuous action: "If we are continually confessing our sins."

So neither the confession nor the cleansing spoken of in 1 John 1 is a one-time, finished event. These verses simply do not support the idea that God pays no heed to the believer's daily transgressions, as if our justification once and for all made sin an utterly moot point for the Christian.¹

Continual confession of sin is an indication of genuine salvation. While the false teachers would not admit their sin, the genuine Christian admitted and forsook it.

(Psalms 32:3-5 NIV) When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. {4} For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah {5} Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah

(Proverbs 28:13 NIV) He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

The term "confess" means to say the same thing about sin as God does; to acknowledge His perspective about sin.

While v. 7 is from God's perspective, v. 9 is from the Christian's perspective. Confession of sin characterizes genuine Christians, and God continually cleanses those who are confessing (cf. v. 7). Rather than focusing on confession for every single sin as necessary, John has especially in mind here a settled recognition and acknowledgment that one is a sinner in need of cleansing and forgiveness (Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13).²

¹MacArthur, John: *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*. electronic ed. Wheaton, IL : Crossway Books, 1998, S. 57

²MacArthur, John Jr: *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed. Nashville : Word Pub., 1997, c1997, S. 1 Jn 1:9

To "confess" to the Lord is to tell Him we are sorry for the specific sin we have committed. Of course, He knows what we have done. It is the motive of the believer's heart that is important in confession. Psalm 51 evidences David's sorrow and sincerity as he confesses to the Lord, following his sin with Bathsheba. David's submissive attitude is seen throughout the Psalm.

If others are involved in our sin, in order for our confession to be acceptable to God, we must ask forgiveness of those whom we have offended. We should not wait, but go immediately to anyone involved and make matters right. Irrespective of who is to blame, to expect God's forgiveness, we must seek our neighbor's forgiveness. The Lord Jesus Himself emphasized this: (Matthew 5:23-24 NIV) *"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, {24} leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."*

This is not easy to do, but the obedient believer will be blessed in doing it. If we are truly repentant in our confession, we are in a position to claim the promise that God "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

There are three words here that must not be overlooked. "He is faithful." Christians have been heard to say that they had confessed to God, but did not "feel" forgiven. God's forgiveness depends solely upon His love and mercy, not our feelings. There is never a time when He is not faithful. (Deuteronomy 7:9 NIV) *Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.*

He is "the faithful God" who never changes. One may not "feel" forgiven because of the guilt associated with disobedience. But God is still "the faithful God." Thus, never forget, if you are honest and sincere in your confession, God will be faithful in His forgiveness.

Not only is the Lord "faithful" in His forgiveness, He is "just." This has to do with the righteous nature of God. Because of His righteous nature, there is never a time when He can fail His promises. We are assured of forgiveness on the basis of confession because God cannot fail or lie. For this reason, believers need never beg God for forgiveness. Our responsibility is to confess. If we do, God forgives. His forgiveness is promised on the basis of our confession.

WE CAN CONFESS OUR SINS (1 JOHN 1:7, 9)

John gives two interesting titles to Jesus Christ: *Advocate* and *Propitiation* (1 John 2:1-2). It's important that we understand these two titles because they stand for two ministries that only the Lord Himself performs.

Let's begin with *Propitiation*. If you look this word up in the dictionary, you may get the wrong idea of its meaning. The dictionary tells us that "to propitiate" means "to appease someone who is angry." If you apply this to Christ, you get the horrible picture of an angry God, about to destroy the world, and a loving Saviour giving Himself to appease the irate God—and this is *not* the Bible picture of salvation! Certainly God is angry at sin; after all, He is infinitely holy. But the Bible reassures us that "God so *loved* [not *hated*] the world" (John 3:16, italics added).

No, the word "propitiation" does not mean the appeasing of an angry God. Rather, it means *the satisfying of God's holy law*. "God is light" (1 John 1:5) and, therefore, He cannot close His eyes to sin. But "God is love" (1 John 4:8) too and wants to save sinners.

How, then, can a holy God uphold His own justice and still forgive sinners? The answer is in the sacrifice of Christ. At the cross, God in His holiness judged sin. God in His love offers Jesus Christ to the world as Saviour. God was *just* in that He punished sin, but He is also *loving* in that He offers free forgiveness through what Jesus did at Calvary. (Read 1 John 4:10, and also give some thought to Rom. 3:23-26.)

Christ is the Sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, but He is Advocate only for believers. "We [Christians] have an Advocate with the Father." The word "advocate" used to be applied to lawyers. The word John uses is the very same word Jesus used when He was talking about the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26). It means, literally, "one called alongside." When a man was summoned to court, he took an advocate (lawyer) with him to stand at his side and plead his case.

Jesus finished His work on earth (John 17:4)—the work of giving His life as a sacrifice for sin. Today He has an “unfinished work” in heaven. *He represents us before God’s throne.* As our High Priest, He sympathizes with our weaknesses and temptations and gives us grace (Heb. 4:15-16; 7:23-28). As our Advocate, He helps us *when we sin.* When we confess our sins to God, because of Christ’s advocacy God forgives us.

The Old Testament contains a beautiful picture of this. Joshua (Zech. 3:1-7) was the Jewish high priest after the Jews returned to their land following their Captivity in Babylon. (Don’t confuse this Joshua with the Joshua who conquered the Promised Land.) The nation had sinned; to symbolize this, Joshua stood before God in filthy garments and Satan stood at Joshua’s right hand to accuse him (cf. Rev. 12:10). God the Father was the Judge; Joshua, representing the people, was the accused; Satan was the prosecuting attorney. (The Bible calls him the accuser of the brethren.) It looked as if Satan had an open-and-shut case. But Joshua had an Advocate who stood at God’s right hand, and this changed the situation. Christ gave Joshua a change of garments and silenced the accusations of Satan.

This is what is in view when Jesus Christ is called our “Advocate.” He represents believers before God’s throne, and the merits of His sacrifice make possible the forgiveness of the believer’s sin. Because Christ *died* for His people, He satisfied the justice of God. (“The wages of sin is death.”) Because He *lives* for us at God’s right hand, He can apply His sacrifice to our needs day by day.

All He asks is that when we have failed we confess our sins. What does it mean to “confess”? Well, to *confess* sins means much more than simply to “admit” them. The word *confess* actually means “to say the same thing [about].” To confess sin, then, means to say the same thing about it that God says about it.

Confession simply means being honest with ourselves and with God, and if others are involved, being honest with them too. It is more than *admitting* sin. It means *judging* sin and facing it squarely.

When we confess our sins, God promises to forgive us (1 John 1:9). But this promise is not a “magic rabbit’s foot” that makes it easy for us to disobey God!

“I went out and sinned,” a student told his campus chaplain, “because I knew I could come back and ask God to forgive me.”

“On what basis can God forgive you?” the chaplain asked, pointing to 1 John 1:9.

“God is faithful and just,” the boy replied.

“Those two words should have *kept you out of sin,*” the chaplain said. “Do you know what it cost God to forgive your sins?”

The boy hung his head. “Jesus had to die for me.”

Then the chaplain zeroed in. “That’s right—forgiveness isn’t some cheap sideshow trick God performs. God is faithful to His promise, and God is just, because Christ died for your sins and paid the penalty for you. Now, the next time you plan to sin, remember that you are going to sin against a faithful loving God!”

Of course, cleansing has two sides to it: the judicial and the personal. The blood of Jesus Christ, shed on the cross, delivers us from the guilt of sin and gives us right standing (“justification”) before God. God is able to forgive because Jesus’ death has satisfied His holy Law.

“Confess,” as it is used in verse 9, is not a once-and-for all experience. We should confess to the Lord immediately whenever sin is committed. One should never wait until evening or morning prayer time for confession, which could result in periods of sad defeat in the believer’s life. Sin must always be confessed immediately to enjoy fellowship with the Lord.

As the believer walks with the Lord in fellowship with Him, he becomes extremely sensitive toward sin. Merely rationalizing or trying to explain it away in one’s mind is not enough. To enjoy the continued blessing of God on his life, his only recourse is to confess. Nowhere in the Bible are we told of anyone who was ever forgiven any other way than by confessing to the Lord. Confession is the key that unlocks the door to God’s blessing. Sin must not be allowed to smolder in the heart! We must get rid of it fast!

David prayed, (*Psalms 51:10 NIV*) *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.* This should be the desire of every believer. God has given us eternal deliverance from sin and all its consequences. Let’s not live in daily defilement since God’s forgiveness is always available. Our God is not a policeman, waiting to punish us if we fail.

He is a sympathetic, loving Heavenly Father who longs to help us, whatever our need. Especially is He desirous of forgiving us of all our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.

"If we say that we 'have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." In verse 8, the apostle declared that anyone who said he had no sin, deceived himself. It is bad enough to deceive one's self, but this does not begin to compare with the seriousness of calling God a liar.

In verse 10, the apostle was writing about those who say, "we have not sinned" at any time, either before or after conversion. To make such a statement not only declares God to be a liar, but reveals profound ignorance of the Word of God. From Genesis to Revelation, God has given us scores of examples of men and women who failed because of sin. The Bible does not glorify humanity; it simply reveals it as it is. There is not a perfect character presented in the Bible other than Jesus Christ. God declared "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3 :23).

Sin has always been, and will continue to be, a distinct mark of human nature. To deny this is to reject the truth of God. Jesus said, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures" (Matthew 22:29). To refuse to acknowledge the fact of sin is to claim God to be a liar and His truth to be worthless.

The purpose of Christ's first advent was to provide deliverance from sin. He "came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5: 32). Thus a denial of sin is a rejection of the purpose and plan of the cross. Sin is real even more real than any of us can understand. It is always a problem. It hinders the believer's effectiveness for God. It robs him of the joy of the Lord.

It keeps him from many of the blessings God desires to bestow upon him. It is something with which the believer must contend every hour of every day. For this reason we must keep in a right relationship with Jesus, the Son of God, for He is our strength to overcome sin.

At the root of our sinfulness is our selfish heart, which resists the work of God within us. This was the problem of the children of Israel during their many years of wilderness wanderings. It took forty long years to make an eleven-day journey. Because of their selfish resistance to God's plan, they averaged thirty-three funerals a day for forty years.

Though we may not deny the reality of sin as a fact, by our capricious attitude it is evident that we are denying it experientially. The Apostle Paul dealt with this problem in his life: "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Corinthians 9:27). Though he desired to obey the Lord, the self-life was a constant hindrance. Realizing this Paul did something about it: "I keep under my body.". He kept the evil intent of his heart under control.

All praise went to the only One who could do it: "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57). Let us face the reality of our sinful hearts in the same way. Begin with a fresh commitment of your entire life to GO? Then ask Him to take complete control. Should you yield to temptation in the future, confess immediately. Then thank Him for forgiveness and live in the blessedness of a Christ-controlled life.

In this passage John describes and condemns two further mistaken ways of thought.

(i) There is the man who says that he has no sin. That may mean either of two things. It may describe the man who says that he has no responsibility for his sin. It is easy enough to find defences behind which to seek to hide. We may blame our sins on our heredity, on our environment, on our temperament, on our physical condition. We may claim that someone misled us and that we were led astray. It is characteristic of us all that we seek to shuffle out of the responsibility for sin. Or it may describe the man who claims that he can sin and take no harm.

It is John's insistence that, when a man has sinned, excuses and self-justifications are irrelevant. The only thing which will meet the situation is humble and penitent confession to God and, if need be, to men.

Then John says a surprising thing. He says that we can depend on God *in his righteousness* to forgive us if we confess our sins. On the face of it, we might well have thought that God *in his righteousness* would have been much more likely to condemn than to forgive. But the point is that God, because he is righteous, never breaks his word; and Scripture is full of the promise of mercy to the man who comes to him with penitent heart.

God has promised that he will never despise the contrite heart and he will not break his word. If we humbly and sorrowfully confess our sins, he will forgive. The very fact of making excuses and seeking for self-justification debars us from forgiveness, because it debars us from penitence; the very fact of humble confession opens the door to forgiveness, for the man with the penitent heart can claim the promises of God.

(ii) There is the man who says that he has not in fact sinned. That attitude is not nearly so uncommon as we might think. Any number of people do not really believe that they have sinned and rather resent being called sinners. Their mistake is that they think of sin as the kind of thing which gets into the newspaper. They forget that sin is *hamartia* which literally means a *missing of the target*. To fail to be as good a father, mother, wife, husband, son, daughter, work-man, person as we might be is to sin; and that includes us all.

In any event the man who says that he has not sinned is in effect doing nothing less than calling God a liar, for God has said that all have sinned.

So John condemns the man who claims that he is so far advanced in knowledge and in the spiritual life that sin for him has ceased to matter; he condemns the man who evades the responsibility for his sin or who holds that sin has no effect upon him; he condemns the man who has never even realized that he is a sinner. The essence of the Christian life is first to realize our sin; and then to go to God for that forgiveness which can wipe out the past and for that cleansing which can make the future new.

THE MAN WHO DENIES SIN

We are now experiencing the unique ministry of John the Mender, the apostle whose particular function it was to call men back to fundamentals. This was foreseen, in figure, in the act John was performing when he was called by Christ, for he was found mending his nets. The ministry of a mender is very much needed in any hour of weakness and attack. This is why the Holy Spirit chose the Apostle John to be the last writer of Scripture. His writings came at a time when the Church had begun to be infiltrated by various false concepts and ideas, and strong persecution had arisen.

John lived in the reign of Domitian, the Roman emperor whose cruelties exceeded all those before him, including even the infamous Nero. The Church was under great attack, not only from the violence of a direct and frontal attack on it by the Roman empire, but also from the subtle and much more dangerous attacks of various ideas which had arisen.

Now you will recognize that we live in the same kind of a day. Today much of the Christian church is under direct and frontal attack. Here in America we are free from that, and we ought to give thanks every day for our freedom, but here we are exposed to a very powerful barrage of attack by many devious errors that exist today. The Christian faith is threatened with a very subtle undermining that removes all vestiges of vital Christianity, leaving us dull, dead, and useless. So this letter of John's has tremendous significance for us.

John is writing to Christians and pointing out that their great need is fellowship with Jesus Christ, i.e., to hold all things in common with him. Not just to talk about it -- he makes that point clear. It is so easy to say we have fellowship but what is needed is to really have fellowship, actually enter into the experience of having all our resources in common with him, and all his resources in common with us. In other words, it is to turn from a reliance upon methods and propaganda, programs, and pronouncements unto power; to discover again the power of genuine Christianity.

We have looked enough at this letter of John's to know that fellowship is not an automatic thing. Simply because you are a Christian does not mean that you have fellowship with Christ. That needs to be made clear, for there are many who feel that it is almost automatic, and they take it for granted. But there is a key to fellowship, and the key, as John is reminding us, is to walk in the light. "If we walk in the light we have fellowship, one with another" {1 Jn 1:7 RSV}, i.e., with Jesus Christ and with one another as well.

Walking in the light, as we have already seen, means to see and treat things exactly as the light reveals them to be. Suppose you and I were in this room with the lights out and it was dark outside and we had never been here before. It would be quite likely that moving around in the room, stumbling over pieces of furniture, we might mistake the character of them. We might think the piano was a table, or the organ was a piano. This would be understandable in view of the absence of light.

But once the light comes on, we would be stupid morons if we went on calling the piano a table and the organ a piano. The light reveals them for what they are, and to walk in the light is to call things what the light reveals them to be.

Now, the Apostle John simply applies this to life. He says God is light and to walk with him in the light of his Word is to see life as it really is. Well, then, act accordingly: That is walking in the light. Adjust yourselves to what you see. Treat things realistically. That is walking in the light. Openness, honesty, and obedience, these are the characteristics of walking in the light. This is the key to fellowship, and fellowship is the key to the enjoyment and glory of vital Christianity. So it is exceedingly important that we understand what this means.

The apostle now points out that there are three ways by which, traditionally and continuously, we avoid walking in the light. We have already looked at one, the tendency to avoid light, to refuse to look at what it reveals, i.e., never to examine ourselves. This is the unexamined life, and even Plato says that an unexamined life is a life not worth living. The need for Christians these days is to examine themselves in view of what they see in the light.

But now we shall look at a second thing which will keep us from walking in the light and thus miss out on fellowship. It is given in Verses 8 and 9 of Chapter 1:

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. {1 Jn 1:8-9 RSV}

It is necessary that we note first the difference between the words, *sin* and *sins*. In Verse 8 it is in the singular number, "If we say we have no sin," in Verse 9 it is plural, "If we confess our sins." Now this marks a very important distinction, the distinction between the root which is *sin*, singular, and the fruit, which are *sins*, plural.

Sin is that fallen twist in man which makes him want to play God on every occasion. We know how this is: We want the world to revolve around us, always to be the center of things. That self-centeredness is sin. It goes by other names as well -- pride, selfishness, or independence. That is the root, the twist in human nature which makes us commit sins.

Sins, therefore, are those specific forms which this inward bent makes us take from time to time. They can cover a wide range of experience. There are many kinds of *sins*, but all from one root, *sin*. This is now what John is zeroing in on. He says if we say we have no sin, that is, no capacity to commit sins, if we deny the very possibility of sins, then we deceive ourselves. Obviously, this is a worse case than the previous one. In the first instance, you remember, John says, "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth" {1 Jn 1:6 RSV}, i.e., we are trying to deceive others and to some degree we often succeed.

But if we say we have no ability to sin at all, we are only deceiving ourselves. Others are quite aware that we are lying to and deceiving ourselves. They are not fooled, it is we who are. That is always pathetic. The man who ignores the light deceives others, but seldom himself. He knows that he is not living as he ought, he knows he is ignoring light. But this one deceives himself. He actually believes that he can no longer sin, that there is no longer any possibility of evil in him.

You say, does this really happen? Are there people so deluded that they have come to the place where they really think they cannot sin? Unfortunately, we must say "Yes," it often happens in our day, and for several reasons. But whenever it happens, the one who makes this claim loses immediately that glorious "fellowship" which makes Christianity so vital and unforgettable. He loses his power, his influence, his vitality, and his effectiveness as a Christian. His life becomes lusterless, orthodox, dull, and deadening. Now how does this happen?

There are primarily three ways in which this occurs:

First, a Christian can become the victim of one of the cults which teach along this line. There are cults which deny the reality of sin, who say that sin is but "an error of mortal mind." Sin, they say, has no real existence, it is a mere figment of the imagination, and all that is necessary to deal with sin is to correct your thinking. You will recognize that this teaching is widespread. It is represented by groups such as Christian Science, the Unity School of Christianity, and Religious Science. Also, it is widespread in non-Christian religions such as Theosophy, Hinduism, and Buddhism. They teach this concept that sin does not really exist, it is merely in the mind. Truth exists, and good exists, but sin does not have objective reality.

Unfortunately there are many who are really Christians who have fallen into this trap and believe that sin merely calls for an adjustment in their thinking. But John says if you believe that, the truth is not in you, there is no light in you, for light

is truth and truth is light. The truth as it is revealed in Jesus says quite differently. According to the word of the Lord, both directly from his own lips and through the apostles that followed, the truth is that sin is a very objective reality. It does exist, it is always a present possibility. It finds its final expression in the great hosts of satanically-controlled beings who are at work in the world, as we have seen in previous series, influencing and controlling the thinking of men. Sin is personified in the person of the adversary, the devil, but it exists as a very powerful and persuasive factor in life. To treat it as though it is not there is but to practice self-deception and to become the victim of the saddest of delusions.

Sin does exist. There is nothing more pathetic than the person who denies the reality of sin. It has always reminded me of the story of the young woman who was attending a meeting with older women. They were discussing the effects of prenatal influences upon a child, and some gave rather strange accounts of how, when they were carrying their babies they saw a red fire engine and the baby was born with a red blotch on the forehead, etc. This young woman said, "I don't believe all this. My mother told me that before I was born she dropped a whole pile of phonograph records and broke every one, but it didn't affect me, affect me, affect me."

So those who make this claim of being free from the universal taint of sin are constantly saying by their very lives that it did affect them, as it affects all. Now that is the first classification, those who succumb to the false teaching of the cults. Then there are those Christians -- and very devout Christians, for the most part -- who have come to believe that the root of sin with which they were born has been somehow eradicated. By the activity of the Holy Spirit in the outworking of their salvation, it has been completely torn out, lifted out, and they are freed from the root of sin. There are a considerable number of Christians who follow this teaching today. They group themselves in denominations that usually bear the name, *holiness*. They interpret sanctification as a digging out and eradicating of the root of sin. Often they even base this idea upon a verse here in First John. Many of them quote First John 3:9: "No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God."

We must admit that at first glance this looks like a confirmation of that view. I shall withhold the explanation of that verse until we come to it in the study of the passage, but suffice it to say now that it does not mean that the Christian's ability to sin is totally removed. But there are those who take it that way. Having gone through this wonderful experience of sanctification, and they are usually ready to describe it to you in the most glowing terms, they now say they have reached a place where they no longer sin. I am always reminded of the words of D. L. Moody when someone came up to him and told him that he had reached the place where he no longer sinned. Mr. Moody, in his practical way, said, "Well, I'd like to ask your wife about that."

Here again, those who do this are self-deceived. They walk in the darkness and therefore they are without fellowship, for the key to fellowship with Christ is to walk in the light. If you have reached the place where you say there is nothing for the light to reveal anymore, all sin is taken away, there is nothing to look at anymore, then, of course, you are deceiving yourself and walk in darkness and it always results in loss of fellowship.

Now there is a third classification, even more subtle, but perhaps more widespread, that occurs among the best instructed Christians, those who have learned that there is a possibility of being free from sin by walking in the Spirit. They have fully grasped the implications of the great verse in Galatians that says, "if we walk in the Spirit we shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh," {Gal 5:16 KJV}. They are aware of the mighty possibilities for freedom from the control and power of sin and they enter into this with all their heart. They give themselves diligently to understanding how to walk in the Spirit in every circumstance until they believe that they have so mastered the process of being free from sin that they invariably fulfill it; therefore, they do not, and even cannot, sin.

It seems a perfectly logical position to take, does it not? Theoretically it is possible, for any given period of time, to so walk in the Spirit that we are free from sin, we do not sin. This is the whole purpose of salvation in its present tense. When we manifest the life of the Spirit, we do not sin. This is true. But the remarkable thing is that, as you read the pages of the New Testament, you discover that no New Testament Christian ever makes a claim to sinless perfection. The only one who could say, and did say, that he was without sin was the Lord Jesus himself. All others are reminded that though we must face constantly the challenge of walking without sin, nevertheless, the subtlety of the enemy, the cleverness of the wiles of the devil, the ease by which we can deceive ourselves and be deceived, is so prevalent and powerful that there will be times when we succumb, times when we fail.

As Paul warns his readers, "He who thinks he stands, take heed, lest he fall," {cf, 1 Cor 10:12}. This is why the Christian is always exhorted to walk in fear and trembling. As Paul writes again, "If any man thinks he knows something, he knows

nothing as he ought to know it," {cf, 1 Cor 8:2}. When we think we have come to the place where we have mastered the processes of walking in the Spirit, then we need to think again. We have not yet learned it all. Even the Apostle Paul can say of himself at the close of his ministry that he regards himself as "the chief of sinners" {cf, 1 Tim 1:15}, not because he sees sin abounding in his life, but because as his conscience is sensitized his awareness of transgression multiplies.

He is fully aware of the ease with which he can fall into an attitude of mind that is contrary to the things of the Lord. He is aware of the fact that not until he stands in resurrection life with a redeemed body will he be totally free from the taint of sin. This is why our Lord himself taught in the great Lord's Prayer that we are daily to pray, "Lord, lead me not into temptation," {cf, Matt 6:13, Luke 11:4}. The pressures are so great, the opposing forces are so subtle, that it is easier to succumb.

Then let us not take this stand. If any man deny sin, if any man says he cannot sin, he deceives himself, and the truth is not in him. Then what is the remedy? Well, as we have been seeing all along, it is always the same thing. It is to walk in the light. It is to face reality. Specifically, as the apostle puts it, it is to confess our sins. Regardless of whether we have deluded ourselves into thinking there is no root sin in us anymore, it will still be there and it will keep on producing sins, and all the more if we think there is no need to guard against it. Well then, face the sins, John says. Take a good look at them and agree with God about them. The light reveals them to be there.

Remember the word of the Lord himself? "Out of the heart of man," he says, "proceed murders, adulteries, fornications, evil thoughts, etc." {cf, Matt 15:19, Mark 7:21}. All these things come from within. The root is still planted deep within our physical natures and we shall not escape it until the body is redeemed. Of course, we do not need to yield to it, that is the point of redemption. As we learn to walk in the Spirit there can be great, protracted periods of time when we walk free from the taint of sin. Ah, but when we do sin, do not try to hide it, do not cover it over, do not, out of some mistaken notion that you will lower yourself in the estimation of someone else, refuse to acknowledge sin. Confess it, say what it is -- anger, or malice, envy or lust, jealousy or selfishness or ambition -- any of these things. Do not deny them and do not deny the root. Face the reality, the apostle says, confess these faults when they do appear.

Now the word *confess*, as you know, does not mean to ask for forgiveness, and you will see why in a moment. Christ's work for us upon the cross has already done all that is necessary to forgive us. What God wants us to do is to look at the sin before us and call it what he calls it. That means to agree with God about it, and that is what the word confess means: *Fess* comes from a root which means "to say," and *con* means "with." "To say with" God what he says about this thing, that is confessing sin. There is a popular song which you sometimes hear in Christian circles, "If I have wounded any soul today, If I have caused one foot to go astray, If I have lived in my own selfish way, Dear Lord, forgive. "

That is not a confession at all. The *"if's"* take it out of the realm of confession. Do not say "if," say, "Lord, I have caused some foot to go astray, I have lived in my own selfish way." That is confession, that is agreeing with God. When you agree with God about these things, what happens? Well, we are told, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. {1 Jn 1:9 RSV}*

Sometimes, I might add, there is need for confession to others besides God who are injured by what we do. There is need, often, for restitution. If we are honestly saying what God says about it, then we need to do something about it. We need to remedy the harm we have done as much as possible, and God will sometimes demand this of us. There is no sense of forgiveness granted to us until we have moved in restitution. Ah, but if we look at it as he does, then he says we are cleansed.

The cleansing is not based upon God's mercy, or his kindness, or his love, least of all his caprice; it is based on the work of Jesus Christ. On that basis God is faithful and just to forgive, and he would be utterly unjust if he refused to forgive a penitent sinner. God himself would be wicked if he refused, on the basis of the work of Christ, to forgive a penitent sinner. That is how certain we can be of the cleansing that comes when we agree with God about these things.

Do you remember how our Lord himself dramatized this for us in the solemnity of that Last Supper, before he went to the cross? Gathered with his disciples in the Upper Room, he took a basin and a towel and girded himself and set about to wash the feet of the disciples. You recall, as he came to Peter, Peter shook his head and said, "No, Lord, you will never wash my feet," {cf, John 13:8a}. Jesus then said these significant words, "If I wash you not, you can have no part with me," {cf, John 13:8b}. Peter did not understand all he meant until years later, but we can see that what our Lord meant

was, "Peter, here is the key to fellowship. You can be related to me by sharing my life, but you do not have any fellowship with me unless you let me wash your feet." "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me," {John 13:8b KJV}.

Peter, in his impetuosity, always plunging himself to the full in everything said, "Lord, if that's the case, then wash me all over," {cf, John 13:9}. Again the Lord has to correct him. "No, Peter, he that is bathed does not need to wash again," {cf, John 13:10}. That first cleansing of redemption, that coming to Christ which washes away the guilt of the past, the Adamic guilt, that is "bathing all over." Jesus said he that is so bathed does not need to wash all over again, but he does need to wash his feet. This is what John is talking about -- this repeated washing of the feet.

Whenever we are aware of having fallen into a fleshly reaction, into sins, then let us stop right there and in our hearts before God agree with God about it and experience anew this wonderful cleansing, this faithful and righteous cleansing of our lives, "cleansing from all unrighteousness." That is keeping the feet clean.

Do you know what happens when you do not keep your feet clean? You become very unpleasant to live with. Now, I do not mind living with someone who thinks his feet get dirty and who therefore frequently washes them, but it is terribly distressing to live with someone who thinks his feet never get dirty. That is what John is saying. If we say we cannot get dirty feet, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we face up to it, and confess it, and agree with God about it, (and that is sometimes hard to do because we want so desperately to get him to agree with us) well then, the cleansing that the Lord Jesus has fully and abundantly provided for on the cross is immediately ours, and we are as though we had never sinned.

(1:8-9) The great testimony has been borne; the great proclamation has been made. John the apostle has declared: "the Son of God has come to earth. He has come to earth to reveal who God is and what God is like and how God wants us to live. In addition to this, He has come to die for us and to cleanse us from our sin."

But note: man objects to the idea that Jesus Christ *had to die* for our sins. Man shouts at the idea:

"We are not that sinful, so sinful that we cannot handle the problem of sin ourselves. We can change our behavior and act responsibly. Man has the capacity to reform himself, to discipline and control his own life. Man has the ability to live a responsible life: he can resolve to change and live a decent, moral, and responsible life. Man has the power to please God himself. Man can do good and be good enough to make himself acceptable to God. Man is not so terrible a sinner, not down deep within. Man can become a moral and righteous person on his own. All he needs is...

- to be educated to understand himself and his world.
- to have a set of moral values and religious worship to encourage him in his values.
- to use his technology and science for moral and just causes."

The point is this: man rejects the idea that he needs someone to die for his sins, that he cannot become acceptable to God on his own. Man objects to the idea that the perfect and sinless Son of God had to come to earth to die for his sins.

This is the reason many persons object to Jesus Christ. This is the reason many accept Him as a great religious teacher, but reject His claim to be the Son of God and the Savior of the world. They are unwilling to accept the fact that man is sinful.

1. We are not sinful (v.8).
 - a. This is a deception.
 - b. The truth is not in us.

2. The truth: we must confess our sins (v.9).
 - a. Because God is faithful and just.
 - b. Because God forgives.

WE CAN TRY TO COVER OUR SINS (1 JOHN 1:5-6, 8, 10; 2:4)

"God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). When we were saved, God called us out of darkness into His light (1 Peter 2:9). We are children of light (1 Thes. 5:5). Those who do wrong hate light (John 3:19-21). When light shines in on us, it reveals our true nature (Eph. 5:8-13).

Light produces life and growth and beauty, but sin is darkness; and darkness and light cannot exist in the same place. If we are walking in the light, the darkness has to go. If we are holding to sin, then the light goes. There is no middle ground, no vague "gray" area, where sin is concerned.

How do Christians try to cover up their sins? *By telling lies!* First, we tell lies to *others* (1 John 1:6). We want our Christian friends to think we are "spiritual," so we lie about our lives and try to make a favorable impression on them. We want them to think that we are walking in the light, though in reality we are walking in the darkness.

Once one begins to lie to others, he will sooner or later lie to *himself*, and our passage deals with this (1 John 1:8). The problem now is not deceiving others, but deceiving ourselves. It is possible for a believer to live in sin yet convince himself that everything is fine in his relationship to the Lord.

Perhaps the classic example of this is King David (2 Sam. 11-12). First David lusted after Bathsheba. Then he actually committed adultery. Instead of openly admitting what he had done, he tried to cover his sin. He tried to deceive Bathsheba's husband, made him drunk, and had him killed. He lied to himself and tried to carry on his royal duties in the usual way. When his court chaplain, the Prophet Nathan, confronted him with a similar hypothetical situation, David condemned the other man, though he felt no condemnation at all for himself. Once we begin to lie to others, it may not be long before we actually *believe* our lie.

But the spiritual decline becomes still worse: the next step is trying to lie *to God* (1 John 1:10). We have made ourselves liars; now we try to make God a liar! We contradict His Word, which says that "*all* have sinned," and we maintain that we are exceptions to the rule. We apply God's Word to others but not to ourselves. We sit through church services or Bible studies and are not touched by the Bible's teachings. Believers who have reached this low level are usually highly critical of other Christians, but they strongly resist applying the Word to their own lives.

The Holy Spirit's inspired picture of the human heart is devastating indeed! A believer lies about *his fellowship* (1 John 1:6); about *his nature*—"I could never do a thing like that!" (1 John 1:8) and about *his actions* (1 John 1:10).

Sin has a deadly way of spreading, doesn't it?

At this point we must discuss an extremely important factor in our experience of the life that is real. That factor is *honesty*. We must be honest with ourselves, honest with others, and honest with God. Our passage describes a believer who is living a dishonest life: he is a phony. He is playing a role and acting a part, but is not living a genuine life. He is insincere.

What losses does this kind of person experience?

For one thing, he loses *the Word*. He stops "doing the truth" (1 John 1:6); then the truth is no longer in him (1 John 1:8); and then he turns the truth into lies! (1 John 1:10) "Thy Word is truth" (John 17:17) said Jesus; but a person who lives a lie loses the Word. One of the first symptoms of walking in darkness is a loss of blessing from the Bible. You cannot read the Word profitably while you are walking in the dark.

But a dishonest person loses something else: he loses his fellowship with God and with God's people (1 John 1:6-7). As a result, prayer becomes an empty form to him. Worship is dull routine. He becomes critical of other Christians and starts staying away from church: "What communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14)

A backslidden husband, for example, who is walking in spiritual darkness, out of fellowship with God, can never enjoy full fellowship with his Christian wife, who is walking in the light. In a superficial way, the couple can have companionship; but true spiritual fellowship is impossible. This inability to share spiritual experiences causes many personal problems in homes and between members of local churches.

One problem with dishonesty is that just keeping a record of our lies and pretenses is a full-time job! Abraham Lincoln used to say that if a man is going to be a liar, he had better have a good memory! When a person uses up all his energy in *pretending*, he has nothing left for *living*; and life becomes shallow and tasteless. A person who pretends not only robs himself of reality, but he keeps himself from growing: his true self is smothered under the false self.

The third loss is really the result of the first two: the believer loses his character (1 John 2:4). The process starts out with his *telling* lies and it ends up with his *becoming a liar!* His insincerity, or lack of truthfulness, is at first a role that he

plays. Then it is no longer a role—it has become the very essence of his life. His character has eroded. He is no longer a liar because he tells lies; he now tells lies because he is a confirmed liar.

Is it any wonder that God warns, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper"? (Prov. 28:13) David tried to cover his sins and it cost him his health (Ps. 32:3-4), his joy (Ps. 51), his family, and almost his kingdom. If we want to enjoy the life that is real, we must *never* cover our sins.

(1:8) **Man—Sin**: the misconception is forcefully stated—"we have no sin." Note that the word *sin* is not plural but singular. The sin being talked about is *sin as a root within man*, as a part of man's nature, as a principle, a law, a force, an energy within man. Persons who say that they can approach God on their own are saying that they have no sin, no root of sin, no nature of sin, no principle of sin within them.

They are saying...

□ that they can handle sin themselves; that they can change their lives and stop sinning enough to please God and to become acceptable to Him.

□ that they do not need the Son of God to come to earth and die for their sins.

□ that they can control their lives enough to keep from sinning.

Note what Scripture says about this misconception: we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. No person can keep from sinning. If any person thinks that he can keep from sinning, the truth is not in him; he is utterly deceived. And note: if we cannot keep from sinning, this means that we have a nature, a root of sin within us. The force and energy of the root shoots out and we sin. As stated, we cannot keep from sinning: this fact alone proves that we have sin within our nature, a nature that is depraved. To say differently is to be deceived and to deny the truth of all human experience.

Remember: sin is imperfection. Sin is coming short of God's glory and perfection, missing the mark of His glory and perfection. This is the reason no person can ever live with God. God is perfect; therefore, only perfection can live in His presence. Man is imperfect and short of God's glory; he is sinful. Therefore, man can never live in God's presence. This is what the objector needs to see. If he misses this, then he will miss the eternal salvation that is in Christ Jesus our Lord, the very Son of God who came to earth to die for our sins.

Note a significant fact. There are those who say that man is not responsible for his sin; therefore, he cannot be charged with sin. They say that man acts the way he does because of his upbringing, parents, society, environment, education or the lack of it, playmates and associates. They say that man is a product of his environment; therefore, God cannot charge man with guilt. Man just is not responsible for his behavior. For this reason, God nor society can hold man accountable for his actions. The reason man sins is because someone else made him do it.

The problem with this is that it is only partly true. Environment and upbringing do affect us and have some bearing on our actions. But this is not all that we are; we are not just robots responding to the trigger of environment. We are free moral creatures with a free will that chooses to sin or not to sin. And it is deception to deny the fact. The truth is just not in us if we deny that we have a great degree of freedom in all that we do. The problem is not our environment; we just cannot keep from sinning and acting irresponsibly. We sin because there is a root, a nature, a force of sin within us. To object to what is so clear and visible is to be deceived, to show that the truth is not in us.

The person who thinks that he can control sin enough to become acceptable to God has a low view of God and too high a view of himself. Think how weak man really is: how weak his flesh is. He is not only sinful by acts, but he walks short of God's glory every day. And he is so corruptible that he dies after just a few brief years on earth.

(1:9) **Confession of Sins—Forgiveness of Sin**: the truth is this—we must confess our sins. Man is deceived if he denies that he has sinned, if he denies that he has a root and force of sin within him. He deceives himself if he says that he does not need the Son of God to deliver him from sin and its guilt. Remember: the Son of God came to die for our sins, and it is His blood that cleanses us from sin.

Therefore, if we will confess our sins, God will forgive our sins. And He will do even more: He not only will forgive us for the sins we know about and confess, He will cleanse us from *all unrighteousness*.

☐ *To forgive our sins* means that God forgives the *guilt of sin*. God justifies us: He counts the death of Christ as our punishment. Jesus Christ bore our guilt of sin. When we believe in Jesus Christ and confess our sins, God counts our belief and confession as the guilt which Christ bore. We stand before God, no longer guilty of sin.

☐ *To cleanse us from all unrighteousness* means that God cleanses us from all the dirt, filth, pollution, and contamination of sin. Not a single stain or spot of sin remains on us. We stand before God sinless and perfect, but remember why: because we believe in Jesus Christ and confess that we are sinners who trust the blood of God's Son to cleanse our sins. How do we know that God will forgive our sins and cleanse us? How do we know that God will count the death of Jesus Christ as the punishment for our sins? Because God is faithful and just or righteous.

☐ God is perfectly just or righteous; therefore He must condemn and punish sin. But note: God is also perfect love and mercy; therefore, He must demonstrate His love and mercy and provide a way of forgiveness for man. This is exactly what He has done in Jesus Christ. God has demonstrated His love in the most perfect and supreme way possible: He has given His Son to die for the sins of man.

The point is this: having done this for man—having given His Son to die for man's sins—God will forgive man. He is faithful and righteous; therefore, He will keep His Word. He will do exactly what He says. He would be unfaithful and unrighteous if He did not forgive us. Therefore, God will forgive any repentant sinner who truly turns away from his sin and turns to God and confesses his sin. God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

Man Can Become Sinless and Righteous on His Own

1 John 1:10: "If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives."

1 John 2:1-2: "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. {2} He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

(1:10-2:2) **Introduction:** sin is a terrible thing. We see it blazed across the headlines of news reports every day: murder, mayhem, assault, fraud, cheating, lying, deceit, adultery, divorce, fightings, wars. Sin is so corrupt and common that every conceivable sin is seen or heard about in one form or another practically every day. Sin is so much a part of human life that we hardly pay attention to it unless it is some major crime or else it involves our own lives and families. Sin is just everywhere.

No matter where we turn we see people mistreating others—criticizing, backbiting, and gossiping about them. We see people verbally tearing other people down. We see husbands and wives living together but lacking true love. They are just together, living in coldness and being withdrawn from one another. We see all kinds of selfishness in children and fellow workers. We see lying, deception, stealing, cheating, and all sorts of sexual immorality. We see people dressing in tight clothes or else exposing parts of the human body in order to attract attention, and then we see all kinds of promiscuity and rapes, assaults and murders. The list of sins and shortcomings in life could fill a book.

But the point is this: some people say they have not sinned. Despite all the sin in the world—all the sin that swirls around and engulfs human lives and society—some persons say that they can become righteous on their own. They say they can become so righteous that God will approve their behavior—that God will accept them because of their own righteousness and sinlessness. They say they do not need a Savior; they are able to save themselves. They say that the Son of God does not need to die for the sins of man because man can become righteous and sinless enough on his own, righteous and sinless enough to become acceptable to God.

This is the subject of the present passage. There are those who object to the idea that Jesus Christ *had to die* for the sins of man. They object to the preaching of sin, the idea that they are sinners, to the idea that they need the blood of God's Son to cleanse their sins. They object and declare that *man can become righteous and sinless on His own*.

1. We can become righteous and sinless on our own (v.10).
2. The truth: we are sinful, but we should not sin (ch.2:1).
3. The provision is made if we do sin (v.1-2).
 - a. Jesus Christ, the Advocate.
 - b. Jesus Christ, the propitiation, the perfect sacrifice, for our sins.

THE MAN WHO RATIONALIZES SIN

In this present series in the First Letter of John we are concerned with the great and pressing question of maintaining an intimate and, therefore, powerful and fruitful fellowship with the Son of God. It is fellowship which makes Christian life vital, compelling, effective, and worth the living.

We have seen before that there are two ties we may have with Christ: There is the matter of relationship which is established by the response of our faith to the invitation of his Word. You come to know Jesus Christ by coming to him. He puts it on that basis. "Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest," {cf, Matt 11:28}. "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; out of his innermost being will flow rivers of living water," {cf, John 7:37-38}. That establishes relationship.

It makes you one with Christ and opens the possibility of gaining all that he is in your experience. But fellowship, as John is making clear in this first letter, is the actual experience of his power and wisdom, his love and life at work in you. It is actually to come into a day-by-day experience of Christ working, living, and manifesting himself through you. There is nothing more exciting than that! And this experience of fellowship is continually yours if you live honestly before God and call the reactions of your life what God calls them, shunning all pretense and deceit. In other words, walking in the light is the secret of fellowship. Fellowship is the secret of power, and walking in the light is the secret of fellowship.

Now it sounds easy to do, does it not? Just to be open, to be honest, to not kid ourselves, to cease pretending to be something we are not; then all that God is, is available to us and we can live as God intended man to live in the fullness of fellowship, having all things in common with him. I do not suppose there is one of us here today who would not readily subscribe to the necessity of being honest, but when it comes to translating it into practical living it is sometimes difficult to do.

The reason it is difficult is threefold. John goes right on to point out three very common conditions or practices which we employ to shut off the light of God that is shining upon us, in Christ, and thus cut us off from the fellowship of the Son of God and from fellowship with each other as well. For, as we are learning, we must all live in a vertical and horizontal relationship. If the vertical relationship is wrong, the horizontal one will be wrong. So frequently we get concerned about this horizontal relationship (our contacts with other people), and try to correct them on that level, but they are never correctable there, they can be changed only when the vertical is right. That is why John stresses this matter of fellowship so much.

There are only three kinds of conditions that can cut off fellowship. John has listed them for us here. Every failure in fellowship is explained right here in this first chapter of John's letter. If we are having difficulty experiencing all that is promised to us in the Scriptures, we shall find the reason for it here in these three practices. We have already looked at two of them:

First, there is the man who ignores light, i.e., the one who never stops to look at what the light reveals. The light of God, expressed in God's Word, is always shining on us. But far too frequently we never stop to look at what it reveals, we never examine ourselves. We have already seen this. We avoid the channels of light, such as the Word of God. We never read it. We avoid fellowship with other Christians, or at least contact with them too closely, for such contact can be a channel of light. We avoid coming to church, since that, too, is a channel of light. We do not like having the light. We do not like having the light turned on and we try to walk through life never stopping to look at ourselves. That is an exceedingly dangerous position and one that always produces weakness.

Now, we saw also that there is a group of people who persistently deny the need for light, who believe that the possibility of sin has been removed, that they have advanced so far in the Christian experience that they can no longer sin, therefore they do not need light. This is, as you will recognize, an extreme form of self-righteousness, which John immediately labels self-delusion. Such are kidding themselves. We do not reach the place of perfect sinlessness in this life, and if we think we have, then we are simply walking in darkness, and therefore, walking in weakness.

Now, today, we come to the third of these conditions, the case of the man who rationalizes the sin which the light reveals. It is described for us in Chapter 1, Verse 10, and, ignoring the chapter break, the first two verses of Chapter 2:
If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the expiation for our sins, and not ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. {1 Jn 1:10-2:2 RSV}

Here is the man who rationalizes sin. I do not hesitate to say that this is the commonest failure in Christian experience -- to rationalize sin. In the first case we referred to, the man does not like what the light reveals so he keeps himself too busy ever to see it. In the second case, the person says there is no need for light because, he says, I cannot sin, therefore I shall just go on living the Christian life as I see it, since there is an automatic something in me that keeps me from falling into sin. But in this third case, the person is saying, "Of course, I *can* sin as a Christian, I know this. I do need light. But when I stop to look at my life, and examine myself, what I *see* is not sin. Weakness and failure perhaps, but not sin. I may have to admit that I have been weak, but I have not sinned." Now, that is what John means: "If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

Essentially this is an evasion of fact, an evasion of reality. It is the exercise of that terrible power of the human mind which we call rationalization, the ability to clothe wrong so that it looks right, and evil so that it looks good. Who of us has not experienced this? We are all experts at it. We know well how to invent reasons to do what we want to do, and invent equally valid-sounding reasons to avoid what we want to avoid, and all the time make it sound as though there is really nothing we can do about it. There are perfectly understandable circumstances that keep us from doing these things. That is rationalization.

Someone handed me this week a comment by Richard DeHaan on the great electrical blackout in the New England states that occurred last year. Very few people realize that in England a very similar thing was occurring at the same time, but on a much more limited scale. The difference was that in the United States, we were calling it "a power failure," in England they called it "a power reduction." Well, it was a reduction, all right, all the way down to zero! But it illustrates the tendency we have, even in non-religious things, to tone down a word.

We do that with the word, *sin*. Many people really do not know what the word means, but all of us have an uncomfortable feeling about it. We know that it suggests something bad and we do not like to use it about ourselves. So we have invented a lot of very fancy names for it. What the Scripture would call sin, we call human frailty, or bad tendencies, or simply weakness, or a hereditary fault, or environmental kick-back. The fancier the name, the more we like it, because it sounds so much better than that simple, ugly, three-letter word, *sin*. Thus, one way of saying, "I have not sinned" is to rename it, and call it by a much pleasanter name.

It is just as if you went through your medicine cabinet, took out all the bottles of poison and re-labeled them -- perfume, hand lotion, etc. It does not change the character of the poison, but it does make it sound a lot better. The evil twist of our fallen natures is revealed in the fact that what others do, we call sin, but when we do the same thing, we have a different name for it: Others have prejudices; we have convictions. Others are conceited; but we have self-respect. When another man is lazy, we say so; but when we do not want to do something, we say we are too busy. When someone else goes ahead and acts on his own, we say he is presumptuous; when we do the same thing, we have initiative. When someone else gets angry and blows up, we say he has lost his temper; but when we do that, we are merely showing righteous indignation. And as long as we can find a nicer label we never will treat the thing like the poison it is.

Now, we laugh at these things, but these are the reasons why we are weak as Christians. As long as we laugh at them, we never will do anything about them. We say, "Oh well, everyone does it. It is so common, even the Christians at church all do it."

As long as we take that attitude we shall always be in the grip of evil. We will never treat these things as the poison they are, as long as we permit ourselves to paste on a label that says something different, and call it perfume. Also we will never understand why we still go around crippled and ailing and acting as though some poison were sapping the spiritual strength from our lives. Another way we do this is to excuse our sins, because of the pressure of circumstances we are experiencing: We say it is nerves that causes us to speak impatiently to one another. We say it is tiredness, fatigue, that makes us utter sharp words at home. We blame the pressure of work for losing our peace and making us worried, troubled, and harassed. We say it is our difficult neighbors that make us resentful and bitter. If it were not for them we could be sweet, lovely, and kind.

What we are saying is that the problem is not sin, it is circumstances. We do not need the cleansing of the blood of Christ. Obviously, if we sinned we would need that, but what we are saying is, we do not need this. What we need is our tensions

unraveled by our psychiatrist. We are saying "I know I shouldn't have said that, or done this thing, but it's not really my fault. I can't help it. It's because of the circumstances and therefore it's not really sin. Sin is deliberate, sin is willful, but I can't help myself and so I have not sinned."

Now put that alongside what John has said. "If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." Again I say, there is nothing more common in Christian experience than this. After many years in the ministry, hearing many tales of problems, struggles, difficulties and hardship, I can say that this is far and away the most frequently-heard excuse for the weakness of Christian lives, this constant tendency to rename what is wrong or excuse it because of circumstance.

Now, look further at what John says. He says this is not only an evasion of reality, but it is also a direct accusation against God. "We make him a liar," he says, "and his word is not in us." In other words, we are not shifting the blame to some unknown, unstated individual, we are putting it squarely on God. The Christian always lives in direct relationship to God. There are only two people in life, as far as your basic relationship is concerned, you and God. So if we say it is not our fault, we are saying it is his fault:

"It's your fault, God, not mine. These circumstances that you've allowed me to get involved with make it impossible for me to obey you. Therefore, you're to blame. I want to do it. You know my heart. You know that I really want to be what I ought to, but, because of these circumstances, I can't, so it's really your fault!"

Now that is the oldest excuse in the world. It goes back to the Garden of Eden. When God came looking for man {see Gen 3:9 ff}, he said to him, "Why did you do this thing?" And man said, "Well, it's the woman you gave me. It's your fault." And when God said to the woman, "Why did you do it?" she said, "It is the serpent. It's your fault because you let him talk to me." So, the blame comes right back to God. We are, in effect, calling God a rascal and a double-crosser. But John uses even a worse name. He says, "we make him a liar."

The Word of God makes clear that the Christian has a source of strength in Christ that is imparted to him from within. We are inwardly strengthened by him. As Paul puts it, "our inner man is renewed, day by day," {cf, 2 Cor 4:15}. The outer man can perish, but the inner man is being renewed daily. Therefore, nothing outward should hinder us.

In Romans, Paul cries, "What can separate us from the love of Christ?" {Rom 8:35 KJV}. Then he goes through the list of possibilities. Can life, or death, or things present (your circumstances), or things to come (the pressure of the future), or height, or depth, or time, or eternity, or anything else in all creation, separate us from the strength of Christ, the love of Christ. But that is not what we say. We say to God, "Yes, there are a lot of things that cut me off from you and make it impossible for me to do what you ask me to do. Difficulties cut me off, and fatigue, and sickness, and pressure. Therefore, God, you're a liar. You say that none of these things will do it; I say they do! Now, one of us is telling the truth and one of us is lying, and I know who it is; it's you!"

Now think of the enormity of that charge! Here is what we are constantly saying to God: "Lord, it is your fault, you are not true." Here we are, mere human pygmies, standing before the faithful and unchanging God, the God who has revealed himself as without a shadow of turning, absolutely faithful, and charging him with faithlessness; we glory in the unchangeableness of God when it comes to our comfort. We love to speak of the unchanging God, the Refuge from every kind of pressure. Yet, how strange it is that we can stand before him the next moment and defiantly assert that the reason for our weakness is not our failure, but his. We declare he is not faithful to his Word, he doesn't keep his promises, he denies himself, he's a liar.

I have often quoted First Corinthians 10:13 to Christians in difficult circumstances, "There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but with the temptation also make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." I have had them look me right in the eye, and say, without batting an eyelid, "That's not true. I have been tempted already above what I've been able to bear. I can't stand this thing." How many times do we say that, in one way or another? But what is that but calling God a liar? Do we realize it is impossible for God to be wrong and us to be right? If that were true, we would be God, not him. It is simply an impossibility.

We need to read again the book of Job and see how Job learned this great lesson. Because he was going through terrible pain and hardship, his heart protested and cried out against God. There came a time when God said to Job,

"Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it." {Job 40:2 RSV}

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: "Gird up your loins like a man; I will question you, and you will declare to me. Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his?" {Job 40:6-9 RSV}

In that amazing fortieth chapter God puts to Job a series of test questions, asking Job if he can perform even the simplest functions which God performs every day. And Job's answer is,

"Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer thee? I lay my hands on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further." {Job 40:4-5 RSV}
"therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." {Job 42:6 RSV}

But the blunt truth is, we do not like our circumstances. Is that not it? We do not like where God puts us. We do not like the people or the pressures we have to live under, we do not like the circumstances that surround us, and we refuse to accept them. That is the real problem. Therefore, we are not interested in Christ's power to live in them. We do not want it. We have set our will against God's will. We have said, "You ask me to live my Christian life in these circumstances, but I don't want to do it." And we rationalize it all by saying we cannot help ourselves.

Now, let us be honest and admit that we fall because we do not choose to meet the circumstances with his strength, but we run away from them. We do not like them, we do not want to live in them, and therefore we blame it all on God. No wonder we lose fellowship. No wonder God seems to be our enemy, and things all go wrong. We find that peace has fled our hearts, we are troubled, harassed, worried, and upset. We find ourselves flying off the handle even more easily, and losing our patience and we are baffled by it all, not knowing what is causing all this. Does this sound familiar? Well, John explains what the trouble is. In Verse 1, Chapter 2, he says,

My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin, but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the expiation for our sins, {1 Jn 2:1-2a RSV}

What does this mean? Well, there is never any need to sin, but, if we find ourselves doing so, we have a perfect defense available to us; a defense which the Father will gladly receive, one that he already assures us will be welcomed. We have an Advocate with the Father who will rush to our defense immediately, but his defense is of no avail to us because we are still defending ourselves. There cannot be two advocates in this case. You either rely on his defense of you -- the manifestation of his work on your behalf which has wiped away every stain, every sin which you ever will commit or ever have committed -- or you must rely on your own defense. Here you are, standing before God, defiantly telling him that you are not to blame, that you have a defense. You are not guilty. You can explain all this by the pressure of circumstances, or it is really not what he says it is, it is something else, entirely.

Now, you see, as long as you remain defiant or evasive, you are still justifying and excusing yourself, and therefore the Judge can only condemn you, and permit the inevitable, built-in judgment that follows to upset you, overthrow you, harass you, baffle you, and leave you in weakness and folly. But if you will stop justifying yourself, he will justify you. The blood of Jesus Christ cannot cleanse excuses. It only cleanses sins.

If you will say, "Yes, it wasn't the pressure, it wasn't the circumstances, it wasn't that these things are not as bad as you call them, it's that I chose to be impatient, I chose to be resentful. I decided to be worried and to let anxiety grip me." If we come to that place, then we discover that there is One who stands before the Father and reveals to him the righteousness of his life, and God sees us in him, and we are cleansed and accepted. Strength again flows into the inner man, peace comes back to our hearts, we are cleansed of our sin, washed and restored to the grace of God. Then we can go back into the very same circumstance, under the very same pressure, in the very same disagreeable relationship, and find our heart kept by the grace and strength of God.

Paul puts it so beautifully, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God that passes all understanding [You cannot explain it. Someone says to you, "How can you be so calm in the midst of these circumstances?" And you say, "I don't know, but it must be because I'm trusting Christ, resting on him."], the peace of God that passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus," {cf, Phil 4:6-7 KJV}. Now is that not practical? That is not designed for church, that is designed for life, for home, for work, for your relationship with your neighbors, and your boss, and your mother-in-law, your children, everyone.

Now, why does John say, "he is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world?" Why does he put that in? Obviously he is drawing a contrast between Christians and non-Christians. He is reminding us that when the Lord Jesus died upon the cross 1900 years ago, he not only paid the debt of our sins, he not only took our guilt, as Christians, but he took the guilt of the whole world. He paid the price for every man.

There is no man who will be kept away from God because of his sins, if he accepts the work of Christ on his behalf. Sin can never separate an individual from God, because of the cross of Christ. No matter how bad the sins, no matter how extreme it may be, or how long continued, sin can never separate anybody, anywhere, in any time, or any age, from the heart of God, if the work of the cross be received. That is the extent of the expiation mentioned here. But why does he remind us of that in this context? The answer is: It is to help us see ourselves.

Why is it that all the world is not reconciled to God? Why is it that these others, whose sins have been already settled for on the cross, are living in estrangement and hostility to the God who loves them and who seeks after them? Why is it that men are still defying God, and blaspheming God, and turning and running from him, and experiencing the death, darkness, and degradation that comes from not knowing? You know the answer: Because they will not believe him. They will not accept his forgiveness. He has forgiven them, but they have never forgiven him. As Paul puts it in Second Corinthians 5, "We are ambassadors for Christ, for God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Therefore, we beseech men, be ye reconciled to God," {cf, 2 Cor 5:20}. We do not have to say to God, "be reconciled to men"; we are saying to men, "be ye reconciled to God," {2 Cor 5:20b KJV}.

Now, that is the very same reason why we Christians are not enjoying the full flow of the Spirit of power, life, love, and wisdom, in our experience. It is all available to us, but we will not receive it. That is what John means. Like the world, we are turning our back on it. We are saying to God, "I'm not interested in cleansing because, you see, I really don't need it. After all, this is not a sin, it's simply a weakness, just an inherited tendency, something I got from my family. I can't help it." That kind of thing is cutting the ground out from under the whole redemptive work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Though his power is all-available, it is not experienced because of that.

Now let us bow before him. In a moment of quietness before God, let us confess this terrible tendency that each of us has unquestionably experienced, to rationalize sin, to excuse it, justify it, call it something else, doll it up, sprinkle perfume on it and make it look better, instead of calling it exactly what it is. Christ has found a way below, around, and above our circumstances. He can reach us despite the pressures; it is just that we do not want it.

(1:10) **Sin—Self-righteousness—Self-Sufficient:** the misconception is forcefully stated—"we have not sinned." How could any person conceivably claim this? Who would claim such a thing in light of all the sin that swirls and engulfs man and society? Many people! There are many people who object to being called *sinner*s, and they are insistent in their objection. They believe they are righteous and sinless enough that God would never reject them. They believe they can become good enough and sinless and righteous enough for God to accept them. They accept Jesus Christ as a great moral teacher and as the founder of Christianity, one of the great religions of the world. And they claim to be Christians; they follow the teachings of Jesus Christ.

But they reject His deity, the fact that He is the Son of God who had to die for the sins of the world. They look upon the death of Jesus Christ as the death of a martyr, as a great man who was showing us how we should be willing to pay any price for what we believe—even death.

Who would make such a claim? Who would say "we have not sinned"? Who is it that objects to being called a *sinner*?
□ There is the *religious perfectionist*. This is a person who actually believes that he can achieve a state of sinlessness. Often he believes in Christ, but he believes that once he is saved, he can live so righteous and so pure a life that he can achieve a state of sinlessness and righteousness before God. He believes that the Holy Spirit will help him to *walk perfectly* before God.

□ There is the *social perfectionist*. This is a person who is a social Christian, who accepts Jesus Christ as a great teacher but rejects Him as the Savior from sin. He objects to being called a *sinner*; he objects to the fact that he is sinful enough that he can be termed a *sinner*. He believes that he is righteous and sinless enough for God to accept, that God would never reject them. He believes he is too good for God to reject. He cannot accept the fact that he is bad enough and sinful enough for God to condemn him.

Note what the problem is with these two objectors. They just do not have a clear view of what sin is. To them sin is the gross violation of law and morality, the thing that society looks upon as gross sins: murder, fraud, and abuse—the kinds of things that would grab a neighbor's attention and cause talk. They fail to see what sin is to God. God is perfect; therefore, to God:

- Sin is any imperfection.
- Sin is coming short of God's glory.
- Sin is missing the mark of God's perfection.

This is the reason no person can ever live with God. God is perfect; therefore, only perfection can live in His presence. Man is imperfect and short of God's glory; he is sinful. Therefore, man can never live in God's presence. This is what the objector needs to see.

To God man is *a sinner*, a person who is ever so short of God's glory, a person...

- who fails to use his mind to the fullest degree and who focuses it upon evil.
- who sometimes thinks impure and wrong thoughts and who commits impurity.
- who sometimes acts unlovely and mean to people.
- who sometimes acts impatiently and abuses others.
- who sometimes acts selfishly and steals.
- who sometimes owns too much and banks and hoards instead of living sacrificially to meet the desperate needs of the world.

All men are short in so much—short in worshipping God like they should, short in praying and fellowshiping and communing with God. No person obeys God perfectly all the time. All men come short of loving others like they should, short in witnessing and sharing Christ and in sacrificing and reaching out to help everywhere they should. No person is perfect; all are ever so short and sinful, so sinful that to God we are all sinners. We are sinners who need a Savior, the very Son of God Himself, to save us from our sins.

Now, note what the verse says:

"If we say that we have no sin, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:10).

God's Word plainly tells us that we are sinners, and it tells us often. If we, therefore, deny sin, we make God out to be a liar. In addition, we show that God's Word is not in us; that is, we are not acceptable to God. No matter what we may claim, we are not acceptable to God...

- if God's Word is not in us.
- if we call God a liar.
- if we say we do not need God's Son to save us from our sin.
- if we say we can become good enough and righteous enough and sinless enough to be acceptable to God.

(2:1) **Sin—Spiritual Struggle:** the truth is that we are sinful, but *we should not sin*. This is a tender exhortation: John addresses the believers "my little children." They are very, very dear to him. He was their minister, their spiritual father; and they were his spiritual children, the ones under his care. He loved them with the love of a strong and caring father. Therefore, he must exhort them. He must exhort them in the areas where they needed strength. Where was that? In sinning.

Note exactly what John says:

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not" (1 John 1:1).

Both in Latin and in Greek diminutives carry a special affection. They are words which are used, as it were, with a caress. John is a very old man; he must be, in fact, the last survivor of his generation, maybe the last man alive who had walked and talked with Jesus in the days of his flesh. So often age gets out of sympathy with youth and acquires even an impatient irritableness with the new and laxer ways of the younger generation. But not John; in his old age he has nothing but tenderness for those who are his little children in the faith. He is writing to tell them that they must not sin but he does not scold. There is no cutting edge in his voice; he seeks to love them into goodness.

In this opening address there is the yearning, affectionate tenderness of a minister for people whom he has known for long in all their wayward foolishness and still loves.

His object in writing is that they may not sin. There is a two-fold connection of thought here—with what has gone before and with what comes afterwards. There is a two-fold danger that they may indeed think lightly of sin.

John says two things about sin. First, he has just said that sin is universal; anyone who says that he has not sinned is a liar. Second, there is forgiveness of sins through what Jesus Christ has done, and still does, for men. Now it would be possible to use both these statements as an excuse to think lightly of sin. If all have sinned, why make a fuss about it and what is the use of struggling against something which is in any event an inevitable part of the human situation? Again, if there is forgiveness of sins, why worry about it?

In face of that, John, as Westcott points out, has two things to say.

First, the Christian is one who has come to know God; and the inevitable accompaniment of knowledge must be *obedience*. We shall return to this more fully; but at the moment we note that to know God and to obey God must, as John sees it, be twin parts of the same experience.

Second, the man who claims that he abides in God (verse 6) and in Jesus Christ must live the same kind of life as Jesus lived. That is to say, union with Christ necessarily involves *imitation* of Christ.

So John lays down his two great ethical principles; knowledge involves obedience, and union involves imitation. Therefore, in the Christian life there can never be any inducement to think lightly of sin.

These things refer to the things John has just said, to the fact that all have sinned and all do sin. Because of man's nature, the very fact that he lives within a corruptible world, he *cannot keep from sinning*. But note the strong exhortation: "Sin not! I am writing these things to you, that you sin not." The believer lives in a corruptible world, and he is housed in a body of flesh that is so easily aroused and attracted to eat more, take more, have more, be more, and receive more. But the believer is to struggle and fight against sin.

He is not to give in to sin. He is to *cast down imaginations* and struggle to captivate every thought for Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). He is to do all he can to become more and more like Christ and to be a stronger and stronger witness for righteousness in the world. He will never achieve perfection; he will never be sinless so long as he is in the flesh and in this corruptible world. But he is to struggle to be as good as he can. He is to be as righteous as possible and he is to gain ground; he is to grow in righteousness. The believer is to become more and more like Christ as long as he is on earth.

Believers must prove they are sincere when they come to Christ for forgiveness of sins. Christ has no patience with hypocrisy and no place for half-hearted commitment. He can look at our lives and tell whether we love Him or not, whether we are sincere or not. He can watch our struggle against sin and tell if we really want to follow Him or not. The genuine believer struggles against sin; he fights, wrestles, and wars against sin with every ounce of energy he has. He does all he can to please God and to receive God's approval.

(2:1-2) **Jesus Christ, Death:** there is the great provision. The believer is not to sin, but if he sins he has the most wonderful provision—that is Jesus Christ, the Son of God Himself.

John makes it clear that Christians do not *have* to sin. "I am writing these things unto you *that you may not sin*" (1 John 2:1, nasb).

The secret of victory over sin is found in the phrase "walk in the light" (1 John 1:7).

To walk in the light means to be open and honest, to be sincere. Paul prayed that his friends might "be sincere and without offense" (Phil. 1:10). The word *sincere* comes from two Latin words, *sine* and *cera*, which mean "without wax." It seems that in Roman days, some sculptors covered up their mistakes by filling the defects in their marble statues with wax, which was not readily visible—until the statue had been exposed to the hot sun awhile. But more dependable sculptors made certain that their customers knew that the statues they sold were *sine cera*—without wax.

It is unfortunate that churches and Bible classes have been invaded by insincere people, people whose lives cannot stand to be tested by God's light. "God is light," and when we walk in the light, there is nothing we can hide. It is refreshing to meet a Christian who is open and sincere and is not trying to masquerade!

To walk in the light means to be honest with God, with ourselves, and with others. It means that when the light reveals our sin to us, we immediately confess it to God and claim His forgiveness. And if our sin injures another person, we ask *his* forgiveness too.

But walking in the light means something else: it means obeying God's Word (1 John 2:3-4). "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105). To walk in the light means to spend time daily in God's Word, discovering His will; and then obeying what He has told us.

Obedience to God's Word is proof of our love for Him. There are three motives for obedience. We can obey because we *have to*, because we *need to*, or because we *want to*.

A slave obeys because he *has* to. If he doesn't obey he will be punished. An employee obeys because he *needs* to. He may not enjoy his work, but he *does* enjoy getting his paycheck! He needs to obey because he has a family to feed and clothe. But a Christian is to obey his Heavenly Father because he *wants* to—for the relationship between him and God is one of love. "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

This is the way we learned obedience when we were children. First, we obeyed because we *had* to. If we didn't obey, we were spanked! But as we grew up, we discovered that obedience meant enjoyment and reward; so we started obeying because it met certain *needs* in our lives. And it was a mark of real maturity when we started obeying because of love.

"Baby Christians" must constantly be warned or rewarded. Mature Christians listen to God's Word and obey it simply because they love Him.

Walking in the light involves honesty, obedience, and love; it also involves following the example of Christ and walking as He walked (1 John 2:6). Of course, nobody ever *becomes* a Christian by following Christ's example; but *after* we come into God's family, we are to look to Jesus Christ as the one great Example of the kind of life we should live.

This means "abiding in Christ." Christ is not only the Propitiation (or sacrifice) for our sins (1 John 2:2) and the Advocate who represents us before God (1 John 2:1), but He is also the perfect Pattern (He is "Jesus Christ the righteous") for our daily life.

The key statement here is "as He is" (1 John 2:6). "Because *as He is*, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17). We are to walk in the light "*as He is* in the light" (1 John 1:7). We are to purify ourselves "*even as He is* pure" (1 John 3:3). "He that doeth righteousness is righteous, *even as He is* righteous" (1 John 3:7). Walking in the light means living here on earth the way Jesus lived when He was here, and the way He is right now in heaven.

This has extremely practical applications in our daily lives. For example, what should a believer do when another believer sins against him? The answer is that believers should forgive one another "*even as* God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32; cf. Col. 3:13).

Walking in the light—following the example of Christ—will affect a home. Husbands are supposed to love their wives "*even as* Christ also loved the church" (Eph. 5:25). Husbands are supposed to care for their wives "*even as* the Lord" cares for the church (Eph. 5:29). And wives are to honor and obey their husbands (Eph. 5:22-24).

No matter what area of life it may be, our responsibility is to do what Jesus would do. "As He is, so are we in this world." We should "walk [live] *even as* He walked [lived]."

Jesus Himself taught His disciples what it means to abide in Him. He explains it in His illustration of the vine and its branches (John 15). Just as the branch gets its life by remaining in contact with the vine, so believers receive their strength by maintaining fellowship with Christ.

To abide in Christ means to depend completely on Him for all that we need in order to live for Him and serve Him. It is a living relationship. As He lives out His life through us, we are able to follow His example and walk as He walked. Paul expresses this experience perfectly: "Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20).

This is a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit. Christ is our Advocate in heaven (1 John 2:1), to represent us before God when we sin. The Holy Spirit is God's Advocate for us here on earth. Christ is making intercession for us (Rom. 8:34), and the Holy Spirit is also making intercession for us (Rom. 8:26-27). We are part of a fantastic "heavenly party line": God the Son prays for us in heaven, and God the Spirit prays for us in our hearts. We have fellowship with the Father through the Son, and the Father has fellowship with us through the Spirit.

Christ lives out His life through us by the power of the Spirit, who lives within our bodies. It is not by means of *imitation* that we abide in Christ and walk as He walked. No, it is through *incarnation*: through His Spirit, "Christ liveth in me." To walk in the light is to walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (cf. Gal. 5:16).

God has made provisions for us in these ways to conquer sin. We can never lose or change the sin nature that we were born with (1 John 1:8), but we need not obey its desires. As we walk in the light and see sin as it actually is, we will hate it and turn from it. And if we sin, we immediately confess it to God and claim His cleansing. By depending on the power of the indwelling Spirit, we abide in Christ and "walk as He walked."

But all this begins with openness and honesty before God and men. The minute we start to act a part, to pretend, to impress others, we step out of the light and into shadows. Sir Walter Scott puts it this way: Oh, what a tangled web we weave When first we practice to deceive!

The life that is real cannot be built on things that are deceptive. Before we can walk in the light, we must know ourselves, accept ourselves, and yield ourselves to God. It is foolish to try to deceive others because God already knows what we really are!

All this helps to explain why walking in the light makes life so much easier and happier. When you walk in the light, you live to please only one Person—God. This really simplifies things! Jesus said, "I do always those things that please *Him*" (John 8:29, italics added). We "ought to walk and to please God" (1 Thes. 4:1). If we live to please ourselves *and* God, we are trying to serve two masters, and this never works. If we live to please men, we will always be in trouble because no two men will agree and we will find ourselves caught in the middle. Walking in the light—living to please God—simplifies our goals, unifies our lives, and gives us a sense of peace and poise.

John makes it clear that the life that is real has no love for sin. Instead of trying to cover sin, a true believer confesses sin and tries to conquer it by walking in the light of God's Word. He is not content simply to know he is going to heaven. He wants to enjoy that heavenly life right here and now. "As He is, so are we in this world." He is careful to match his walk and his talk. He does not try to impress himself, God, or other Christians with a lot of "pious talk."

John gives two interesting titles to Jesus Christ: *Advocate* and *Propitiation* (1 John 2:1-2). It's important that we understand these two titles because they stand for two ministries that only the Lord Himself performs.

Let's begin with *Propitiation*. If you look this word up in the dictionary, you may get the wrong idea of its meaning. The dictionary tells us that "to propitiate" means "to appease someone who is angry." If you apply this to Christ, you get the horrible picture of an angry God, about to destroy the world, and a loving Saviour giving Himself to appease the irate God—and this is *not* the Bible picture of salvation! Certainly God is angry at sin; after all, He is infinitely holy. But the Bible reassures us that "God so *loved* [not *hated*] the world" (John 3:16, italics added).

No, the word "propitiation" does not mean the appeasing of an angry God. Rather, it means *the satisfying of God's holy law*. "God is light" (1 John 1:5) and, therefore, He cannot close His eyes to sin. But "God is love" (1 John 4:8) too and wants to save sinners.

How, then, can a holy God uphold His own justice and still forgive sinners? The answer is in the sacrifice of Christ. At the cross, God in His holiness judged sin. God in His love offers Jesus Christ to the world as Saviour. God was *just* in that He punished sin, but He is also *loving* in that He offers free forgiveness through what Jesus did at Calvary. (Read 1 John 4:10, and also give some thought to Rom. 3:23-26.)

Christ is the Sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, but He is Advocate only for believers. "We [Christians] have an Advocate with the Father." The word "advocate" used to be applied to lawyers. The word John uses is the very same word Jesus used when He was talking about the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26). It means, literally, "one

called alongside." When a man was summoned to court, he took an advocate (lawyer) with him to stand at his side and plead his case.

Jesus finished His work on earth (John 17:4)—the work of giving His life as a sacrifice for sin. Today He has an "unfinished work" in heaven. *He represents us before God's throne.* As our High Priest, He sympathizes with our weaknesses and temptations and gives us grace (Heb. 4:15-16; 7:23-28). As our Advocate, He helps us *when we sin.* When we confess our sins to God, because of Christ's advocacy God forgives us.

The Old Testament contains a beautiful picture of this. Joshua (Zech. 3:1-7) was the Jewish high priest after the Jews returned to their land following their Captivity in Babylon. (Don't confuse this Joshua with the Joshua who conquered the Promised Land.) The nation had sinned; to symbolize this, Joshua stood before God in filthy garments and Satan stood at Joshua's right hand to accuse him (cf. Rev. 12:10).

God the Father was the Judge; Joshua, representing the people, was the accused; Satan was the prosecuting attorney. (The Bible calls him the accuser of the brethren.) It looked as if Satan had an open-and-shut case. But Joshua had an Advocate who stood at God's right hand, and this changed the situation. Christ gave Joshua a change of garments and silenced the accusations of Satan.

This is what is in view when Jesus Christ is called our "Advocate." He represents believers before God's throne, and the merits of His sacrifice make possible the forgiveness of the believer's sin. Because Christ *died* for His people, He satisfied the justice of God. ("The wages of sin is death.") Because He *lives* for us at God's right hand, He can apply His sacrifice to our needs day by day.

All He asks is that when we have failed we confess our sins.

What does it mean to "confess"? Well, to *confess* sins means much more than simply to "admit" them. The word *confess* actually means "to say the same thing [about]." To confess sin, then, means to say the same thing about it that God says about it.

A counselor was trying to help a man who had come forward during an evangelistic meeting. "I'm a Christian," the man said, "but there's sin in my life, and I need help." The counselor showed him 1 John 1:9 and suggested that the man confess his sins to God.

"O Father," the man began, "if we have done anything wrong—"

"Just a minute!" the counselor interrupted. "Don't drag *me* into your sin! My brother, it's not 'if' or 'we'—*you'd* better get down to business with God!"

The counselor was right.

Confession is not praying a lovely prayer, or making pious excuses, or trying to impress God and other Christians. True confession is naming sin—calling it by name what God calls it: envy, hatred, lust, deceit, or whatever it may be. Confession simply means being honest with ourselves and with God, and if others are involved, being honest with them too. It is more than *admitting* sin. It means *judging* sin and facing it squarely.

When we confess our sins, God promises to forgive us (1 John 1:9). But this promise is not a "magic rabbit's foot" that makes it easy for us to disobey God!

"I went out and sinned," a student told his campus chaplain, "because I knew I could come back and ask God to forgive me."

"On what basis can God forgive you?" the chaplain asked, pointing to 1 John 1:9.

"God is faithful and just," the boy replied.

"Those two words should have *kept you out of sin,*" the chaplain said. "Do you know what it cost God to forgive your sins?"

The boy hung his head. "Jesus had to die for me."

Then the chaplain zeroed in. "That's right—forgiveness isn't some cheap sideshow trick God performs.

God is faithful to His promise, and God is just, because Christ died for your sins and paid the penalty for you. Now, the next time you plan to sin, remember that you are going to sin against a faithful loving God!"

Of course, cleansing has two sides to it: the judicial and the personal. The blood of Jesus Christ, shed on the cross, delivers us from the guilt of sin and gives us right standing ("justification") before God. God is able to forgive because Jesus' death has satisfied His holy Law.

But God is also interested in cleansing a sinner inwardly. David prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Ps. 51:10). When our confession is sincere, God does a cleansing work (1 John 1:9) in our hearts by His Spirit and through His Word (John 15:3).

The great mistake King David made was in trying to cover his sins instead of confessing them. For perhaps a whole year he lived in deceit and defeat. No wonder he wrote (Ps. 32:6) that a man should pray "in a time of finding out" (lit.).

When should we confess our sin? *Immediately when we discover it!* "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). By walking in the light, we are able to see the "dirt" in our lives and deal with it immediately.

Let us first set out the problem. It is clear that Christianity is an ethical religion; that is what John is concerned to stress. But it is also clear that man is so often an ethical failure. Confronted with the demands of God, he admits them and accepts them-and then fails to keep them. Here, then, there is a barrier erected between man and God. How can man, the sinner, ever enter into the presence of God, the all-holy? That problem is solved in Jesus Christ. And in this passage John uses two great words about Jesus Christ which we must study, not simply to acquire intellectual knowledge but to understand and so to enter into the benefits of Christ.

Two things are said about Jesus Christ that show the wonderful provision God has made for us.

1. Jesus Christ is our "Advocate" (*parakleton*). The word "advocate" means someone who is called in to stand by the side of another. The purpose is to help in any way possible. (This is the word [*parakletos*] used of the Holy Spirit).

- There is the picture of a friend called in to help a person who is troubled or distressed or confused.
- There is the picture of a commander called in to help a discouraged and dispirited army.
- There is the picture of a lawyer, an advocate called in to help a defendant who needs his case pleaded.

There is no one word that can adequately translate *parakletos*. The word that probably comes closest is simply *helper*. Sin causes the believer to be distressed and confused, discouraged and dispirited. Sin separates the believer from God and makes him guilty of transgression and worthy of condemnation and punishment. But Jesus Christ is the believer's *Advocate*. Jesus Christ stands before God and pleads the case of the believer.

Note two significant points.

a. What is it that gives Jesus Christ the right to plead the case of the believer? Note exactly what the verse says: Jesus Christ is *the righteous One*. He is the Son of God who came to earth and lived a sinless life as man. He is the One who secured the *perfect and ideal righteousness* for man. Therefore, Jesus Christ is the *only Person* who has the right to stand before God. Why? Because God is perfect, and only a perfect person can stand in God's presence. This is the reason man must approach God through Jesus Christ: He alone is perfect and righteous. He alone has the right to stand in the court of God as the Advocate or attorney to represent man. There is no other righteousness, no other goodness that is acceptable to God; only the perfect and ideal righteousness of Christ has been approved to stand as the advocate in the court of heaven.

This means a most wonderful thing. God will never turn down a person who has Jesus Christ as his advocate. The person who has Jesus Christ to approach God for him will never be turned down, for Jesus Christ has the right to stand as the advocate before God in the court of heaven.

b. What is it that Jesus Christ pleads?

- He does not plead the reputation of the believer.
- He does not plead the good works of the believer.
- He does not plead *not guilty*, that the believer did not commit sin.
- He does not plead the personal righteousness of the believer.
- He does not plead that the believer has been as good as he can be.

What is it that Jesus Christ pleads? Again, note the verse:
"We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

He pleads His own righteousness. How can He do this? This is the discussion of the next point.

2. Jesus Christ is the *propitiation for our sins*. "Propitiation" (*hilasmos*) means to be a sacrifice, a covering, a satisfaction, a payment, an appeasement for sin. It means to turn away anger or to make reconciliation between God and man. Remember: God is holy and just. He is perfect love, but He is also perfect holiness and justice. Therefore He must execute justice against the sinner. He must judge and condemn sin. His justice must be perfectly satisfied. Now there is only one way God's justice can be perfectly satisfied: His justice has to be cast against the perfect sacrifice. If there was a Perfect and Ideal Man, then that Man could accept the guilt and punishment for sin. The Perfect Man could step forward and bear the punishment for sin and satisfy the justice of God.

This is the glorious gospel, the wonderful love and provision of God. Jesus Christ is the Ideal and Perfect Man. Therefore, He sacrificed His life for man and His sacrifice covered all men. As the Ideal Man, Jesus Christ accepted the guilt and punishment of sin for all men. He died for all men. When He died, He died as the perfect sacrifice for sins.

Therefore, God accepts His death...

- as the *sacrifice* for our sins.
- as the *covering* for our sins.
- as the *satisfaction* for our sins.
- as the *payment* for the penalty of our sins.
- as the *appeasement* of His wrath against sin.

When Jesus Christ carries a man's case before God, He pleads His own righteousness and death, and God accepts His righteousness and death for man. It is by this, by the sacrifice of His death for our sins, that we become acceptable to God.

Note one other point: Jesus Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the *whole world*. He is the eternal Son of God, the Ideal and Perfect Man. Therefore, all that He ever did covers eternity. His sacrifice for sin covers the first man ever born and spans all of time over to the last man, and then continues right on throughout all of eternity. Jesus Christ paid the penalty of sin for all sinners of all generations. He died for the sins of all people, no matter who they are or what they have done.

But note a critical fact: a person has to come to Jesus Christ and trust Him to be his advocate before God. Jesus Christ is the only Person who has the right to stand as an advocate in the court of God's perfect justice. He is the only Person who can present man's case before God and have man declared righteous. Therefore, a person is not covered by the advocacy of Christ unless he comes to Christ and has Christ represent him before God.

(2:2) **Propitiation** (*hilasmos*): to sacrifice in order to appease; to satisfy; to cover; to pay the penalty for. It is a sacrificial word. In the Old Testament when a man sinned or something went wrong, he brought a sacrifice to God. The idea was that the sacrifice would appease and pacify and satisfy God. He thought God would be gracious to him and place the punishment for his sin upon the animal. When things go wrong, man has always offered to fast and pray and serve with renewed vigor, or else he has offered to give up some meaningful pleasure or possession. There is a feeling that this kind of denial or renewed sacrifice appeases and satisfies God.

It is true that God told Israel to offer sacrifices. But He did it for a reason: to teach Israel, and through them the world, that the answer does not lie in human or animal sacrifice. A human sacrifice cannot bring about a right relationship with God. Man's problem is too deep for human sacrifice; his contamination too severe; his disease too terrible; his infection too deadly. The paraphernalia of earthly sacrifice can never put things right with God.

The reason is simply stated. Man's sin has cut him off from God, severed his relationship with God, put God out of *arm's reach*. Man instinctively senses this. Thus, when man fails to get satisfaction from his sacrifice, he often returns to his former behavior and practices.

What man needs is to be disinfected, to have his sins covered. He needs to know beyond a doubt that God does accept him and is satisfied with him. And then he needs a power to live for God. This comes about through propitiation.

Four things need to be said about propitiation.

1. God is the One who has to be appeased, satisfied, and propitiated. The Bible is not speaking of reconciliation. The Bible never says that God has to be reconciled to man. God is already the friend of man; He loves man. It is man who needs to be reconciled to God. Man is the one who holds enmity, who ignores, neglects, and rejects God. Thus, God is the One who has to be appeased or propitiated (cp. Luke 18:13).

There is another thought here as well. God is righteous and holy, and His righteousness and holiness have to be satisfied. He can only accept a person who is perfectly righteous and holy. It might be said that anything less than perfection would contaminate the very atmosphere around God. And the presence and dwelling place of God would no longer be the utopia which God has prepared for the believer and for which man dreams.

2. Jesus Christ is the propitiation, the satisfaction for sins. Christ was completely righteous and holy; therefore, He was the perfect and ideal Man. This means that His death was the perfect and ideal sacrifice. God was able to satisfy His justice against sins by casting it against Christ. The perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ completely satisfied and appeased the righteousness of God (1 John 4:9-10).

3. Propitiation means *coverage*. Christ covers our sins so that God no longer can see them (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2).

4. Propitiation finds its type in the mercy seat, that is, in the lid of the ark (Hebrews 9:5). God had said that man was to approach Him through the sacrifice of an animal, through the shedding of blood. The lid or covering of the ark was sprinkled once a year with the blood of a perfect animal. This signified that the life of the people was being offered to God in the blood of the victim. God was thereby appeased and satisfied. (Cp. Luke 18:13; Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 1 John 4:10.)

John goes on to say that Jesus is *the propitiation for our sins*. The word is *hilasmos*. This is a more difficult picture for us fully to grasp. The picture of the *advocate* is universal for all men have experience of a friend coming to their aid; but the picture in *propitiation* is from *sacrifice* and is more natural to the Jewish mind than to ours. To understand it we must get at the basic ideas behind it.

The great aim of all religion is fellowship with God, to know him as friend and to enter with joy, and not fear, into his presence. It therefore follows that the supreme problem of religion is sin, for it is sin that interrupts fellowship with God. It is to meet that problem that all sacrifice arises. By sacrifice fellowship with God is restored. So the Jews offered, night and morning, the sin-offering in the Temple. That was the offering, not for any particular sin but for man as a sinner; and so long as the Temple lasted it was made to God in the morning and in the evening. The Jews also offered their trespass-offerings to God; these were the offerings for particular sins. The Jews had their Day of Atonement, whose ritual was designed to atone for *all* sins, known and unknown. It is with that background that we must come at this picture of propitiation.

As we have said, the Greek word for *propitiation* is *hilasmos*, and the corresponding verb is *hilaskesthai*. This verb has three meanings.

(i) When it is used with a man as the subject, it means *to placate* or *to pacify* someone who has been injured or offended, and especially to placate a god. It is to bring a sacrifice or to perform a ritual whereby a god, offended by sin, is placated.

(ii) If the subject is *God*, the verb means *to forgive*, for then the meaning is that God himself provides the means whereby the lost relationship between him and men is restored.

(iii) The third meaning is allied with the first. The verb often means to perform some deed, by which the taint of guilt is removed. A man sins; at once he acquires the taint of sin; he needs something, which, to use C. H. Dodd's metaphor, will *disinfect* him from that taint and enable him once again to enter into the presence of God. In that sense *hilaskesthai* means, not to propitiate but to *expiate*, not so much to pacify God as to disinfect man from the taint of sin and thereby fit him again to enter into fellowship with God.

When John says that Jesus is the *hilasmos* for our sins, he is, we think, bringing all these different senses into one. Jesus is the person through whom guilt for past sin and defilement from present sin are removed. The great basic truth behind this word is that it is through Jesus Christ that man's fellowship with God is first restored and then maintained.

We note one other thing. As John sees it, this work of Jesus was carried out not only for us but for the whole world. There is in the New Testament a strong line of thought in which the universality of the salvation of God is stressed. God so loved *the world* that he sent his son (*John* 3:16). Jesus is confident that, if he is lifted up, he will draw *all men* to him (*John* 12:32). God will have *all men* to be saved (*1 Timothy* 2:4).

He would be a bold man who would set limits to the grace and love of God or to the effectiveness of the work and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Truly the love of God is broader than the measures of man's mind; and in the New Testament itself there are hints of a salvation whose arms are as wide as the world.

DESIGNATION

(1 John 2:1-2 NIV) My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. {2} He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

These verses continue the concluding thought of the previous chapter: When the believer sins, he should confess to God and be forgiven immediately.

"Little children" seems to be one of the Apostle John's favorite expressions, which he uses nine times in this Epistle. It was also used by our Lord as He spoke with His disciples. Possibly it was then that John first learned to appreciate these words.

"Little children" refers to those born into the family of God when they trusted Christ as Saviour and Lord. Some of them were being deceived by false teachers.

John appealed to them as "little children" to be extremely careful what they believed. He wrote as one mature in the faith, who had "heard" and "seen" the Lord. He didn't want them to get the wrong impression and think that because they had a sinful nature it was necessary to continue in sin. Believers have a mighty Lord who can give **victory over any sin**.

This, of course, is not true in the life of the unsaved. The only strength unbelievers have to overcome sin is the strength of the flesh. Since the flesh is sinful, it is impossible to fight sin with sin. Nowhere in the Bible does God tell unbelievers to "sin not." But He does tell His "little children," those who have experienced new life in Christ, to stop sinning. *"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not."*

The believer can overcome any sin, if he trusts Christ for the power. Paul expressed this important truth well: *"But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15: 5 7).*

According to this, God gives believers victory. Since there can be no defeat in victory, even though he has a sinful nature the believer can overcome any or all sin in the power of Christ.

Though the believer lives in a body of sinful flesh, he need not be dominated by the flesh, for in Christ he is free. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (*Romans* 8:2).

But does it really work? Considering our own lives and past failures, we may have doubts. Let's face it--there have been times when we failed, but this was not a failure on God's part. We failed to appropriate the power of Christ by not submitting to His control. He refuses to work through us until we let Him work in us. Sin cannot be overcome by a determined effort of the flesh. God's plan demands a yielded life. We must come to the end of ourselves. Realizing our extreme weakness, with full dependence on Christ, we must claim Him as our Victor.

Paul did not instruct young Timothy to "fight the good fight." This would have been nothing more than a struggle culminating in defeat. The admonition was, "Fight the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6: 12).

We are told to "Resist the devil" (James 4:7). This is a serious responsibility. If left to ourselves, it would be utterly impossible. But before Paul wrote this, he said, "Submit yourselves therefore to God." This is the secret in resisting the devil.

The same thought is expressed in 1 Peter 5:8: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." In the next verse, we are told how this can be done: "Whom resist steadfast in the faith." There must be unreserved dependence on the Lord: "in the faith." Even the angels would not presume to stand against Satan without God's strength. "Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee" (Jude 9). If the angelic beings find it necessary to depend upon the Lord in their conflict with Satan and sin, can we do any less?

Thus, for the believer in Christ, there is no such thing as a hopeless case, as far as sin's power is concerned. As we yield to Christ's control, we enjoy His victory.

Following conversion, the believer is commanded not to sin. But if he does, then what? Does he lose his salvation? Must he get saved all over again? Definitely not! One cannot lose his salvation if he was genuinely saved in the first place. Of course, if his was only a mental or emotional experience, he could fall away. But if he was sincere in receiving Jesus Christ into his life, he was saved for eternity.

This certainly is verified by our Lord Himself: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.

My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand" (John 10:28-29). What did Jesus say we receive the moment we believe on Him? "Eternal life!" There is nothing in these verses to suggest that if the believer sins, he is lost. It is just the opposite: "They shall never perish." What actually happens is, when the believer sins, though he does not lose his salvation, he severs his fellowship with God. As the result, his prayer life is hindered and his usefulness for God is curtailed until he confesses to the Lord and receives forgiveness.

John's phrase, as used here, "If any man sin," does not refer to the habitual, willful practice of sin. If one professes to be a believer in Christ and continues to live in sin, it is obvious that he has never really entered the family of God. Paul refers to this in Romans 6: 1-2:

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" What John is writing about is a single act of sin. He pleads with the believer in Christ not to sin; but if he does, his advocate, Jesus Christ, is ready immediately to plead his case before the Father.

Christ is in a position to do this because He is "Jesus Christ the righteous." Not only is He without sin, but He died and shed His blood for our sins. On this basis, forgiveness and restoration are available for the repentant believer immediately upon confession of his sin. Doubtless you have had the experience of feeling unworthy of God's forgiveness after yielding to temptation.

In no sense of the word is forgiveness ever based upon our worthiness. It is our Advocate who is worthy. "Jesus Christ the righteous" has come to our side to help, as well as present our case to the Father, thus making forgiveness a reality. Frequently, after we confess to the Lord, Satan plagues us with false accusations in an attempt to make us feel as if we are not fully forgiven. Don't listen to him!

God has declared that we are forgiven. As the result, we are back in fellowship with Him. For this reason, we should forget the past and continue to walk by faith. Learn from the experience. Let it be a reminder of the weakness of the flesh so that you will depend more completely on Christ.

Believers can be thankful that God has made such a marvelous provision for forgiveness. This should not, however, cause us to become careless in our relationship to sin. We who love Christ must pray for a holy hatred of sin. Realizing that all the suffering and misery in the world is the result of sin, it should cause us to heed John's words and "sin not."

Are you experiencing His victory in your life? Maybe you say, "Not exactly. I seem to have real problems along this line. I believe in Christ, but I keep yielding to temptation." Are you spending the time you should in God's Word each day, feeding on the truth that can sustain you when tempted? Have you learned the value of communing with God in prayer? Are you permitting Christ to be your Lord in everything? Or, are you trying to live in your own strength? If you are, it is understandable why you are failing. Trust your Advocate; He cannot fail. He will help you at any time you allow Him. "Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 124:8).

The huge jets that fly the skies are built to cross the oceans and reach their destinations. But occasionally something goes wrong. This is why inflatable rafts are kept in the planes; a provision has been made.

Believers are called not to sin. But in the event that they do, God has made a provision. Forgiveness is available on the basis of confession, made possible through Jesus Christ, our Advocate.

Not only is Christ our advocate, "He is the propitiation for our sins." More than this, He is the propitiation "also for the sins of the whole world." The blood that was shed at Calvary provided atonement for all who believe on Jesus Christ. The sacrifice of Christ is sufficient for all of us who have trusted in the Lord. At the same time, it is also sufficient for all who have not yet believed, if they come to Him.

The word "propitiation" has to do with satisfaction. The righteous demands of the law were satisfied by the sacrifice of the all-righteous Son of God on the cross.

Believers can rejoice because forgiveness for sin is always available since Christ "is the propitiation for our sins." But since Christ is the propitiation "for the sins of the whole world," we are obligated to all in the world who are outside of Christ to get God's message of forgiveness to them. We cannot rest or content ourselves until this task is completed. Paul said, "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise" (Romans I: 14). We are not debtors to God, for the price of our sins has been paid completely. We are, however, debtors to those who do not know that Christ is their propitiation for sin. We owe every unsaved person an opportunity to hear the gospel at least once. Among other things, God saved us to be His witnesses.

Our Lord said, "Ye have not chosen Me, but! have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit (John 15: 16). Helping the lost to find Christ is not the only way to bear fruit, but it is one way. God has called every believer to this responsibility. "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1 :8). Here we are told of the world-wide coverage for which Christ is the propitiation. He is concerned about everyone in all the world. If we are His followers, we should have this same concern.

We need to remind ourselves constantly that there is only one propitiation for sin. Some people appear to have the mistaken notion that if a person is religious, that is all that is necessary. The Bible makes it clear that Christ is the only way into Heaven. The words of Acts 4: 12 cannot be misunderstood, "*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*"

"He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." Anyone who places faith in the Son of God for salvation will never be disappointed; he will reach his destination safely. Have you trusted Christ for your salvation? If not, He is ready to receive you, if only you will trust Him.

The Proof That One Really 'Knows' God *1 John 2:3-6*

Christianity is the religion which offers the greatest privilege and brings with it the greatest obligation

1 John 2:3-6: "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. {4} The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. {5} But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: {6} Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."

After one believes on Christ, things should be different as far as his involvement with sin is concerned. Having received a new life, he should abstain from evil with a desire to please the Lord. It is refreshing to meet a Christian who is open and sincere and is not trying to masquerade!

Several proofs are given whereby one who professes Christ may substantiate his relationship to Christ. If one has truly believed on the Lord, this fact will be demonstrated outwardly.

We come to the first of three 'tests' which John's epistle will bring before us throughout the rest of this study. We'll see each one of them presented in several ways, and we'll let John do it in the order he chooses.

The first one is a moral test: do we obey the commandments?

In the original what is said here is, "by this we may know that we have known him [perfect tense -- something done in the past], because we are now keeping his commandments [present tense]."

The present willingness to keep his commandments is a sign of a valid relationship. It is proof that an act of union with Christ has already occurred, you have been born again. Your actions have changed, and because they have changed and you do not behave as you once did but you now have a desire to obey him, you can be sure you have indeed been born again.

Greatness in the kingdom of God is measured in terms of obedience. If you've ever been in the military, you know about traveling under sealed orders. Your orders say go to this point and fly to this place, or take the boat to this place. You open your orders, and they tell you where to go next. That's the way Abraham lived. *"Abraham believed God...and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.*

The Christian will obey the truth of God: *"We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The "commandments" do not refer to the Old Testament law only, but to all the precepts of God as given in the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit. Failure to obey these teachings is to negate one's profession of faith: for The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*

It is obvious that such a person has never had a heart-experience with Christ, regardless of what he might say. A verbal claim of believing on Christ is not enough. Visible evidence must be given by obedience to the truth.

The Bible recognizes no faith that does not lead to obedience, nor does it recognize any obedience that does not spring from faith. The two are at opposite sides of the same coin. -- A.W. Tozer.

The will of God never has been and never will be accomplished by those who are not totally obedient to Him. During the Civil War, it is said that there was a man who was sympathetic to both sides. He lived, you see, in a border line state. Finally, he decided that he would effect a compromise. He put on a mixed uniform, wearing the Confederate gray coat, and the Union blue trousers. All went well, it seems, until he became engaged in a hard fought battle, when the Federals shot him in the coat, and the Confederates shot him in the seat of the pants! Now, there's a moral to this highly improbable story. If you are going to serve in an army you must wear it's uniform. If you are going to march in the parade, you must keep in step.

God's love does not end after one believes on Christ. It is at work in the believer's life every step of the way. For what purpose? To enable us to obey the Word of God. Our obedience to the Word is an evidence of this fact: *But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him.*

The word "perfected" is used in the older translations and is better rendered here "made complete." It has to do with bringing to fruition. The intended purpose of God's love is being fulfilled as the believer obeys God's Word and does His will.

Think of the way we learned obedience when we were children. First, we obeyed because we *had* to. If we didn't obey, we were spanked! But as we grew up, we discovered that obedience meant enjoyment and reward; so we started obeying because it met certain *needs* in our lives. And it was a mark of real maturity when we started obeying because of love. "Baby Christians" must constantly be warned or rewarded. Mature Christians listen to God's Word and obey it simply because they love Him.

Peter expresses a similar truth: *"For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (I Peter 3: 12).* The contrast is seen between the obedient and the disobedient. Those who obey God experience His love in His watchful care and provision through prayer. The disobedient, on the other hand, have not yet experienced the love of God.

"To obey is better than sacrifice," we are told (1 Samuel 15:22). God will not accept anything in lieu of obedience. Thus the question must be asked frequently, am I obeying God in every area of my Christian experience? Knowing what we should do is not enough: we must do it.

Our Lord said, (*John 13:17 NIV*) *Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.* Happiness is discovered only as we obey the Lord. It can be known in no other way. Knowledge of spiritual truth is not sufficient; it must be applied.

Let's say you came to my house for a party and the cars were lined up along the street and you pulled in the empty driveway. A little girl came out and said, "Mr. Davenport has asked you not to park in the driveway because a caterer is coming later, and he wants the driveway free. Would you park in the street?" Even though physically you could overpower that girl, I suspect you would park in the street because of your respect for me. She is a delegated authority. We show our respect for God by being obedient to his delegated authority.

To cling always to God and to the things of God--this must be our major effort, this must be the road that the heart follows.

A study was released by the University of Southern California indicating that one-third of the medical patients in this country ignore what doctors tell them to do. Before the study was completed, the doctors didn't think the figures would be quite that bad. Forty-two per cent estimated that almost all their patients were obeying orders, and forty-seven per cent thought that at least three-fourths were doing what they were told. The survey proved all of them wrong. Only fourteen per cent of the patients always obeyed the physicians and about forty nine per cent did so "most of the time." Another twenty three per cent obeyed less than half the time. Nine per cent obeyed "very seldom," and five per cent, "not at all." Strange to say, persons with more severe illnesses were less likely to carry out orders.

The situation is not much different when it comes to the believer doing what God tells him to do. Believers listen to the Word of God preached and taught, but many fail to do it. Indeed, the words of Hebrews 4:2 are most applicable: *"But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it."* What a mistake it is to hear God's Word, or to read it, and yet refuse to obey.

A little girl misquoted the words of a familiar hymn: "If there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, then trust and obey." If we fail to respond to the truth, it is evident that many of us would have to agree with those lines.

We should obey the Lord for **three reasons:** **first**, whatever our Lord commands us, He really means us to do; **secondly**, whatever He commands us is always for our good; and **thirdly**, whatever He commands us, He is able and willing to enable us to do. Thus, let us obey the Lord in everything, that the love of God may be perfected in us, for then we shall know *"that we are in Him."*

When the heart's wrong, there can't be peace. Selfishness is a gangrene, eating at the very vitals. Sin is a cancer, poisoning the blood. Peace is the rhythm of our wills with Jesus' love-will. Disobedience breaks the music. Failure to keep in touch makes discord. The notes jar and grate. We have broken off. The peace can't get in. Jesus made peace by his blood. We get it only by keeping in full touch with him.

Obedience or Performance?

- Obedience is seeking God with your whole heart. Performance is having a quiet time because you'll feel guilty if you don't.
- Obedience is finding ways to let the word of God dwell in you richly. Performance is quickly scanning a passage so you can check it off your Bible reading plan.
- Obedience is inviting guests to your home for dinner. Performance is feeling anxious about whether every detail of the meal will be perfect.
- Obedience is doing your best. Performance is wanting to be the best.
- Obedience is saying yes to whatever God asks of you. Performance is saying yes to whatever people ask of you.
- Obedience is following the promptings of God's spirit. Performance is following a list of man-made requirements.
- Obedience springs from a fear of God. Performance springs from a fear of failure.

I like to story of the little boy, who was riding his tricycle furiously around the block, over and over again. Finally a policeman stopped and asked him why he was going around and around. The boy said that he was running away from home. Then the policeman asked why he kept going around the block. The boy responded, "Because my mom said that I'm not allowed to cross the street." The point is clear - obedience will keep you close to those you love.

Not only should the believer obey God, he should reveal Him in his life. *Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."*

Abiding in Christ has to do with more than our position in Him. It is true that anyone who abides in Christ has been born again by the Holy Spirit and has passed from death unto life. But it also has to do with one's present relationship with his Saviour. Is he walking in harmony with his Lord, or does his manner of life betray his profession? The word "ought" comes from a word meaning "to owe to another," referring to a debt that must be paid. Believers are in debt to God to walk in a manner that is well-pleasing in His sight.

How can Christians walk like Christ? The Bible tells us that He "knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21); He "did no sin" (1 Peter 2:22); and "in Him is no sin" (1 John 3: 5). Can we live like Christ without sin? Of course not. "To walk, even as He walked," does not infer perfection. It means that we should pattern our lives after Him.

What are some of the characteristics evidenced in Christ's life?

1. He prayed for His enemies. Even though His persecutors climaxed their atrocities by nailing Him to a cross, He prayed, *"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"* (Luke 23:34).
2. Christ always pleased the Father. Never did He act in opposition to the divine will. His concern was *"not My will, but Thine, be done"* (Luke 22 :42).
3. Christ always showed love and kindness, regardless of what had been said or done against Him. It was He who said, *"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you, and persecute you"* (Matthew 5:44).

These and many other characteristics of our Lord should be visible in the believer's life. If they are not, we might wonder if the conversion experience was real. Jesus declared, *"By their fruits ye shall know them"* (Matthew 7: 20). Are we walking like Christ, or are we bearing the characteristics of the ungodly? How we answer will give unquestionable evidence of our relationship to the Saviour.

The Lord tells us to walk like Christ, but He also gives us the necessary equipment to do this. Christ not only gives us a standard to live by, He gives us the power to live by the standard. In spite of all the hardships and afflictions Paul faced, he could say with confidence, *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"* (Philippians 4: 13).

Paul knew full well that he was unable to do "all things," but he also knew that as he relied upon Christ, "all things" were possible. Likewise, "all things" are possible for us. But there must be complete reliance on the Son of God. lie must be the

Master of our lives. This demands unconditional surrender to Him. We must realize from the moment of our conversion until we meet Christ face to face that we are no longer our own but His to do what He wants.

Actually, this is what conversion is all about. Some "join church" and wonder why they do not feel any different. Others have a mere emotional experience, which simply stirs their feelings. These may satisfy for a time, but they do not last. Conversion has to do with a complete change: *"Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new"* (2 Corinthians 5: 1 7). When one has experienced conversion, he will walk like Christ. Many temptations will befall him, but he will keep his eyes fixed on the Son of God, and walk steadily, faithfully forward.

It will not always be easy to walk like Christ; there will be difficulties all along the way. But we can be faithful for *"greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world"* (1 John 4:4).

Let's settle for nothing less than for a walk that glorifies God. There can be no greater evidence to ourselves, as well as to the world, that we belong to Jesus.

When one is a follower of Christ and is saved, everyone around will know it. Not only because of what the new convert says, but by what he does. One thing he will do is to keep God's commandments, the precepts of God which appear in both the Old and New Testaments.

Secondly, he will walk as Christ walked. In God's strength, he will live like Christ. These two things will witness to the fact that he has really met the Lord. John offers a third evidence: *"Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning"* (1 John 2:7).

A man really wanted to help his son understand the importance of making right choices, obeying, and doing right. So, if his son made a bad choice or a wrong decision, he'd give him a nail, send him to a post out in the back yard, and have him take a hammer and put the nail in the post. And every day that he went through the whole day making good decisions, he'd let him go out and remove one of those nails.

As the boy grew up from the age of about eight years until about fourteen or fifteen, there were always 2 or 3 nails in the post, and he'd be nailing them in and pulling them out. But he got better, until finally all the nails were removed as he started to mature. When all the nails were removed, he felt pretty good.

Then his dad took him out and said, "I want you to notice something about the post." The boy looked at it for a moment and realized that all the holes where the nails had been placed in the post were still there. His dad said, "I want to tell you something, son, about bad choices. You may be completely forgiven; there are no nails left -- no problem there -- but you do have the remaining effects. That post will never be the same again."

God, for this coming year Just one request I bring: I do not pray for happiness Or any earthly thing -- I do not ask to understand The way Thou leadest me, But this I ask: Teach me to do the thing that pleaseth Thee. I want to know Thy guiding voice, To walk with thee each day. Dear Master make me swift to hear And ready to obey. And thus the year I now begin A happy year will be -- If I am seeking just to do the thing that pleaseth Thee.

Some Strange People I Know

- People who talk about prayer but never pray.
- People who say tithing is right but never tithe.
- People who want to belong to the church but never attend.
- People who say the Bible is God's Word to man but never read it.
- People who criticize others for things they do themselves.
- People who stay away from church for trivial reasons and sing, "Oh, How I Love Jesus."
- People who continue in sin all their lives but expect to go to heaven

1. He that hopes to find peace by trusting God must obey him.
2. It is not what we do that matters, but what a sovereign God chooses to do through us.
3. God doesn't want our success; he wants us. He doesn't demand our achievements; he demands our obedience.

4. Obedience means marching right on whether we feel like it or not. Many times we go against our feelings. Faith is one thing, feeling is another.
5. One act of obedience is better than one hundred sermons. We learn more by five minutes' obedience than by ten years' study.
6. When we are obedient, God guides our steps and our stops.

This passage deals in phrases and thoughts which were very familiar to the ancient world. It talked much about *knowing God* and about *being in God*. It is important that we should see wherein the difference lay between the pagan world in all its greatness and Judaism and Christianity. To know God, to abide in God, to have fellowship with God has always been the quest of the human spirit, for Augustine was right when he said that God had made men for himself and that they were restless until they found their rest in him. We may say that in the ancient world there were three lines of thought in regard to knowing God.

(i) In the great classical age of their thought and literature, in the sixth and fifth centuries before Christ, the Greeks were convinced that they could arrive at God by the sheer process of intellectual reasoning and argument. In *The World of the New Testament*, T. R. Glover has a chapter on *The Greek* in which he brilliantly and vividly sketches the character of the Greek mind in its greatest days when the Greek glorified the intellect. "A harder and more precise thinker than Plato it will be difficult to discover," said Marshall Macgregor. Xenophon tells how Socrates had a conversation with a young man. "How do you know that?" asked Socrates. "Do you know it or are you guessing?" The young man had to say, "I am guessing." "Very well," answered Socrates, "when we are done with guessing and when we know, shall we talk about it then?" Guesses were not good enough for the Greek thinker.

To the classical Greek curiosity was not a fault but was the greatest of the virtues, for it was the mother of philosophy. Glover writes of this outlook: "Everything must be examined; all the world is the proper study of man; there is no question which it is wrong for man to ask; nature in the long run must stand and deliver; God too must explain himself, for did he not make man so?" For the Greeks of the great classical age the way to God was by the intellect.

It has to be noted that an intellectual approach to religion is not necessarily ethical at all. If religion is a series of mental problems, if God is the goal at the end of intense mental activity, religion becomes something not very unlike the higher mathematics. It becomes intellectual satisfaction and not moral action; and the plain fact is that many of the great Greek thinkers were not specially good men. Even men so great as Plato and Socrates saw no sin in homosexuality. A man could know God in the intellectual sense but that need not make him a good man.

(ii) The later Greeks, in the immediate background time of the New Testament, sought to find God in emotional experience. The characteristic religious phenomenon of these days was the Mystery Religions. In any view of the history of religion they are an amazing feature. Their aim was union with the divine and they were all in the form of passion plays. They were all founded on the story of some god who lived, and suffered terribly, and died a cruel death, and rose again. The initiate was given a long course of instruction; he was made to practise ascetic discipline. He was worked up to an intense pitch of expectation and emotional sensitivity. He was then allowed to come to a passion play in which the story of the suffering, dying and rising god was played out on the stage. Everything was designed to heighten the emotional atmosphere. There was cunning lighting; sensuous music; perfumed incense; a marvellous liturgy. In this atmosphere the story was played out and the worshipper identified himself with the experiences of the god until he could cry out: "I am thou, and thou art I"; until he shared the god's suffering and also shared his victory and immortality.

This was not so much *knowing* God as *feeling* God. But it was a highly emotional experience and, as such, it was necessarily transient. It was a kind of religious drug. It quite definitely found God in an abnormal experience and its aim was to escape from ordinary life.

(iii) Lastly, there was the Jewish way of knowing God which is closely allied with the Christian way. To the Jew knowledge of God came, not by man's speculation or by an exotic experience of emotion, but by God's own revelation. The God who revealed himself was a holy God and his holiness brought the obligation to his worshipper to be holy, too. A. E. Brooke says, "John can conceive of no real knowledge of God which does not issue in obedience." Knowledge of God can be proved only by obedience to God; and knowledge of God can be gained only by obedience to God. C. H. Dodd says, "To know God is to experience his love in Christ, and to return that love in obedience."

Here was John's problem. In the Greek world he was faced with people who saw God as an intellectual exercise and who could say, "I know God" without being conscious of any ethical obligation whatever. In the Greek world he was faced with people who had had an emotional experience and who could say, "I am in God and God is in me," and who yet did not see God in terms of commandments at all.

John is determined to lay it down quite unmistakably and without compromise that the only way in which we can show that we know God is by obedience to him, and the only way we can show that we have union with Christ is by imitation of him. Christianity is the religion which offers the greatest privilege and brings with it the greatest obligation. Intellectual effort and emotional experience are not neglected—far from it—but they must combine to issue in moral action.

Test 1: Keeping God's Commandments

(2:3-6) **Introduction:** How do we know if we really know God? We live in a day when many people are not even interested in knowing God. They could care less about knowing God. They want to live like they want and get all the possessions and enjoy all the pleasures of the world they can. To know God is the furthest thing from their minds.

But this is dangerous ground, for if God really exists then the rejectors of God are going to miss out:

□ They are going to miss out on the purpose, meaning, and significance of life; they are going to miss out on real love, joy, and peace and the abundance of a rich and full life both now and eternally. If God really exists and they fail to know Him, they are going to miss out on all of what life really is. Why? Because God created life and He knows what life should be. Therefore, if we do not know God, God who gave us life, then we miss out on everything that God meant life to be. But this is not all that the rejectors will face if they do not know God.

□ If God exists, then it means that all those who reject Him must face His holiness and justice. They must stand before Him having rejected Him and face His judgment.

The point is clear: we must know God. But how can we tell if we really know Him? There are seven tests that will show us.

The first test is the discussion of this passage: Do we keep God's commandments?

1. The test: do we keep God's commandments (v.3)?
2. The professing man: says he knows God but does not keep His commandments (v.4).
3. The obedient man: keeps God's Word (v.5).
4. The responsible man: lives up to his profession (v.6).

(2:3) **Commandments—Knowledge, of God—Believers:** How do we know if we really know God? There is a test that will show us. Do we keep God's commandments? Man faces an enormous problem, a problem that any thinking and honest person can see. If God really exists, man can never know it—not by his own reasonings and energy or effort. No matter how much thought or creative thinking and *inner feelings* man may have, man can never know for sure if God exists—not in and of himself.

There is a clear reason for this. Man lives in a physical and material world, and the physical and material world cannot penetrate or cross over into the other world, that is, into the spiritual world. If man is ever to *know* the spiritual world, if he is ever to know God, then God has to enter the physical and material world and reveal Himself to man. And note: this is exactly what God has done. God has sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world to tell man the truth: the truth about God, about man himself, about the world in which man lives, and about the world to come. This is exactly what Jesus Christ and His followers said time and again.

This is exactly what Jesus Christ and Scripture declare:

□ No man has ever crossed over into the spirit world and returned, no man but Jesus Christ.

"And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven" (John 3:13).

"For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world....For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:33, 38).

□ Jesus Christ came to save man from perishing and to give man an abundant life both now and eternally.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).

□ Jesus Christ said that God had sent Him to make God known.

"And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not" (John 5:38).

"Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:29).

This means something very significant: if we are to know God, we must know Jesus Christ. God has revealed Himself and made Himself known through Jesus Christ and through Christ alone.

Therefore, to know God we must know Jesus Christ whom He has sent. How do we know if we know God? If we know Jesus Christ, then we know God.

Now, note exactly what the verse says.

"Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments" (1 John 2:3).

This verse says explicitly that we know God if we keep God's commandments. What are God's commandments?

"And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment" (1 John 3:23).

God's chief commandment is this: that we believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another. There are two things said here.

1. First, to know God we must believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ. If we believe in Christ, then we come to know God, for Jesus Christ came to earth to reveal God. By believing in Jesus Christ we keep God's commandment.

2. Second, to know God we must love one another. Love covers all the commandments of God. If we love one another, we will not hurt or cause pain for one another; we will not offend or sin against one another. We will be keeping all the commandments of God.

This is exactly what Scripture declares.

"Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:8-10).

The point is this: How do we know if we know God? Take a test: Do we keep God's commandments? If we keep God's commandments, then we believe in Jesus Christ, that he is God's Son, and we love one another. We surrender all we are and have to Jesus Christ and to loving one another. Unless we are doing these two things, we do not know God. No matter what a person may say, he does not know God if he has never given his life to Jesus Christ. And he does not know God if he criticizes, grumbles, and backbites his brother and commits adultery, kills, steals, lies, covets, or does anything else against his brother. If a person really knows God, then he wants to please God.

He wants to know more and more about God, and the only way he can know more and more about God is to follow God. He has to do the things that God does, to walk and love as God walks and loves. The more we walk and love as God does, the more we will come to know God. Therefore, if we keep His commandments, we know Him. This is the way we can tell if we know Him, the only way.

Some people seek to know God. They seek after God, but they do it in the wrong way.

1) Some speculate about God. This is the route most people take in trying to know God. They imagine what God is like and hold that image in their mind and try to live by what they imagine. They have their own teachings and their own images of what God is like, and they govern their lives by that image.

2) Some try to seek and know God by mystical or emotional experiences. They seek to know the spiritual world and its focus through spiritists, astrology, seances, magic, and a host of other man-made mystical experiences.

(2:4) **Profession, False:** there is the man who makes a false profession. Scripture is direct and pulls no punches: *"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4).*

It is absolutely impossible to know God and not to keep His commandments. Why? For one clear reason: if God really exists, then He created us. We came from God. He created us for some purpose; He put us on earth for some reason. Therefore, He is bound to tell us why He created us; He is bound to tell us what He wants us to do and exactly how to do it. He would defeat His purpose if He did not. Therefore, God would never leave us in the dark, groping and grasping and trying to find out the truth. He would be a God of hate if He left us in the dark, and He is the farthest thing from hate.

Jesus Christ has shown us that God is love, that God loves us so much that He has given us the Holy Scriptures to tell us what to do. But more than this, God has shown us His love by giving His Son to live the truth out right before our eyes. God has not only given us His written Word that tells us how to live, He has given us the *Living Word* in the life of His Son. God has sent His very own Son to live the perfect and ideal life upon earth so that we might know how to live. Jesus Christ lived out the will of God; He lived just like God commands man to live. Therefore, He knew God perfectly. He had perfect communion and fellowship with God.

The point is this: if a person says that he knows God and does not keep God's commandments, he is a liar. The only way a person can know God is to follow Jesus Christ, to walk in fellowship with God just like Jesus Christ did. A person has to follow the perfect and ideal life of Jesus Christ. The person has to walk and live as Jesus Christ walked and lived; he has to follow Jesus Christ and do exactly what Jesus Christ says in order to know God. This is what Jesus Christ did: He kept all the commandments of God; therefore, He knew God perfectly. This is exactly what man must do.

Man must follow Jesus Christ and do exactly what Christ did: keep the commandments of God. When man keeps the commandments of God, then he will come to know God.

But note: the converse is also true. If a man does not keep God's commandments, then he does not know God. This is exactly what this verse says. Note it again.

"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4).

Note: this person makes a false profession. His knowledge of God—what he thinks God is like—is false. His image of God and the ideas within his mind of God are not true. They are false, counterfeit, not genuine. The person does not know God at all. How can we tell? Because he does not keep the commandments of God. He has not truly believed in Jesus Christ, nor is he loving his brother like God commands. He is not walking like Jesus Christ walked, not obeying God nor doing what God says to do. The verse is clear; note it: the person is a liar and the truth is not in him. He is making a false profession.

(2:5) **Profession, True—Obedience:** there is the obedient man. The obedient man keeps God's Word and knows God and loves God. Note how obedience is tied to knowing and loving God. All these things are involved in knowing anyone. The only way to know anyone is...

□ to get near them.

□ to study them, learn all about them—all about their will, desires, and wants, their nature and thoughts and behavior.

The same is true with God. The only way to know God is to get near Him and study Him, learning all we can about His will, desires, and wants; all about His nature and thoughts and behavior. But how can we do this when God is in the spiritual world, another whole dimension of being, a world that is far removed from this world? By Jesus Christ. Remember: Jesus Christ came to earth to reveal God and to show us how to draw near God. Therefore, to know God, we must draw near Jesus Christ and follow the example He left us. We must follow the Word of Christ; we must keep the Word of Christ, living exactly as He lived. This is the person who knows God.

Note a most wonderful result: the person who keeps God's Word has the love of God perfected in his life. What does this mean? When we draw near God and begin to keep His Word, we begin to *establish a relationship* with God. It is just like

a boy who meets a girl and begins to draw near her. He begins to know her and to develop affection for her, and the more he associates with her, the more he loves her.

So it is with God. The more we draw near Him and keep His Word and please Him, the more we learn about Him and love Him. The word "keep" (tereí) is continuous action. It means to continue on and not to stop. It means day by day obedience. If we keep God's Word day by day, then we learn more and more about God; we learn to love Him more and more. His love becomes perfected, completed, and fulfilled in us.

The obedient person is the person who knows God and loves God. He is the person who knows the love of God; he knows all the fullness of life that God's love brings. No matter what a person may profess—no matter how religious a person may be—if he does not obey God, he does not know God. Neither does he love God.

(2:6) **Believer, Duty—Walk, Spiritual:** there is the responsible man, the man who lives up to his profession. The word "walk" (peripatein) is continuous action. It means to keep on walking; to continuously walk. If a person says that he abides in Christ, he must be a responsible person. He ought to walk as Jesus Christ walked. In fact, the word *ought* means debt, constraint, obligation.

The person who professes Jesus Christ, who claims that he knows God, is obligated to walk as Jesus Christ walked. He is in debt to walk as Christ walked. How did Christ walk upon earth? He walked...

- believing and trusting God
- worshipping and praying to God
- fellowshiping and communing with God
- giving and sacrificing all He was and had to God
- seeking and following after God
- teaching and telling others about God
- loving and caring for others just as God said to do
- obeying and keeping all of God's commandments

This is the responsible man, the man who lives what he professes. If he professes to know God, he walks even as the Lord Jesus Christ walked upon earth. He believes and trusts God; he worships and prays to God, and he does all the other things that Christ did. He walks in the footsteps of Christ, doing exactly what Christ did. This is the person who knows God.

COUNTERFEITS AND REFLECTORS

We are considering John's great analysis, in his first letter, of the way to maintain unbroken fellowship with the Son of God. Such fellowship is described to us by Jesus himself as the flowing of rivers of living water out of the center of life. It is something that cannot be hindered by anything outward because it comes from within. Jesus said, "If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. ... 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water,'" {John 7:37-38 RSV}. John adds, "this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive," {John 7:39a RSV}.

Now in this first letter of John we have examined the three conditions which, John indicates, interrupt the flow of these rivers. Or, to use the figure that John himself employs, that block the light that shines to us from the person of God. "God is light and in him is no darkness at all," {1 Jn 1:5b RSV}. We can block the light from shining into our life, and thus revealing reality in three ways:

First, by ignoring the light, i.e., refusing to examine ourselves, never stopping to look at what the light reveals, going on with our life without ever stopping to ask ourselves questions about where we are and what we are doing and why we are what we are. Then we can close our eyes to the light by denying the possibility of sin. John indicates that it is possible to come to the place where we think that, for one reason or another, we are no longer able to sin. And finally, we can obscure the light by rationalizing the sin which is revealed in our life, by excusing it because of circumstances, or calling it another name that does not sound as bad. We looked at that together last week. Now John pauses in the flow of his discourse to deal with an inevitable human reaction to this kind of a searching examination of our spiritual life. In Chapter 2, beginning with Verse 3, we shall look at that reaction and what he says about it.

When I was a boy we had on the shelf of our library at home a big, thick book called, *The Journal of Home Medicine*. It had a lot of fascinating pictures in it -- fascinating to me because I was hoping at that time to become a surgeon -- and it

gave a brief description of all the sicknesses that afflict the human race, their symptoms, and their cures, or, at least, certain suggestions as to the cures. I remember reading through that book many, many times, and feeling a kind of macabre fascination at descriptions of such horrendous things as cancer, diabetes, heart failure, perforated ulcers, and other equally horrible diseases. Inevitably, after each reading of that book, I became aware of certain symptoms which I had just read about that were apparent in my own body, and I spent some hours of intense anxiety over the suspicion that I was developing one of these terrible diseases.

Is that not what often happens when we start reading about sickness? We all have a bit of hypochondria in us, and perhaps it is true on the spiritual level as well. So when John is examining our spiritual lives, as a doctor would examine our physical lives, and points out the sicknesses of the soul, it is only natural that he would expect a reaction of spiritual hypochondria, in which some of us might feel we had some of these diseases, or even worse. He evidently feels there may be many who are saying to themselves, "Am I really a Christian at all? Can I even claim a saving relationship with Christ?" If the Spirit has convicted us and we sense a lack, the question that is at the back of our mind may be, "Perhaps my trouble is not merely a break in fellowship; perhaps I am experiencing a complete breakdown of faith." Of course, as we saw in our series on spiritual warfare, the Tempter is very quick to suggest this very thing. He is alert to push us into such feelings, to arouse such fears within us, whenever we examine ourselves. So John stops to handle that very question.

And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says "I know him" but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. {1 Jn 2:3-6 RSV}

He is making here a very careful distinction between two things, relationship and fellowship. We have seen something of this in earlier messages, but he wants us to be very clear that there is a distinction between union with Christ and communion with Christ. The division here is marked by the phrase, twice repeated, "by this we may be sure." The first part is in Verses 3-4:

And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says "I know him" but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; {1 Jn 2:3-4 RSV}

John is talking here about an experience in the past for any believer in Christ. The original Greek makes that even clearer than our Revised {Standard} Version or King James Version. In the original what is said here is, "by this we may know that we have known him [perfect tense -- something done in the past], because we are now keeping his commandments [present tense]." The present willingness to keep his commandments, John is saying, is a sign of a valid relationship. It is proof that an act of union with Christ has already occurred, you have been born again. Your actions have changed, and because they have changed and you do not behave as you once did but you now have a desire to obey him, you can be sure you have indeed been born again.

Now please do not reverse this! Do not change it around. You cannot know God by attempting to keep his commandments. That is impossible. Let us be clear on that. You never come to know God by trying to keep his commandments, for the knowledge of God comes by faith in Jesus Christ. That must be first.

Martin Luther made the mistake of trying, as an Augustinian monk, to find God by keeping his commandments. He made a desperate and sincere effort to do anything that he felt God required of him, in order that he might discover and know God. This is always the hunger of the human heart, to know God. He would beat himself, spend days in protracted fasts, lay for long, weary, agonizing hours on the cold floor of his cell in the monastery, and try in every way he could to discover God by keeping his commandments, but it only drove him to despair. As you know, it was only when those words from Paul's letter to the Romans, "the just shall live by faith" {Rom 1:17b KJV} came alive to him, that he found God and then spent the rest of his life actually keeping God's commandments.

Now it must always come in that order. We receive Christ by faith, by believing his invitation and accepting him. When we do, he comes quietly and invisibly into our life and begins his delivering work. The sign of that delivering work is a change in our attitude about obeying him. John says there is a desire to obey God. Notice that Jesus himself declared this to us in the great message called the Upper Room Discourse when he said to his disciples (John 14:15), "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." And (in Verse 21), "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me;" {John 14:15, 14:21a RSV}.

Are you willing to obey him? Whatever he makes clear is his will, are you already pre-committed in your own heart to do? Well, you may have a lot of problems as a Christian, you may have a sense of weakness or lack in your life, but one thing is clear: If you are keeping his commandments, if you desire to obey him, then you know him. You can be sure that you know him; that is what John declares. He puts this also in the negative in order that we may be doubly sure: *He who says "I know him" but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; {1 Jn 2:4 RSV}*

Have you ever seen a counterfeit bill? I do not know that I have ever had one handed to me. I may have, and, if so, I passed it along without knowing. But I know one thing about counterfeit bills. Contrary to popular expression they never come in \$3.00 or \$7.00 denominations. You hear the phrase, "as phony as a \$3.00 bill," but I have never seen a \$3.00 bill and I never hope to see one. Counterfeiters are smarter than that. At a superficial glance, a counterfeit bill appears to be perfectly normal and in a common denomination. But there is always something bogus about it, there is always something phony. There is a lack of exact correspondence. There is a blur somewhere, or something is omitted from it which marks it as a counterfeit bill. It is the same with a phony Christian, and there are phony Christians, many of them.

As John indicates, they say the right things. If you were to judge them by what they say, you would never know they were phonies. They go to the right places, they mingle with the right crowds, and they say the right things. They say "I love him," but, as John indicates, there is something wrong with their lives: They disobey his commandments. They have no apparent desire to do what he says, to keep his word. Their lives are unchanged. Their actions are no different than they were before.

As a dairyman once said to me, "They preach cream, but live skim milk." Paul also warns about this in his letter to Titus. He speaks of some who, he says, "profess to know God, but they deny him by their deeds; they are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good deed," {Tit 1:16a RSV}. It was Charles Spurgeon, the prince of English preachers, who once said, "An unchanged life is the sign of an uncleansed heart." The Scripture is very clear about this: If the thief has not stopped his stealing, if the liar has not quit lying, if the alcoholic has not stopped drinking, there is no good in his claiming that he is a Christian. If there has been no basic change in his life, there is nothing that indicates to him or to anyone else, that he has been delivered from bondage to Satan and the power of evil into the kingdom of God. Now let me make something clear. You can stop all these things without being born again. There are many reasons why men quit something evil, if for no other reason than that it is bad for their health. You can stop these things without being born again, but you cannot be born again without stopping them. That is the claim John makes. He goes still further in Verse 5:

...but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God [this is a preferable translation to 'love for God'] is perfected. {1 Jn 2:5a RSV}

He declares that if we are willing to obey, then something else is also happening to us. If we keep his word, if there is a willingness to do what he says regardless of whether we see the reasons for it, then something else is also happening to us: The love of God is gradually taking over our lives and changing us, it is being perfected within us. In Romans 5, the apostle says, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us," {cf, Rom 5:5b KJV}. If we have been born again, if we have received Christ and we are willing to obey him, then the love of God is doing something to us. It is being shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit and it is leading us on, step by step, toward the goal the Lord desires in our lives -- the experience of continuous, unbroken fellowship with him.

Do you see how relationship leads on into fellowship? The act by which we began the Christian life is intended to precipitate a process that leads us into the experience of the fullness of Christ. It will, and it is, for God is at work in your life to do this very thing, for this is the goal of love. The love of God is being perfected, it is being completed, but it may take awhile. For some of us who are particularly resistant, it takes long years, and I speak from full experience here.

That brings us to the next section. What is the sign of fellowship? If an obedient will is the sign of relationship, what is the sign that we are beginning to move into the experience of fellowship? Well, that is in the latter part of Verse 5 and in Verse 6:

By this we may be sure that we are in him: he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. {1 Jn 2:5b-6 RSV}

This phrase, "abides in him" means exactly the same thing as "fellowship with him." They are one and the same experience. The Lord Jesus made that clear when he said, as is recorded in the 15th chapter of John's Gospel, "As the

branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me," {John 15:4b RSV}. You can be in Christ, as a member of the vine, and only bear leaves. That is mere relationship. But if you want fruit in your life, there must be that further attitude of abiding in him, resting in him. That, he says, is what produces significant results in life. Without that, "you can do nothing," {cf, John 5:5b}.

The sign of abiding, as John says here, is to walk in the same way in which Christ walked: "he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." That does not mean to do the same things that Jesus did; that means to act from the same principle upon which he acted, to reflect the same kind of relationship to the Father that he had. That is the sign of fellowship. Now, you who are familiar with the record of our Lord's life, how did he walk? How did he do the things that he did? How did he manage to speak such matchless words, convey such challenging ideas, do such remarkable things among men, and change lives so consistently? What was the secret of his power? You can be sure that, while he was ministering, this was the question everyone was asking. "Wherein lies this man's power?"

That is what brought Nicodemus to him by night, to try to ferret out the secret, if he could. Many others came wondering what the secret of his power was. The amazing thing was that he kept telling people what it was, as he keeps telling us. But we skip over it with easy disregard. He said, "the Son of Man does not do these things of himself." That is, "I'm not doing this; it's the Father who dwells in me; he's doing it. I don't speak these words of myself, but I speak only that which I hear the Father say. It's the Father who speaks the words; it's the Father who does the work. I am a man, available to him, but he is in me and his working in me is the secret of the things that I do. I am simply counting on him every minute to be at work and to do these things, and he does them," {cf, John 14: 10-11}.

That is the great secret, and that is one of the hardest things for Christians to learn. How did he walk? Well, he walked in total, unrelenting, unbroken fellowship and dependence upon the activity of the Father who indwelt him. But that seems so hard for us to learn. With us, it is the Son of God who lives within us, and he has come to reproduce the effect of his death and the power of his resurrection -- to live again his life in us. But we have such difficulty with this. Our attitude is, "Please, Father, I'd rather do it myself!"

We are brought up with this idea that we have in ourselves an ability to act significantly, that God is looking to us to act on his behalf and if we fail him the whole program will fall apart, but if we do it God should be eternally grateful to us for our faithfulness. Does this not represent our attitude?

But this is not Christianity. This is not what a Christian is called to do. If we ever learn the great secret that John is trying desperately to impart to us it will revolutionize our lives. We will never again be the same persons. When we begin to see it, and act on it, our lives are immediately changed, and five years from that day we will be more different than we were when it first hit us, and 50 years later we will be still different, so revolutionary, so transforming is this principle of action. A quiet, unrelenting dependence upon an indwelling God to be always at work in us, reproducing the value of his death and the power of his resurrection -- That is what Christianity is, that is what fellowship is, that is what abiding in him means. We are continually to expect him to do this and we are to consent to its being done.

But this is where the rub comes! We want him to do it despite us. We do not always want to consent to it, for his death means that we must absolutely renounce all the self life, all the self-centeredness around which our lives have for so long been built. His death cuts off the old man, with its egocentric ways. We do not like that. If we were arranging the Christian plan for living, we would devise a different process. In fact, we try to do just that most of the time. We want to make it some of us, and some of him. A little bit of glory, fame, power, and favoritism for us, and quite a bit for him. We are glad to let him have the lion's share, but we hang on so desperately to something for us!

That is the problem, do you see? But his death absolutely eliminated the natural man. When he became man and died in our place, he cut off, he ended, not merely part of the old life, but all of it. Therefore his death, reproduced in us, means that all of it has to go. But that is tough, that is hard for us to take. But, of course, what draws us on is the rest of the transaction. His life in us means the reproducing in us of the power of his resurrection, and that is wonderful because his resurrection power is the kind of power that works in the midst of death.

When everything else has ceased to work, when nothing that man can do can be performed any longer, when all hope is gone, when all possible avenues of human endeavor have been blocked off, resurrection power begins to work. That is wonderful. That is a different kind of power than the world has ever seen, a kind that works when everyone else is discouraged. It keeps on blossoming, growing green and bright, full and productive. When everyone else's life seems dead

and dull, and for them life is monotonous and boring, this power keeps one alert and alive and interesting and fascinating. Resurrection life!

How we long for it. But, you see, the two go together. It is a package deal. As Paul puts it, "that I might know him, and the fellowship of his sufferings and the power of his resurrection [both of them], being made conformable unto his death," {cf, Phil 3:10}. That is fellowship. That is what the love of God will lead us into, step by step, little by little, as we grow along with him. And the sign of it? We learn to be dependent upon the Father. We learn to walk as Jesus walked, in a complete and unbroken dependence upon another to work within us. That is the sign of fellowship.

Well, then, where does this leave us? Let us not be counterfeits, denying the faith by an unchanged life. Let us rather be reflectors, reflecting the character, the quality, and the principle by which the Lord himself lived his life. Let me read you this description of that from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord [seeing the secret of Jesus and of his life], are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. {2 Cor 3:18 RSV}

That is what John is talking about, that is what he is trying to lead us into, and what the Spirit of God is working at in our lives. That is the goal toward which God is leading. May we see that goal, may our eyes be opened, as Paul prays for us, "the eyes of our understanding enlightened" {cf, Eph 1:18 KJV}, that we may begin to see the direction in which God is driving, and walk with him in it.

The Perfection of God's Love

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he declared that we are God's fellow workers. (2 Corinthians 6:1). It is through us that God accomplishes His work of giving the gospel to the whole world, for we have this treasure. In earthen vessels. It is through us that God is fulfilled. We are, according to John, the perfection of God's love. Let us be assured that we can know that we know God, that we can come to know God, and that we know how God's love can truly be perfected in us.

I. CAN WE BE SURE? Many times we are asked if we are saved. When we answer yes, we then are asked, .How do you know?. or Are you sure? Is it really possible for us to know that we are saved? Do we really believe that we can be sure? We sing such songs as *I Know Whom I Have Believed*.. If we cannot be sure, should we be singing these songs? I believe that we can have an assurance of our relationship with our Lord. Paul said, .For I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. (2 Timothy 1:12). Is Paul claiming something for himself that we all cannot possess? I believe not.

God can be known. This great truth differs greatly from what many have believed in the past. Most religions hold their gods afar off; they reverence them from a distance. But the Scriptures tell us that we can know. John repeatedly MUCH of the world walks in constant uncertainty. In fact, fear is a constant emotion in most of the world. We are all buffeted by fear and indecision. Those who do not have the assurance of our Savior live in a constant state of uncertainty which causes them to fear, for fear often results from the uncertainties of the future.

We often sing the song .Blessed Assurance.. By faith, we know that what God has promised will truly be given to us. Paul's great faith caused him to write, .For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. (2 Timothy 1:12). Again, when Paul and those shipwrecked with him were threatened by the storm, Paul's faith came to the rescue. To those fearing for their lives, Paul cried, .Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God, that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. (Acts 27:25). Isn't it great to have such faith? This is what John is telling those Christians.

The Christian can know of a certainty of his relationship with God because he is a partner with God. What a blow this was to those false teachers who were threatening the faith of those early Christians. They could not fathom how God in heaven could have any relationship with lowly mankind. But John declared that Christians can be .made complete in Him.. Christians actually enter into a special communion or relationship with God. says that we can know God. In addition to our text, notice the following Scriptures: .We are from God. (4:6); .Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. (4:7); .We know that we abide in Him. . . . (4:13). Thus, we do know God; God knows us. We have a close relationship with the Father of all humanity.

II. HOW CAN WE KNOW? If God can be known, and we believe that He can be, then, the question is this: How can God be known? Many who believe in Christ have differing views on this. Many feel that God will speak to them in some sort of a .still, small voice.. Others, on the other hand, believe that God will provide them with some sort of a personal, supernatural experience that will, in turn, bring them into a more personal understanding and knowledge of God. Then, there are still others who believe that simply professing God will cause them to know Him. Paul told Titus that there are those who .profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him.. He then adds that they are .detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed. (Titus 1:16). Jesus spoke of those who profess to know Him. He said, Not everyone who says to me, .Lord, Lord,. Will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father, who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, .Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons and in Your name perform many miracles?. And then I will declare to them, .I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness. (Matthew 7:21-23).

The Scriptures tell us that there is a way we can come to know God. Jesus tells us, .Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. (John 15:4). John says, in our text, that .we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. . . . By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. (2:3-6). This same truth is repeated in many other places in the New Testament. Christians need to constantly examine their own private lives to be assured that they are acceptable to God. Paul admonishes the Corinthians to .test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you fail the test? But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test. (2 Corinthians 13:5, 6).

We should not be concerned with what we were, but with what we are. God can make us what He wants us to be if we will let Him. The past is forgotten to the penitent person and the future lies as a challenge. But our present is secure as long as we can pass the test.

III. WHAT IS OUR GOAL? In our everyday parlance, we tend to think of the words *perfect* and *perfected* as referring to that which is without error or flaw. The Greek word *teleios* means .to attain to the end of. or .to make complete.. (See Arndt and Gingrich.) This being true, then, we ask, .How can we make God's love complete in us?. or .How can it attain the intended end in our lives? Love is the very essence of God. Later on in this epistle, John says that .God is love.. (Cf. 4:16.) *Agape* has the meaning of unselfish concern for others.. Certainly God showed an unselfish concern for us when He sent His own Son to die for us (John 3:16). We must, therefore, recognize that if God's love is demonstrated in our lives, we must demonstrate an unselfish concern for others in our own lives. If we love God, we will be concerned for His will; we will want to be involved in .unselfish concern. For God and His will.

Jesus has made it clear that we must be obedient if we expect to be pleasing to God. If we want God's love to shine in our lives, we must have a concern for God's will for us. The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. (2:6). Again, in John 14:15 Jesus is quoted as having said, *If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.* Again, in the same chapter, we read, *He who has My commandments, and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him. (John 14:21) and .If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. (John 14:23). Thus, if we want to perfect the love of God in our lives, we will walk as He walked (2:6) and be careful to obey the teachings of Jesus, for they come from the Father.*

The apostle Paul speaks of the perfection of God. He sees us as the perfection of God. Christians who properly conduct their lives are God's epistle, for we .are known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.. When our lives demonstrate the life of Jesus, we will truly be epistles of God. When we love like Christ loved, we will be demonstrating or perfecting the love of God. We are the earthen vessels through which God demonstrates to the world His .all-surpassing power. (4:7).

So, the question is this: How is the love of God perfected on earth? Can the world truly see the love of God? We are the perfection of God's love, for when we demonstrate our love, we will demonstrate God's love. The only picture of God that much of the world will see will be through the life that each of us lives. If we do not live sober, righteous, and godly lives, the world will never know the love of God. In the words of John .if anyone obeys His word, God's love is truly made complete in him. (2:6).

Test 2: Loving One's Neighbor

1 John 2:7-11: "Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. {8} Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. {9} Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. {10} Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. {11} But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him."

This is not something new. There were scores of new doctrines being taught which were not scriptural. But the aged apostle makes it clear that, years before, the message of love was one of the basic teachings of Christ when He was on this earth. He had taught, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

I just *love* that hat!"

"Man, I really *love* the old-fashioned kind of baked beans!"

"But, Mom, don't you realize that Tom and I *love* each other?"

Words, like coins, can be in circulation for such a long time that they start wearing out. Unfortunately, the word *love* (or, as it is now sometimes spelled, *luv*) is losing its value and is being used to cover a multitude of sins.

It is really difficult to understand how a man can use the same word to express his love for his wife as he uses to tell how he feels about baked beans! When words are used that carelessly they really mean little or nothing at all. Like the dollar, they have been devalued.

As John describes the life that is real, he uses three words repeatedly: *life*, *love*, and *light*. In fact, he devotes three sections of his letter to the subject of Christian love.

He explains that *love*, *life*, and *light* belong together. Read these three sections (1 John 2:7-11; 3:10-24; 4:7-21) *without the intervening verses* and you will see that love, life, and light must not be separated.

In our present study (1 John 2:7-11), we learn how Christian love is affected by *light and darkness*. A Christian who is walking in the light (which simply means he is obeying God) is going to love his Christian brother and sister.

In 1 John 3:10-24, we are told that Christian love is a matter of *life or death*: to live in hatred is to live in spiritual death. In 1 John 4:7-21 we see that Christian love is a matter of *truth or error* (cf. 1 John 4:6): because we *know* God's love toward us, we *show* God's love toward others.

In these three sections, then, we find three good reasons why Christians should love one another:

1. God has commanded us to love (1 John 2:7-11).
2. We have been born of God and God's love lives in us (1 John 3:10-24).
3. God first revealed His love to us (1 John 4:7-21). "We love . . . because He first loved us."

John not only *writes* about love but also *practices* it. One of his favorite names for his readers is "Beloved." He felt love for them. John is known as the "Apostle of Love" because in his Gospel and his epistles he gives such prominence to this subject. However, John was not *always* the "Apostle of Love." At one time Jesus gave John and his brother James, both of whom had hot tempers, the nickname "Boanerges" (Mark 3:17), which means "sons of thunder." On another occasion these two brothers wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy a village (Luke 9:51-56).

Since the New Testament was written in Greek, the writers were often able to use more precise language. It is unfortunate that our English word *love* has so many shades of meaning (some of them contradictory). When we read in 1 John about "love," the Greek word used is *agape* (ah-GAH-pay), the word for God's love toward man, a Christian's love for other Christians, and God's love for His church (Eph. 5:22-33).

Another Greek word for love, *philia* (fee-LEE-ah), used elsewhere, carries the idea of "friendship love," which is not quite as profound or divine as *agape* love. (The Greek word for sensual love, *eros*, from which we get our word *erotic*, is not used at all in the New Testament.)

The amazing thing is that Christian love is both old and new (1 John 2:7-8). This seems to be a contradiction. Love itself, of course, is not new, nor is the commandment—that men love God and each other—a new thing. Jesus Himself combined two Old Testament commandments, Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, and said (Mark 12:28-34) that these two commandments summarize all the Law and the Prophets. Loving God and loving one's neighbor were old, familiar responsibilities before Jesus ever came to earth.

As far as John was concerned, these precepts were still true and necessary. Nothing new was needed on the subject since they were foundational for the Christian experience. None of God's truth will ever need revising. What we have received through God's revelation will stand forever.

The time will never come when it will be necessary to say, "We made a mistake. We apologize for what has been said in God's Word." Though the precept of love did not change, something new had been discovered through the understanding of the precept. "Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in Him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth." The new principle is embodied in the phrase, "which thing is true in Him and in you." Christ was love and taught love. But how was it possible for believers with sinful natures to practice this love? Only one way: it is known as the believer allows the Christ of love to live through him.

"In Him and in you." Paul wrote, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). This is the believer's only possibility of loving God and his neighbor as Christ commanded. As Christ is permitted to control us, "the true light" will shine, and "the darkness" of hatred will be expelled.

John becomes very stern as he says, "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now." It matters not what one says about his conversion experience if he persists in hating someone. It will be certain that he has not entered into Christ's love, for Christ's love in the believer, evidenced by the believer, is a necessary witness to salvation. Hatred, on the other hand, is a dead giveaway that he has never been converted. He "is in darkness even until now."

In contrast, John says, "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him." To abide in the light is not only to be saved, but to live in fellowship with the Lord. When one does this, he will not be a stumbling block. He will not prevent others from coming to Christ, for they shall see Christ in him.

What has already been said in verse 9 is restated with greater emphasis: "But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes." There is no question about it, the person described here has not come to know Christ. Anyone who is "in darkness," and walking "in darkness," has never known the light of Christ. For this reason, the true believer should be extremely sensitive to the evil of hatred and all of its by-products such as anger, malice, and revenge. He will not allow these to remain in his life. Though there may be times when they might appear, he will confess to God immediately, and if others have been offended, he will be quick to apologize.

In what sense, then, is "love one another" a "new" (1 John 2:8) commandment? Again, a look at the Greek helps to answer the question.

The Greeks had two different words for "new"—one means "new in time," and the other means "new in quality." For example, you would use the first word to describe the latest car, a recent model. But if you purchased a car that was so revolutionary that it was *radically* different, you would use the second word—new in quality. (Our English words "recent" and "fresh" just about make this distinction: "recent" means new in time, "fresh" means new in character.)

The commandment to love one another is not new in time, but it is new in character. Because of Jesus Christ, the old commandment to "love one another" has taken on new meaning.

(2:7-11) **Introduction:** How do we know if we really know God? There are seven tests that will show us. This passage covers the second test: it deals with love. Do we love our neighbors? If we criticize, grumble, gripe, backbite, ignore,

neglect, curse, abuse, slander, hate, or mistreat our neighbors in any way, then we do not know God. No matter what we may claim nor how loudly we claim it, we do not know God if we do not love our neighbors. God is love; therefore any person who truly knows God is bound to love. Loving others is a strong test of our knowledge of God. We can tell whether or not we know God by testing our love for others.

1. The test: the supreme commandment—love (v.7-8).
2. The professing man: professes God but hates his brother (v.9).
3. The obedient man: loves his brother (v.10).
4. The bitter and hating man (v.11).
 - a. Is in darkness and walks in darkness.
 - b. Has no direction and is blind.

(2:7-8) **Commandment—Love:** How do we know if we know God? There is a test that shows us: Do we follow after the supreme commandment, the commandment to love our neighbors?

Beloved is John's favourite address to his people (cp. 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7;3 *John* 1, 2, 5, 11). The whole accent of his writing is love. As Westcott puts it: "St. John, while enforcing the commandment of love, gives expression to it." There is something very lovely here. So much of this letter is a warning; and parts of it are rebuke. When we are warning people or rebuking them, it is so easy to become coldly critical; it is so easy to scold; it is even possible to take a cruel pleasure in seeing people wince under our verbal lash. But, even when he has to say hard things, the accent of John's voice is love. He had learned the lesson which every parent, every preacher, every teacher, every leader must learn; he had learned to speak the truth in love.

Note three significant facts.

1. This is not a new commandment, but an old commandment. Observe: John does not come right out and say that he is talking about love, not immediately. He says that the commandment he is about to talk about...
 - is not a new commandment but an old commandment.
 - is the commandment that they had heard from the beginning of time.

One of the very first things that God ever said to man was this: man must love his neighbor (Leviticus 19:18). Why then would John not just go ahead and mention the commandment? Why take a backdoor approach to the subject of love? John had a very good reason: what John is about to say is new, so new that people would say that it was his own idea and not the truth. Therefore, John had to establish the fact that God had said the same thing from the beginning of time. But note a crucial question: If the commandment of love has been with man from the beginning of time, how can it be a new commandment? What is there about the commandment that might upset people and cause them to turn away from John's exhortation? This is the second thing discussed by John.

2. The commandment is a new commandment (1 John 2:8). It is not only an old commandment but a new commandment. Again, what is so new about love? Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ gave love a new meaning. Jesus Christ...
 - loved not only friends, but enemies.
 - loved not only good people, but bad people.
 - loved not only the righteous, but the sinner.
 - loved not only the acceptable, but the rejected.
 - loved not only the clean, but the dirty.

Jesus Christ Himself stated the fact as clearly as it can be stated:

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:43-45).

This was a totally new concept of love. Man has always felt free to mistreat others, especially those who had mistreated him. But Jesus Christ has shown that we cannot mistreat people *no matter what they have done*, that we must love everyone no matter who they are. Note His words above: "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:45). The only way we can become children of God is to love even as God loves. If we do not love, then we do not know God, for God is love. He is the love that loves all people no matter who they are.

Note another statement of Jesus Christ:

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35).

Jesus Christ says an astounding thing: the only way people can tell that we are His disciples is by our love for one another. Our discipleship and our knowledge of God can be measured by whether or not we love our brothers and sisters in the Lord. This is exactly what John says in 1 John 2:8: "the new commandment...is true in Him [Christ] and in you [true believers]." The person who truly follows God has the love of God in him. The love of God dwells not only in Christ but in the believer also.

3. Note another fact about the new commandment of love. Love is now made known by the true light that shines and erases the darkness (1 John 2:8). "The darkness is now past and the true light now shineth" (1 John 2:8).

The darkness refers to man's old idea of love, that he could react against anyone who mistreated him. But Jesus Christ, who is the light of the world, has now shone forth the truth. Man is to love his neighbor no matter what the neighbor does. In fact, man is to love all men no matter who they are or what they have done. God is love; therefore man is to be as God: man is to love. It is by his love that man knows whether or not he knows God. No man knows God unless he loves as Christ loves, loves even his enemies.

"Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

"Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth" (John 12:35).

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

"For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret" (Ephes. 5:12).

"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined" (Isaiah 9:2).

John goes on to say that this commandment of love is true in Jesus Christ and true in the people to whom he is writing. To John, as we have seen, truth was not only something to be grasped with the mind; it was something to be done. What he means is that the commandment to love one another is the highest truth; in Jesus Christ we can see that commandment in all the glory of its fullness; in him that commandment is true; and in the Christian we can see it, not in the fullness of its truth but coming true. For John, Christianity is progress in love.

He goes on to say that the light is shining and the darkness is passing away. This must be read in context. By the time John wrote, at the end of the first century, men's ideas were changing. In the very early days they had looked for the Second Coming of Jesus as a sudden and shattering event within their own life time. When that did not happen, they did not abandon the hope but allowed experience to change it. To John the Second Coming of Christ is not one sudden, dramatic event but a process in which the darkness is steadily being defeated by the light; and the end of the process will be a world in which the darkness is totally defeated and the light triumphant.

In this passage and in verses 10 and 11, the light is identified with love and the dark with hate. That is to say, the end of this process is a world where love reigns supreme and hate is banished for ever. Christ has come in the individual heart when a man's whole being is ruled by love; and he will have come in the world of men when all men obey his commandment of love. The coming and reign of Jesus is identical with the coming and reign of love.

In the previous paragraph (1 John 2:3-6), John has been talking about "the commandments" in general, but now he narrows his focus down to *one single commandment*. In the Old Testament, the command that God's people love one another was only one of *many*, but now this old commandment is lifted out and given a place of preeminence.

How is it possible for one commandment to stand head and shoulders above all the others? This is explained by the fact that love is the fulfillment of God's Law (Rom. 13:8-10).

Parents must care for their children according to law. Child neglect is a serious crime. But how many parents have a conversation like this when the alarm clock goes off in the morning?

She: "Honey, you'd better get up and go to work. We don't want to get arrested."

He: "Yeah, and you'd better get up and get breakfast for the kids, and get their clothes ready. The cops might show up and put us both in jail."

She: "You're right. Boy, it's a good thing they have a law, or we'd stay in bed all day!"

It's doubtful that the fear of the law is often the motive behind earning a living or caring for one's children. Parents fulfill their responsibilities (even if grudgingly on occasion) because they love each other and their children. To them, doing the right thing is not a matter of *law*—it's a matter of *love*.

The commandment "Love one another" is the fulfillment of God's Law in the same way. When you love people, you do not lie about them or steal from them. You have no desire to kill them. Love for God and love for others motivates a person to obey God's commandments *without even thinking about them!* When a person acts out of Christian love he obeys God and serves others—not because of fear, but because of his love.

This is why John says that "Love one another" is a new commandment—it is *new in emphasis*. It is not simply one of many commandments. No, it stands at the top of the list!

But it is new in emphasis in another way too. It stands at the very beginning of the Christian life. "The old commandment is the word which ye had from the beginning" (1 John 2:7). This phrase "from the beginning" is used in two different ways in John's letter, and it is important that you distinguish them. In 1 John 1:1, describing the eternity of Christ, we read that He existed "from the beginning." In John 1:1—a parallel verse—we read, "In the beginning was the Word."

But in 1 John 2:7, the subject is *the beginning of the Christian life*. The commandment to love one another is not an appendix to our Christian experience, as though God had an afterthought. No! It is in our hearts from the very beginning of our faith in Jesus Christ. If this were not so, John could not have written, "We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14, nasb). And Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35, nasb).

By nature, an unsaved person may be selfish and even hateful. As much as we love a newborn baby, we must confess that the infant is self-centered and thinks the whole world revolves around his crib. The child is typical of an unsaved person. "We ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another" (Titus 3:3). This unretouched photo of the unbeliever may not be beautiful, but it is certainly accurate! Some unregenerate persons do not display the traits here mentioned, but the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21) are always potentially present in their dispositions.

When a sinner trusts Christ and is baptized into Christ, he receives a new life and a new nature. The Holy Spirit of God comes to live in him and the love of God is "shed abroad in [his] heart" by the Spirit (Rom. 5:5). God does not have to give a new believer a long lecture about love! "For ye yourselves are taught of God [i.e., by the Holy Spirit within you] to love one another" (1 Thes. 4:9). A new believer discovers that he now hates what he used to love, and that he loves what he used to hate!

So the commandment to love one another is new in *emphasis*: it is one of the most important commandments Christ gave us (John 13:34). In fact, "love one another" is repeated at least a dozen times in the New Testament (John 13:34; 15:9, 12, 17; Rom. 13:8; 1 Thes. 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11-12; 2 John 5). And there are many other references to brotherly love.

It is important that we understand the meaning of Christian love. It is not a shallow sentimental emotion that Christians try to "work up" so they can get along with each other. It is a matter of the *will* rather than an *emotion*—an affection for and attraction to certain persons. It is a matter of determining—of making up your mind—that you will allow God's love to reach others through you, and then of acting toward them in loving ways. You are not to act "as if you loved them," but *because* you love them. This is not hypocrisy—it is obedience to God.

Perhaps the best explanation of Christian love is 1 Corinthians 13. You should read a modern translation of this chapter to get the full force of its message: the Christian life without love is NOTHING!

"Love one another," John points out, was first true in Christ, and now it is true in the lives of those who are trusting Christ. Jesus Himself is the greatest Example of this commandment.

Later on we will think about that great statement, "God is love" (1 John 4:8), but it is anticipated here. When one looks at Jesus Christ, one sees love embodied and exemplified. In commanding us to love, Jesus does not ask us to do something that He has not already done Himself. The four Gospel records are the account of a life lived in the spirit of love—and that life was lived under conditions far from ideal. Jesus says to us, in effect, "I lived by this great commandment, and I can enable you to follow My example."

Jesus illustrated love by the very life that He lived. He *never* showed hatred or malice. His righteous soul hated all sin and disobedience, but He *never hated the people who committed such sins*. Even in His righteous announcements of judgment, there was always an undercurrent of love.

It is encouraging to think of Jesus' love for the twelve disciples. How they must have broken His heart again and again as they argued over who was the greatest, or tried to keep people from seeing their Master. Each of them was different from the others, and Christ's love was broad enough to include each one in a personal, understanding way. He was patient with Peter's impulsiveness, Thomas' unbelief, and even Judas' treachery. When Jesus commanded His disciples to love one another, He was only telling them to do as He had done.

Consider too our Lord's love for all kinds of people. The publicans and sinners were attracted (Luke 15:1) by His love, and even the lowest of the low could weep at His feet (Luke 7:36-39). Spiritually hungry rabbi Nicodemus could meet with Him privately at night (John 3:1-21), and 4,000 of the "common people" could listen to His teaching for three days (Mark 8:1-9) and then receive a miraculous meal from Him. He held babies in His arms. He spoke about children at play. He even comforted the women who wept as the soldiers led Him out to Calvary.

Perhaps the greatest thing about Jesus' love was the way it touched even the lives of His enemies. He looked with loving pity on the religious leaders who in their spiritual blindness accused Him of being in league with Satan (Matt. 12:24). When the mob came to arrest Him, He could have called on the armies of heaven for protection, but He yielded to His enemies. And then He died for them—for His enemies! "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his *friends*" (John 15:13, italics added). But Jesus died not only for His friends, but also for *His foes*! And as they crucified Him, He prayed for them: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

In His life, in His teachings, and in His death, Jesus is the perfect Example of this new commandment, "Love one another." And this is what helps to make the commandment "new." In Christ we have a new illustration of the old truth that God is love and that the life of love is the life of joy and victory.

What is true in Christ ought to be true in each believer. "As He is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17). A believer should live a life of Christian love "because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining" (1 John 2:8, nasb). This reminds us of the emphasis (1 John 1) on walking in the light. Two ways of life are contrasted: those who walk in the light practice love; those who walk in the darkness practice hatred. The Bible repeatedly emphasizes this truth.

"The darkness *is passing away*," but the light does not yet shine fully all over the world, nor does it penetrate every area of even a believer's life.

When Christ was born, "the Dayspring from on high" visited the world (Luke 1:78). "Dayspring" means *sunrise*. The birth of Christ was the beginning of a new day for mankind! As He lived before men, taught them, and ministered to them, He spread the light of life and love. "The people who sat in darkness saw a great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up" (Matt. 4:16).

But there is a conflict in this world between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. "And the light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness is not able to put it out" (John 1:5, lit.). Satan is the Prince of darkness, and he extends his evil kingdom by means of lies and hatred. Christ is the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4:2), and He extends His kingdom by means of truth and love.

The kingdoms of Christ and of Satan are in conflict today, but "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18). The darkness is passing away little by little, and the True Light is shining brighter and brighter in our hearts.

Jesus Christ is the standard of love for Christians. "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another," He says; "as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). And He repeats: "This is My commandment, that ye love one another, *as I have loved you*" (John 15:12, italics added). We are not to measure our Christian love against the love of some other Christian (and we usually pick somebody whose life is more of an excuse than an example!) but against the love of Jesus Christ our Lord. The old commandment becomes "new" to us as we see it fulfilled in Christ.

So the commandment, "Love one another," is new in emphasis and new in example. It is also new in a third way.

Our passage continues the illustration of light and darkness. If a Christian walks in the light and is in fellowship with God, he will also be in fellowship with others in God's family. *Love* and *light* go together, much as *hatred* and *darkness* go together.

It is easy to talk about Christian love, but much more difficult to practice it. For one thing, such love is not mere talk (1 John 2:9). For a Christian to say (or sing!) that he loves the brethren, while he actually hates another believer, is for him to lie. In other words (and this is a sobering truth), *it is impossible to be in fellowship with the Father and out of fellowship with another Christian at the same time.*

This is one reason why God established the local church, the fellowship of believers. "You can't be a Christian alone"—a person cannot live a complete and developing Christian life unless he is in fellowship with God's people. The Christian life has two relationships: the vertical (Godward) and the horizontal (manward). And what God has joined together, man must not put asunder! And each of these two relationships is to be one of love, one for the other.

Jesus deals with this matter in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matt. 5:21-26). A gift on the altar was valueless as long as the worshiper had a dispute to settle with his brother. Note that Jesus does not say that the worshiper had something against his brother, but that the brother had something against the worshiper. But even when *we* have been offended, we should not wait for the one who has offended us to come to us; *we should go to him*. If we do not, Jesus warns us that we will end up in a prison of spiritual judgment where we will have to pay the last penny (Matt. 18:21-35). In other words, when we harbor an unforgiving, unloving spirit, we harm ourselves most.

The contrast between "saying" and "doing" is one we have met before (1 John 1:6, 8, 10; 2:4, 6). It is easy to practice a Christianity of "words"—singing the right songs, using the right vocabulary, praying the right prayers—and, through it all, deceiving ourselves into thinking we are spiritual. This mistake also ties into something Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:33-37). What we say should be the true expression of our character. We should not need extra words ("oaths") to fortify what we say. Our yes should mean yes and our no should mean no. So, if we *say* we are in the light, we will prove it by loving the brethren. Many Christians urgently need to be accepted, loved, and encouraged.

Contrary to popular opinion, Christian love is not "blind." When we practice true Christian love, we find life getting brighter and brighter. Hatred is what darkens life! When true Christian love flows out of our hearts, we will have greater understanding and perception in spiritual things. This is why Paul prays that our love may grow in knowledge and perception, "that ye may distinguish the things that differ" (cf. Phil. 1:9-10). A Christian who loves his brother is a Christian who sees more clearly.

No book in the Bible illustrates the blinding power of hatred like the Book of Esther. The events recorded there take place in Persia, where many of the Jews were living after the Captivity. Haman, one of the king's chief men, had a burning hatred for the Jews. The only way he could satisfy this hatred was to see the whole nation destroyed. He plunged ahead in an evil plot, completely blind to the fact that the Jews would win and that he himself would be destroyed.

Hatred is blinding people today too.

Christian love is not a shallow sentiment, a passing emotion that we perhaps experience in a church service. Christian love is a *practical* thing; it applies in the everyday affairs of life. Just consider the "one another" statements in the New

Testament and you will see how practical it is to love one another. Here are just a few (there are over twenty such statements):

1. Wash one another's feet (John 13:14).
2. Prefer one another (Rom. 12:10).
3. Be of the same mind one to another (Rom. 12:16).
4. Do not judge one another (Rom. 14:13).
5. Receive one another (Rom. 15:7).
6. Admonish one another (Rom. 15:14).
7. Edify [build up] one another (1 Thes. 5:11).
8. Bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2).
9. Confess your faults to one another (James 5:16).
10. Use hospitality one to another (1 Peter 4:9).

In short, to love other Christians means to treat them the way *God* treats them—and the way God treats us. Christian love that does not show itself in action and in attitude (cf. 1 Cor. 13:4-7) is spurious.

What happens to a believer who does not love the brethren? We have already seen the first tragic result: he lives in the darkness, though he probably *thinks* he is living in the light (1 John 2:9). He *thinks* he sees, but he is actually blinded by the darkness of hatred. This is the kind of person who causes trouble in Christian groups. He thinks he is a "spiritual giant," with great understanding, when actually he is a babe with very little spiritual perception. He may read the Bible faithfully and pray fervently, but if he has hatred in his heart, he is living a lie.

The second tragic result is that such a believer becomes a cause of stumbling (cf. 1 John 2:10). It is bad enough when an unloving believer hurts himself (1 John 2:9); but when he starts to hurt *others* the situation is far more serious. It is *serious* to walk in the darkness. It is *dangerous* to walk in the darkness when stumbling blocks are in the way! An unloving brother stumbles himself, and in addition he causes others to stumble.

A man who was walking down a dark street one night saw a pinpoint of light coming toward him in a faltering way. He thought perhaps the person carrying the light was ill or drunk; but as he drew nearer he could see a man with a flashlight carrying a *white cane*.

"Why would a blind man be carrying a light?" the man wondered, and then he decided to ask.

The blind man smiled. "I carry my light, not so *I* can see, but so that *others* can see me. I cannot help being blind," he said, "but I can help being a stumbling block."

The best way to help other Christians not to stumble is to love them. Love makes us stepping-stones; hatred (or any of its "cousins," such as envy or malice) makes us stumbling blocks. It is important that Christians exercise love in a local church, or else there will always be problems and disunity. When we are falling over each other, instead of lifting each other higher, we will never become a truly happy spiritual family.

Apply this, for instance, to the delicate matter of "questionable things" (Rom. 14-15).

Since believers come from different backgrounds, they do not always agree. In Paul's day, they differed on such matters as diets and holy days. One group said it was unspiritual to eat meat offered to idols. Another group wanted strict observance of the Sabbath. There were several facets to the problem, but basic to its solution was: "Love one another!" Paul puts it this way: "Let us not, therefore, judge one another anymore; but judge this, rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. . . . But if thy brother be grieved with thy food, now walkest thou not in love" (Rom. 14:13, 15, sco).

A third tragic result of hatred is that it retards a believer's spiritual progress (1 John 2:11). A blind man—a person who is walking in darkness—can never find his way! The only atmosphere that is conducive to spiritual growth is the atmosphere of spiritual light—of love. Just as the fruits and flowers need sunshine, so God's people need love if they are going to grow.

The commandment, "Love one another," becomes new to us in our own day-by-day experience. It is not enough for us to recognize that it is new in emphasis and say, "Yes, love is important!" Nor is it enough for us to see God's love

exemplified by Jesus Christ. We must know this love *in our own experience*. The old commandment, "Love one another," becomes a *new* commandment as we practice God's love in daily life.

Thus far, we have seen the *negative* side of 1 John 2:9-11; now let's look at the positive. If we practice Christian love, what will the wonderful results be?

First of all, we will be living in the light—living in fellowship with God and with our Christian brothers.

Second, we will not stumble or become stumbling blocks to others.

And, third, we will grow spiritually and will progress toward Christlikeness.

At this point, we should think about the contrast between the ugly "works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19-21) and the beautiful fruit of the Spirit—"Love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23).

When we are walking in the light, the "seed of the Word" (Luke 8:11) can take root and bear fruit. And the first cluster the Spirit produces is *love!*

But love does not live alone. Love produces *joy!* Hatred makes a man miserable, but love always brings him joy.

A Christian couple came to see a minister because marriage was beginning to fall apart. "We're both saved," the discouraged husband said, "but we just aren't happy together. There's no joy in our home." As the minister talked with them and they considered together what the Bible has to say, one fact became clear: both the husband and wife were nursing grudges. Each recalled many annoying little things the other had done!

"If you two really loved each other," said the minister, "you wouldn't file these hurts away in your hearts. Grudges fester in our hearts like infected sores, and poison the whole system."

Then he read, "[Love] thinketh no evil" (1 Cor. 13:5). He explained, "This means that love never keeps records of things others do that hurt us. When we truly love someone, our love covers their sins and helps to heal the wounds they cause." Then he read, "And above all things have fervent love among yourselves; for love shall cover the multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8, sco).

Before the couple left, the minister counseled them: "Instead of keeping records of the things that hurt, start remembering the things that please. An unforgiving spirit always breeds poison, but a loving spirit that sees and remembers the best always produces health."

A Christian who walks in love is always experiencing some new joy because the "fruit of the Spirit" is love and joy. And when we blend "love" and "joy," we will have "peace"—and peace helps to produce "patience." In other words, walking in the light, walking in love, is the secret of Christian growth, which nearly always begins with love.

Now, all of us must admit that we cannot generate Christian love under our own power. By nature, we are selfish and hateful. It is only as God's Spirit floods our hearts with love that we, in turn, can love one another. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5). The Spirit of God makes the commandment, "Love one another," into a new and exciting day-by-day experience. If we walk in the light, God's Spirit produces love. If we walk in darkness, our own selfish spirit produces hatred.

The Christian life—the life that is real—is a beautiful blending of "something old, something new." The Holy Spirit takes the "old things" and makes them "new things" in our experience. When you stop to think about it, the Holy Spirit never grows old! He is always young! And He is the only Person on earth *today* who was here centuries ago when Jesus lived, taught, died, and rose again. He is the only One who can take "old truth" and make it fresh and new in our daily experience at this present time.

There are other exciting truths in the rest of John's letter, but if we fail to obey in this matter of love, the rest of the letter may well be "darkness" to us. Perhaps the best thing we can do, right *now*, is to search our hearts to see if we hold anything against a brother, or if someone has anything against us. The life that is real is an honest life—and it is a life of *doing*, not merely *saying*. It is a life of active love in Christ. This means forgiveness, kindness, long-suffering. But it also means joy and peace and victory.

The love life is the only life, because it is the life that is real!

(2:9) **Hate—Profession, False:** there is the professing man, the man who professes that he knows God but who hates his brother. How many persons do just what this scene pictures? A person says that he is *in the light*, that is, that he is *in Christ*. He says that he...

- has been baptized in Christ
- belongs to the church of Christ
- reads the Word of Christ
- prays to Christ
- lives for Christ
- teaches for Christ

But the person hates his brother. He says, "Oh, I don't hate my brother. I just don't like him. I don't know how to get along with him." Or, "He just turns me off: his appearance, his behavior." Or, "He did me wrong; he mistreated me." Whatever the reason, it is not love. Love is love; it is not mistreatment or hate. And Jesus Christ revealed the light of love to us. We must love our neighbors, even those who are our enemies, if we are to become children of God and followers of Him.

No man walks in the light of God, no man knows God, unless he loves his neighbor—even the neighbors who stand against him. If we hate our neighbors—neglect, dislike, disregard, criticize, backbite, and mistreat them—we are not living in the light, not living *in Christ*. We are making a false profession. We do not know God, not really, no matter what we claim. We are living in the darkness of this world—living like most people in the world live—hating some of our brothers.

The first thing which strikes us about this passage is the way in which John sees personal relationships in terms of black and white. In regard to our brother man, it is a case of either love or hate; as John sees it, there is no such thing as neutrality in personal relationships. As Westcott put it: "Indifference is impossible; there is no twilight in the spiritual world."

It is further to be noted that what John is speaking about is a man's attitude to his *brother*, that is, to the man next door, the man beside whom he lives and works, the man with whom he comes into contact every day. There is a kind of Christian attitude which enthusiastically preaches love to people in other lands, but has never sought any kind of fellowship with its next door neighbour or even managed to live at peace within its own family circle. John insists on love for the man with whom we are in daily contact. As A. E. Brooke puts it, this is not "vapid philosophy, or a pretentious cosmopolitanism"; it is immediate and practical.

John was perfectly right when he drew his sharp distinction between light and dark, love and hate, without shades and halfway stages. Our brother cannot be disregarded; he is part of the landscape. The question is *how* do we regard him?

(i) We may regard our brother man as *negligible*. We can make all our plans without taking him into our calculations at all. We can live on the assumption that his need and his sorrow and his welfare and his salvation have nothing to do with us. A man may be so self-centred—often quite unconsciously—that in his world no one matters except himself.

(ii) We may regard our brother man with *contempt*. We may treat him as a fool in comparison with our intellectual attainment and as one whose opinions are to be brushed aside. We may regard him much as the Greeks regarded slaves, a necessary lesser breed, useful enough for the menial duties of life, but not to be compared with themselves.

(iii) We may regard our brother man as a *nuisance*. We may feel that law and convention have given him a certain claim upon us, but that claim is nothing more than an unfortunate necessity. Thus a man may regard any gift he has to make to charity and any tax he has to pay for social welfare as regrettable. Some in their heart of hearts regard those who are in poverty or in sickness and those who are under-privileged as mere nuisances.

(iv) We may regard our brother man as an *enemy*. If we regard competition as the principle of life, that is bound to be so. Every other man in the same profession or trade is a potential competitor and, therefore, a potential enemy.

(v) We may regard our brother man as a *brother*. We may regard his needs as our needs, his interests as our interests, and to be in fellowship with him as the true joy of life.

(2:10) **Love**: there is the obedient man, the man who loves his brother. Two wonderful things are said about the person who loves his brother.

1. He is a man who abides *in the light*, that is, *in Christ*. The obedient man lives and walks in Jesus Christ. He walks in love just as Jesus Christ walked in love. What does it mean to walk in love? Scripture spells out some very practical acts.

- Love suffereth long (endures long, is patient).
- Love is kind.
- Love envies not (is not jealous).
- Love vaunts not itself (brags not, boasts not).
- Love is not puffed up (is not vainglorious, arrogant, prideful).
- Love does not behave itself unseemly (unbecomingly, rudely, indecently, unmannerly).
- Love seeks not her own (is not selfish, self-seeking, insisting on one's rights and way).
- Love is not easily provoked (is not touchy, angry, fretful, resentful).
- Love thinks no evil (harbors no evil thought, takes no account of a wrong done it).
- Love rejoices not in iniquity (in wrong, sin, evil, injustice), but rejoices in the truth (in justice, in righteousness).
- Love bears all things.
- Love believes all things (exercises faith in everything, under all circumstances).
- Love endures all things (never weakens; has the power to endure).

2. The man who loves his brother has no occasion of stumbling in him. There is nothing in him to make him stumble, nothing to trip him up in life, nothing to make him fall and hurt himself or destroy his life. How can this be? How can it be said of any man that he will not stumble? Because love is the great binding force of the universe.

- God is love; therefore the more we love God, the closer and closer we draw to Him. And the closer we get to Him, the more we learn to trust His care, provision, protection, and power. When God is taking care of us, there is absolutely nothing that can touch us (cp. Romans 8:35-39).
- The great need of man is love. Man needs to be loved, but not with the sentimental feelings and passions of the world that come and go as freely as the falling star that shoots across the sky. Man needs to be loved with the love of God, the kind of love just covered above, the kind of love that will help him to know that God loves him. Man needs to know that God cares for him and wants to deliver and strengthen him against all the trials of life. This kind of love will pull men together, not alienate them. The man who loves his neighbor like this will not fail to live the kind of life he should live.

(2:11) **Hate—Darkness**: there is the bitter, hating man. This person differs from the professing person in that he does not profess to know God. He is a man who is totally lost in the darkness of this world.

John has something further to say. As he sees it, our attitude to our brother man has an effect not only on him but also on ourselves.

(i) If we love our brother, we are walking in the light and there is nothing in us which causes us to stumble. The Greek could mean that, if we love our brother, there is nothing in us which causes *others* to stumble and, of course, that would be perfectly true. But it is much more likely that John is saying that, if we love our brother, there is nothing in us which causes *ourselves* to stumble. That is to say, love enables us to make progress in the spiritual life and hatred makes progress impossible. When we think of it, that is perfectly obvious. If God is love and if the new commandment of Christ is love, then love brings us nearer to men and to God and hatred separates us from men and from God. We ought always to remember that he who has in his heart hatred, resentment and the unforgiving spirit, can never grow up in the spiritual life.

(ii) John goes on to say that he who hates his brother walks in darkness and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him. That is to say, hatred makes a man blind and this, too, is perfectly obvious. When a man has hatred in his heart, his powers of judgment are obscured; he cannot see an issue clearly. It is no uncommon sight to see a man opposing a good proposal simply because he dislikes, or has quarrelled with, the man who made it. Again and again

progress in some scheme of a church or an association is held up because of personal animosities. No man is fit to give a verdict on anything while he has hatred in his heart; and no man can rightly direct his own life when hatred dominates him.

Love enables a man to walk in the light; hatred leaves him in the dark—even if he does not realize that it is so.

Several things are said about this man.

1. He is in darkness and walks in darkness. He is not in the light, not in Christ. Therefore, he does not know God. He does not even profess to know God. He is wrapped up and focused only upon the world. When it comes to God and Christ, he is totally in the dark and often could care less. He takes what he can and accumulates all that he can, no matter who it hurts. He cares little about other people except perhaps family and close friends. He lives mainly for the pleasures and passions of the world. Therefore, how he treats his neighbor matters little, just so he gets what he wants.

2. He has no direction and is blind. He does not look beyond this life and he is blind to it. He sees little if any meaning to life other than getting all he can of its comfort, pleasures, and possessions. Therefore, to hate his neighbor means nothing to him if his neighbor gets in the way. Note: when a man hates or is bitter against another person, it blinds him even more. He often focuses upon getting back at the person and loses sight of what he should be doing. He just cannot see the truth.

How often a person has opposed a good project simply because he was upset with the leader. The great good of the project is often clearly visible, but hatred blinds the mind and more tragically the heart—so much so that a person makes a fool out of himself without even knowing it. But more tragically, he often causes damage and division among people, and his soul is doomed to be in darkness forever—forever separated from the light of God and of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The New Commandment

“Behold I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who 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 you for His name’s sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one” (1 John 2:7-14).

We have learned that God’s love is perfected in our own lives when we are obedient to His commands and when we walk in the way that Jesus His Son walked. This was a new outlook on life for many of those to whom John was writing.

The Jewish people in their concern for God were careful to live up to the letter of the law. Their approach to godliness was a legalistic keeping of the letter of the law. There was no way for them to receive the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. Their relationship to God was made possible through the law; our relationship to God is made possible through grace.

Let us continue with the concept of *agape* or love. John discusses this as a “new commandment” in 2:7-14. He commends those who have been faithful to the will of God. They are certainly faithful because they have demonstrated the love of God in their lives.

I. THE NEW COMMANDMENT EMPHASIZED

The world of John’s day was plagued with a particularly nagging problem. False teaching was so great that it threatened the very unity and growth of the early church. The false teachers did not understand nor appreciate the impact of *agape* in one’s life. They believed that one’s true relationship with God was evidenced through the possession of a superior knowledge. The impact of this false teaching will become more significant as we look at other features of it later.

Today, people feel, as many did in that day, that God is best seen through great works. Great effort is made, therefore, in showing one’s righteousness by works. This was one of the major causes of Martin Luther’s retaliation against the Roman Catholic church. He could not see how salvation by faith could be harmonious with the great emphasis upon works by the clergy of his day. Others since Luther’s time have seen how God stresses salvation by faith through the grace of God. This, of course, does not minimize the importance of obedience, as we have already seen.

John emphasizes in this text that good is seen through loving lives and purified hearts. The love of our lives will cause us to respond to the unselfish love of God. We will let the blood of the cross cleanse our own hearts, and our lives will be purified through this great love. This is the importance of the new commandment.

II. THE NEW COMMANDMENT DEFINED

Love as an emotion is as old as mankind. It is a part of almost every known religion. Love, however, as is taught by many, is an emotional type of relationship. The law of Moses commanded that one should love his neighbor (Leviticus 19:18). In fact, David was certainly in agreement with his understanding of the law when he wrote, “Arise, O Lord, in Thine anger; lift up Thyself against the rage of my adversaries” (Psalm 7:6). It was right not only for God to rise up against one’s enemies, but also for the individual to do so as well. The one who should be loved was the neighbor or one’s own family or people. Jesus expressed the spirit of the law when He said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:43, 44).

Jesus introduced a new dimension of love. In fact, Henry Thayer, the famous Greek lexicographer, wrote concerning *agape*, that it is a “purely biblical and ecclesiastical word.” Unfortunately, in our English language, we have only one word to express the many meanings of love. In the Greek language, several words expressed various types and shades of love. For example, *eros* described a physical relationship, the kind of love that a husband or wife could have for his or her spouse. It was more physical, but it also included a level of emotion. The word *philos*, on the other hand, involved a friendship type of love. It also involved relationships, but the relationships were on a friendship level. “I love you because you love me” is a good expression of its meaning. *Agape*, however, was this special type of love that John is discussing. Its real meaning and significance involves seeking the best for the object of one’s love.

It is true that *agape* existed in non-Christian sources. Arndt and Gingrich state that “an unquestioned example from a pagan source was lacking for a long time. . . . Now we have an inscription that is surely pagan.” Yet, since the occurrence of this word in pagan sources is so rare, we may with good reason declare that it is a purely “biblical and ecclesiastical word.”

Have you ever wondered why God could be “jealous with a godly jealousy”? How could one be the true essence of love, as God is, and still be jealous? When one recognizes the true nature of love, this is not hard to see. *Agape* can be jealous because in any category, there is only one best. God cannot be equalled. He is the only one in His category. He can be jealous for us because we are His; He has expressed His love to us in a way that is and shall evermore be unequalled. He gave His Son. Why should He not be jealous over us?

III. THE NEW COMMANDMENT LIVED

It is possible for us to understand the meaning of this new type of love and never have it to influence our lives. What will true love cause us to do? How will our lives be changed as a result of possessing this new commandment in our lives? There are many ways that love will influence our lives and change our conduct. We shall notice only three.

First, *love (agape) will change our way of thinking about life*. The world is filled with people who are miserable; they are unhappy and have no real reason for living. The Christian is a most fortunate person. Christ gives the Christian a reason for living. He gives the Christian a purpose. In the world, one of the major ways of thinking is to exalt oneself. Our generation has developed a self-centered approach to life. “If something feels good, he should do it,” goes the argument. “After all, it is a playboy world.”

On the other hand, the Christian knows that love changes his life. The self is not nearly so important. Paul wrote that “the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer” (2 Corinthians 5:14-16). It is not true that we should not love ourselves at all, for we are told to “love our neighbor as ourselves” (Matthew 22:37). Once you have given yourself for someone else, you will realize what a great blessing it is. Love does indeed change our lives.

Second, *love will cause us to obey God*. We have noted that Jesus emphasized the importance of obedience as a demonstration of our love. I am reminded of a statement I often heard quoted while in one of my graduate classes. Augustine was quoted as saying that the center of life was to “love God and do as you please.” When asked what this meant, Augustine would say that “if you love God as you should, you will not want to do anything to hurt Him; therefore, you can love God and do as you please.” As we just noted, Christ’s love constrains us.

Third, *love is God’s greatest healer*. Love helps us to overcome all of the problems we face as Christians. As darkness

and light cannot live together, so love and hate cannot dwell together. Love and hatred make for strange bedfellows. Misunderstandings, divisions, problems within God's family—all of these can be solved with an ample dose of love. Fear, depression, wrath, and sorrow can be eased with an ample dose of love. In 4:18, John states that "there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love." Truly, love is God's greatest healer.

IV. THE NEW COMMANDMENT ILLUSTRATED

The beloved apostle John saw the love of those he addressed. He is not only warning them of those who would destroy their love; he is also commending them for their practice of love. John tells his readers and us at least three blessings that the possession of love (*agape*) will provide for us.

Love produces forgiveness. It was God's love that caused Him to forgive us. John says that "your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake" (2:12). But not only will God's love cause Him to forgive us; it will cause us to forgive one another. A friend of mine said to me recently that "God forgives and forgets; mankind must learn to forget in order that he may be able to forgive." What a blessing it is to be able to lie down at night knowing that God has forgiven us.

Love helps us to know God more intimately. The Gnostics believed that the highest level of development was to become the "knowing ones." They placed the highest priority on some sort of special knowledge. Yet, John makes it clear that if we learn to love, we will learn to know God. He impresses on them the fact that "you know Him who has been from the beginning." (See 2:13, 14.) If we truly practice the unselfish concern for others, *agape*-type love, then in truth we come to know God, for God is love. The very essence of God's relationship with man has been His concern for us.

Love will overcome and conquer the evil one. Satan is not only the father of lies; he is the father of hatred. It was Satan who produced the separation of mankind from his intimacy with God in the Garden of Eden. It was Satan who caused Cain to hate his brother and slay him in anger. It is Satan who separates us from God. Yet, through the practice of unselfish love for others, we can be victorious. John says that "the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one" (2:14). It is this "new commandment" that produces the power to overcome through the cross. Truly, John saw their love; he knew the power of their love.

CONCLUSION

The answer to the world's problems lies in a super dose of love. We are told that "all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Love is the answer. It was a new commandment because it gave a new dimension to men's lives. It is the greatest emotion ever to enter the world. It produces the most astounding results in our lives. No wonder, John says, "the one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him" (2:10).

Test 3: Remembering Your Spiritual Growth

(1 John 2:15-17 NIV) *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. {16} For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. {17} The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.*

(1 John 2:15-17 NNAS) *Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. {16} For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. {17} The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.*

A group of first-graders had just completed a tour of a hospital, and the nurse who had directed them was asking for questions. Immediately a hand went up.

"How come the people who work here are always washing their hands?" a little fellow asked. After the laughter had subsided, the nurse gave a wise answer:

"They are 'always washing their hands' for two reasons. First, they love health; and second, *they hate germs.*"

In more than one area of life, love and hate go hand in hand. A husband who loves his wife is certainly going to exercise a hatred for what would harm her. "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil" (Ps. 97:10). "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cleave to what is good" (Rom. 12:9, nasb).

John's epistle has reminded us to exercise love (1 John 2:7-11)—the right kind of love. Now it warns us that there is a *wrong* kind of love, a love that God hates. This is love for what the Bible calls "the world."

There are four reasons why Christians should not love "the world."

Because of What the World IS

The New Testament word *world* has at least three different meanings. It sometimes means the *physical* world, *the earth*: "God that made the world [our planet] and all things therein" (Acts 17:24). It also means the *human* world, *mankind*: "For God so loved the world" (John 3:16). Sometimes these two ideas appear together: "He [Jesus] was in the world, and the world [earth] was made by Him, and the world [mankind] knew Him not" (John 1:10).

But the warning, "Love not the world!" is not about the world of nature or the world of men. Christians ought to appreciate the beauty and usefulness of the earth God has made, since He "giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). And they certainly ought to love people—not only their friends, but even their enemies.

This "world" named here as our enemy is an invisible spiritual system opposed to God and Christ.

We use the word *world* in the sense of *system* in our daily conversation. The TV announcer says, "We bring you the news from the world of sports." "The world of sports" is not a separate planet or continent. It is an organized system, made up of a set of ideas, people, activities, purposes, etc. And "the world of finance" and "the world of politics" are likewise systems of their own. Behind what we see, in sports or finance, is an invisible system that we cannot see; and it is the system that "keeps things going."

"The world," in the Bible, is Satan's system for opposing the work of Christ on earth. It is the very opposite of what is godly (1 John 2:16) and holy and spiritual. "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19, nasb). Jesus called Satan "the prince of this world" (John 12:31). The devil has an organization of evil spirits (Eph. 6:11-12) working with him and influencing the affairs of "this world."

Just as the Holy Spirit uses people to accomplish God's will on earth, so Satan uses people to fulfill his evil purposes. Unsaved people, whether they realize it or not, are energized by "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:1-2).

Unsaved people belong to "this world." Jesus calls them "the children of this world" (Luke 16:8). When Jesus was here on earth, the people of "this world" did not understand Him, nor do they now understand those of us who trust Him (1 John

3:1). A Christian is a member of the *human* world, and he lives in the *physical* world, but he does not belong to the *spiritual* world that is Satan's system for opposing God. "If ye were of the world [Satan's system], the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:18).

"The world," then, is not a natural habitat for a believer. The believer's citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20, nasb), and all his effective resources for living on earth come from his Father in heaven.

The believer is somewhat like a scuba diver. The water is not man's natural habitat, for he is not equipped for life in (or under) it. When a scuba diver goes under, he has to take special equipment with him so that he can breathe.

Were it not for the Holy Spirit's living within us, and the spiritual resources we have in prayer, Christian fellowship, and the Word, we could never "make it" here on earth. We complain about the pollution of earth's atmosphere—the atmosphere of "the world" is also so polluted spiritually that Christians cannot breathe normally!

But there is a second—and more serious—reason why Christians must not love the world.

Because of What the World Does to Us (1 John 2:15-16)

"If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

Worldliness is not so much a matter of *activity* as of *attitude*. It is possible for a Christian to stay away from questionable amusements and doubtful places and still love the world, for worldliness is a matter of the heart. To the extent that a Christian loves the world system and the things in it, he does *not* love the Father.

Worldliness not only affects your response to the love of God; it also affects your response *to the will of God*. "The world passeth away . . . but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (1 John 2:17).

Doing the will of God is a joy for those living in the love of God. "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." But when a believer loses his enjoyment of the Father's love, he finds it hard to obey the Father's will.

When you put these two factors together, you have a practical definition of worldliness: anything in a Christian's life that causes him to lose his enjoyment of the Father's love or his desire to do the Father's will is worldly and must be avoided. Responding to the Father's love (your personal devotional life), and doing the Father's will (your daily conduct)—these are two tests of worldliness.

Many things in this world are definitely wrong and God's Word identifies them as sins. It is wrong to steal and to lie (Eph. 4:25, 28). Sexual sins are wrong (Eph. 5:1-3). About these and many other actions, Christians can have little or no debate. But there are areas of Christian conduct that are not so clear and about which even the best Christians disagree. In such cases, each believer must apply the test to his own life and be scrupulously honest in his self-examination, remembering that even a *good* thing may rob a believer of his enjoyment of God's love and his desire to do God's will.

A senior student in a Christian college was known for his excellent grades and his effective Christian service. He was out preaching each weekend and God was using him to win the souls and challenge Christians.

Then something happened: his testimony was no longer effective, his grades began to drop, and even his personality seemed to change. The president called him in.

"There's been a change in your life and your work," the president said, "and I wish you'd tell me what's wrong."

The student was evasive for a time, but then he told the story. He was engaged to a lovely Christian girl and was planning to get married after graduation. He had been called to a fine church and was anxious to move his new bride into the parsonage and get started in the ministry.

"I've been so excited about it that I've even come to the place where I don't want the Lord to come back!" he confessed. "And then the power dropped out of my life."

His plans—good and beautiful as they were—came between him and the Father. He lost his enjoyment of the Father's love. He was worldly!

John points out that the world system uses three devices to trap Christians: the lust (desire) of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). These same devices trapped Eve back in the Garden: "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food [*the lust of the flesh*], and that it was pleasant to the eyes [*the lust of the eyes*], and a tree to be desired to make one wise [*the pride of life*], she took of the fruit" (Gen. 3:6).

The lust of the flesh includes anything that appeals to man's fallen nature. "The flesh" does not mean "the body." Rather, it refers to the basic nature of unregenerate man that makes him blind to spiritual truth (1 Cor. 2:14). Flesh is the nature we receive in our physical birth; spirit is the nature we receive in the second birth (John 3:5-6). When we trust Christ, we become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). A Christian has both the old nature (flesh) and the new nature (Spirit) in his life. And what a battle these two natures can wage! (Gal. 5:17-23)

God has given man certain desires, and these desires are good. Hunger, thirst, weariness, and sex are not at all evil in themselves. There is nothing wrong about eating, drinking, sleeping, or begetting children. But when the flesh nature controls them, they become sinful "lusts." Hunger is not evil, but gluttony is sinful. Thirst is not evil, but drunkenness is a sin. Sleep is a gift of God, but laziness is shameful. Sex is God's precious gift when used rightly; but when used wrongly, it becomes immorality.

Now you can see how the world operates. It appeals to the normal appetites and tempts us to satisfy them in forbidden ways. In today's world we are surrounded by all kinds of allurements that appeal to our lower nature—and "the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41). If a Christian yields to it, he will get involved in the "works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19-21 gives us the ugly list).

It is important that a believer remember what God says about his old nature, the flesh. Everything God says about the flesh is *negative*. In the flesh there is *no good thing* (Rom. 7:18). The flesh profits *nothing* (John 6:63). A Christian is to put *no confidence* in the flesh (Phil. 3:3). He is to make *no provision* for the flesh (Rom. 13:14). A person who lives for the flesh is living a negative life.

The second device that the world uses to trap the Christian is called "the lust of the eyes." We sometimes forget that the eyes can have an appetite! (Have you ever said, "Feast your eyes on this"?)

The lust of the flesh appeals to the lower appetites of the old nature, tempting us to indulge them in sinful ways. The lust of the eyes, however, operates in a more refined way. In view here are pleasures that gratify the sight and the mind—sophisticated and intellectual pleasures. Back in the days of the Apostle John, the Greeks and Romans lived for entertainments and activities that excited the eyes.

Times have not changed very much! In view of television, perhaps every Christian's prayer ought to be, "Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity" (Ps. 119:37, nasb). Achan (Josh. 7), a soldier, brought defeat to Joshua's army because of the lust of his eyes. God had warned Israel not to take any spoils from the condemned city of Jericho, but Achan did not obey. He explained: "When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and 200 shekels of silver, then I coveted them, and took them" (Josh. 7:21). The lust of the eyes led him into sin, and his sin led the army into defeat.

The eyes (like the other senses) are a gateway into the mind. The lust of the eyes, therefore, can include intellectual pursuits that are contrary to God's Word. There is pressure to make Christians *think* the way the world thinks. God warns us against "the counsel of the ungodly." This does not mean that Christians ignore education and secular learning; it *does* mean they are careful not to let intellectualism crowd God into the background.

The third device is the "boastful pride of life" (nasb). God's glory is rich and full; man's glory is vain and empty. In fact, the Greek word for "pride" was used to describe a braggart who was trying to impress people with his importance. People have always tried to outdo others in their spending and their getting. The boastful pride of life motivates much of what such people do.

Why is it that so many folks buy houses, cars, appliances, or wardrobes *that they really cannot afford*? Why do they succumb to the "travel now, pay later" advertising and get themselves into hopeless debt taking vacations far beyond their

means? Largely because they want to impress other people—because of their "pride of life." They may want folks to notice how affluent or successful they are.

Most of us do not go that far, but it is amazing what stupid things people do just to make an impression. They even sacrifice honesty and integrity in return for notoriety and a feeling of importance.

Yes, the world appeals to a Christian through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. And once the world takes over in one of these areas, a Christian will soon realize it. He will lose his enjoyment of the Father's love and his desire to do the Father's will. The Bible will become boring and prayer a difficult chore. Even Christian fellowship may seem empty and disappointing. It is not that there is something wrong with others, however—what's wrong is the Christian's worldly heart.

It is important to note that no Christian becomes worldly all of a sudden. Worldliness creeps up on a believer; it is a gradual process. First is the *friendship of the world* (James 4:4). By nature, the world and the Christian are enemies ("Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you," 1 John 3:13). A Christian who is a friend of the world is an enemy of God.

Next, the Christian becomes "*spotted by the world*" (James 1:27). The world leaves its dirty marks on one or two areas of his life. This means that gradually the believer accepts and adopts the ways of the world.

When this happens, the world ceases to hate the Christian and starts to love him! So John warns us, "Love not the world!"—but too often our friendship with the world leads to love. As a result, the believer becomes *conformed to the world* (Rom. 12:2) and you can hardly tell the two apart.

Among Christians, worldliness rears its ugly head in many subtle and unrecognized forms.

Sometimes we tend to idolize great athletes, TV stars, or political leaders who profess to be Christians—as if these individuals were able to be of special help to Almighty God. Or we cater to wealthy and "influential" persons in our local church, as if God's work would fold up without their good will or financial backing. *Many* forms of worldliness do not involve reading the wrong books and indulging in "carnal" amusements.

Sad to say, being *conformed to the world* can lead a Christian into being "*condemned with the world*" (1 Cor. 11:32). If a believer confesses and judges this sin, God will forgive him; but if he does not confess, God must lovingly chasten him. When a Christian is "condemned with the world," he does not lose his sonship. Rather, he loses his testimony and his spiritual usefulness. And in extreme cases, Christians have even lost their lives! (read 1 Cor. 11:29-30)

The downward steps and their consequences are illustrated in the life of Lot (Gen. 13:5-13; 14:8-14; 19). First Lot looked toward Sodom. Then he pitched his tent toward Sodom in the well-watered plains of Jordan. Then he moved into Sodom. And when Sodom was captured by the enemy, Lot was captured too. He was a believer (2 Peter 2:6-8), but he had to suffer with the unbelieving sinners of that wicked city. And when God destroyed Sodom, everything Lot lived for went up in smoke! Lot was saved so as by fire and lost his eternal reward (1 Cor. 3:12-15).

No wonder John warns us not to love the world!

Because of What a Christian Is (1 John 2:12-14)

This raises a practical and important question about the nature of a Christian and how he keeps from getting worldly.

The answer is found in the unusual form of address used in 1 John 2:12-14. Note the titles used as John addresses his Christian readers: "little children . . . fathers . . . young men . . . little children."

What is he referring to?

To begin with, "little children" (1 John 2:12) refers to *all believers*. Literally, this word means "born ones." *All* Christians have been born into God's family through faith in Jesus Christ, and their sins have been forgiven. The very fact that one is in God's family, sharing His nature, ought to discourage him from becoming friendly with the world. To be friendly with the world is treachery! "Friendship with the world is enmity with God . . . whosoever therefore will be [wants to be] a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (cf. James 4:4).

But something else is true: we begin as little children—born ones—but *we must not stay that way!* Only as a Christian grows spiritually does he overcome the world.

John mentions three kinds of Christians in a local church family: fathers, young men, and little children (1 John 2:12-14). The "fathers," of course, are mature believers who have an intimate personal knowledge of God. Because they know God, they know the dangers of the world. No Christian who has experienced the joys and wonders of fellowship with God, and of service for God, will want to live on the substitute pleasures this world offers.

The "young men" are the conquerors: they have overcome the wicked one, Satan, who is the prince of this world system. How did they overcome him? Through the Word of God! "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you" (1 John 2:14). The "young men," then, are not yet fully mature; but they are maturing, for they use the Word of God effectively. The Word is the only weapon that will defeat Satan (Eph. 6:17).

The "little children" addressed in 1 John 2:13 are not those addressed in 1 John 2:12; two different Greek words are used. The word in 1 John 2:13 carries the idea of "immature ones," or little children still under the authority of teachers and tutors. These are young Christians who have not yet grown up in Christ. Like physical children, these spiritual children know their father, but they still have some growing to do.

Here, then, is the Christian family! All of them are "born ones," but some of them have grown out of infancy into spiritual manhood and adulthood. *It is the growing, maturing Christian to whom the world does not appeal.* He is too interested in loving his Father and in doing his Father's will. The attractions of the world have no allure for him. He realizes that the things of the world are only toys, and he can say with Paul, "When I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Cor. 13:11).

A Christian stays away from the world because of what the world is (a satanic system that hates and opposes Christ), because of what the world does to us (attracts us to live on sinful substitutes), and because of what he (the Christian) is—a child of God.

Because of Where the World Is Going (1 John 2:17)

"The world is passing away!" (cf. 1 John 2:17)

That statement would be challenged by many men today who are confident that the world—the system in which we live—is as permanent as anything can be. But the world is *not* permanent. The only sure thing about this world system is that it is not going to be here forever. One day the system will be gone, and the pleasant attractions within it will be gone: all are passing away. What is going to last?

Only what is part of the will of God!

Spiritual Christians keep themselves "loosely attached" to this world because they live for something far better. They are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13). "For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Heb. 13:14). In Bible times, many believers lived in tents because God did not want them to settle down and feel at home in this world.

John is contrasting two ways of life: a life lived for eternity and a life lived for time. A worldly person lives for the pleasures of the flesh, but a dedicated Christian lives for the joys of the Spirit. A worldly believer lives for what he can see, the lust of the eyes; but a spiritual believer lives for the unseen realities of God (2 Cor. 4:8-18). A worldly minded person lives for the pride of life, the vainglory that appeals to men; but a Christian who does the will of God lives for God's approval. And he "abideth forever."

Every great nation in history has become decadent and has finally been conquered by another nation. There is no reason why we should suppose that *our* nation will be an exception. Some nineteen world civilizations in the past have slipped into oblivion. There is no reason why we should think that our present civilization will endure forever. "Change and decay in all around I see," wrote Henry F. Lyte (1793-1847), and if our civilization is not eroded by change and decay it will certainly be swept away and replaced by a new order of things at the coming of Christ, which could happen at any time.

Slowly but inevitably, and perhaps sooner than even Christians think, the world is passing away; but the man who does God's will abides forever.

This does not mean that all God's servants will be remembered by future generations. Of the multitudes of famous men who have lived on earth, less than 2,000 have been remembered by any number of people for more than a century.

Nor does it mean that God's servants will live on in their writings or in the lives of those they influenced. Such "immortality" may be a fact, but it is equally true of unbelievers like Karl Marx, Voltaire, or Adolf Hitler.

No, we are told here (1 John 2:17) that Christians who dedicate themselves to doing God's will—to obeying God—"abide [remain] forever." Long after this world system, with its vaunted culture, its proud philosophies, its egocentric intellectualism, and its godless materialism, has been forgotten, and long after this planet has been replaced by the new heavens and the new earth, God's faithful servants will remain—sharing the glory of God for all eternity.

And this prospect is not limited to Moody, Spurgeon, Luther, or Wesley and their likes—it is open to each and every humble believer. If you are trusting Christ, it is for *you*.

This present world system is not a lasting one. "The fashion of this world passeth away" (1 Cor. 7:31). Everything around us is changing, but the things that are eternal never change. A Christian who loves the world will never have peace or security because he has linked his life with that which is in a state of flux. "He is no fool," wrote missionary martyr Jim Elliot, "who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

The New Testament has quite a bit to say about "the will of God." One of the "fringe benefits" of salvation is the privilege of knowing God's will (Acts 22:14). In fact, God wants us to be "filled with the knowledge of His will" (Col. 1:9). The will of God is not something that we consult occasionally like an encyclopedia. It is something that completely controls our lives. The issue for a dedicated Christian is not simply, "Is it right or wrong?" or "Is it good or bad?" The key issue is, "Is *this* the will of God for me?"

God wants us to *understand* His will (Eph. 5:17), not just *know* what it is. "He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel" (Ps. 103:7). Israel knew *what* God was doing, but Moses knew *why* He was doing it! It is important that we understand God's will for our lives and see the purposes He is fulfilling.

After we know the will of God, we should *do it from the heart* (Eph. 6:6). It is not by talking about the Lord's will that we please Him, but by doing what He tells us (Matt. 7:21). And the more we obey God, the better able we are to "find and follow God's will" (Rom. 12:2, wms). Discovering and doing God's will is something like learning to swim: you must get in the water before it becomes real to you. The more we obey God, the more proficient we become in knowing what He wants us to do.

God's goal for us is that we will "stand . . . complete in all the will of God" (Col. 4:12). This means to be *mature* in God's will.

A little child constantly asks his parents what is right and what is wrong and what they want him to do or not to do. But as he lives with his parents and experiences their training and discipline, he gradually discovers what their will for him is. In fact, a disciplined child can "read his father's mind" just by watching the parent's face and eyes! An immature Christian is always asking his friends what they think God's will is for him. A mature Christian stands complete in the will of God. He *knows* what the Lord wants him to do.

How does one discover the will of God? The process begins with *surrender*: "Present your bodies a living sacrifice . . . be not conformed to this world . . . that ye may prove [know by experience] what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:1-2). A Christian who loves the world will never know the will of God in this way. The Father shares His secrets with those who obey Him. "If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7:17). And God's will is not a "spiritual cafeteria" where a Christian takes what he wants and rejects the rest! No, the will of God must be accepted in its entirety. This involves a personal surrender to God of one's entire life.

God reveals His will to us through His Word. "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105). A worldly believer has no appetite for the Bible. When he reads it, he gets little or nothing from it. But a spiritual believer, who spends time daily reading the Bible and meditating on it, finds God's will there and applies it to his everyday life.

We may also learn God's will through circumstances. God moves in wonderful ways to open and close doors. We must test this kind of leading by the Word of God—and not test the Bible's clear teaching by circumstances!

Finally, God leads us into His will through prayer and the working of His Spirit in our hearts. As we pray about a decision, the Spirit speaks to us. An "inner voice" may agree with the leading of circumstances. We are never to follow this "inner voice" alone: we must always test it by the Bible, for it is possible for the flesh (or for Satan) to use circumstances—or "feelings"—to lead us completely astray.

To sum it up, a Christian is *in* the world physically (John 17:11), but he is not *of* the world spiritually (John 17:14). Christ has sent us *into* the world to bear witness of Him (John 17:18). Like a scuba diver, we must live in an alien element, and if we are not careful, the alien element will stifle us. A Christian cannot help being in the world, but when the world is in the Christian, trouble starts!

The world gets into a Christian through his heart: "Love not the world!" Anything that robs a Christian of his enjoyment of the Father's love, or of his desire to do the Father's will, is worldly and must be avoided. Every believer, on the basis of God's Word, must identify those things for himself.

A Christian must decide, "Will I live for the present only, or will I live for the will of God and abide forever?" Jesus illustrated this choice by telling about two men. One built on the sand and the other on the rock (Matt. 7:24-27). Paul referred to the same choice by describing two kinds of material for building: temporary and permanent (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

Love for the world is the love God hates. It is the love a Christian must shun at all costs!

(2:12-14) **Introduction:** note that three groups of people are addressed by John—*little children, fathers, and young men*. Note also that each one is addressed twice. In 1 John 2:12-13 John uses the present tense and says "I am writing to you." In 1 John 2:14 he uses the past tense and says, "I have written to you." Two questions immediately arise: Who are these people and why does John change tenses?

1. First, who are the people John is addressing? Is he addressing the various age groups in the church: the children, the aged fathers, and the young men? Or is he talking about stages of spiritual growth? Now note a significant fact: there are within the church other adults other than fathers and young men. There are full grown men who are aged and there are women. It is doubtful that John would be referring to the various age groups within the church and addressing only the fathers and young men among the adults. This points rather strongly to John's classification being the stages of spiritual growth.

2. Second, why does John change tenses from "I am writing" (1 John 2:12-13) to "I have written to you" (1 John 2:14)? For emphasis: John is driving home the point that believers must grow in Christ. They must confirm their growth in Christ, confirm their great relationship with God over and over again. To stress the point John says...

□ "I am writing *this part of the letter* and what is to follow so that you will grow and grow in Christ."

□ "I have written *the first part of the letter* so that you grow and grow in Christ."

The following chart will help us to grasp what John is doing. (Note: the idea of this chart was stirred by the chart of A. Plummer. *The Epistles of St. John*. "The Pulpit Commentary," Vol.22, ed. by HDM Spence and Joseph S. Exell. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950, p.23.)

I AM WRITING this part of the letter...	Reasons for writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To the little children among you, that is, the newborn Christians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because your sins are forgiven
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To spiritual fathers among you, that is, the spiritually mature with a deep and rich knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because you have known God and have been faithful from the beginning

of God	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To the young men among you, that is, the mature believers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because you have overcome the wicked one
I HAVE WRITTEN the first part of the letter...	Reasons for writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To little children among you, that is, the newborn Christians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because you have known the Father
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To spiritual fathers among you, that is, the spiritually mature with a deep and rich knowledge of God 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because you have known God and have been faithful from the beginning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To the young men among you, that is, the mature believers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because you are strong, have the Word of God abiding in you, and have overcome the wicked one

Now, to the discussion of the passage. Remember the overall subject that John is discussing: How do we know if we really know God? There are seven tests that will show us. This passage covers the third test, a test that shows us beyond any question whether or not we know God. It is the test of spiritual growth.

- Do you remember your spiritual growth?
- Do you remember how you have grown in Christ from the beginning of your conversion?
- Do you remember how God has grown and matured and developed you in Christ?

If you really know Christ, then you have grown in Christ; you have developed and matured stage by stage. Have you grown in Christ since you professed Christ? If you have grown, then you know God. You are a child of God. If you have not grown in Christ, you do not know God. Once a person is truly converted he grows in Christ. That is what *conversion* means: to convert over; to change over; to become a new person; to be born again; to exchange the old life without Christ for the new life with Christ. If a person is *truly born again* in Christ, then he begins to live and walk *in Christ*. If he is *truly converted* over to Christ, then he is a follower of Christ; he focuses upon Christ and grows in Christ.

The point is perfectly understandable to a clear and honest mind: a person who truly knows God follows God. He grows spiritually; he grows in the knowledge of God and of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The person who truly knows God remembers his spiritual growth. He has a spiritual growth to remember.

- Step 1: remember your spiritual growth (v.12-13).
- Step 2: confirm who you are—your great relationship to God—over and over again (v.14).

(2:12-13) **Growth, Spiritual—Maturity—Stages, Spiritual**: first, remember your spiritual growth. In the church, in God's family, there are various stages of growth. Note: what John is writing applies to every stage of the believer's growth. No matter who the believer is, how weak or strong he is, this message applies to him. This is a message for the whole church.

- There are *little children*, people who have just received Jesus Christ and begun to follow Him. If you are a newborn Christian, remember this: your sins are forgiven. You are...
 - no longer guilty of sin
 - no longer to be judged for sin
 - no longer to be condemned for sin
 - no longer to be punished for sin

You have trusted Jesus Christ as the great Bearer of your sins. You believe that Jesus Christ took your sins upon Himself and bore the condemnation and punishment for them. You believe that Jesus Christ became your substitute in bearing the judgment for your sins. Therefore, you are cleansed of sin; your sins are forgiven.

But note why: "for his name's sake." God forgives our sins *for Christ's sake*. He cleanses us for the sake of Christ far more than He does for us. God loves us perfectly, yes, but God loves His own Son with a very special love. God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is God's Son by nature. In addition, Christ has obeyed and fulfilled the will of God perfectly. In obedience to God's will, He left the glory of heaven and came to this corrupt world to die for our sins. Jesus Christ did exactly what God willed and ordained; He obeyed God perfectly.

Therefore, no person can ever take the place of Christ in the heart of God. For this reason God has destined that Jesus Christ have many *adopted brothers and sisters*, many believers who follow and attach themselves to Him. God has ordained that believers live forever with Christ, worshipping and serving Him throughout all eternity. This is what is meant by the words "for Christ's sake." Because of what Christ has done, for His sake, God has forgiven our sins. God loves His Son so much that He honors any person who honors His Son. Any person who believes in God's Son, who gives his life to Jesus Christ, God will take and do exactly what that person believes. He does it *for Christ's sake*—does it so that Jesus Christ will have another brother or sister to worship and serve Him throughout all eternity. Our sins are forgiven *for Christ's sake*.

The point is this: all believers must *remember* that their sins are forgiven. But young believers—you who are young children in the faith—you in particular must remember this. Because you are young in the faith, because you have just recently left the world and its pleasures and possessions, you are more likely to forget what Jesus Christ has done for you. You must focus and concentrate upon Jesus Christ, upon the glorious fact that He has forgiven your sins. You must guard against returning to the world and its enticements.

2. There are *fathers*, spiritual fathers, believers who are spiritually mature with a deep and rich knowledge of God. What is the exhortation to these who have such a deep and rich knowledge of God? To these few who have walked so faithfully for so many years, the exhortation is this: remember, you have known God from the very beginning of your conversion, and you have faithfully and diligently served Him. Day by day you have...

- fed upon the Word of God.
- set aside time for prayer and learned to walk in prayer all day long.
- learned to fellowship and commune with God all day long, striving for an unbroken communion and fellowship with Him.
- witnessed to the saving power of Jesus Christ.
- been loyal to the church, its members, mission, and ministry.
- committed your life to minister to the needs surrounding you and reached out beyond to the world through your prayers and gifts
- given all you are and have to Christ and His mission, meeting the desperate needs of the world.

The point is this: the spiritually mature who have a deep and rich knowledge of God must never forget where they have come from, never forget how they grew in Christ. They must remember how they grew and came to know the Father so well. They must remember how they gained such a deep and rich knowledge of God. Remembering and staying focused upon the Father is the only way a person can finish the Christian race faithfully and receive his reward. The spiritually mature, those with a deep and rich knowledge of God, must remember and continue to grow in the knowledge of God.

3. There are *young men*, mature believers in the church. These must remember how far they have come. They have come a long way: they have fought a long battle and they have now overcome the wicked one. The wicked one used to attack them right and left, at every turn.

The point is this: believers who have walked *faithfully with Christ* over a long period of time have overcome the temptations of the wicked one. The temptations do not strike as often nor with the force that they once did. It was a difficult struggle, a fierce battle all along the way, for it is never easy to die to self, never easy to deny self completely. It is never easy to give up all one is and has to Christ and His mission. In fact, after we have committed our lives and possessions to Christ, the wicked one attacks us more fiercely than ever before. Satan does not want to lose us and our loyalty to sin; he wants to cause God as much pain as possible. Therefore right after we accept Christ, he attacks us with far greater force than ever before. But the mature believer overcomes. However, he must remember how he overcame, for Satan stays after the believer as long as he is on earth. The attacks perhaps are not as often nor as fierce as when the

believer was younger, but the believer must stay strong or else he will be caught off-guard and fall into sin. The mature believer must remember how he overcame the wicked one and continue to combat him in the Word.

How do believers overcome Satan?

- They overcome by drawing near God and praying and asking for wisdom.

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5).

"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Peter 2:9).

- They overcome by using God's Word, quoting it over and over in their minds, to conquer the temptation.

"And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Luke 4:8).

- They overcome by learning and knowing that God allows temptation to teach endurance.

"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience" (James 1:2-3).

- They overcome by not yielding their bodily members to sin.

"Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Romans 6:13).

- They overcome by clothing themselves with the armor of God.

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Ephes. 6:13).

- They overcome by being on guard and watching for the tempter's temptations.

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness" (2 Peter 3:17).

- They overcome by not giving in to anger nor giving place to the devil.

"Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil" (Ephes. 4:26-27).

- They overcome by submitting to God and resisting the devil.

"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

- They overcome by not giving in to the enticement of sinners.

"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not" (Proverbs 1:10).

- They overcome by not entering into the path of the wicked.

"Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men" (Proverbs 4:14).

(2:14) **Growth, Spiritual—Maturity—Diligence—Faithfulness:** second, remember your great relationship to God over and over again. Note the emphasis in this second exhortation to each of the believers: the stress is upon the believer's relationship to God and His Word. What John has written has been written to stir up their relationship to the Father. Believers, no matter their stage of spiritual growth, must never forget who it is they know: God the Father. They have the greatest privilege in all the world, the privilege of knowing God Himself, of being adopted into the very family of God and of becoming a son or a daughter of God. The believer receives the great privilege of calling God "Father."

1. *Little children*, young believers, must remember that they have known the Father. They have just been adopted into the family of God. God Himself, the Supreme Force of the universe, the Supreme Intelligence and Power of the universe, is not some abstract energy way off in outer space. God is a Person, the Supreme Person in all the universe, the only living and true God. And He desires the most wonderful thing in all the world: to relate to man. He wants to become a Father to

people. He wants to adopt people as His children, to have people believe in Him and trust Him to look after them. Young believers know this; therefore they have come to God through Jesus Christ, and they have experienced the privilege of adoption. They now know God as their Father.

But note: young believers must remember this glorious truth. They must remember and focus upon God as their Father; they must not let the thought of God slip from their mind. They must come to God *day by day* as their Father. They must...

- bring their needs to Him
- trust Him to look after them
- ask and depend upon Him to teach them
- trust Him to discipline them when they need it
- study Him and His Word, and listen and do what He says
- fellowship and commune with Him
- love Him and receive His love
- do nothing that would shame Him
- share with others what a wonderful Father He is

2. *Fathers*, the believers who have a deep and rich knowledge of God, must remember that they have known God who is from the beginning. They must remember everything that has been said to them in the above note (1 John 2:12-13). But in addition, they must never be lifted up with pride—no matter how long they have walked with God. Note the words: "Him [God] that is from the beginning." God has been around from the beginning of time, much longer than the *fathers* of the faith. No matter how deep and rich the believer's knowledge of God is, there is so much more to know. God is eternal and He has an eternity of experience for us to learn about. Therefore, we must never be lifted up with pride as though we know God and have arrived. There is still an eternity of things to learn about God. Mature believers, those with a rich and full knowledge of God, must remember from where they have come and continue to seek to know God. They have known God from the beginning of their conversion and they must continue to grow and grow in their relationship with God.

3. *Young men*, the mature believers, must remember three things.

a. Mature believers must remember that they are strong. They must know their strength and be assured and have confidence in the strength they have gained. But mature believers must remember where their strength comes from and how they became spiritually strong: all through Jesus Christ.

b. Mature believers must remember that the Word of God abides in them. This is the key to spiritual growth and to pleasing and securing the approval of God. No matter what a person may think or say, there is no spiritual growth apart from God's Word. No person pleases or secures God's approval without studying and living in God's Word. Mature believers must never forget this, and they must continue to give their lives to studying and living in the Word of God.

c. Mature believers must remember that they have overcome the wicked one.

Test 4: Loving Not the World

1 John 2:15-17: "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. {16} For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. {17} The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever."

(2:15-17) **Introduction:** How do we know if we really know God? This is the fourth test that proves whether or not we know God: Do we love the world? If a person loves the world, he does not know God. No matter what a person may feel or think, the Scripture is clear, and it is forceful in its statement: the person who loves the world does not know God.

1. The test: do we love the world (v.15)?
2. The professing man (v.15-16).
3. The obedient man: is immortal (v.17).

It was characteristic of ancient thought to see the world in terms of two conflicting principles. We see this very vividly in Zoroastrianism, the religion of the Persians. That was a religion with which the Jews had been brought into contact and which had left a mark upon their thinking. Zoroastrianism saw the world as the battle-ground between the opposing forces

of the light and the dark. The god of the light was Ahura-Mazda, the god of the dark was Ahura-Mainyu; and the great decision in life was which side to serve. Every man had to decide to ally himself either with the light or with the dark; that was a conception which the Jews knew well.

But for the Christian the cleavage between the world and the Church had another background. The Jews had for many centuries a basic belief which divided time into two ages, *this present age*, which was wholly evil, and *the age to come*, which was the age of God and, therefore, wholly good. It was a basic belief of the Christian that in Christ the age to come had arrived; the Kingdom of God was here. But the Kingdom of God had not arrived in and for the *world*; it had arrived only in and for the *Church*. Hence the Christian was bound to draw a contrast. The life of the Christian within the Church was the life of the age to come, which was wholly good; on the other hand the world was still living in this present age, which was wholly evil. It followed inevitably that there was a complete cleavage between the Church and the world, and that there could be no fellowship, and even no compromise, between them.

But we must be careful to understand what John meant by the world, the *kosmos*. The Christian did not hate *the world as such*. It was God's creation; and God made all things well. Jesus had loved the beauty of the world; not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of the scarlet anemones which bloomed for a day and died. Jesus again and again took his illustrations from the world. In that sense the Christian did not hate the world. The earth was not the devil's; the earth was the Lord's and the fullness thereof. But *kosmos* acquired a moral sense. It began to mean *the world apart from God*.

C. H. Dodd defines this meaning of *kosmos*: "Our author means human society in so far as it is organized on wrong principles, and characterized by base desires, false values, and egoism." In other words, to John *the world was nothing other than pagan society* with its false values and its false gods.

The world in this passage does not mean the world in general, for God loved the world which he had made; it means the world which, in fact, had forsaken the God who made it.

It so happened that there was a factor in the situation of John's people which made the circumstances even more perilous. It is clear that, although they might be unpopular, they were not undergoing persecution. They were, therefore, under the great and dangerous temptation to compromise with the world. It is always difficult to be different, and it was specially difficult for them.

To this day the Christian cannot escape the obligation to be different from the world. In this passage John sees things as he always sees them—in terms of black and white. As Westcott has it: "There cannot be a vacuum in the soul." This is a matter in which there is no neutrality; a man either loves the world or he loves God, Jesus himself said, "No one can serve two masters" (*Matthew* 6:24). The ultimate choice remains the same. Are we to accept the world's standards or the standards of God?

(2:15) **World—Worldliness**: the test is clearly stated—do we love the world? A believer can tell whether or not he knows God by taking this test. He can examine his life and see if he loves the world. What is meant by the world? Does this mean that we are not to appreciate the beauty, splendor, and resources of the earth and heavens? No! For we live of the earth, and God has given us the earth and the heavens in which to live, appreciate, and enjoy. What, then, does Scripture mean by *the world* and *love not the world*?

- The world means the earth and the heavens that are passing away. The world is corruptible and deteriorating and will eventually be destroyed. Therefore, believers must not become attached to the world; they must be attached to God and to heaven. Believers are not to love the world so much that they desire to stay here more than they desire to be with God in heaven.
- The world is a system of man-made governments and societies, some good and some bad, but none perfect. Therefore, believers must respect and be loyal to the good, but reject and stand against the bad. Believers must love none of them, not to the point that they are more attached to the systems of man's organizations than they are to God and heaven.

- The world means a system of sin and lust and evil and pride and rebellion against God. The world is full of sinful people, people who are evil and full of lust and pride; it is full of people who are in rebellion against God. Therefore, believers must not love this sinful system of the world.

A person is not to love this world, the possessions and pleasures of this world; he is to love God. Of course, he is to appreciate and enjoy the beauty and the good things of both the earth and the heavens. But he is not to become more attached to this world than he is to God and heaven. The believer's eyes are to be focused upon God, and he is to be attached to God, loving God before all else.

(2:15-16) **Lust—Flesh—Eyes—Pride:** there is the professing man. Note that a particular man is being talked about here, the man who *loves the world*. And note in 1 John 2:17 that another man is being talked about, the man who *does the will of God*. The first man is the professing man, the man who makes a false profession; the second man is the obedient man, the man who does exactly what God says. Four things are pointed out about the professing man.

1. The professing man loves the world. He loves and is attached more to this world than he is to God. The people to whom John is writing are church members. They have professed Christ, yet John is having to charge them not to love the world. Some in the church had returned or were apparently about to return to the world. Scripture pronounces the terrible truth: "the love of the father is not in [them]." Any person who loves the world does not love the Father.

Three things happen to believers that cause them to return to the world and to love the world.

1) Some begin to enjoy nature and the beauty of the earth so much that they no longer worship regularly. They forsake the worship of God and the study of His Word in order to be out in nature (cp. fishing, golfing, hiking, camping, and other forms of recreation out in nature).

2) Some become so involved in man's government and social organizations that they become more attached and faithful to them than they do to God and His church and its mission of salvation.

3) Some become so hungry for the world and its things that they begin to return to its pleasures and possessions.

2. The professing man follows after the world. There are three sins of worldliness.

a. There is the lust of the flesh. The *flesh* has to do with feeling, touching, tasting, smelling, hearing, and seeing. It is the seat of desires and urges. Note that desires and urges are not wrong. A man has to have desires and urges in order to live a healthy and normal life. But the desires of the flesh have to be controlled. If they are not controlled, then the flesh begins to desire and lust more and more. There are two times when the desires and urges of the flesh are wrong:

- when the flesh desires something that is directly forbidden by God. (For example, sex is not wrong within marriage, but adultery and fornication [pre-marital sex] are wrong. One helping of food is not wrong, but several helpings is gluttony.)
- when the flesh desires and desires and consumes and consumes, then it becomes indulgence and license. For example, we must desire food in order to maintain life. But if the flesh desires and desires food in order to consume and indulge, then food is wrong. Too much cake is wrong. The desire has become lust, consumption, indulgence, and license.

What are the sins of the flesh? They are far more than what people usually think, far more than just the immoral sins of society. The works of the flesh are these:

- Adultery: sexual unfaithfulness to husband or wife. It is also looking on a woman or a man to lust after her or him. Looking at and lusting after the opposite sex whether in person, magazines, books, on beaches or anywhere else is adultery. Imagining and lusting within the heart is the very same as committing the act.
- Fornication: a broad word including all forms of immoral and sexual acts. It is pre-marital sex and adultery; it is abnormal sex, all kinds of sexual vice.
- Uncleaness: moral impurity; doing things that dirty, pollute, and soil life.
- Lasciviousness: filthiness, indecency, shamelessness. A chief characteristic of the behavior is open and shameless indecency. It means unrestrained evil thoughts and behavior.
- Idolatry: the worship of idols, whether mental or made by man's hands; the worship of some idea of what God is like, of an image of God within a person's mind; the giving of one's primary devotion (time and energy) to something other than God.

- Witchcraft: sorcery; the use of drugs or of evil spirits to gain control over the lives of others or over one's own life. In the present context it would include all forms of seeking the control of one's fate including astrology, palm reading, seances, fortune telling, crystals, and other forms of witchcraft.
- *Hatred* (echthrai): enmity, hostility, animosity. It is the hatred that lingers and is held for a long time; a hatred that is deep within.
- *Variance* (ereis): strife, discord, contention, fighting, struggling, quarreling, dissension, wrangling. It means that a man strives against another person in order to get something: position, promotion, property, honor, recognition. He deceives, doing whatever has to be done to get what he is after.
- *Emulations* (zeloi): wanting and desiring to have what someone else has. It may be material things, recognition, honor, or position.
- *Wrath* (thumoi): indignation; a violent, explosive temper; anger; quick and explosive reactions that arise from stirred and boiling emotions. But it is anger which fades away just as quickly as it arose. It is not anger that lasts.
- *Strife* (eritheiai): conflict, struggle, fight, contention, faction, dissension; a party spirit, a cliquish spirit.
- *Seditions* (dichostasiai): division, rebellion, standing against others, splitting off from others.
- *Heresies* (aireseis): rejecting the fundamental beliefs of God, Christ, the Scriptures, and the church; believing and holding to some teaching other than the truth.
- *Envyings* (phthonoi): this word goes beyond jealousy. It is the spirit... that wants not only the things that another person has, but begrudges the fact that the person has them; that wants a person to lose the things he has, and wants him to suffer through the loss of them.
- *Murders* (phonoï): to kill, to take the life of another person. Murder is sin against the sixth commandment.
- *Drunkness* (methai): taking drink or drugs to affect one's senses for lust or pleasure; becoming tipsy or intoxicated; partaking of drugs; seeking to loosen moral restraint for bodily pleasure.
- *Revellings* (komoi): carousing; uncontrolled license, indulgence, and pleasure; taking part in wild parties or in drinking parties; lying around indulging in feeding the lusts of the flesh.

b. There is the lust of the eyes. The eyes have to do with seeing and wanting to have what one sees. Again, there is nothing wrong with desiring what we see. Seeing and desiring is normal. It becomes wrong when two things happen:

- When we see and desire what is directly forbidden by God.
- When we see and desire in order to consume it upon our lusts and to indulge.

What are the sins of the eyes? Scripture says the following.

There is the lust of the eyes for sex.

"But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).

"For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient [natural, normal]" (Romans 1:26-28).

There is the lust of the eyes after all kinds of evil.

"But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:23).

There is the lust of the eyes after the things of other people.

"He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily [secretly] set against the poor" (Psalm 10:8).

"And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

There is the lust of the eyes after all the pleasures and possessions of the world.

"And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor: and this was my portion of all my labor" (Eccles. 2:10).

There is the lust of the eyes after wine, drugs, and alcoholic drinks.

"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright" (Proverbs 23:29-31).

There is the lust of the eyes after other gods.

"Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image [to look upon], neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the lord your God" (Leviticus 26:1).

c. There is the pride of life. This is at least two things. First, the pride of life means self-centeredness, a person who is focused upon himself and wants people to notice him.

Second, the pride of life means self-sufficiency, a person who is focused upon himself and feels completely capable of handling life himself. It is a person who feels that self-image, public image, ego and personal strength are the basis of life; a person who feels little if any need for God. He feels he can plow through life himself and conquer whatever problems and circumstances confront him. He feels that this world is an end within itself, that there is probably nothing beyond this life; therefore, he is to get all the comfort, pleasure, luxury, honor, and glory that he can while here.

What are the sins of the pride of life? Scripture says the following:

There is the pride of self-sufficiency.

"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17).

"Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1).

There is the pride of wealth.

"For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the lord abhorreth" (Psalm 10:3).

"Surely every man walketh in a vain show: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them" (Psalm 39:6).

"They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him" (Psalm 49:6-7).

There is the pride of position.

"Not a novice [new believer], lest being lifted up with a pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Tim. 3:6).

"I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes [a church leader], who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not" (3 John 9).

There is the pride of power.

"And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass" (Leviticus 26:19).

There is the pride of intelligence and knowledge.

"And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (1 Cor. 8:2).

There is the pride of being better and superior.

"And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness" (Romans 2:19).

"Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain" (Proverbs 25:14).

There is the pride of conceit.

"Be of the same mind one toward another, Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits" (Romans 12:16).

"Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him" (Proverbs 26:12).

There is the pride of self-glory.

"For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful" (Psalm 36:2).

There is the pride of self-righteousness.

"The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican" (Luke 18:11).

"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:3).

"I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me" (Job 33:9).

3. The professing man is not of God; he is of the world. To be of God means to be spiritually born of God. It means to be born again; to be made into a new creature; to be recreated into a new man; to have the divine seed and nature of God implanted into one's heart and life. But note: the professing man is of the world, not of God.

- He has been born of the flesh, not of God (John 3:3, 5).
- He is still the old creature of the earth, not the new creature of God (2 Cor. 5:17).
- He is still the old man of the earth, not the new man of God (Ephes. 4:24; Col. 3:10).
- He has only the corruptible and dying nature of man, not the incorruptible and eternal nature of God (1 Peter 1:23; 2 Peter 1:4).

(2:17) **Obedience:** there is the obedient man. The man who does the will of God abides forever. He knows something: the world shall pass away. It is important to know this, for it means that the lusts of the world will pass away as well.

The world and its lusts pass away when he dies. Every man leaves behind the world and all he has secured. He loses all of the world he has accumulated and enjoyed. He will not be able to take a single pleasure or possession with him when he leaves the world. Imagine! He cannot take a single thing. The world will have passed away from him; time will be no more—not for him, not for his pleasures or possessions.

The world and its lusts will pass away at the end of the world. The world is to be destroyed by fire and a new heavens and earth will be created by God where only righteousness will dwell.

This is the reason the wise man turns away from the world and turns to God. He wants God and the life God offers, the life that is both abundant and eternal. Therefore, he seeks after the will of God, to do what God commands so that he may live with God forever.

Test 5: Guarding Against Antichrists or False Teachers

1 John 2:18-23: "Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. {19} They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. {20} But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. {21} I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. {22} Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist--he denies the Father and the Son. {23} No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also."

It makes no difference what you believe, just as long as you are sincere!"

That statement expresses the personal philosophy of many people today, but it is doubtful whether most of those who make it have really thought it through. Is "sincerity" the magic ingredient that makes something *true*? If so, then you ought to be able to apply it to any area of life, and not only to religion.

A nurse in a city hospital gives some medicine to a patient, and the patient becomes violently ill. The nurse is sincere but the medicine is wrong, and the patient almost dies.

A man hears noises in the house one night and decides a burglar is at work. He gets his gun and shoots the "burglar," who turns out to be his daughter! Unable to sleep, she has gotten up for a bite to eat. She ends up the victim of her father's "sincerity."

It takes more than "sincerity" to make something true. Faith in a lie will always cause serious consequences; faith in the truth is never misplaced. *It does make a difference what a man believes!* If a man wants to drive from Chicago to New York, no amount of sincerity will get him there if the highway is taking him to Los Angeles. A person who is *real* builds his life on truth, not superstition or lies. It is impossible to live a real life by believing lies.

God has warned the church family ("little children") about the conflict between light and darkness (1 John 1:1-2:6) and between love and hatred (1 John 2:7-17). Now He warns them about a third conflict: the conflict between truth and error. It is not enough for a believer to walk in the light and to walk in love; he must also walk in truth. The issue is truth—or consequences!

Before John explains the tragic consequences of turning from the truth, he emphasizes the seriousness of the matter. He does so by using two special terms: "the last time" and "antichrist." Both terms make it clear that Christians are living in an hour of crisis and must guard against the errors of the enemy.

"The last time" (or "the last hour") is a term that reminds us that a new age has dawned on the world. "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth" (1 John 2:8). Since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God is doing a "new thing" in this world. All of Old Testament history prepared the way for the work of Christ on the cross. All history since that time is merely preparation for "the end," when Jesus will come and establish His kingdom. There is nothing more that God must do for the salvation of sinners.

You may ask, "But if it was 'the last hour' in John's day, why has Jesus not yet returned?"

This is an excellent question and Scripture gives us the answer. God is not limited by time the way His creatures are. God works *in* human time, but He is *above* time (cf. 2 Peter 3:8).

"The last hour" began back in John's day *and has been growing in intensity ever since*. There were ungodly false teachers in John's day, and during the intervening centuries they have increased both in number and in influence. "The last hour" or "the last times" are phrases that describe a *kind* of time, not a *duration* of time. "The latter times" are described in 1 Timothy 4. Paul, like John, observed characteristics of his time, and we see the same characteristics today in even greater intensity.

In other words, Christians have *always* been living in "the last time"—in crisis days. It is therefore important that you know what you believe and why you believe it.

The second term, "antichrist," is used in the Bible only by John (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). It describes three things: 1. a *spirit* in the world that opposes or denies Christ; 2. the false teachers who embody this spirit; and, 3. a *person* who will head up the final world rebellion against Christ.

The "spirit of antichrist" (1 John 4:3) has been in the world since Satan declared war on God (cf. Gen. 3). The "spirit of antichrist" is behind every false doctrine and every "religious" substitute for the realities Christians have in Christ. That prefix *anti* actually has a dual meaning. It can mean, in the Greek, both "against" Christ and "instead of" Christ. Satan in his frenzy is *fighting* Christ and His eternal truth, and he is *substituting* his counterfeits for the realities found only in our Lord Jesus.

The "spirit of antichrist" is in the world today. It will eventually lead to the appearance of a "satanic superman" whom the Bible calls "Antichrist" (capital A). He is called (2 Thes. 2:1-12) "the man of sin" (or "lawlessness").

This passage explains that there are two forces at work in today's world: truth is working through the church by the Holy Spirit, and evil is working by the energy of Satan.

Does it make any difference what you believe? It makes all the difference in the world! You are living in crisis days—in the last hour—and the spirit of antichrist is working in the world! It is vitally important that you know and believe the truth and be able to detect lies when they come your way.

(2:18-23) **Introduction:** How do we know if we really know God? This is the fifth test that proves whether or not we know God: Are we guarding against *antichrists*? Note that the word is plural, *antichrists*, not singular, antichrist. Scripture is speaking of false teachers. Are we guarding ourselves against false teachers? Or are we swallowing the false doctrine of

false teachers? This is a test of our salvation, a test that will clearly show us whether or not we know God. We must guard against *antichrists*, against all false teachers.

1. The warning against antichrists (v.18).
2. The origin of antichrists (v.19).
3. The protection against antichrists (v.20-21).
4. The false teaching of antichrists (v.22-23).

(2:18) **Antichrist—Teachers, False—Last Time**: there is the warning against antichrists. Note the tenderness with which John wants to issue this warning: he calls the believers "little children." He is the aged minister, and the people are ever so dear to him. His heart beats ever so tenderly for their welfare. They are facing a critical period in their lives, the threat of false teaching, a teaching that can stir questions, doubts, unbelief, and denial of Jesus Christ. To him they are his dear children who must be warned against false teachers. The warning is for all believers.

It is important that we should understand what John means when he speaks of the time of the last hour. The idea of the last days and of the last hour runs all through the Bible; but there is a most interesting development in its meaning.

(i) The phrase occurs frequently in the very early books of the Old Testament. Jacob, for instance, before his death assembles his sons to tell them what will befall them in the last days (*Genesis* 49:1; cp. *Numbers* 24:14). At that time the last days were when the people of Israel would enter into the Promised Land, and would at last enter into full enjoyment of the promised blessings of God.

(ii) The phrase frequently occurs in the prophets. In the last days the mountain of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills, and all nations shall flow to it (*Isaiah* 2:2; *Micah* 4:1). In the last days God's Holy City will be supreme; and Israel will render to God the perfect obedience which is his due (cp. *Jeremiah* 23:20; 30:24; 48:47). In the last days there will be the supremacy of God and the obedience of his people.

(iii) In the Old Testament itself, and in the times between the Old and the New Testaments, the last days become associated with the Day of the Lord. No conception is more deeply interwoven into Scripture than this. The Jews had come to believe that all time was divided into two ages. In between *this present age*, which was wholly evil, and *the age to come*, which was the golden time of God's supremacy there was the Day of the Lord, the last days, which would be a time of terror, of cosmic dissolution and of judgment, the birthpangs of the new age.

The last hour does not mean a time of annihilation whose end will be a great nothingness as there was at the beginning. In biblical thought the last time is the end of one age and the beginning of another. It is *last* in the sense that things as they are pass away; but it leads not to world obliteration but to world re-creation.

Here is the centre of the matter. The question then becomes: "Will a man be wiped out in the judgment of the old or will he enter into the glory of the new?" That is the alternative with which John-like all the biblical writers-is confronting men. Men have the choice of allying themselves with the old world, which is doomed to dissolution, or of allying themselves with Christ and entering into the new world, the very world of God. Here lies the urgency. If it was a simple matter of utter obliteration, no one could do anything about it. But it is a matter of re-creation, and whether a man will enter the new world or not depends on whether or not he gives his life to Jesus Christ.

In fact John was wrong. It was not the last hour for his people. Eighteen hundred years have gone by and the world still exists. Does the whole conception, then, belong to a sphere of thought which must be discarded? The answer is that in this conception there is an eternal relevance. *Every hour is the last hour*. In the world there is a continual conflict between good and evil, between God and that which is anti-God. And in every moment and in every decision a man is confronted with the choice of allying himself either with God or with the evil forces which are against God; and of thereby ensuring, or failing to ensure, his own share in eternal life. The conflict between good and evil never stops; therefore, the choice never stops; therefore, in a very real sense every hour is the last hour.

In this verse we meet the conception of *Antichrist*. *Antichrist* is a word which occurs only in John's letters in the New Testament (1 *John* 2:22; 4:3; 2 *John* 7); but it is the expression of an idea which is as old as religion itself.

From its derivation *Antichrist* can have two meanings. *Anti* is a Greek preposition which can mean either *against* or *in place of*. *Strategos* is the Greek word for a *commander*, and *antistrategos* can mean either *the hostile commander* or the

deputy commander. Antichrist can mean either the opponent of Christ or the one who seeks to put himself in the place of Christ. In this case the meaning will come to the same thing, but with this difference. If we take the meaning to be *the one who is opposed to Christ*, the opposition is plain. If we take the meaning to be *the one who seeks to put himself in the place of Christ*, Antichrist can be one who subtly tries to take the place of Christ from within the church and the Christian community. The one will be an open opposition; the other a subtle infiltration. We need not choose between these meanings, for Antichrist can act in either way.

The simplest way to think of it is that Christ is the incarnation of God and goodness, and Antichrist is the incarnation of the devil and evil.

We began by saying that this is an idea which is as old as religion itself; men have always felt that in the universe there is a power which is in opposition to God. One of its earliest forms occurs in the Babylonian legend of creation. According to it there was in the very beginning a primaeval sea monster called Tiamat; this sea monster was subdued by Marduk but not killed; it was only asleep and the final battle was still to come. That mythical idea of the primaeval monster occurs in the Old Testament again and again. There the monster is often called Rahab or the crooked serpent or leviathan. "Thou didst crush Rahab like a carcass," says the Psalmist (*Psalms* 89:10). "His hand pierced the fleeing serpent," says Job (*Job* 26:13). Isaiah speaking of the arm of the Lord, says, "Was it not thou that didst cut Rahab in pieces, that didst pierce the dragon?" (*Isaiah* 51:9). Isaiah writes: "In that day the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword will punish leviathan the fleeing serpent, leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea" (*Isaiah* 27:1). All these are references to the primaeval dragon. This idea is obviously one which belongs to the childhood of mankind and its basis is that in the universe there is a power hostile to God.

Originally this power was conceived of as the dragon. Inevitably as time went on it became personalized. Every time there arose a very evil man who seemed to be setting himself against God and bent on the obliteration of his people, the tendency was to identify him with this anti-God force.

For instance, about 168 B.C. there emerged the figure of Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Syria. He resolved on a deliberate attempt to eliminate Judaism from this earth. He invaded Jerusalem, killed thousands of Jews, and sold tens of thousands into slavery. To circumcise a child or to own a copy of the Law was made a crime punishable by instant death. In the Temple courts was erected a great altar to Zeus. Swine's flesh was offered on it. The Temple chambers were made into public brothels. Here was a cold-blooded effort to wipe out the Jewish religion. It was Antiochus whom Daniel called "The abomination that makes desolate" (*Daniel* 11:31; 12:11). Here men thought was the anti-God force become flesh.

It was this same phrase that men took in the days of Mark's gospel when they talked of "The Abomination of Desolation"- "The Appalling Horror," as Moffatt translates it-being set up in the Temple (*Mark* 13:14; *Matthew* 24:15). Here the reference was to Caligula, the more than half-mad Roman Emperor, who wished to set up his own image in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. It was felt that this was the act of anti-God incarnate.

In 2 *Thessalonians* 2:3, 4, Paul speaks of "the man of sin," the one who exalts himself above all that is called God and all that is worshipped and who sets himself up in the very Temple of God. We do not know whom Paul was expecting, but again there is this thought of one who was the incarnation of everything which was opposed to God.

In *Revelation* there is the beast (13:1; 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). Here is very probably another figure. Nero was regarded by all as a human monster. His excesses disgusted the Romans and his savage persecution tortured the Christians. In due time he died; but he had been so wicked that men could not believe that he was really dead. And so there arose the *Nero Redivivus*, Nero resurrected, legend, which said that Nero was not dead but had gone to Parthia and would come with the Parthian hordes to descend upon men. He is the beast, the Antichrist, the incarnation of evil.

All down history there have been these identifications of human figures with Antichrist. The Pope, Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler, have all in their day received this identification.

But the fact is that Antichrist is not so much a person as a principle, the principle which is actively opposed to God and which may well be thought of as incarnating itself in those men in every generation who have seemed to be the blatant opponents of God.

John has a view of Antichrist which is characteristically his own. To him the sign that Antichrist is in the world is the false belief and the dangerous teaching of the heretics. The Church had been well forewarned that in the last days false teachers would come. Jesus had said, "Many will come in my name, saying, I am he; and they will lead many astray" (*Mark* 13:6; cp. *Matthew* 24:5). Before he left them, Paul had warned his Ephesian friends: "After my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves will arise men, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (*Acts* 20:29, 30). The situation which had been foretold had now arisen.

But John had a special view of this situation. He did not think of Antichrist as one single individual figure but rather as a power of falsehood speaking in and through the false teachers. Just as the Holy Spirit was inspiring the true teachers and the true prophets, so there was an evil spirit inspiring the false teachers and the false prophets.

The great interest and relevance of this is that for John *the battleground was in the mind*. The spirit of Antichrist was struggling with the Spirit of God for the possession of men's minds. What makes this so significant is that we can see exactly this process at work today. Men have brought the indoctrination of the human mind to a science. We see men take an idea and repeat it and repeat it and repeat it until it settles into the minds of others and they begin to accept it as true simply because they have heard it so often. This is easier today than ever it was with so many means of mass communication—books, newspaper, wireless, television, and the vast resources of modern advertising. A skilled propagandist can take an idea and infiltrate it into men's minds until, all unaware, they are indoctrinated with it. We do not say that John foresaw all this but he did see the mind as the field of operations for Antichrist. He no longer thought in terms of a single demonic figure but in terms of a force of evil deliberately seeking to pervade men's minds; and there is nothing more potent for evil than that.

If there is one special task which confronts the Church today, it is to learn how to use the power of the media of mass communication to counteract the evil ideas with which the minds of men are being deliberately indoctrinated.

Note three facts.

1. Believers must know that it is the last time, that the midnight hour is about to strike for the end of the world. Note the term "the last time" (*eschate hora*). It really means *the last hour*, the midnight hour when the world is to end.
2. Believers must know that it is time for the antichrist. We must be alert to the fact that the antichrist can appear upon the scene of world history anytime. Note this: the Bible definitely teaches that there will be a personal antichrist, a man to arise in the end time who will oppose and stand against Christ more fiercely than anyone else has ever done. Antichrist does not mean the spirit of evil that sweeps the world; it does not mean the spirit of false doctrine that is always presenting a problem for the church and believers. The spirit of evil and of false doctrine do, of course, stand against Christ, and they do great harm. But this is not what is meant by the antichrist.

The Bible is clear about this: the antichrist refers to a person, a man who is to arise upon the scene as a world leader—a world leader who is going to exalt the state and world government above all worship of God. Believers must know that the antichrist will come. Unless they know the teaching of the Bible, they will not be prepared. Believers must prepare and know that he is coming soon. They must sound forth the warning.

3. How do we know that it is the last time, that the world is about to end and Jesus Christ is about to return? Because there are many antichrists now, many who oppose and stand against Christ. The antichrist has his *forerunners* just as Jesus Christ had His prophets as forerunners. Many false prophets and teachers are on the world scene today. There are many persons—leaders, teachers, and even preachers—who are denying that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. How does this show us that it is the last time? Because this is exactly what Jesus Christ said. He said in the last days many would arise who would oppose and deny Him, and the emphasis is upon *many*. The world will be overflowing with false teachers, false preachers, and false leaders—all false prophets who proclaim a false message of hope to the world, a message that offers nothing beyond this life and the grave, nothing but judgment and hell. Note the forcefulness of John's declaration: "We know that it is the last time."

We know because there are so many who are denying Jesus Christ.

□ They are *denying His deity*: that He is the Son of God who came *out of* (ek) heaven, out from the spiritual world and dimension into this world; who came through the womb of a virgin as the God-Man to save the world.

□ They are *denying that He is the sinless Son of God* who lived a perfect and righteous life and thereby secured the ideal and perfect righteousness for man.

□ They are *denying His death and resurrection*: that He died as the perfect sacrifice for man's sins and that He rose from the dead to conquer death for man.

□ They are *denying His Lordship*: that He is truly the Son of God who ascended into heaven and is now seated at the right hand of God as the Lord and God of the universe.

□ They are *denying His return to earth*: that He is coming again to execute judgment upon every person who has ever lived upon the earth.

But there is even more to show us that we are in the last days. Not only is the world full of false teachers, it is full of false messiahs. People all over the earth are proclaiming that they or some other person is the Messiah, the Savior of man. They are declaring that they have the answer to man's utopia, to man's hopes and dreams. The great tragedy is that millions of people are following these antichrists and false teachers of false hopes.

(2:19) **Teachers, False—Antichrists**: there is the origin of antichrists. Where do antichrists come from? Shockingly, they come from within the church. False teachers are teachers within the church; they hold positions of leadership within the church. Note exactly what John says: "They went out from us, but they were not of us." They were within the church, but they were not true believers. They did not honestly believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior of the world. They professed Christ, were baptized, and joined the church. They even became teachers and ministers in the church, but they were not true believers.

Thought 1. How many ministers and teachers within the church do not truly believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior of the world? Only God knows. But all who claim to be ministers of Christ and of His church stand warned: Scripture calls them antichrists. If they were honest, they would admit that they do not belong in the church.

(2:20-21) **Teachers, False**: there is the protection against antichrists. God gives the believer two protections.

1. God gives an unction to the believer. The word "unction" (chrisma) means anointing. Note who it is that anoints us: the Holy One, that is, God Himself. What is the anointing, the unction that He gives? The Holy Spirit. This is exactly what Scripture declares:

"Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest [guarantee] of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:21-22).

Why does God give us the Holy Spirit? One of the major reasons is to teach us all things. This was the glorious promise of Jesus Christ.

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26; cp. John 14:16-20; John 16:7-11).

What is meant by *all things*? Does it mean that the Holy Spirit teaches us all the skilled professions of the world such as science, history, and medicine? No, not in the technical sense. But note: the Holy Spirit does teach the believer to relate all professions to the truth. The believer knows that no profession stands as a *god* before men, as though it were the answer to man's basic problems. The Holy Spirit will also strengthen and help a sincere believer learn whatever field or profession he wishes to enter. But this is not the primary teaching that concerns the Holy Spirit. The primary concern of the Holy Spirit is the truth about Jesus Christ and about man and his world as they relate to Christ and to eternity. It means *all things* that have to do with God and Christ and man's spiritual hunger; it means all things that have to do with man and his world, their purpose and fate; it means all things that have to do with Christianity and life, the purpose, meaning, and significance of life. This means a most wonderful thing: it means that any believer who has a question about some person's teaching can ask the Holy Spirit to teach him the truth. There is no excuse for any believer ever being misled by false teaching. God has given him the Holy Spirit to protect him.

2. God gives the truth to the believer. He gives us the truth in two ways.

a. God gives us the truth in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the truth. He declared this emphatically:

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

Jesus Christ is the very embodiment of truth. He is the picture of truth. God not only talks to man about Himself in the Word of God, God shows man what He is like in the person of Jesus Christ. Man can look at Jesus Christ and see a perfect picture of the truth of God. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, shows us exactly what God is like.

As Jesus Christ says in John 14:6, "I am the way [to God], the truth [of God], and the life [of God]." The truth is found in Jesus Christ. True believers know this. Therefore, there is never an excuse for believers to be led astray by false teachers or antichrists.

b. God gives us the truth in the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures or Holy Bible. Jesus Christ Himself and Scripture declare:

"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17).

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16).

The genuine believer knows the truth; he knows the Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord and Savior of men, the very Son of God Himself; and he has the Word of God itself. In addition to this, he has the Holy Spirit to teach him the truth and to help him remember the words of Christ. Therefore, there is no excuse for the believer ever being misled by antichrists or false teachers.

Note the words "no lie is of the truth." No matter how attractive or appealing, no matter how much charisma a person may have, no matter how much we may like a person—if he teaches a doctrine that differs from the Word of God, it is a lie. It is not of the truth; it is a deception.

Thought 1. This lays an enormous obligation upon us, an obligation to study the Word of God and to depend upon the Holy Spirit to teach us. He will not teach a lethargic or lazy person. We must be diligent in studying the Word of God, in praying and seeking the leadership of the Spirit of God.

(2:22-23) **Teachers, False—Unbelief—Apostasy:** there is the false teaching of antichrists or false teachers. The false teaching is stated as clearly as human language can state it:

"Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ: He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son" (1 John 2:22).

As someone has put it, to deny that Jesus is the Christ is the master lie, the lie *par excellence*; the lie of all lies.

John says that he who denies the Son has not the Father either. What lies behind that saying is this. The false teachers pleaded, "It may be that we have different ideas from yours about *Jesus*; but you and we do believe the same things about *God*." John's answer is that that is an impossible position; no man can deny the Son and still have the Father. How does he arrive at this view?

He arrives at it because no one who accepts New Testament teaching can arrive at any other. It is the consistent teaching of the New Testament and it is the claim of Jesus himself that apart from him no man can know God. Jesus said quite clearly that no man knows the Father except the Son and him to whom the Son reveals that knowledge (*Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22*). Jesus said, "He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And he who sees me sees him who sent me" (*John 12:44, 45*). When, toward the end, Phillip said that they would be content if Jesus would only show them the Father, Jesus's answer was: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (*John 14:6-9*). It is through Jesus that men know God; it is in Jesus that men can approach God. If we deny Jesus's right to speak, if we deny his special knowledge and his special relationship to God, we can have no more confidence in what he says. His words become no more than the guesses which any-good and great man could make. Apart from Jesus we have no secure knowledge of God; to deny him is at the same time to lose all grip of God.

Further, it is Jesus's claim that a man's reaction to him is, in fact, a reaction to God and that that reaction settles his destiny in time and in eternity. He said, "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (*Matthew* 10:32, 33). To deny Jesus is to be separated from God, for on our reaction to Jesus our relationship to God depends.

To deny Jesus is indeed the *master lie*, for it is to lose entirely the faith and the knowledge which he alone makes possible.

We may say that there are three New Testament confessions of Jesus. There is the confession that he is the *Son of God* (*Matthew* 16:16; *John* 9:35-38); there is the confession that he is *Lord* (*Philippians* 2:11); and there is the confession that he is *Messiah* (1 *John* 2:22). The essence of every one of them is the affirmation that Jesus stands in a unique relationship to God; and to deny that relationship is to deny the certainty that everything Jesus said about God is true. The Christian faith depends on the unique relationship of Jesus to God. John is, therefore, right; the man who denies the Son has lost the Father, too.

The false teacher who is a forerunner of the antichrist is the person who denies that Jesus is the Messiah. He denies the very Son of God whom God had promised to send as the Savior of the world. Two terrible things are said about this person: first, he is a liar; and second, he denies the Father if he denies the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Why is this so? How is it that a person denies God if he denies Christ? The answer is twofold.

First, if a person denies that God sent His Son into the world, then his image of God differs entirely from the God who is the Father of Jesus Christ. God sent His Son into the world. Therefore, if we picture a *god* in our minds that did not send His Son, then our image of God differs entirely from the *true and living God*. The *true and living God* is love, perfect love. Therefore, He has loved man perfectly. God has done the greatest thing that can be done for man: He has sent His only Son into the world to save man by dying for man's sins. No greater love could ever be demonstrated for man. Therefore, if a man says that God did not send His Son into the world—that Jesus Christ is not the Son of God—then that man is thinking of some *god* other than the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

□ By denying Jesus Christ, the man denies the Father.

□ By denying the Son, the man does not have the Father. He is separated from the Father, standing against and opposed to both God and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The man is doomed, for he has denied that God loves the world enough to send His Son to save the world.

Second, any person who denies Jesus Christ is denying the New Testament. Why? Because the New Testament says time and time again that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the one Person who reveals God the Father to the world.

The point is clear: any person who denies Jesus Christ is denying God as well, the *only living and true God*. Any person who denies that Jesus Christ is the Son of God is a false teacher, a forerunner of the antichrist.

Test 6: Letting the Gospel Abide in You

1 John 2:24-27: "See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. {25} And this is what he promised us--even eternal life. {26} I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. {27} As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit--just as it has taught you, remain in him."

(2:24-27) **Introduction:** How do we know if we really know God? This is the sixth test that proves whether or not we know God: Does the gospel abide in us? How we live shows quicker than anything else whether or not we know God. If we have grasped the truth of God's Word, of His gospel, and are living it out in our lives, then we definitely know God. But the converse is also tragically true: if the gospel, God's Word, is not within us, if we are not living out the gospel, then we do not know God. Regardless of what we may feel or profess—regardless of what others may think—we do not know God. The gospel lives within the life of every genuine believer and the believer lives out the gospel.

1. The test: does the gospel abide in you (v.24)?
2. The promise: eternal life (v.25).
3. The warning: some seduce us away from Christ (v.26).

4. The provision of God to protect us: the Holy Spirit (v.27).

(2:24) **Gospel—Word of God—Truth**: the test is clearly stated—does the gospel abide in you? Note that the word gospel is not used in this passage. But note the exact words of the verse:

"Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father" (1 John 2:24).

John is pleading with his people to abide in the things which they have learned, for, if they do, they will abide in Christ. The great interest of this passage lies in an expression which John has already used. In verse 20 he has already spoken of the *anointing* which his people had had from the Holy One and through which all of them were equipped with knowledge.

Here he speaks of the anointing which they have received and the anointing which teaches them all things. What is the thought behind this word *anointing*? We shall have to go back some distance in Hebrew thought to get at it.

In Hebrew thought and practice anointing was connected with three kinds of people. (i) *Priests* were anointed. The ritual regulation runs: "You shall take the anointing oil, and pour it on his (the priest's) head and anoint him" (*Exodus* 29:7; cp. 40:13; *Leviticus* 16:32). (ii) *Kings* were anointed. Samuel anointed Saul as king of the nation (1 *Samuel* 9:16; 10:1). Later, Samuel anointed David as king (1 *Samuel* 16:3, 12). Elijah was bidden to anoint Hazael and Jehu (1 *Kings* 19:15, 16). Anointing was the symbol of coronation, as it still is. (iii) *Prophets* were anointed. Elijah was bidden to anoint Elisha as his successor (1 *Kings* 19:16). The Lord had anointed the prophet Isaiah to bring good tidings to the nation (*Isaiah* 61:1).

Here, then, is the first significant thing. In the old days anointing had been the privilege of the chosen few, the priests, the prophets and the kings; but now it is the privilege of every Christian, however humble he may be. First, then, the anointing stands for the privilege of the Christian in Jesus Christ.

The High Priest was called *The Anointed*; but the supreme *Anointed One* was the *Messiah*. (*Messiah* is the Hebrew for *The Anointed One* and *Christos* is the Greek equivalent). So Jesus was supremely *The Anointed One*. The question then arose: when was he anointed? The answer which the Church always gave was that *at his baptism* Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit (*Acts* 10:38).

The Greek world also knew of anointing. Anointing was one of the ceremonies of initiation into the Mystery Religions in which a man was supposed to gain special knowledge of God. We know that some at least of the false teachers claimed a special anointing which brought them a special knowledge of God. Hippolytus tells us how these false teachers said, "We alone of all men are Christians, who complete the mystery at the third portal and are anointed there with speechless anointing." John's answer is that it is the ordinary Christian who has the only true anointing, the anointing which Jesus gives.

When did that anointing come to the Christian and of what does it consist?

The first question is easy to answer. There was only one ceremony that all Christians passed through, and that was *baptism*; it was, indeed, in later days the standard practice at baptism to anoint Christians with holy oil, as Tertullian tells us.

The second question is not so easy. There are, in fact, two equally possible answers.

(i) It may be that the anointing means the coming of the Spirit upon the Christian in baptism. In the early Church that happened in the most visible way (*Acts* 8:17). If in this passage we were to substitute the *Holy Spirit* for anointing we would get excellent sense.

(ii) But there is another possibility. Verses 24 and 27 are almost exactly parallel in expression. In verse 24 we read: "Let what you have heard from the beginning abide in you." And in verse 27 we read: "But the anointing which you received from him abides in you." *That which you have received from the beginning* and *the anointing* are exactly parallel. Therefore, it may well be that the anointing which the Christian receives is the instruction in the Christian faith which is given him when he enters the Church.

It may well be that we do not need to choose between these two interpretations and that they are both present. This would mean something very valuable. It would mean that we have two tests by which to judge any new teaching offered to us. (i) Is it in accordance with the Christian tradition which we have been taught? (ii) Is it in accordance with the witness of the Holy Spirit speaking within?

Here are the Christian criteria of truth. There is an *external* test. All teaching must be in accordance with the tradition handed down to us in Scripture and in the Church. There is an *internal* test. All teaching must undergo the test of the Holy Spirit witnessing within our hearts.

What we heard from the beginning is the gospel. Glance back to 1 John 2:22-23 where the denial of Jesus Christ is discussed. False teachers were denying that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; they were denying the gospel. Therefore, "that which you have heard from the beginning" is the message of the gospel...

- ☐ the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- ☐ the gospel of the truth, of the Word of God itself (1 John 2:21).
- ☐ the gospel of the apostolic message (cp. 1 Cor. 15:1-4).
- ☐ the gospel of salvation (cp. Titus 2:11-14; Titus 3:4-7).

Now note the evidence of salvation, of knowing God: if the gospel continues in you, "you also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father." The word "remain" (meneto) means to abide, dwell, remain. It means not to be carried away by false teaching or worldly pleasures and possessions. How do we know if we know God?

Does the gospel continue to live in our lives? Are we continuing to live in the Son and in the Father? Is the gospel being lived out in our lives? Are we confessing Jesus Christ to be the Son of God? Do we really believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? Are we letting Jesus Christ live His life out in us? This is the final proof that we know God.

(2:25) **Eternal Life**: there is the promise of eternal life. This is the great promise of God to man. God has made many promises, but this is the one promise that supercedes all others. Eternal life is the supreme promise of God. But note the thrust of the verse: the gospel must remain in us if we are to receive eternal life (1 John 2:27). What is eternal life? It is life, real life. It is the very life of God Himself. It is the very energy, force, being, essence, principle, and power of life. It has to do with both quality and with what life really is, with duration. To live forever in the present world with the world like it is is not necessarily a good thing. The world and man's body need changing. That changed life is found only in eternal life. The only being who can be said to be eternal is God. Therefore, life—supreme life—is found only in God. To possess eternal life is to know God. Once a person knows God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, that person has eternal life—he shall live forever. But more essential, the person has the supreme quality of life, the very life of God Himself.

Thought 1. Once a person believes in Jesus Christ, he has eternal life. That is, he immediately receives eternal life. It is not that he is going to receive eternal life; he has already received it. He begins to live eternally from that very moment onward. The day that he makes his decision for Christ is the first day of his eternal life. And every day of his life thereafter is another day in eternity for him. This is significant: it means that we should be very careful about how we live every day. For every day is another day lived in eternity. We shall never die. When God is ready to move us from this physical world into the spiritual world (heaven), He simply transfers us—all quicker than the blink of the eye.

(2:26) **Teachers, False—Seduction**: there is the warning—some do attempt to seduce us. Why is John writing his letter to the believers? One of the major reasons is given here: there were false teachers who were trying to seduce them. The word "seduce" (planonton) means to deceive; to lead astray. A false teacher is one who attempts to lead us away from Jesus Christ, from the glorious truth that He is the Son of God who came to earth to die for our sins. The false teacher deceives people; that is, he teaches that man can become acceptable to God by some other way than Jesus Christ. He teaches that there are other ways to God, other approaches, other religions, other truths. He seduces and leads people astray; he deceives people into following some other teaching. Note this: the tense is continuous action in the Greek. That is, false teachers are continually teaching false doctrine. They are always teaching a false doctrine and always trying to seduce people.

Thought 1. Believers must be on constant guard against false teaching. So much is at stake: the very promise of God. We will abandon the faith if we listen to the deception and go astray. We must continue to follow Christ; we must let the gospel abide and take up a permanent residence in our lives.

Thought 2. Note this: if God has really sent His Son into the world to save man, there is not a chance in eternity that He will allow a person to approach Him by any other way. His very purpose for sending His Son was to save man. If there was another way God would never have allowed His Son to leave the glory of heaven and be so humiliated as to come to such a corruptible world as ours.

(2:27) **Holy Spirit:** there is the provision of God to protect us—the Holy Spirit Himself.

1. The Holy Spirit is the anointing. It is He who abides in us.
2. The Holy Spirit is the One who teaches us the truth.
3. The Holy Spirit seals us and guarantees and assures us that we do abide in Christ.

Test 7: Abiding in Christ

1 John 2:28-29: "And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming. {29} If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him."

(2:28-29) **Introduction:** How do we know if we really know God? This is the seventh and final test that proves whether or not we know God: Do we abide in Christ? Remember: Christ is the only Person who ever came "out of" (ek) heaven, out of the spiritual world and dimension. He is the Son of God who came to earth to reveal who God is and to show us what life is all about. Jesus Christ is of the very nature of God. He is righteous just like God is righteous. He always did what was right; He was righteous in every detail of life just like God is righteous. Therefore, when we abide in Christ, we abide in the very nature of God. We live like God lives, and we live life like it should be lived. We live righteous lives; we try to do all things right just like God. Consequently, the person who abides and lives in Christ is the person who knows God, but the person who does not abide in Christ does not know God. The test of salvation, of whether or not we know God, is this: Do we abide in Christ?

1. The test: do we abide in Christ (v.28)?
2. The purpose for abiding: that we may have confidence and not be ashamed at Christ's return (v.28).
3. The proof of abiding: living a righteous life (v.29).

(2:28) **Abiding:** there is the test—do we abide in Christ? The word *abide* means to dwell, continue, stay, sojourn, rest in or upon. It is being set and fixed and remaining there; continuing on and on in a fixed state, condition, or being. It is being at home and being permanent and settled. Therefore, to abide in Christ means...

- to continue and stay in Christ
- to sojourn and rest in and upon Christ
- to be set and fixed in Christ and to remain in Him
- to continue on and on in Christ, in being fixed in Him
- to be at home in Christ; to find our permanent home in Him and to be settled in Him

The basic idea of *abiding in Christ* is that of dwelling. It is just like dwelling in a house. We are to dwell in Christ, in the kind of life He showed us how to live. He lived a righteous life, a life that was always right toward God and man. Therefore, we are to make our home in Christ, to dwell and move about in the righteous life of Christ. We are to be right with God and man just like He was.

Now, when a person abides in Christ, what kind of life does he live? Very practically, what kinds of things does he do? How does he behave toward God and man?

Scripture says the following:

Abiding in Christ means that a person confesses that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He believes the love that God has shown him in Christ, and he loves God because of what God has done for him.

"Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:15-16).

Abiding in Christ means that a person walks and fellowships with Christ. He lives and moves and has his being in Christ. He communes and lives in a consciousness of the Lord's presence, and from the Lord's presence he learns of God, and he draws the strength and authority to live victoriously day by day.

"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John 2:6).

"But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him" (1 John 2:27; cp. Psalm 16:11; Proverbs 3:5-6).

□ Abiding in Christ means that a person walks in open confession before God. He walks hour by hour all day long opening up his life to God; he constantly confesses that he is short of God's glory and any known sin that he slips into. He does not walk in sin, and he does not allow any sin to go unconfessed.

"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we [continually] confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:6-10).

□ Abiding in Christ means that a person continues in the Word of Christ and knows the truth.

"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

□ Abiding in Christ means that a person lets the Word of God abide in his life.

"I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one" (1 John 2:14).

"Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father" (1 John 2:24).

□ Abiding in Christ means that a person experiences the indwelling presence and witness of the Spirit.

"No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit" (1 John 4:12-13).

□ Abiding in Christ means that a person has power to live like he should.

"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7).

□ Abiding in Christ means that a person dwells in love and in unity and fellowship with all other believers.

"That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:21-23).

"And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16; cp. 1 John 4:20).

□ Abiding in Christ means that a person bears fruit and lives a very fruitful life.

"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

□ Abiding in Christ means that a person loves others, that he lives and walks in love toward others.

"No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit" (1 John 4:12-13).

□ Abiding in Christ means that a person continues in the church; he has not gone out from the church.

"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John 2:19).

"Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him" (1 John 3:6).

☐ Abiding in Christ means that a person possesses confidence, an unashamedness in life that prepares him for eternity. *"And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (1 John 2:28).*

☐ Abiding in Christ means that a person actively surrenders himself to obey God's commandments. *"And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us" (1 John 3:24).*

☐ Abiding in Christ means that a person loves his brother. *"He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him" (1 John 2:10; cp. 1 John 3:14-15).*

☐ Abiding in Christ means that a person does the will of God. *"And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:17).*

☐ Abiding in Christ means that a person experiences the continuous presence and anointing of the Holy Spirit. *"But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him" (1 John 2:27).*

"And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us" (1 John 3:24).

(2:28) **Abiding—Jesus Christ, Return—Judgment—Unashamed**: there is the purpose for abiding—that we may have confidence and not be ashamed when Christ returns. Note two significant points.

1. Jesus Christ is coming again. Scripture emphatically declares that He is going to return to earth again. He is coming to consummate human history and to judge the earth—every man and woman who has ever lived. This is the constant declaration of Scripture.

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matthew 16:27).

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:31-32).

"For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son....Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:22, 28-29).

2. The task of believers, yea of all people, is to be prepared for the return of Christ. How can we prepare ourselves? By doing just what is discussed above: *abiding in Christ*. If we *abide in Christ*, we will have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

☐ The word "confidence" (parresian) means boldness, assurance. It has the idea of unshakeable boldness and assurance. If we abide in Christ now, today, and every day hereafter, we can have unshakeable confidence and assurance and even boldness when Jesus Christ returns to earth.

☐ The word "ashamed" (aischunthomen) means to shrink back; to sense guilt and disgrace; to feel embarrassment. If we do not abide in Christ, we shall be ashamed when Jesus Christ returns to earth.

Note a fact that is so often ignored by believers, a fact that is seldom if ever thought about. There shall be shame, disgrace, and embarrassment when Christ returns. Some believers will shrink back from Christ. The picture of nothing but joy and rejoicing when Christ returns is not a true picture. There is going to be judgment: the judgment of every man's works no matter what the works are, and there shall be the judgement of sinners no matter who they are, all unbelievers.

There will be joy and rejoicing for some believers, for those who have been abiding in Christ. But there will be shame, guilt, disgrace, and embarrassment—a shrinking back, for those who have been walking unfaithfully.

Before we leave this passage we must note two great and practical things in it.

(i) In verse 28, John urges his people to abide continually in Christ so that, when he does come back in power and glory, they may not shrink from him in shame. By far the best way to be ready for the coming of Christ is to live with him every day. If we do that, his coming will be no shock to us but simply the entry into the nearer presence of one with whom we have lived for long.

Even if we have doubts and difficulties about the physical Second Coming of Christ, this still remains true. For every man life will some day come to an end; God's summons comes to all to rise and bid this world farewell. If we have never thought of God and if Jesus has been but a dim and distant memory, that will be a summons to voyage into a frightening unknown. But if we have lived consciously in the presence of Christ, if day by day we have talked and walked with God, that will be a summons to come home and to enter into the nearer presence of one who is not a stranger but a friend.

(ii) In verse 29 John comes back to a thought which is never far from his mind. The only way in which a man can prove that he is abiding in Christ is by the righteousness of his life. The profession a man makes will always be proved or disproved by his practice.

(2:29) **Righteousness—Jesus Christ, Sinless—New Birth:** there is the proof of abiding—living a righteous life. If a person abides in Jesus Christ, he lives a righteous life. This is the supreme and final proof that a person knows God. We can always tell if a person knows God by the fruit and treasure of his life: Is he living a righteous life, a life just like Jesus Christ lived? This is exactly what Jesus Christ said.

"Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Matthew 7:16-18).

"A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things" (Matthew 12:35).

There is one reason why a person who knows Christ lives a righteous life. Note how significant this reason is: the person knows that Jesus Christ is righteous. The person knows that Jesus Christ is the sinless Son of God. Jesus Christ was sinless before He ever came to earth; He was the perfect and righteous Son of God throughout all of eternity. In addition to this, He was sinless when He lived on earth. He walked as a Man upon earth and He lived a perfect and righteous life as a Man. Therefore, He secured the perfect and ideal righteousness for man. This is the very reason Jesus Christ was able to bear the sins of man and die for them. As the Perfect and Ideal Man, God was able to accept His death as the perfect sacrifice for sin.

The point is this: everything that Jesus Christ did hinges upon His righteousness, upon the fact that He is the righteous and sinless Son of God. Therefore, the person who truly believes in Jesus Christ lives in the righteousness of Christ. He abides, dwells, lives, and moves in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He trusts and casts himself upon the righteousness of Christ, and he continues day by day to trust and cast himself upon His precious Lord and His righteousness.

This is the way we can tell whether or not a person is born of God, whether or not God has given a new birth to a person. If a person honors God's Son by trusting and casting himself upon the righteousness of His Son, God takes that person and honors him. God gives him a new life, a spiritual birth. God makes a new creature out of him, a spiritual man. The true believer becomes a new creature, the new man of God. Now note the verse:

"If you know that he [Christ] is righteous, you know that everyone that doeth righteousness is born of him [God]" (1 John 2:29).

Thought 1. The person who lives a righteous life is the person who knows God. God is righteous; His very nature is righteousness. Therefore, a person who lives a righteous life is the person who has the nature of God. He is the person who allows God's nature to be lived out and through his life. If a person does not have the nature of God, then he does not

live out the life of God. He does not live a righteous life. We can tell whether or not a person knows God by the life he lives.

Chapter Three – The Proof that One Really Loves God: Six Tests

If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that every one who does right is born of him. {1 Jn 2:29 RSV}

It is most unfortunate that the chapter break occurs after this verse and not before. If you compare this with Verse 7 of Chapter 3, you will see that Verse 29 belongs with Chapter 3 rather than with Chapter 2. It is surprising to me that among the plethora of new versions of the Bible we have, there is none that attempts to revise the chapter divisions. The authors of these new versions seem in many instances not to hesitate in the least to take liberties with the inspired text, but these uninspired and uninspiring chapter divisions they seem to regard as so many "sacred cows" which no one has the temerity to change.

In this section John has been thinking of Jesus Christ. He has reminded us that there is coming an hour when each Christian will see him face to face. He is thinking of that encounter and the joy of seeing him again without that incomplete understanding we often experience now. It is not that Christians do not have personal contact with Christ now. We definitely do. It is that which keeps our faces alight, our hearts aflame, and our lives filled with joy.

But, as Peter describes it, ours is now an experience of not seeing and yet loving. But John speaks of a day when we shall see him face to face. Suddenly he sees how the knowledge of Christ which we now have, incomplete as it may be, is the key to a problem that every Christian faces at one time or another -- the problem of recognizing other Christians.

How to know whether a man or woman, a boy or girl, is genuinely born again. How to distinguish between the phony and the true, the mere professor and the real possessor of Christian life, between the one who is genuinely born again and the religious activist. He says the key is, "every one who does right is born of him."

Surely there is someone in this congregation who says, "Aha, that's what I've been waiting for. I have thought all along that this whole business of doctrine and belief was secondary, that the real test is a life. The man who is helpful, honest, and kind, and does the right thing, that is the man who is acceptable, that is the important thing."

Well, if you are thinking that way it reveals that you are a victim of the folly of incomplete truth. Unfortunately there are many people who read the Scriptures that way. They extract from it a portion of a verse, one particular phrase, and canonize it, making that the whole Scripture and discarding the rest.

For, notice, there is a qualification that John links with this. It is folly to ignore these qualifications. He says, "If you know that he is righteous, then (and only then) will you know that every one who does right is born of him." If you cannot fulfill the qualification you are in no condition to make the judgment. But if you know that he is righteous, then you have the key.

In this little verse the apostle uses two quite different words for know. There is the first one, "If you know," which means absolute truth, i.e., if you know in a clear and unqualified way, if you understand in the fullest degree "that he is righteous, then you will know," by means of experience or observation, "that every one who does righteousness is born of him." The key to this passage is this qualification. Do you know, as absolute truth, understanding it clearly, that God is righteous? You say, "What does righteous mean, anyway?" Is it not strange that we can read Scripture frequently and never really grasp some of these major words? Righteous or righteousness is one of these. What is it? Righteousness is God behaving. It is whatever God does.

God, obviously, is the standard for all human behavior, or for the behavior of any creature in the universe. God is always consistent with himself, i.e., he always acts like God. He cannot act in any other way. Therefore, whatever he does is righteous. That is the standard, so that righteousness is God behaving as God. Now read that verse like that. "If you know how God behaves, then you will know that whoever behaves like God is born of him." That is what John is saying. They will bear the family mark. Whoever behaves like God is obviously born of God, for it takes God's life to behave like God. That is the simplicity of it.

Now we can break this down even further. In specifics, what does God do that is different? The answer is given to us in the revelation that has come through Jesus Christ. That is what he came for, to manifest the Father, to show us how God behaves, how he acts. The answer can be put briefly this way. He acts out of love in such a way as to satisfy justice.

Love that satisfies justice; that is righteousness. Nothing else will qualify, it must be both; love and justice. If you are hungry, and I feel sorry for you and steal \$5.00 from the bank to buy you a meal, I have manifested love toward you, but I have not satisfied justice with regard to the bank. That would be love without justice, and is an unrighteous act. No matter if the motive be commendable, it is love without justice.

If parents indulge your children, giving them anything and everything they want, you show love to them, but you do not show justice. You are not treating them according to reality, and so it is an unrighteous deed.

It will ultimately result in that wickedness of yours being imparted to them, and appearing as a rebellious attitude in them later on. It may be love, but it is not love that satisfies justice, and so it is not righteousness.

Test 1: Experiencing God's Incredible Love, 3:1-3

1 John 3:1-2: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. {2} Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

The United States Treasury Department has a special group of men whose job it is to track down counterfeiters. Naturally, these men need to know a counterfeit bill when they see it. How do they learn to identify fake bills?

Oddly enough, they are not trained by spending hours examining counterfeit money. Rather, they study *the real thing*. They become so familiar with authentic bills that they can spot a counterfeit by looking at it or, often, simply by feeling it.

This is the approach in 1 John 3, which warns us that in today's world there are counterfeit Christians—"children of the devil" (1 John 3:10). But instead of listing the evil characteristics of Satan's children, the Scripture gives us a clear description of *God's* children. The contrast between the two is obvious.

The key verse of this chapter is 1 John 3:10: a true child of God practices righteousness and loves other Christians despite differences. First John 3:1-10 deals with the first topic, and 1 John 3:11-24 takes up the second.

Practicing righteousness and loving the brethren, of course, are not new themes. These two important subjects are treated in the first two chapters of this epistle, but in 1 John 3 the approach is different. In the first two chapters the emphasis was on *fellowship*: a Christian who is in fellowship with God will practice righteousness and will love the brethren. But in 1 John 3-5, the emphasis is on *sonship*: because a Christian is "born of God," he will practice righteousness and will love the brethren.

Every great personality mentioned in the Bible sinned at one time or another. Abraham lied about his wife (Gen. 12:10-20). Moses lost his temper and disobeyed God (Num. 20:7-13). Peter denied the Lord three times (Matt. 26:69-75). But sin was not the settled practice of these men. It was an *incident* in their lives, totally contrary to their normal habits. And when they sinned, they admitted it and asked God to forgive them.

An unsaved person (even if he professes to be a Christian but is a counterfeit) lives a life of *habitual sin*. Sin—especially the sin of unbelief—is the normal thing in his life (Eph. 2:1-3). He has no divine resources to draw on. His profession of faith, if any, is not real. This is the distinction in view in 1 John 3:1-10—a true believer does not live in habitual sin. He may *commit* sin—an occasional wrong act—but he will not *practice* sin—make a settled habit of it.

The difference is that a true Christian knows God. A counterfeit Christian may talk about God and get involved in "religious activities," but he does not really *know* God. The person who has been "born of God" through faith in Christ *knows* God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And because he *knows* them, he lives a life of obedience: he does not practice sin.

It may well be that the best illumination of this passage is the Scottish paraphrase of it:

Behold the amazing gift of love the Father hath bestow'd
On us, the sinful sons of men, to call us sons of God!
Concealed as yet this honour lies, by this dark world unknown,
A world that knew not when he came, even God's eternal Son.
High is the rank we now possess, but higher we shall rise;
Though what we shall hereafter be is hid from mortal eyes.
Our souls, we know, when he appears, shall bear his image bright;
For all his glory, full disclosed, shall open to our sight.
A hope so great, and so divine, may trials well endure;
And purge the soul from sense and sin, as Christ himself is pure.

John begins by demanding that his people should remember their privileges. It is their privilege that they are called *the children of God*. There is something even in a name. Chrysostom, in a sermon on how to bring up children, advises parents to give their boy some great scriptural name, to teach him repeatedly the story of the original bearer of the name, and so to give him a standard to live up to when he grows to manhood. So the Christian has the privilege of being called the child of God. Just as to belong to a great school, a great regiment, a great church, a great household is an inspiration to fine living, so, even more, to bear the name of the family of God is something to keep a man's feet on the right way and to set him climbing.

But, as John points out, we are not merely *called* the children of God; we *are* the children of God.

There is something here which we may well note. It is by the gift of God that a man becomes a child of God. By nature a man is the *creature* of God, but it is by grace that he *becomes* the child of God. There are two English words which are closely connected but whose meanings are widely different, *paternity* and *fatherhood*. *Paternity* describes a relationship in which a man is responsible for the physical existence of a child; *fatherhood* describes an intimate, loving, relationship. In the sense of *paternity* all men are children of God; but in the sense of *fatherhood* men are children of God only when he makes his gracious approach to them and they respond.

There are two pictures, one from the Old Testament and one from the New, which aptly and vividly set out this relationship. In the Old Testament there is the *covenant idea*. Israel is the covenant people of God. That is to say, God on his own initiative had made a special approach to Israel; he was to be uniquely their God, and they were to be uniquely his

people. As an integral part of the covenant God gave to Israel his law, and it was on the keeping of that law that the covenant relationship depended.

In the New Testament there is the idea of *adoption* (*Romans* 8:14-17; *1 Corinthians* 1:9; *Galatians* 3:26, 27; 4:6, 7). Here is the idea that by a deliberate act of adoption on the part of God the Christian enters into his family.

While all men are children of God in the sense that they owe their lives to him, they become his children in the intimate and loving sense of the term only by an act of God's initiating grace and the response of their own hearts.

Immediately the question arises: if men have that great honour when they become Christians, why are they so despised by the world? The answer is that they are experiencing only what Jesus Christ has already experienced. When he came into the world, he was not recognized as the Son of God; the world preferred its own ideas and rejected his. The same is bound to happen to any man who chooses to embark on the way of Jesus Christ.

John, then, begins by reminding his people of the privileges of the Christian life. He goes on to set before them what is in many ways a still more tremendous truth, the great fact that *this life is only a beginning*. Here John observes the only true agnosticism. So great is the future and its glory that he will not even guess at it or try to put it into inevitably inadequate words. But there are certain things he does say about it.

(i) When Christ appears in his glory, we shall be like him. Surely in John's mind there was the saying of the old creation story that man was made in the image and in the likeness of God (*Genesis* 1:26). That was God's intention; and that was man's destiny. We have only to look into any mirror to see how far man has fallen short of that destiny. But John believes that in Christ a man will finally attain it, and at last bear the image and the likeness of God. It is John's belief that only through the work of Christ in his soul can a man reach the true manhood God meant him to reach.

(ii) When Christ appears, we shall see him and be like him. The goal of all the great souls has been the vision of God. The end of all devotion is to see God. But that vision of God is not for the sake of intellectual satisfaction; it is in order that we may become like him. There is a paradox here. We cannot become like God unless we see him; and we cannot see him unless we are pure in heart, for only the pure in heart shall see God (*Matthew* 5:8). In order to see God, we need the purity which only he can give. We are not to think of this vision of God as something which only the great mystics can enjoy. There is somewhere the story of a poor and simple man who would often go into a cathedral to pray; and he would always pray kneeling before the crucifix. Someone noticed that, though he knelt in the attitude of prayer, his lips never moved and he never seemed to say anything. He asked what he was doing kneeling like that and the man answered: "I look at him; and he looks at me." That is the vision of God in Christ that the simplest soul can have; and he who looks long enough at Jesus Christ must become like him.

One other thing we must note. John is here thinking in terms of the Second Coming of Christ. It may be that we can think in the same terms; or it may be that we cannot think so literally of a coming of Christ in glory. Be that as it may, there will come for every one of us the day when we shall see Christ and behold his glory. Here there is always the veil of sense and time, but the day will come when that veil, too, will be torn in two.

When death these mortal eyes shall seal,
And still this throbbing heart,
The rending veil shall thee reveal
All glorious as thou art.

Therein is the Christian hope and the vast possibility of the Christian life.

(3:1-3) **Introduction:** the love of God—there is no greater subject in all the world. Why? Because if God loves us, it means that He is not far off in outer space someplace. It means that God is not distant, unreachable, and unconcerned with the world. It means that God is not mean and vengeful, that He does not cause all the bad things that happen to us, things such as accidents, diseases, and death. It means that God is not hovering over us looking for every mistake we make so that He can punish us.

On the contrary, since God is love, it means that He is bound to show us His love and act for us. It means...

- that God cares and looks after us.
- that God will help us through all the trials and temptations of life.
- that God will save us from the sin, evil, corruption, and death of this world.
- that God will provide a way for us to be delivered from the coming judgment of His holy wrath against sin.

But note: if God loves us and has demonstrated His love to us, then He must expect us to respond. He must expect us to love Him. Love expects to be loved in return. In fact, if someone loves us and we do not receive his love, then his love never touches us. We never experience his love. To know love, we must receive love and share it. God loves us, but we have to receive His love in order to experience it. We have to enter a loving relationship with God in order to know the love of God. If we do not love God, then we can never know or experience God's love for us. His love will never touch us. It is absolutely essential that we love God if we wish to experience the love of God.

But note this: few people truly love God. Therefore, they have to walk through life without knowing God's love and care.

- They have to face all the terrible trials and temptations of life alone. They have no help except what help man can give. They have rejected the love and help of God.
- They have to face suffering and sorrow and the death of loved ones all alone. They do not have the supernatural power of God to help. They have rejected His love.
- They have to confront death without really knowing if God is on the other side waiting to judge them.
- They have no hope beyond this life, feeling that this life may be all, but not quite sure, wondering if perhaps there might be something after death.

We could go on and on listing the things that a person has to face if he does not love God. And note: he has to face them all alone. But thanks be to God, He loves the world. He loves all of us. Therefore, any of us who want to know God's love and care can do so. All we have to do is respond to His love—open up our lives and receive His love and love Him in return.

This is the discussion of this section of John's letter: the love of God and our love for Him. How can we really tell if we love God? How can we make sure that God is pleased with us, with what love we show Him? There are six tests that measure our love for God, six tests that will show if and how much we love God (1 John 3:1-4:21).

The first test is the discussion of the present passage: Have we experienced God's incredible love?

1. The privilege of God's love: we are called children of God (v.1).
2. The great hope and mystery of God's love: eternal transformation (v.2).
3. The incentive of God's love: purity (v.3).

(3:1) **Believers, Children of God—Adoption—God, Love of**: there is the great privilege of God's love, the great privilege of being called the *children of God*. Think how astounding this is, to be called a child of the Supreme Majesty of the universe, of the Supreme Intelligence and Power that created all things. There is no greater privilege than to be called a child of God. Two significant points are made.

1. It is the love of God that has bestowed the privilege of adoption upon us. No man is a child of God because of any merit or work of his own. Man has rebelled against God.

Man has chosen to go his own way in life and to do his own thing. He has wanted little if anything to do with God. He has not wanted the restraints of God upon his life; he has preferred to make his own way through life.

It is this that makes the love of God so amazing. It was while we were rebelling and opposing God—while we were sinners and enemies of God—while we were standing against God—while we were in wrath and at enmity with God—while we wanted little if anything to do with God—that God bestowed His love upon us.

Note that God's love is the giving of His Son to the world. God bestowed His love upon us by giving His Son to die for our sins. We know that God loves us because He gave His Son to die for us. It is the death of Jesus Christ that makes it possible for us to become children of God.

Therefore, God is able to receive us as righteous men and women, as being free of sin. When Jesus Christ died for our sins, He removed all sin from us; He freed us of sin. Therefore, God is able to accept us into His family, the family of God. God is able to adopt us as children of God.

2. The world does not know nor understand believers. This explains why believers are ridiculed, mocked, ignored, opposed, abused, rejected, and persecuted by the world. The persecution may come at work, at school, in the neighborhood, or anywhere else; the world just does not understand why believers act and live the way they do.

The world does not understand...

- why believers separate themselves from the pleasures and things of the world.
- why believers deny themselves and live sacrificially so that they can carry the message of Christ to the world and meet the needs of the desperate.
- why believers go to church so much and talk so much about Christ.

Note why the world does not understand believers: because the world did not know Jesus Christ. Think about it: God's very own Son came into the world, but the world did not know Him. They wanted nothing to do with Him; they rejected Him. Now if the world rejected Jesus Christ, God's very own Son, they are bound to reject God's adopted children. The world is just unwilling to recognize and acknowledge that God is righteous and pure and just. They want nothing to do with a life-style that demands all that a person *is and has*. They are just unwilling to give sacrificially to carry the gospel around the world and to meet the needs of the world. They do not understand the nature of believers—that they are the children of God; that they can live no other life than that of following God. Why? Because believers know God in all of His love and the majesty of His being. This the world cannot understand.

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called the children of God; {1 Jn 3:1a RSV}

Here is an astonishing thing, he says. It is not the fact that God loves, but how God loves. That is the astonishing thing. What manner of love is this! Literally, the Greek for what manner is, "of what country" is this! It is an exclamation of astonishment, of surprise. What kind of country is this, what foreign land is this, that is represented in love like that! It is so different. It is the strangeness of God's love that is in view in this whole thing. How is God's love strange? "Well," John says, "in that it makes us, you and me, the children of God."

Perhaps some of you are thinking, "Well, you may be surprised at this, but I'm not. I consider it quite logical. Why shouldn't I be a child of God, like anyone else?" If you think this, then you do not understand righteousness.

Romans 5 reveals to us how God saw us when he found us. There are three words that describe us in that passage: "When we were without strength," when we were helpless, when we were unable to make any contribution to the redemption we desperately needed, when there was not a thing we could do about it, we were utterly bankrupt, and even our good was tainted with self-interest so that we could make no contribution whatsoever, "when we were without strength, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly," -- for us. But it does not stop there, it goes on even further. "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." While we were sinners, i.e., while we were proud, overbearing in our attitude toward God, treating him with condescension and indifference, tiresome. That is what sin does, it makes us tiresome individuals, difficult to live with, hard to get along with. When we were this way, Christ died for us. Even this does not exhaust his description.

He goes on a verse or two later to say, "If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son ..." If while we were enemies; not only without strength, not only sinners, proud and prickly in our attitude, but also when we were absolutely opposed to God, enemies of his grace, treacherous, hateful, resenting what God was doing and resisting every attempt he made to reach us: that is Paul's description. Now, John says, what amazing love! God flings the bloodstained mantle of his love over us and calls us his children. And he not only calls us this, but he actually makes us so:

...and so we are. {1 Jn 3:1b RSV}

Is that not amazing? You Christian people, do you ever think of yourself that way? Do you ever think of yourself as in this condition when God found you, and you would still be like that if God had not found you? What kind of pride is it that makes us think of ourselves as some kind of special catch that God has made. How fortunate he ought to feel that we have consented to join his side! No, no, "see what manner of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God," that we prickly, tiresome, difficult people should be made children of God!

Now, God does not call all men his children, as some people do. Paul makes that clear in his letter to the Galatians, "you are all the children of God, by faith in Jesus Christ," {cf, Gal 3:26}. The only one God ever calls his child is the one who has exercised faith in Jesus Christ. God is not "the Father of all mankind." This is an absolutely unbiblical phrase. It has

no justification whatever in the Scriptures, in fact, it is positively denied. He is the Creator of all mankind. We all share with every other human being on the face of this earth a common heritage in humanity. We are all members of one race. This is an important truth; but we are not all the children of God. When you see that phrase used in that sense you know that the one who employs it does not know or understand what God has said. We are children of God only by faith in Jesus Christ.

All men can be the children of God, there is redemption provided for all. We sang it together, "Lord, I believe were sinners more, than sands upon the ocean shore; thou hast for all a ransom paid, for all a full atonement made." There is plenty of grace in Christ. Wherever a man responds to the grace of God reaching out toward him, that man, by faith, becomes a child of God. God's love has reached the world, has encompassed the race. In potential he is ready to fling around all the mantle of relationship that makes men his children. That is the extent of God's love, consistent with his justice. God desires that his enemies should become his children, and that his children should become mature sons. That is his righteousness, and this is the unmistakable mark of one who becomes a child of God; he too begins to exercise righteousness. He begins to exhibit love in line with justice. He becomes concerned and prompted to act contrary to his self-interest, yet consistent with the law, in the commitment of love. That is the mark.

Now, if you do not see that in someone else it does not necessarily mean they are not Christians. It may mean, as it does with many of us at times, that at the moment they are not acting consistent with the nature God has given them. But the point John is making is, if you do see this unmistakable mark of love acting in consistency with justice, then you need have no doubts whatsoever. The man is born of God. He may be confused in certain areas of truth, he may not agree about the mode of baptism with you, he may not have light on the dispensations, or fall short in many other things, but if you see him acting righteously, prompted by love and yet consistent with justice, then you know here is one of God's own.

But do not expect the world in general to recognize this. They will not understand and may even strongly resent the fact that another has become a child of God. Every new convert discovers this when, in the flush of his new-found enthusiasm for Christ, he goes back to his family and friends to tell them he has now become a child of God. He expects them to glow with enthusiastic rapport, but he meets with coldness and an "Oh-is-that-so? I'll-watch-and-see" attitude. He feels the first bucket of cold water thrown upon his faith. Why? John explains it. "The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him." That is why.

We Christians only manifest the nature of God occasionally. We ought to be doing it more and more as we grow in grace, so that it becomes more consistently visible, but there are occasions when we do not, and, even when we do, it is sometimes rather indistinct. But when Jesus was here among men, when he walked for thirty-three and a half years among men, living among them in the intimacy of daily life, there was never a moment but that he clearly and continuously manifested righteousness, the nature and character of God. It was as clear as the daylight. There could never be a clearer human revelation of what God is like than there was in the Son of God. It was a perfect picture, but still they did not know him. Even then, they failed to recognize him, they did not know who he was.

They did not know, when he stood before them, that here was God behaving as God in man. They saw only the externals. They saw him as a peasant's son, a carpenter, as a tub-thumping rabble-rouser, or, at best, as a good man experiencing incredible bad luck, that is how they saw him. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, said, "Had they known him, they never would have crucified the Lord of glory," {cf, 1 Cor 2:8}. If they had any idea who it was that was standing before them -- if they could have discerned the glory of his character, if they had seen behind the externals to the inward beauty he was exhibiting, they never would have nailed him to a cross. That is the last thing they would have done.

But they did not see -- and why not? -- because they shut their ears to what he said. They would not believe him, and, therefore, they could not see him. It is always an amazing thing to me how the "seeing is believing" proverb ever got credence among men. It is exactly the reverse, believing is seeing. Not only religiously, but in every field of life. Believing is seeing; but they did not believe, therefore, they could not see. Because they shut their ears and their eyes to his words and his deeds, they would not believe; therefore, they could not see, and they did not know him, and so they took him out and nailed him to a cross. Now if they did not know him in spite of the perfect manifestation of righteousness which he was giving, then surely we cannot expect the world to recognize us as sons of God, or to treat us with the deference that a child of God ought to expect. They will not.

Do not be surprised at this. All the writers of Scripture say, "Do not be surprised if the world discounts your Christian testimony, laughs in your face, and makes scornful, even contemptuous, remarks about what you believe. Do not be

surprised at that, they did it with the Lord too." They did not know him. And it will still be true of us, as John is pointing out. The principle by which we find power, rest, joy and strength is, in the eyes of the world, utter foolishness.

Paul says so. "The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing," {1 Cor 1:18 RSV}. The word of the cross, the principle which repudiates self-interest, the principle which renounces any advantage you may gain out of a situation in order to gain advantage for God; which risks income, position, and sometimes even life itself, in order to be true, honest, clean and committed -- that principle, the world says, is foolish. "You'll never get ahead, not in this company, if you act like that." "Save that for church, it won't work in business, it's foolish." Is that not what they say? Yet to us who are being saved, if we have the guts to act on what God has said -- not only at church but in the world, at home, at school, anywhere else in life -- it is the power of God. It achieves what God has come to do in human life. It is power.

What for? Why do you need power? Do you think of it in terms of miracles, dazzling displays, and wonderful deeds that you could do to capture the attention of others? Is that why you want power? Look at Colossians Chapter 1, Verse 11: Paul prays for power for believers, "May you be strengthened with all power [tremendous, isn't it?], according to his glorious might [isn't that exciting! For what?], for all endurance and patience with joy," {Col 1:11 RSV}. Endurance! That means putting up with the conditions in which you live. And patience - waiting quietly for something to happen. And joy, in the midst of it all. That takes power, does it not? You cannot do that without power. It is impossible to live like that in the midst of the conditions in which you live, if you do not have the power of God. You know it, do you not? It takes far more power than any of us can possibly produce in ourselves. It takes God's power. The word of the cross, the principle of the denial of self and self-interest, is the power of God, to us who are being saved. Now, that is righteousness. The question John leaves with us in this whole section is this: "What is the quality of your life?" What is it like? What kind of life are you displaying before others? Do they recognize you as a child of God? The world will not, necessarily, but do other Christians? Do you have the mark?

(3:2) **Jesus, Return:** there is the great hope and mystery of God's love, the eternal transformation that believers shall undergo. Note the great declaration: "Beloved, now are we the sons [children] of God." It is not that we shall be God's children; we are already God's children. If we have trusted and given our lives to Jesus Christ, we are *now* the children of God. Now note the declaration again: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God." We know what we are now, but "it does not yet appear what we shall be...when he [Christ] shall appear." The contrast is emphatic: we know what we are now, the children of God, but we do not know what we shall be like when Christ returns.

Oliver Greene has an excellent statement on this point:

"We cannot understand a body, a personality, like that, we cannot comprehend such tremendous truth with these finite minds. Therefore God did not explain in detail what it will mean to be like Jesus. We will just wait and let Him show us in that glorious resurrection morning" (Oliver Greene. The Epistles of John. Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, 1966, p.112f).

Note the words: "When he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." God is light; therefore, when we first see God face to face, His light will be transmitted to us and we shall become light even as He is light.

The Pulpit Commentary has an excellent explanation of this fact:

"'We shall be like him, because we shall see him.' God is light (1 John 1:5), and light is seen. In this life we cannot see the light of the Divine nature 'as it is,' but only as it is reflected: and the reflected light cannot transmit to us the nature of the Divine original, though it prepares us to receive it. Hereafter the sight, 'face to face' (1 Cor. 13:12), of the Light itself will illuminate us through and through, and we shall become like it" (A. Plummer. "The Pulpit Commentary," Vol.22, p.71).

The believer is to be made just like Christ, conformed to His very image. This means that believers shall be like Christ in person and in character. Believers shall possess a perfect body and being (1 Cor. 15:51-57).

This is a precious thought. It is more than just a general idea that believers are to be like Christ. It is a definite idea—the idea that what Christ is, believers shall be. The Scripture says in Romans 8:28, He is "a Son" (uios); so believers are *sons* (uioi). The Scripture also says in Phil. 2:6, He was "in the form of God" (enmorphē theou); so believers shall be *in the form of God* (summorphoi). The believer is to have a *form* (morphē) just like the *image* (eixon) of Christ—resemble Him in perfection as much as His very image is stamped with perfection. The whole precious idea is that Jesus Christ took the believer and purified and exalted him; therefore, the believer is to partake of the purity and holiness of Christ (see notes—

□ Romans 8:29).

This much is known about the body that we shall receive: it will be a body just like the body that Jesus Christ has.

This is made abundantly clear by the glorious promises of Scripture:

- Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. 3:21; cp. Matthew 13:43; Romans 8:17; Col. 3:4; Rev. 22:5).
- We shall be "conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29. Cp. 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18.)
- "We shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

The body of the believer is to undergo a radical change just as the Lord's body was radically changed.

Several changes are promised the believer.

1. The body will not be corruptible but incorruptible.

"It [the earthly body] is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption" (1 Cor. 15:42).

Our earthly body is corruptible; our resurrected body will be incorruptible. Corruptible means that our bodies age, deteriorate, die, decay, and decompose. But our heavenly bodies will differ radically. They shall be incorruptible: never age, never deteriorate, never die, never decay, and never decompose. They will be transformed and never perish. They will be completely free from defilement and depravity, from death and decay.

2. The body will not be a body of dishonor but a resurrected body of glory.

"It [the earthly body] is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory" (1 Cor. 15:43).

Our earthly body is buried in dishonor; our resurrected body will be raised in glory. Our body is dishonorable, and nothing shows the body's dishonor any more than its death and burial. Every human body is ultimately shamed and disgraced, degraded and deprived of all it has. Every human body is doomed to become nothing more than a handful of dirt. Think about it. Nothing could be any more dishonorable than to take the wonderful mechanism and beauty of a man's body and see it become nothing more than dirt. Yet that is exactly what happens.

But not the resurrected body. The human body will be transformed into a body of glory. Glory means to possess and to be full of *perfect light*; to dwell in the perfect light, brilliance, splendor, brightness, luster, magnificence, dignity, majesty and grace of God Himself.

3. The body will not be a body of weakness but a body of power.

"It [the earthly body] is sown in weakness; it is raised in power" (1 Cor. 15:43).

Our earthly body is buried in weakness; our resurrected body is raised in power. While on earth our body is ever so weak: subject to sickness, disease, and a host of other infirmities and limitations; and eventually it becomes so weak that it dies. In death the human body is utterly powerless: helpless, devoid of any strength and capability whatsoever. In death the human body is so powerless it is unable to lift a single finger. It can do nothing, absolutely nothing.

The resurrected body, however, is raised in power. It shall have a mind and body filled with strength, might, health, authority, and control. It will be a perfect body, never subject to disease, accident, or suffering. It will be a body so powerful that it will be able to control its acts and the circumstances around it—all for good.

The theme that holds our attention through this section of John is that of maintaining right-eousness, the problem of acting out of a love which is fair to everyone concerned -- that is righteousness. Human love is often very horribly unfair. It is often partial to favorites. It can be prejudiced against certain colors, other castes, or other levels of society. It can be smothering, so that the person loved feels deprived of individuality. It can be wholly unfair, and therefore is unrighteous love. But true love, God's love, as we have been learning, is righteous; it is thoughtful, it is courteous. It bears the cost of pain and heartache itself. It satisfies justice, it is careful to do the right thing.

In the eyes of a stuffy, respectable, self-centered world, anyone who acts with that kind of love is always a little suspect. They appear to be slightly mad. Thus, John says, the world will not recognize us if we act this way, just as they did not recognize the Lord Jesus when he did. Because we act differently they regard us as rather foolish, ignorant, certainly

slightly mad. This has been most evident this week at Berkeley where hundreds of students have been speaking to thousands of others there about their faith in Christ, in an open, fearless witness. The reaction of many has been that these Christian students are a bit off, they are not quite all there.

As Henry David Thoreau put it, about another matter, "If I do not seem to be keeping step with those about me it is because I am listening to another drum beat." That is what Christians are doing, walking to another drum beat. It is that which makes us act a bit different. That mystery is evident in these opening words of Verse 2, "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be..."

The emphatic word in that sentence is the word *now*. It is the first word in the Greek structure, and that is always the most emphasized word in a sentence. "Now we are the children of God." Eternal life belongs to us now. We are not waiting until we die to get it, but we are born again right now. We have the life of Jesus Christ in us now. We are the heirs of all God's glory and promises now. This is his theme throughout the whole letter.

Now, he freely admits the world cannot see it. We do not look any different than others. I suppose it might be helpful if Christians had a red spot in the middle of their foreheads by which we could identify them, or some other kind of mark. But, the fact is, we do not look any different than others. It is still true today, as it was in the days of our Lord, that God's life is veiled in flesh and it is not always manifest within us.

Paul speaks of this in his great 8th chapter of Romans, where he says that "the whole creation is looking forward to the day when the sons of God will be manifested" {cf, Rom 8:19 KJV}, will be revealed. He uses two words that are very colorful there. He says the whole creation "waits expectantly," and the word, waits is a word that means "to stand on tiptoe" while expectantly means "to crane the neck with eagerness."

The whole creation is standing on tiptoe, craning the neck with eager anticipation of the day that is coming when the great secret now hidden among mankind will be revealed, and the sons of God will become manifest. That is what the world unconsciously is looking forward to. When that day arrives, the conditions it will bring about upon the earth are so remarkable, so transcendently glorious, that in that day we will think back to all the fine-sounding words that have been uttered about "the Great Society" and will find them puerile and pitiful alongside the conditions that will prevail then.

This is always the hope of the believer in Jesus Christ. He is not living in a world that is heading to a blind end; it is going to an appointed meeting, and is right on schedule, exactly along the line of the predicted program. The day is coming when the sons of God will be manifest. But the mystery now deepens because John says that not only does the world not know who we are now, but we, now, do not know what we shall be. What is it like actually to be with the Lord? What is it like to have Christ return and to be with him, experiencing the program God has in mind for his own?

This year, as you know, some of our beloved friends have left us, have gone to be with the Lord. What is it like for them? What are they experiencing? What are they like now? Those questions are shrouded in mystery to us. "It does not yet appear what we shall be." I do not mean they are clouded by uncertainty; the general answers are very certain. But they are not clear as to the precise nature of the conditions which shall be.

We do not know, for instance, what the actual experience of life beyond this life will be. It is interesting that the Scripture only uses negative expressions along this line. There is no positive description of what life beyond this world is like, it is all negative. There will be no tears, no more sorrow, no night there, no death, no separation, no weakness, no pain -- but that is all negative. What will it be like? Well, we can guess at the opposites to these negatives, but still we do not have clearly defined anywhere in Scripture what it will be like. "It does not yet appear what we shall be."

There is that strange passage in the closing chapter of Second Corinthians where the Apostle Paul speaks of the experience of being caught up into the third heaven with the Lord. He did not know whether he was in the body or out of the body, he could not tell. He heard things and saw things which, he said, were not lawful to utter. I think the real meaning of that phrase is, they were simply indescribable in terms of our present experience. It does not yet appear what we shall be -- as far as the positive understanding of the conditions of life beyond this.

Furthermore, it does not yet appear how our present circumstances relate to what we shall be. Certainly we do not understand that. We do not understand how what we are going through right now is producing what is coming, yet that is what the Scriptures declare. In Second Corinthians the Apostle Paul cries, "For this slight momentary affliction [Is that not

an amazing description, when you read the list of things he went through -- stoning, prison, shipwreck, hungering and thirsting and all the other things? But he groups it all together and labels it 'this light affliction'] is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison," {2 Cor 4:17 KJV}.

I confess I am forever fascinated by that phrase, "weight of glory." I would like to know what that means. We speak of a weight of responsibility, by which we mean a burden to be borne, but this is a weight of glory, a responsibility so tremendous, so vast in its implications and yet so glorious in its experience, that it is like a great weight which is fully met and answered by the strength we shall have. Paul describes it as something that is being produced by what we are going through right now.

Does that not cast a lot of light on our experience today? How many of us have questions about what is happening to us, especially when pain and suffering strikes? We know there is some lesson in them, we have learned that much about God. We know that they were sent to us to teach us, but we think all the lessons are intended to be put to use down here, right now. Sometimes when we go through sorrow, difficulty, or pain and suffering we say, "Lord, teach me a lesson from this." We learn certain lessons and think they are all learned, yet the pain goes on. That is when our faith is really put to the test.

When the pain, the darkness, the strife, or the hardship still continues, and yet we have learned all the apparent lessons, that is when our hearts cry, "Why?" Well, that is exactly why John says it does not yet appear what we shall be, and Paul adds, this light affliction is producing something. It is all working out something that will not be manifest now, in this life, but later. It is producing a weight of glory that is yet to appear.

Some years ago I heard of an artist who was painting a picture he felt would be his masterpiece. He was working away on it in his studio, painting the background color, when a friend came in. The artist stepped back and said, "Oh, look at it! It's my masterpiece. What do you think of it?" The friend said, "Well, it doesn't look like much to me, just a mass of color." And the artist said, "Oh, I forget. You're seeing it as it is, but I see it as it will be!" Surely God looks at us that way. He sees us as we will be, but it does not yet appear to us what we shall be.

We do not even understand how what is happening to us now affects someone else. Somebody said to me just this week, "I don't understand the purpose of prayer. What does prayer do, how does prayer work?" I had to confess that I do not understand fully how prayer works, but I know it works. It has tremendous power to influence the lives of others. Paul also says that the things that are happening to us affect others. He speaks of enduring travail on behalf of the Galatian Christians, going through the pains or birth again, until Christ be fully formed in them.

He writes to the Corinthians, "Death is at work in us, but life in you" {2 Cor 4:12 RSV}, i.e., what is happening to me is doing something to you. He says, I delight in that. I am quite willing to bear the pain if you will get the blessing. But we do not understand that, do we? It does not yet appear what we shall be. Life is full of mystery, and even though we have the enlightenment of the Scriptures there is still much we do not understand. John frankly acknowledges this. But notice, he quickly moves on to a note of certainty:

...but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. {1 Jn 3:2b RSV}

We do not know everything, but we do know three definite things about the future:

Certainty #1: We know that he will appear. I wonder if there is anyone here who doubts that. This is the most certain fact of all history. You think death and taxes are sure -- they are nothing compared to this. This is an absolutely inescapable fact in God's program for mankind; he will appear. He appeared once, he will appear the second time. Of this there is no doubt. All history is moving to this goal. You who know your Bibles well know that even the apparent confusion that exists today is but creating the conditions predicted in the Scriptures, and are working out the great purposes of God. Remember, as we saw earlier in John's letter, all this as far as your experience is concerned is no further away than your own death, and you do not know how soon that will come. So this event, this change (we shall be like him when he appears) is no further away than your own death -- and may be much closer than that.

Certainty #2: "We know that we shall be like him. I urge you to read that very carefully now, and note the context out of which it comes. It is linked with our present limited knowledge. Note that it does not say, "when he appears we shall become like him." There is a misconception that has arisen in many Christian minds which seemingly regards this verse as teaching that when Jesus Christ appears, when we see him at death or when he comes into time, we shall all suddenly become like him, in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye. Certainly as regards the body, this is so. Our bodies become like

his. Paul speaks of it to the Philippians, "this vile body of our humiliation shall be made like unto his glorious body, his body of glory. All the groanings and weakness which we experience each day will be forgotten when our body is changed into a body like his. That happens, as Paul tells us in First Corinthians 15, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, when this mortal puts on immortality, and "Death is swallowed up in victory," {1 Cor 15:54}.

But the body is but the shell of the inner life. We do not suddenly change our total character and personality when we see Jesus Christ, and there is no Scripture that says so. Rather, as John is saying here, and is brought out in other places as well, what we have been becoming, through the years of our life, will suddenly be revealed when he appears. And what we have been becoming is, little by little, stage by stage, like him. The full extent to which we have become like him will be revealed when we see him, and not before. That is what he means.

The question, of course, that comes shouting out at us from all this is, "How much of my life is becoming like him right now?" What percent of the time am I, as a Christian, like Jesus Christ? How much of my time now, am I projecting the image of his life in me, rather than the image of the flesh in me? That is the crucial question, because that is what will be revealed when we see him. Everything else will be burned, as Paul says in First Corinthians 3, since it is but wood, hay and stubble. The gold, the silver, the precious stones, are the aspects and parts of our lives in which we have consented to be like him. But those times when we resist him, those areas in which we shut him out and assume that we have what it takes to live as God wants us to live in our own strength and energy, are all wood, hay, and stubble, and will be burned, and we will suffer loss. We have seen all this before. But notice that the change into his likeness must happen now. We are becoming like him right now.

Look at Second Corinthians 3:18:

And we all, with unveiled face [i.e., with the blindness taken from our eyes by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who teaches us all things], **beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness** [right now, as we see the Lord revealed to us from the word by the Spirit, and in the experience of fellowship with one another, we are being changed into his likeness] **from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.** {2 Cor 3:18 RSV}

Thus in the day when we see him, when he appears, then we will be like him only to the extent we have learned to be like him now. That is what makes this "light affliction" Paul speaks of so tremendously important, because it is producing this. This light affliction is working for us, Paul says, producing a likeness to him. As we see him in our circumstances, and we learn to accept them, prickly and thorny as they may be, as coming from him, sent by him to work in us that which he desires; as we learn to do this without grumbling, without complaint, or rejection, we discover that we are becoming like him. All these things are God's instruments to shape us and mold us to make us into his likeness. When we grumble and gripe, or complain and try to run away, we are rejecting the instruments God has sent to make us into his likeness. So we face the possibility of becoming much less like him than we could be.

Certainty #3 is mentioned in this verse, "we shall see him as he is." "But," you say, "according to what this verse says, this is the reason we become like him; when we see him as he is then we all become like him." That is exactly what has given rise to what I have previously called a misconception in the Christian life, this idea that everyone is suddenly to become fully like Jesus when we see him as he is. No, no. We are already becoming like him, even when we see him as in a mirror, faintly, darkly, as Paul puts it. It does not take a full-orbed view of Christ to make us like him, that is happening even now.

But this little word *for* in this verse, is a Greek participle that can also be translated *that*. The best commentators admit that it is ambiguous whether this should be translated, "we shall be like him *because* we shall see him as he is" or whether, as I think, it should be translated, "we shall be like him *that* we might see him as he is," i.e., in order to see him as he is. That is why we are being changed into his likeness now, in order that when we see him we shall see him as he is.

We shall be able to understand him, to enter into communion with him, to fellowship with him. As we well know from our own experience, you must be like something in order to understand it, to enjoy fellowship with it. That is the reason why your dog cannot enter into your sorrows or your joys. You come home brokenhearted and sit down. The dog senses something is wrong. He whines and sits looking up at you with his brown eyes expressive of concern, but he cannot understand, he is puzzled, he does not know what is wrong, he cannot enter in, he cannot comfort you. He does not and cannot understand what you are going through. Again, you are happy, and he knows you are happy. He wags his tail, but

he does not know what it is all about. He cannot know because he is a dog and you are a human; therefore, he cannot enter into what you are going through.

(3:3) **Purity—Holiness:** there is the great motive of God's love—purity. God wants a people just like Himself, a people who are pure and holy and righteous just like Himself. God wants us living with Him in fellowship and communion; He wants us worshipping and serving Him forever and ever. This is the reason God has saved us in Jesus Christ and given us the great hope of being eternally transformed: all so that we can live with Him in glory. If we keep our eyes upon the great glory that lies ahead, it stirs us to live pure lives. God has done so much for us—He has loved us with such an incredible love—that we are stirred to live as Christ lived. We are aroused to please God, aroused to live a godly life. God is going to purify us, make us perfect in every sense of the word. In appreciation we must purify ourselves now, while on this earth. We must seek to be pure even as Christ Jesus is pure.

This is the test, the proof that we love God: Do we understand the incredible love of God? Are we stirred to live pure lives because of His incredible love for us?

If the degree to which you become like him is the degree to which you will see him as he is, then what a powerful motivation this is to become like him now; to accept your circumstances, to stop quarreling with what God sends to you, and begin in everything to give thanks, allowing these strange instruments of God's grace to do their work in your life. Paul says, "tribulation works patience, and patience, experience," {cf, Rom 5:3 ff, KJV}. Tribulation works patience -- that means it makes you ready to wait and watch and pray for God to work things out. And patience works experience -- experience of what?

The experience of seeing God work things out so that again and again you see that the situations which caused you to fear, or made you uncertain, as you patiently waited and looked to God, doing what he indicated you could do at the moment but otherwise resting quietly, began to work out in wonderful ways, time after time. And experience works hope. Not hope in the worldly sense of uncertainty, of chance, but hope in the biblical sense, of certainty, absolute assurance.

A few experiences like this and you know absolutely that God is adequate, that he is able to work everything out. You know that every testing is another opportunity for God to demonstrate his great ability to work things out. Thus hope "makes not ashamed," it gives confidence, a sense of unbeatable confidence which keeps you poised and assured under any circumstance. All that is what happens now, as God begins to work through our circumstances to make us like him. That is why John says that every one who has this kind of hope, this certainty; and understands this process; purifies himself, even as Christ is pure.

But you say, "Purify myself! That's the one thing I can't do." Well, that is true. God knows that. He knows you cannot purify yourself, yet he says to purify yourself here. What does he mean? Well, you purify yourself when you use the means he has provided for purification. You mothers know how this works. Your little boy has been playing in the streets and is covered with dirt. He comes in, and you send him into the bathroom to purify himself. Like all boys, he turns on the water, runs his hands through it, turns the water off, wipes his hands on the towel and comes out. You look him over and say, "But you're not clean." "Well," he says, "I washed myself." "But look at the dirt on your hands and on your arms and on your face and behind your ears. You're not clean at all." Then every wise mother asks, "Did you use soap?" Of course, he hadn't, so she sends him back to use the soap. What is soap? It is a purifying agent, a cleansing agent. It will do the job if it is employed. So when he comes back the second time he has washed with soap and the soap has cleansed him, purified him. Now he says, "Look, mom, I've cleaned myself up." It is true, he did it, but he did it by using the provision provided.

The provision for our cleansing is the Word of God and the Spirit of God. "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin," {cf, 1 Jn 1:7}. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," {1 Jn 1:9 KJV}. This means we must begin to take seriously this matter of a break of fellowship with Christ because of an impatient spirit, or an ugly word, or a lustful idea or thought which we have dwelt on. We must realize the stain of it does not disappear by the passage of time. It has interfered with our fellowship with the Son of God, and we must do something about it. We cannot simply forget it, we must do something about it. We must purify ourselves, using the provision he has provided, that we might be clean.

What a wonderful practical tie there is between this truth of the coming of the Lord and our appearing before him, and the living of our daily life! "Every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." Let me illustrate that by the life

of a woman whose ministry is well known to you. Many of you know of Martha Snell Nicholson who, for more than thirty-five years was an invalid, bound to her bed, and yet whose spirit was so transcendently triumphant through those many weary years, that she wrote some of the finest Christian poetry in my opinion which has ever been written. A number of years before she died she wrote about her hope of the coming of the Lord. This is what she says:

"The best part is the blessed hope of his soon coming. How I ever lived before I grasped that wonderful truth, I do not know. How anyone lives without it these trying days I cannot imagine. Each morning I think, with a leap of the heart, 'He may come today.' And each evening, 'When I awake I may be in glory.' Each day must be lived as though it were to be my last, and there is so much to be done to purify myself and to set my house in order. I am on tiptoe with expectancy. There are no more grey days -- for the radiance of His coming is on the horizon; no more dull days, with glory just around the corner; and no more lonely days, with His footstep coming ever nearer, and the thought that soon, soon, I shall see His blessed face and be forever through with pain and tears."

That was written from a bed of pain and anguish. Yet, is it not significant that that very same person could write the following powerful expression of the desire she felt to purify herself in view of that transcendent event?

When I stand at the judgment seat of Christ
And He shows me His plan for me,
The Plan of my life as it might have been
Had He had His way, and I see
How I blocked Him here, and I checked Him there,
And I would not yield my will --
Will there be grief in my Saviour's eyes,
Grief, though He loves me still?
He would have me rich, and I stand there poor,
Stripped of all but His grace,
While memory runs like a hunted thing
Down the paths I cannot retrace.
Then my desolate heart will well-nigh break
With the tears that I cannot shed;
I shall cover my face with my empty hands,
I shall bow my uncrowned head...
Lord of the years that are left to me,
I give them to Thy hand;
Take me and break me, mould me to
The pattern Thou hast planned!

Test 2: Turning Away from Sin and Its Enslavement

1 John 3:4-9: "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. {5} But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. {6} No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. {7} Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. {8} He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. {9} No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God."

John has just said that the Christian is on the way to seeing God and being like him. There is nothing like a great aim for helping a man to resist temptation. A novelist draws the picture of a young man who always refused to share in the lower pleasures to which his comrades often invited and even urged him. His explanation was that some day something fine was going to come to him, and he must keep himself ready for it. The man who knows that God is at the end of the road will make all life a preparation to meet him.

This passage is directed against the Gnostic false teachers. As we have seen they produced more than one reason to justify sin. They said that the body was evil and that, therefore, there was no harm in sating its lusts, because what happened to it was of no importance. They said that the truly spiritual man was so armoured with the Spirit that he could sin to his heart's content and take no harm from it. They even said that the true Gnostic was under obligation both to scale the heights and to plumb the depths so that he might be truly said to know all things. Behind John's answer there is a kind of analysis of sin.

He begins by insisting that no one is superior to the moral law. No one can say that it is quite safe for him to allow himself certain things, although they may be dangerous for others. As A. E. Brooke puts it: "The test of progress is obedience." Progress does not confer the privilege to sin; the further on a man is the more disciplined a character he will be.

John goes on to imply certain basic truths about sin.

(i) He tells us *what sin is*. It is the deliberate breaking of a law which a man well knows. Sin is to obey oneself rather than to obey God.

(ii) He tells us *what sin does*. It undoes the work of Christ. Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (*John 1:29*). To sin is to bring back what he came into the world to abolish.

(iii) He tells us *why sin is*. It comes from the failure to abide in Christ. We need not think that this is a truth only for advanced mystics. It simply means this—so long as we remember the continual presence of Jesus, we will not sin; it is when we forget that presence that we sin.

(iv) He tells us *whence sin comes*. It comes from the devil; and the devil is he who sins, as it were, on principle. That probably is the meaning of the phrase *from the beginning* (verse 8). We sin for the pleasure that we think it will bring to us; the devil sins as a matter of principle. The New Testament does not try to explain the devil and his origin; but it is quite convinced—and it is a fact of universal experience—that in the world there is a power hostile to God; and to sin is to obey that power instead of God.

(v) He tells us how *sin is conquered*. It is conquered because Jesus Christ destroyed the works of the devil. The New Testament often dwells on the Christ who faced and conquered the powers of evil (*Matthew 12:25-29; Luke 10:18; Colossians 2:15; 1 Peter 3:22; John 12:31*). He has broken the power of evil, and by his help that same victory can be ours.

(3:4-9) **Introduction:** Do we really love God? There are six tests that show us. This is the second test: Have we turned away from sin? Have we been born of God?

If we live in sin, if we are enslaved by the habits of sin, this is a clear sign we do not love God. But if we have turned away from sin, if the habits of sin have been broken by Christ and permanently conquered in our lives, this is a clear sign that we love God.

If we have been born of God, if we have partaken of the divine nature of God, then we love God. If we have not been born of God, if we have not partaken of the divine nature of God, then we do not love God.

When we love someone, we want to know and please him. We want his approval and acceptance; therefore, we do all we can to please him. So it is with God. If we love Him, we want to know Him and please Him. We want His approval and acceptance; therefore, we do all we can to please Him. God is righteous; He is pure and holy. There is no sin in Him at all. Therefore, the person who loves God lives a righteous life, a pure and holy life. He does not live in sin; he does not practice sin. He lives in righteousness and he practices righteousness. He does all he can to please Him whom he loves—the Lord God Himself.

This is the second test, the test that shows whether or not we love God. Have we turned away from sin? Have the habits of sin been broken and conquered in our lives? Have we been truly born again by the Spirit of God?

1. The need for deliverance: man is sinful (v.4).
2. The provision for deliverance: Christ took away our sins (v.5).
3. The proof of deliverance (v.6-7).
4. The great conquest of Christ in deliverance (v.8).
5. The result of deliverance: being freed from living in sin (v.9).

(3:4) **Sin—Transgression:** there is the need for deliverance. Man is sinful and he transgresses the law. Few people like to be called a *sinner*. Some people even react to the statement that men are *sinners*. There is a reason for this. To most people sin is thought to be the gross sins of society, the crimes that make the headlines of our newspapers and telecasts. The sins committed by most people are not thought to be that serious. Most people think that what little wrong they do could never be interpreted as sin.

This is not what sin is, not to God and not to the Bible. Sin is the *transgression of the law*. It is violating the law of God.

- Sin is choosing to go one's own way in life, doing one's own thing instead of doing what God says.
- Sin is living like one wants instead of living like God says.
- Sin is disobeying God, not doing what God says to do and doing what God says not to do.
- Sin is disbelieving God instead of believing what God says.
- Sin is ignoring God and neglecting God instead of following and worshipping Him as He says.
- Sin is rebelling against God instead of doing what God says.

- Sin is rejecting God and denying God instead of confessing God and becoming a follower of God.

And note: God is perfect. Therefore, only perfection is acceptable to God. This is shocking; nevertheless it is true. If God lets anything less than perfection into heaven, then heaven would no longer be perfect. Therefore, God can never accept anything other than perfection. This is what sin is: imperfection—coming short of God’s glory and of God’s perfect nature. Consequently, man not only does things that come short of God’s perfection; man himself is short of God’s nature.

Man is a sinner. He himself is *short of God’s glory, short of perfection*. Therefore, whatever he does is short of God; man’s acts are imperfect. At the very root of things, this is what sin is: it is imperfection; it is being and coming short of God’s glory and nature. It is not only that we do things that are short of perfection, but we ourselves are short of God’s glory, short by nature, short of what we should be.

Man is not only a sinner, he is sinful. The reason he is sinful is because he has *transgressed God’s law*. If he had never transgressed the law of God, then he would have dwelt in the perfect nature of God. He would have always obeyed God; therefore, he would have lived in the glory of God and never come short of God’s will and nature. It was transgression, going against God’s law and nature, that caused the fall of man. There-fore, sin is transgression, disobeying God’s law, coming short of what God says.

(3:5) **Sin, Deliverance—Jesus Christ, Death:** there is the provision for deliverance. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth to take away our sins. How is this possible? How is it possible for Christ to actually remove our sins and take them away so that God can accept us? By living a sinless life. Note the words of the verse: "in Him is no sin." When Jesus Christ came to earth as a Man, He lived a sinless life. He was perfectly righteous, the very embodiment of righteousness. He secured the perfect and ideal righteousness; He was the Perfect and Ideal Man. Therefore as the Ideal Man, whatever Jesus Christ did could stand for and cover man. What does this mean? Simply this: when Jesus Christ died, His death was the perfect sacrifice for sins. He was the Perfect Man so He was able to die as the perfect sacrifice. God was able to accept His death as the perfect sacrifice for sins.

What happens is this. When we really believe in Jesus Christ, God counts the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us. God no longer sees our sins, for Jesus Christ took them and died for them. They are thereby removed from us, and we are counted free of sin. They are gone forever because Jesus Christ took them upon Himself and died for them. Consequently, being free of sin, we become acceptable to God.

This is the great love of God for man, the giving of His Son to die for the sins of man. If a person truly loves God, then that person bows in humble adoration before God’s Son. The person loves God because God sacrificed His own Son in order to save man. This is the test of our love for God: Have we turned from sin to God’s Son?

(3:6-7) **Sin, Deliverance—Righteousness—Believer, Duty:** there is the proof of deliverance. A person abides in Christ if he has turned from sin. When we are baptized into Christ, we begin to *abide in Him*. Remember what *abiding* means: to dwell, continue, stay, sojourn, and rest in Christ. It means to live and move and have our being in Christ. We just begin to live and dwell in Christ, all that He is and all that He taught.

Note three points.

1. If we abide in Christ, we do not continue to sin. If we have really accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior, we love Him because He died for us. Christ paid such an enormous price to take away our sins that we want to please Him. We dare not do anything to hurt Him or cause Him pain; therefore, we do all we can to please Him. The major thing we do is to turn away from sin and begin abiding in Christ. Our desire is not to walk in sin, but to turn away from sin and to break the habits of sin—all for Him, all because our hearts and lives now belong to Him who has loved us and given Himself for us.

This is the proof of whether or not we love God: Are we abiding, living, moving, and having our being in Him, in all that He is and in all that He taught? Have we turned away from sin, from practicing and living in sin?

2. If we sin, then we have not seen Christ, neither known Him. This does not mean that we have to be perfect to be saved from sin. The Greek means this: if we continue in sin, if we go on sinning and sinning, then we do not really know Christ. A true believer is still short of God’s glory; he still sins. He is still human flesh; therefore, he cannot keep from sinning—not all of the time, not perfectly. But sin is not the dominant focus of his life. He does not keep his mind on the comforts

and pleasures and possessions of this life. His focus is Jesus Christ and His mission of righteousness and salvation. He gives of himself, all he is and has, to reach people for Christ and to minister to the desperate needs of the world. He works and labors and then keeps on working and laboring for righteousness and love upon the earth. But note: the person whose focus is still on the world and its pleasures and possessions—the person who continues to sin—that person has not seen Jesus Christ, neither known Him. Once a person sees Jesus Christ, once a person really knows Christ, that person focuses upon and gives his life to Christ. He turns away from sin and turns and follows Jesus Christ. He abides in Christ. He lives and moves and has his being in Christ, in all that Christ taught.

3. We can be deceived about the matter of sin and righteousness. Many think that they are saved and acceptable to God because they have...

- professed Christ through baptism
- attended church
- fellowshipped with Christians
- read the Bible
- prayed

They think that if they do these things they can live like they want. They think that they can go ahead and enjoy a few of the world's pleasures and continue to seek after more and more of the world's comforts and possessions. And they think that God will still accept them. But note this verse:

"Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous" (1 John 3:7).

The only person who is acceptable to God is the person who lives righteously, who follows after the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The demand of Jesus Christ is clear.

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Any person who follows Jesus Christ has to deny himself; he has to die to self. He has to give all he is and has to live righteously. And righteous living does not just mean living pure and clean lives. It means treating other people righteously. It means reaching out and helping all people, giving all we are and have to help them. It means not being unjust by hoarding and keeping more than we need. It means giving and living sacrificially to help those who are dying because they lack the bare necessities of life. It means sacrificing all in order to carry forth the glorious message of salvation from sin, death, and the judgment to come.

(3:8) **Satan—Jesus Christ, Work of:** there is the great conquest of Christ in deliverance. Note two significant points.

1. The person who sins is *of the devil*. This is a shocking statement to some people, but Jesus Christ put it even more clearly:

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44).

What does this mean? Note the words from *the beginning*. This means that Satan was the first person to ever sin. He began sin. He was the first person who ever rebelled against God and disobeyed God. Therefore, every person who sins is akin to Satan. He is following after Satan, in the footsteps of Satan. Morally and spiritually he is the offspring, the child of Satan.

One thing is sure: sin is not of God. God is not the Father of sin and evil and corruption and death. The devil is the father of such things. Therefore when we sin, we are not following after the Father of love and righteousness, we are following after the father of sin and death. Our behavior is not *of God*; it is *of the devil*.

It is by sin that we have separated ourselves from God. It is sin that causes us to die and that is going to bring judgment upon us. It is sin that causes the righteousness and justice of God to fall upon us. It is sin that is going to separate the sinner from God for eternity. This is the reason God hates sin so much. God created man to live with Him, and sin has cut man off from God and doomed man to be cut off forever. But this is the glorious gospel: God is perfect love; He is the sovereign Majesty, the perfect Intelligence and Power of the universe. Therefore, God knows what to do about sin and He

has the power to do it. God knows how to save man, and He is able to save man. God knows how to destroy the works of Satan and He is able to do it. This is the discussion of the second point.

2. This was the very purpose for the Son of God coming to earth, that He might destroy the works of the devil. The works of Satan are destroyed by the death of Jesus Christ. His power, rule, and reign over lives is now destroyed—all by the death of Jesus Christ.

a. Satan's power *to charge men with sin* is now "cast out." Men now have the power to escape the penalty of sin. Christ took the sins of men upon Himself and paid the penalty for their sin. He died for the sins of the world.

"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth" (Romans 8:33).

b. Satan's power *to cause death* is now "cast out." Men no longer have to die. Christ died *for man*, became man's substitute in death.

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14-15).

c. Satan's power *to cause men to be separated from God* is now cast out. Men no longer have to go to hell. Christ was separated from God *for man*. Man can now live forever with God.

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18).

"But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Romans 8:11).

d. Satan's power *to enslave men* with the habits of sin and shame is now "cast out." By His death, Christ made it possible for man to be freed from sin. The believer, cleansed by the blood of Christ, becomes a holy temple unto God, a temple fit for the presence and power of God's Spirit. Man can now conquer the enslaving habits of sin by the power of God's Spirit.

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

"Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

(3:9) **New Birth—Sin, Deliverance:** there is the result of deliverance. The believer is free from living in and practicing sin. Note: the verb *to sin* is in the present tense. *To sin* means to continue in sin; to constantly sin; to practice sin; to habitually sin; to live in sin. This needs to be clearly understood. Scripture is not saying that a person reaches sinless perfection while on earth. No person can achieve the perfection of God and His glory. Such is utter nonsense according to Scripture. By his very nature, man is short of God's glory and perfection. What then is the meaning of the words, "he does not commit sin" and "he cannot sin"?

A.T. Robertson, the great Greek scholar, says this: "he cannot go on sinning." Robertson adds, "Paul has precisely the same idea in Romans 6:1... 'shall we continue in sin' " (*Word Pictures In The New Testament*, Vol.6, p.223). The Amplified New Testament has the correct idea based upon the Greek: *"No one born (begotten) of God [deliberately and knowingly] habitually practises sin, for God's nature abides in him - His principle...remains permanently within him - and he cannot practise sinning because he is born (begotten) of God."*

Once the divine seed or nature of God has been implanted within the believer, the believer cannot go on living in sin. He cannot continue and continue to sin; he cannot practice sin habitually. The divine nature of God will pester and provoke the believer and convict him to the point that he cannot stand it. If he continues on and on in sin, it is clear evidence that he has never been born of God. The genuine believer loves God because of what God has done for him in Christ. God has loved man in the most supreme way possible, by giving up His Son to die for man. Therefore the believer loves God, loves Him with all his heart, and he wants to please God. It is also this that keeps the genuine believer away from sin.

Remember what Joseph said when Potipher's wife tempted him:

"There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9).

Note what it is that frees the believer from sin: being born of God, possessing God's seed within him. What is the Seed of God?

It is the seed of the new birth.

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" (John 3:3-5).

It is the seed of the new creation.

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

It is the seed of the new man.

"And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephes. 4:24).

"And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:10).

It is the divine nature.

"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4).

It is the incorruptible seed of God's Word.

"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:23).

Another way to say the same thing is this: the seed of God within the believer is the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit of God Himself. It is He who helps the believer to conquer sin and to keep from sinning. It is the Spirit of God who stirs the believer to love and focus upon Christ and His mission instead of upon the world and its pleasures and possessions. It is the Spirit of God who stirs the believer not to sin.

William Barclay, in his incisive way of expressing truth, says that John's discussion of sin can be stated in four stages. (Note: we are putting the points in outline form for clarity.) *"The ideal is that in the new age sin is gone for ever. Christians must try to make that true, and, with the help of Christ, they must struggle to avoid individual acts of sin, occasional lapses into that which is wrong, temporary departures from goodness. In point of fact all men do have these lapses, and, when they have them, they must humbly confess them to God, who will always forgive the penitent and the contrite heart. But, in spite of that, no Christian can possibly be a deliberate and a consistent sinner; no Christian can make sin the policy of his life; no Christian can live a life in which sin is dominant and decisive in all his actions. He may have lapses, but he cannot live in sin as the very atmosphere of his life."*

"John is not setting before us here a terrifying perfectionism, in which he is demanding a life which is totally and absolutely without sin; but he is demanding a life which is ever on the watch against sin, a life which ever fights the battle of goodness, a life which has never surrendered to sin, a life in which sin is not the permanent state, but only the temporary aberration, a life in which sin is not the normal accepted way, but the abnormal moment of defeat. John is not saying that the man who abides in God cannot sin; but he is saying that the man who abides in God cannot continue to be a consistent and deliberate sinner" (The Letters of John and Jude, p.96f).

What are some negative consequences of perfectionism?

Examples of the negative consequences of perfectionism include:

1. **Low self-esteem.** Because a perfectionist never feels "good enough" about personal performance, feelings of being a "failure" or a "loser" with a lessening of self-confidence and self-esteem may result.

2. **Guilt.** Because a perfectionist never feels good about the way responsibility has been handled in life (by himself or others) a sense of shame, self recrimination, and guilt may result.
3. **Pessimism.** Since a perfectionist is convinced that it will be extremely difficult to achieve an "ideal goal," he can easily become discouraged, fatalistic, disheartened, and pessimistic about future efforts to reach a goal.
4. **Depression.** Needing always to be "perfect," yet recognizing that it is impossible to achieve such a goal, a perfectionist runs the risk of feeling down, blue, and depressed.
5. **Rigidity.** Needing to have everything in one's life perfect or "just so" can lead a perfectionist to an extreme case of being inflexible, non-spontaneous, and rigid.
6. **Obsessiveness.** Being in need of an excessive amount of order, pattern, or structure in life can lead a perfectionist person to become nit-picky, finicky, or obsessive in an effort to maintain a certain order.
7. **Compulsive behavior.** Over-indulgence or the compulsive use of alcohol, drugs, gambling, food, shopping, sex, smoking, risk-taking, or novelty, is often used to medicate a perfectionist who feels like a failure or loser for never being able to be "good enough" in life.
8. **Lack of motivation.** Believing that the goal of "change" will never be able to be ideally or perfectly achieved can often give a perfectionist a lack of motivation to attempt change in the first place, or to persevere if change has already begun.
9. **Immobilization.** Because a perfectionist is often burdened with an extreme fear of failure, the person can become immobilized. With no energy, effort or creative juices applied to rectify, improve, or change the problem behavior in the person's life, he becomes stagnant.
10. **Lack of belief in self.** Knowing that one will never be able to achieve an idyllic goal can lead a perfectionist to lose the belief that he will ever be able to improve his life significantly.

Test 3: Being Marked by Love

1 John 3:10-17: "This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. {11} This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. {12} Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. {13} Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. {14} We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. {15} Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. {16} This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. {17} If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?"

This is a passage with a closely-knit argument and a kind of parenthesis in the middle.

As Westcott has it: "Life reveals the children of God." There is no way of telling what a tree is other than by its fruits, and there is no way of telling what a man is other than by his conduct. John lays it down that any one who does not do righteousness is thereby demonstrated to be not of God. At present we shall omit the parenthesis and go straight on with the argument.

Although John is a mystic, he has a very practical mind; and, therefore, he will not leave righteousness vague and undefined. Someone might say, "Very well, I accept the fact that the only thing which proves that a man belongs to God is the righteousness of his life. But what is righteousness?" John's answer is clear and unequivocal. *To be righteous is to love our brother men.* That, says John, is a duty about which we should never be in any doubt. And he goes on to adduce various reasons why that commandment is so central and so binding.

(i) It is a duty which has been inculcated into the Christian from the first moment that he entered the Church. The Christian ethic can be summed up in the one word love and from the moment that a man pledges himself to Christ, he pledges himself to make love the mainspring of his life.

(ii) For that very reason the fact that a man loves his brother men is the final proof that he has passed from death to life. As A. E. Brooke puts it: "Life is a chance of learning how to love." Life without love is death. To love is to be in the light; to hate is to remain in the dark. We need no further proof of that than to look at the face of a man who is in love and the face of a man who is full of hate; it will show the glory or the blackness in his heart.

(iii) Further, not to love is to become a murderer. There can be no doubt that John is thinking of the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew* 5:21, 22). Jesus said that the old law forbade murder but the new law declared that anger and bitterness and contempt were just as serious sins. Whenever there is hatred in the heart a man becomes a potential murderer. To allow hatred to settle in the heart is to break a definite commandment of Jesus. Therefore, the man who loves is a follower of Christ and the man who hates is no follower of his.

(iv) There follows still another step in this closely-knit argument. A man may say, "I admit this obligation of love and I will try to fulfill it; but I do not know what it involves." John's answer (verse 16) is: "If you want to see what this love is, look at Jesus Christ. In his death for men on the Cross it is fully displayed." In other words, the Christian life is the imitation of Christ. "Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus" (*Philippians* 2:5). "He left us an example that we should follow in his steps" (*1 Peter* 2:21). No man can look at Christ and then say that he does not know what the Christian life is.

(v) John meets one more possible objection. A man may say, "How can I follow in the steps of Christ? He laid down his life upon the Cross. You say I ought to lay down my life for the brothers. But opportunities so dramatic as that do not come into my life. What then?" John's answer is: "True. But when you see your brother in need and you have enough, to give to him of what you have is to follow Christ. To shut your heart and to refuse to give is to show that that love of God which was in Jesus Christ has no place in you." John insists that we can find plenty of opportunities to show forth the love of Christ in the life of the every day.

C. H. Dodd writes finely on this passage: "There were occasions in the life of the early church, as there are certainly tragic occasions at the present day, for a quite literal obedience to this precept (i.e., to lay down our life for the brothers). But not all life is tragic; and yet the same principle of conduct must apply all through. Thus it may call for the simple expenditure of money we might have spent upon ourselves, to relieve the need of someone poorer. It is, after all, the same principle of action, though at a lower level of intensity: it is the willingness to surrender that which has value for our own life, to enrich the life of another. If such a minimum response to the law of charity, called for by such an everyday situation, is absent, then it is idle to pretend we are within the family of God, the realm in which love is operative as the principle and the token of eternal life."

Fine words will never take the place of fine deeds; and no amount of talk of Christian love will take the place of a kindly action to a man in need, involving some self-sacrifice, for in that action the principle of the Cross is operative again.

(3:10-17) **Introduction:** Do we really love God? This is the third test that shows us. Are we marked by love? Is love the chief characteristic of our lives? Do we love one another? Love shows us whether or not we love God. God is love; therefore, if we love God, we are bound to love one another. In fact, since God is love, it is absolutely impossible to love God and not to love one another. The greatest proof of all that we love God is the mark of love. If we have the mark of love upon our lives, if people can clearly see that we love one another, then we love God. But if we have and hold feelings against anyone else, this is clear proof that we do not love God. The great mark of loving God is the mark of loving one another.

1. Love reveals one's true nature: shows that one is either a child of God or of the devil (v.10).
2. Love is the message heard from the very beginning (v.11).
3. Love does not persecute the righteous (v.12-13).
4. Love is the proof that one has passed from death to life (v.14).
5. Love does not hate (v.15).
6. Love is the proof that one understands the love of Christ (v.16).
7. Love has compassion and gives to meet the needs of people (v.17).

(3:10) **Love—Devil—Children of God:** love reveals one's true nature; love shows that one is either a child of God or of the devil. Note who it is that is not of God.

The person who does not live righteously is not of God. The person who does not live a pure and holy life is not of God.

The person who does not love his brother is not of God. The person who mistreats, abuses, ignores, neglects or takes advantage of his brother is not of God.

This is easily seen: God is holy, righteous, and pure and God is love. Therefore any person who does not live a holy, righteous, and pure life and who does not love could not be of God. His life stands opposed to all that God stands for. The

things that he does are not of God; they are not of the nature of God. Now, of whose nature are they? Whose nature is unholy, unrighteous, impure; and whose nature is unloving? Not God's nature, but the devil's nature. This is not a pleasant thought, but Scripture declares emphatically that we are either a child of God or of the devil. What determines whose child we are? Our lives reveal exactly whose child we are.

The person who lives a righteous life and who loves his brother takes his nature from God.

The person who lives an unrighteous life and who mistreats his brother takes his nature from the devil.

We can look at our nature and tell whose child we are. If we live righteous, pure, and holy lives and love one another, we have the nature of God. If we live unrighteous, impure, and unholy lives and mistreat one another, we have the nature of the devil. It is that clear: there is no middle ground. God's nature is not that of unrighteousness and hate. God is righteous and loving; therefore, the person who lives a righteous life and who loves his brother is of God.

Now, note a significant fact: John defines righteousness as love. This is what he is really saying in this verse: the person who does not do righteousness is the person who does not love his brother. Righteousness is love, and unrighteousness is failing to love. This is seen by scanning this passage:

- Note 1 John 3:12: Cain did not love his brother so he murdered him and did an unrighteous deed.
- Note 1 John 3:14: the proof that we have passed from death to life is our love, our righteous behavior toward our brother.
- Note 1 John 3:15: love is not unrighteous acts, hate, or murder.
- Note 1 John 3:16: love is the righteous act of God in giving His Son to die for us.
- Note 1 John 3:16 again: love is laying down our lives for our brother.
- Note 1 John 3:17: love is compassion and giving to meet the needs of our brother.

The point is this: love is action—righteous deeds in action. And righteousness is love—loving deeds in action. This is exactly what John declared earlier.

"He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him" (1 John 2:10).

This is also what Paul declared in that memorable passage of Romans, a passage that we should live in and preach and teach as long as we live upon earth.

"Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:8-10).

How do we know if we really love God? We can look at love and tell. Do we love our brothers? Or, do we hold things within us toward others? Do we think evil thoughts about them? Talk about them? Criticize, murmur, grumble, gossip, or backbite them? Do we do evil against them? This is the nature of the devil—to tear down and destroy—not the nature of God. Therefore, if we do these kinds of things, we are revealing that we are not the children of God, but children of the devil. Love reveals whose child we are.

(3:11) **Love:** love is the message heard from the beginning.

In this passage there is a parenthesis; we return to it now.

The parenthesis is verse 11 and the conclusion drawn from it is in verse 12. The Christian must not be like Cain who murdered his brother.

John goes on to ask why Cain murdered his brother; and his answer is that it was because his works were evil and his brother's were good. Then he drops the remark: "Do not be surprised, brothers, if the world hates you."

An evil man will instinctively hate a good man. Righteousness always provokes hostility in the minds of those whose actions are evil. The reason is that the good man is a walking rebuke to the evil man, even if he never speaks a word to him, his life passes a silent judgment. Socrates was the good man *par excellence*; Alcibiades was brilliant but erratic and often debauched. He used to say to Socrates: "Socrates, I hate you, because every time I meet you you show me what I am."

The *Wisdom of Solomon* has a grim passage (2:10-20). In it the evil man is made to express his attitude to the good man: "Let us lie in wait for the righteous; because he is not for our turn, and he is clean contrary to our doings. . . . He was made to reprove our thoughts. He is grievous unto us even to behold: for his life is not like other men's, his ways are of another fashion. We are esteemed of him as counterfeits: he abstaineth from our ways as from filthiness." The very sight of the good man made the evil man hate him.

Wherever the Christian is, even though he speak no word, he acts as the conscience of society; and for that very reason the world will often hate him.

In ancient Athens the noble Aristides was unjustly condemned to death; and, when one of the jurymen was asked how he could have cast his vote against such a man, his answer was that he was tired of hearing Aristides called "The Just." The hatred of the world for the Christian is an ever present phenomenon, and it is due to the fact that the worldly man sees in the Christian the condemnation of himself; he sees in the Christian what he is not and what in his heart of hearts he knows he ought to be; and, because he will not change, he seeks to eliminate the man who reminds him of the lost goodness.

(3:12-13) **Love—Persecution**: love does not persecute the righteous. The extreme case of persecution is used to illustrate the point—that of murder. Cain committed the very first murder on earth: he killed his own brother Abel (Genesis 4:1-15). Why? Because Abel was a believer. Abel believed God, that he was to worship God exactly like God said, by the blood of a sacrificial animal. Cain did not accept such a belief. He felt that if he brought the fruit of his own hands to God, then God would accept him because of his hard work and because he worshipped and gave offerings to God. God accepted Abel's worship and offering. It was evident in his life, by the way God blessed him and took care of him. But God rejected Cain's offering. Cain did not have a real sense of God's care or blessing upon his life. Therefore, he became jealous and envious of Abel and he killed Abel.

The point is twofold.

1. First, love does not persecute the righteous. Cain did not love his brother; therefore, he was of that wicked one, the devil, and he persecuted his brother. Just think—love means that we will not even dislike another person. We love them, care for them, and reach out to them. We want their fellowship in Christ, longing for them to experience all the richness of life and for them to know all the fulness of Christ and His love. This is the way we know that we love God, if we do not persecute our brother like Cain did.
2. Second, if we love Christ, then the world will persecute us.

(3:14) **Love—Salvation—Life—Death, Spiritual**: love is the proof that one has passed from death to life.

Note two things.

1. The death here is spiritual death and eternal death. Spiritual death speaks of a person who is dead while he still lives (1 Tim. 5:6). He is a natural man living in this present world, but he is said to be dead to the Lord Jesus Christ and to God and to spiritual matters.

a. A person who wastes his life in riotous living is spiritually dead.

"It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found" (Luke 15:32).

b. A person who has not partaken of Christ is spiritually dead.

"Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" (John 6:53).

c. A person who does not have the spirit of Christ is said to be spiritually dead.

"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:9).

d. A person who lives in sin is said to be spiritually dead.

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephes. 2:1).

"And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col. 2:13).

e. A person who is alienated from God is said to be spiritually dead.

"Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Ephes. 4:18-19).

f. A person who sleeps in sin is spiritually dead.

"Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Ephes. 5:14).

g. A person who lives in sinful pleasure is dead while he lives.

"But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (1 Tim. 5:6).

h. A person who does not have the Son of God is dead.

"He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:12).

i. A person who does great religious works but does the wrong works is dead.

"And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead" (Rev. 3:1).

2. Love is the proof that we have passed from death over into life. Love is *not the cause* of our passing over into life; it is *the proof* that we have passed from death to life. Jesus Christ is the One who saves us from death and gives us life. But once He has done this, we love our brothers. And we can know whether or not we have passed from death to life by our love. If we love our brothers—all of them—then we have been saved from death and we have eternal life. If we do not love our brothers, we have not been saved from death and we do not have life.

Note what the verse says: we "abide in death." We dwell, live, move, and have our being in death; we have made death our home. We are in the process of dying and we shall die and never receive the life of God, the life that is eternal and that overflows with all the fulness and richness of life. The person who does not love his brother "has not made the passage over"; he is living in an "atmosphere of death" (A. Plummer. "The Pulpit Commentary," Vol.22, p.74).

(3:15) **Love—Hate—Murder**: love does not hate. This should be clearly understood, but it is not. Many people feel that they are acceptable to God and that God will never reject them, yet they have all kinds of negative feelings against others.

But note what this verse says: the person who hates his brother is a murderer. Hate is equal to murder; hate is the very same thing as murder. This is exactly what Jesus Christ said:

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca [bitterness], shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool [contempt], shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:21-22).

Anger, bitterness, and contempt are just as serious in God's eyes as murder. Why? Because the person who hates has the very same feelings and spirit that the murderer does—a spirit of anger, bitterness, and contempt. The murderer reacts differently, more violently, but the heart of both the hater and murderer is the same. And God looks and judges by the heart. Some persons can camouflage what is in their heart, but not from God. God knows the heart.

The Pulpit Commentary has an excellent statement on this point: *"Love is the only security against hate. And as every one who does not love is potentially a hater, so every hater is potentially a murderer. A murderer is a hater who expresses his hatred in the most emphatic way. A hater who does not murder abstains for various reasons from this extreme way of expressing his hate. But the temper of the two men is the same"* (A. Plummer. "The Pulpit Commentary," Vol.22, p.74).

Note that no murderer has eternal life. The implication is that neither does any person who hates his brother. A person who does not love his brother, who has negative feelings swirling within his heart, who has allowed his heart to become hardened against his brother—that person does not have eternal life dwelling within him. He has death, separation, alienation, division. He has *cut off* fellowship with a brother; he has *put to death* the relationship that exists between him and his brother. Therefore, he will be cut off from God; his relationship with God is put to death.

(3:16) **Love—Jesus Christ, Love of:** love proves that one understands the love of Christ. Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And remember when He did it: He died for us...

- when we were without strength, totally unable to help ourselves or to save ourselves (Romans 5:6).
- when we were ungodly (Romans 5:6).
- when we were sinners (Romans 5:8).
- when we were enemies of God, rebelling, cursing, neglecting, ignoring, denying and rejecting God (Romans 5:10).

Despite all this, Jesus Christ died for us. He took our sins and the guilt for them upon Himself, and He paid the judgment for them. Jesus Christ died for us. Why? Because He loves us; He loves us enough to die for us even when we oppose and do things against Him and stand against Him.

The point is this: if we love God, then we follow His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We love people just like He did; we love them even when they oppose and do things against us and stand against us. In fact, love is the proof that we really understand the love of Christ. If we love those who do things against us, then we *know* the love of Christ. But if we do not love those who oppose us, we *do not know* the love of Christ. We can prove whether or not we know the love of Christ by our love for others, even for those who do us evil.

"Christ died for those who hated Him; and the Christian must confront...the world with a love that is ready even to die for the haters" (A. Plummer. "The Pulpit Commentary," Vol.22, p.74).

(3:17) **Love—Ministering:** love has compassion and gives to meet the needs of people. This verse is a question, but the answer is clearly seen. Note the words "world's goods." The meaning is necessities of life, livelihood, the means to sustain life. If we have the bare necessities of life and see a person in need, how can we close our heart against him? How can we shut off feelings for him? How can we keep from helping him and from sharing what we have? If a person does this—if we do this—how can the love of God dwell within us?

The answer is clear: the love of God does not exist within a person who does not help those whom he sees in need. No matter what we profess, think, or argue, if we are not actively helping and giving—sacrificially giving—to meet the needs of the desperate and needy of our communities and of the world, we do not love God. God loved us: He gave all that He was and had to save us. Therefore, we must love others: we must give all that we *are and have* to save them. If we do not, how can we say that the love of God dwells in us? For this is exactly what Christ did.

Test 4: Having a Clean Heart

1 John 3:18-24: "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. {19} This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence {20} whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. {21} Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God {22} and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. {23} And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. {24} Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us."

(3:18-24) **Introduction:** Do we really love God? There are six tests that show us. This is the fourth test: Do we have a clean heart? If our hearts are really clean, then we love God; but if our hearts condemn us, then we do not love God. How then can we have a clean heart?

1. A clean heart is wrought by loving in deed and not in word only (v.18-19).
2. A clean heart is wrought by God's knowledge (v.20-21).
3. A clean heart is wrought by keeping the commandments (v.22).
4. A clean heart is wrought by keeping the supreme commandment of God (v.23).
5. A clean heart is wrought by the Spirit dwelling within (v.24).

(3:18-19) **Heart—Love:** a clean heart is wrought by loving in deed and not in word only. Most people have some feelings for a person when they see him, suffering or in need. And most people will talk about and express concern for the needy and suffering. But note this: if the needy and suffering person has done evil against us, then the feelings of many people change. They no longer feel compassion and are no longer ready to reach out and comfort or help. The attitude becomes...

- "He deserves it."

- "He is being paid back."
- "God is judging him for his evil."
- "He made his bed, let him lie in it."
- "He's reaping what he sowed."
- "If he wasn't so lazy, he would find work."
- "He could better himself if he tried."

While this attitude is sweeping through their minds, they still profess to love God and to be caring for people. But note: this is exactly what Scripture is talking about. The love that we are to have is not only the love for friends, but it is the love for one's enemies, the love that loves those who oppose us and do things against us. This is what this exhortation is talking about.

"Little children, let us not love [merely] in theory or in speech but in deed and in truth - in practice and in sincerity" (The Amplified New Testament, 1 John 3:18).

To love only those who love us is to love only in theory and in speech. It is not loving like God loved; it is not practicing the love of God, the love for those who do evil.

Now note the result: if we love as God loves—if we love those who do evil—then we know we are of the truth. God is truth; He does exactly what should be done. And He loves everyone, even those who do evil. Therefore, if we are to be of the truth, we must also love those who do evil. We must love all those who oppose us and do evil against us and stand against us. When we do, the most wonderful things happen: we bring assurance to our hearts. And note: our hearts are assured *before Him*. This means that we are *accepted by Him*. He accepts us to live forever in His presence. Why? Because we are loving all men even as He loves all men—loving even those who are evil. A clean heart—a heart that is full of assurance, a heart that knows that it is pleasing and acceptable to God—is a heart that loves even as God loves. A clean heart is wrought not by loving in word, but by loving in deed.

Oliver Greene gives a good illustration that speaks to all of our hearts:

"There are occasions when a minister visits widows where there are children in need, and after a ministerial call the minister bows in prayer and asks God to supply the need of that family, when at that time there are hundreds - perhaps thousands - of dollars of God's money in the bank to the credit of the big church with the tall steeple! The parishioners in that church sing, 'O, how I love Jesus!' but they love Him in word only - not in deed and in truth. The Bible admonition is, 'Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves' (James 1:22)" (The Epistles of John, p.141).

Into the human heart there are bound to come doubts. Any man with a sensitive mind and heart must sometimes wonder if he really is a Christian at all. John's test is quite simple and far-reaching. It is love. If we feel love for our fellow-men welling up within our hearts, we can be sure that the heart of Christ is in us. John would have said that a so-called heretic whose heart was overflowing with love and whose life was beautiful with service, was far nearer Christ than someone who was impeccably orthodox, yet cold and remote from the needs of others.

John goes on to say something which, as far as the Greek goes, can mean two things. That feeling of love can reassure us in the presence of God. Our hearts may condemn us but God is greater than our hearts. The question is: what is the meaning of this last phrase?

(i) It could mean: since our hearts condemn us and God is infinitely greater than our hearts, God must condemn us even more. If we take it that way, it leaves us only with the fear of God and with nothing to say but: "God be merciful to me, a sinner." That is a possible translation and no doubt it is true; but it is not what John is saying in this context, for here he is thinking of our confidence in God and not our dread of him.

(ii) The passage must therefore mean this. Our hearts condemn us—that is inevitable. But God is greater than our hearts; he knows all things. Not only does he know our sins; he also knows our love, our longings, the nobility that never fully works itself out, our penitence; and the greatness of his knowledge gives him the sympathy which can understand and forgive.

It is this very knowledge of God which gives us our hope. "Man," as Thomas a Kempis said, "sees the deed, but God knows the intention." Men can judge us only by our actions, but God can judge us by the longings which never became deeds and the dreams which never came true. When Solomon was dedicating the Temple, he spoke of how David had wished to build a house for God and how that privilege had been denied to him. "It was in the heart of David, my father, to build a house for the name of the Lord God of Israel. And the Lord said unto David, my father, 'Whereas it was in your heart to build a house for my name, you did well that it was in your heart'" (1 Kings 8:17, 18). The French proverb says, "To know all is to forgive all." God judges us by the deep emotions of the heart; and, if in our heart there is love, then, however feeble and imperfect that love may be, we can with confidence enter into his presence. The perfect knowledge which belongs to God, and to God alone, is not our terror but our hope.

(3:20-21) **Heart—Condemnation:** a clean heart is wrought by God knowing all things. Note the words, "If our heart condemn us." Everyone's heart condemns him sometime. Everyone of us knows what it is to sense wrong and condemnation. God has made our hearts sensitive so they will sense wrongdoing. Why? So that we will correct our behavior and not destroy ourselves. God is greater *than our hearts and He knows all things*.

This means two things.

1. First, God knows everything about us. He knows when we are good and when we are bad. He knows everything that we do and more. God even knows our thoughts. He knows when we have done wrong and when we rightly or wrongly feel condemned. He knows every little thing that we feel or think. He even knows what we would have done under different circumstances. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, that is hid from God. No cover of darkness, no closed doors, no place off the side of the road, no place in the woods—no secret is unknown to God. Take all the evil we have ever done and all the condemnation we feel and sense—God knows every ounce of heaviness and guilt and condemnation we feel.

2. Second, God knows how to assure our hearts and how to give us confidence toward Him. God knows how to deliver us from the sense of guilt and condemnation. God knows how to remove *all condemnation* from our hearts. Think about it: all condemnation and all guilt removed forever from our hearts. God knows how to remove it all.

How can God remove all the guilt and condemnation that weighs upon our hearts and lives? By love. By loving us so much that He would give His Son to die for us. When we see God's love for us, when we receive His Son as our Savior, we discover the most wonderful thing.

- Jesus Christ removes the sense of guilt and condemnation; He actually forgives and cleanses us from sin.
- Something else happens as well: we discover that we love everyone just as He loves everyone. Our attitude toward others is actually changed: we love everyone, and we want them to know the love of God just as we have come to know His love.

Our hearts just flow in full assurance and confidence knowing that all things are well with God. There is no more condemnation or guilt. We know that we are forgiven and cleansed through Jesus Christ. We know that we are acceptable to God and our hearts revel in the confidence and assurance of Him.

(3:22) **Heart—Commandments:** a clean heart is wrought by keeping the commandments of God and doing the things that please God. If a child disobeys his father, he displeases his father. The only way he can please his father is by obeying him. The same is true with God. If we are going to please God, we must obey God.

Note another fact as well. A father cannot reward his child if the child disobeys. The father just cannot grant the child's request, not if he wants to teach him good behavior. Neither can God. The only way we can receive the things we ask is to obey God. He cannot reward our unfaithfulness and disobedience.

This is a great verse of Scripture, for it tells us exactly how to receive the answer to our prayers. In fact, it tells us that we can receive *whatever* we ask, if we will do this one thing: obey God. Just keep His commandments. Keeping God's commandments does two wonderful things for us:

- It gives us everything we ask in prayer.
- It gives us a clean heart, the most wonderful gift we could ever receive.

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2).

"Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23).

"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7).

(3:23) **Commandments—Believer—Love, Brotherly:** a clean heart is wrought by keeping God's supreme commandment. Note that God's supreme commandment has two parts to it. If a person wants a clean heart, he must do these two things above all else.

1. First, he must believe on the *name of God's Son Jesus Christ*. How can a person believe on the name of someone? We can believe a statement or some writing that a person makes. But what does it mean to believe *on the name* of someone? A person's name stands for what he is, for the kind of person he is and for the kind of things he does. Therefore, to believe on the name of Jesus Christ means to believe in all that He stands for and in all that He is. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the promised Savior and Messiah of the world.

- He is the Son of God who has come to earth to reveal God.
- He is the great advocate and sacrifice for man and his sins.

Believing on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is the only way a person can ever have a clean heart before God. This is a basic and fundamental fact; it is the foundation of life. No person ever becomes acceptable to God until he believes on the name of God's Son. Obeying this commandment is the very first thing that a person has to do to please God.

2. Second, he must *love all others*.

(3:24) **Holy Spirit:** a clean heart is wrought by the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. The person who believes in Jesus Christ and loves others dwells in God and God in Him. How do we know that God dwells in us? By the Holy Spirit. This is made abundantly clear: "we know that he abides in us by the Spirit which he has given us."

Note that we dwell in God. This means that we take up residence in God, live and walk in Him, live and move and have our being in Him. It means that we make our home in Him.

Note that God dwells in us. This means that He takes up residence in us; lives and moves and has His being within us. It means that God makes a home in our hearts.

Again, how do we know this? By His Spirit which He has given us. The Holy Spirit of God seals and guarantees us, gives us *absolute assurance*. He lives within us, which means that He talks to us, shares with us, leads and guides us, disciplines us, convicts and convinces us. All that is involved in living, the Spirit of God does within us. He is our constant and permanent companion. He never leaves us nor forsakes us. He is always infusing us with the assurance and confidence of God and with His presence and power.

GOD'S CHILDREN ARE OBEDIENT **(1 John 3:1-10)**

GOD'S LOVE IS BESTOWED ON US IN THAT HE CALLS US HIS CHILDREN!

- A. Being born of God (2:29) suggests the idea of **children of God (3:1)**.
- B. The idea of being children of God invokes wonder – **Behold what manner of Love the Father has bestowed on us.**
 - 1. The end of God's love is our being His children.
 - C. Just because we are children of God does not mean that the world knows us.
 - 1. The world did not know Jesus, and because we are like Him, they do not know us.
 - 2. The "Him" here could refer either to God or Christ, but more than likely refers to Christ as He lived on earth as we are living on earth.
 - 3. Jesus predicted the world would kill Christians, "**and they will do this because they have not known the Father, or me**" (John 16:3).
 - 4. Christians know God through revelation and the Son by what God revealed through him (1 John 5:20-21).
 - D. John repeats his assurance that Christians are the Children of God (v. 2).

1. Still in the flesh, we do not have the final relationship with God as we will in days to come, but we are no less Children of God.
2. We will have a body following our death which no man on this earth has seen as yet as it will be a body like the glorious body of Christ.
3. This will be revealed at the coming of Christ (v. 2).
- E. To have this glorious body, we must live a pure life just as Christ is pure (v. 3).
1. We cannot live impure lives and expect to be saved and receive a spiritual body like Christ's.
2. We have this purity through our relationship with Jesus as our savior.

THE ONE ABIDING IN CHRIST DOES NOT SIN!

- A. One method John uses in his teaching is the drawing of opposites.
- B. With verse 4 John introduces the opposite of his teaching in the first three verses.
- C. Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness (v. 4).
 1. Sin is lawlessness or the breaking of God's laws.
 2. The Greek idea of sin is "missing the mark."
 3. It is a fault or failure to live at as high a standard as one might.
 4. However, sin is not just failing to live up to our potential, but it is lawlessness or rebellion against God's law.
- D. John points out that Jesus was manifest to take away our sins (v. 5a).
 1. John also points out that Jesus had no sin (v. 5b).
 2. Jesus is the only man to ever live a life without even one sin.
- E. Salvation is found "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3; Rom. 6:3); therefore, we must be in Christ to be saved.
 1. Those who are saved do not live lives of sin (v. 6).
 2. Those who live sinful lives do not know Christ (v. 6).
 3. "Does not sin" could be translated "does not go on sinning."
 4. John has said many times we will sin, though not willingly.
 5. In John's audience were Gnostics who believed they could rise above sin and he was pointing out to them that sin will always be a part of their lives.
- F. John continually reminds his readers of the possibility of being deceived (v. 7).
 1. Satan is always trying to deceive Christians and lead them away from Christ.
 2. The only way to be righteous is to practice righteousness.
 3. We must be righteous because Christ is righteous and we cannot be his and not be like him.
- G. John shows the contrast, he who sins is of the devil (v. 8).
 1. The devil always has and always will sin, and those who sin are his (John 8:44).
 2. The one reason Jesus came to the earth was to overcome sin and its leader, Satan.
- H. The one born of God does not sin because he belongs to God, and because he belongs to God he cannot sin.
 1. Not because he does not have the ability, but because he belongs to God.
 2. God is by nature sinless, he who is born of God, thus being made in the likeness of his nature, to the extent that he remains God's child, does not go on committing sin. (The Living Word Commentaries, Vol. 18, p. 85)
- I. As John does so often, he now says the same thing a third way (v. 10).
 1. Here is the way you can tell the followers of God and the followers of the devil:
 - a. Workers of unrighteousness are followers of the devil and workers of righteousness are followers of God.
 - b. Those who do not love their brothers are followers of the devil, the opposite is obvious.

CONCLUSION

- A. Children of God are faithful to Him.
- B. Those who do not obey God are followers of the devil no matter how much they may claim to be the children of God.

LOVE IN ACTION (1 John 3:11-24)

LOVE IS IMPERATIVE!

- A. The message of the gospel does not change with the passing of time (v. 11).
 1. The truth of the deity of Christ has not nor will it ever change, he is the Son of God.
 2. Likewise, the command to love one another is still true as it was in the beginning.

3. Anything taught which is different from what was taught at the beginning of the church refutes itself by its very newness.
- B. The love, which Christians have been taught from the beginning, contrasts with **hate** which is illustrated by Cain (v. 12).
 1. The opposite of love is hate and hate leads to murder (Gen. 4:1-11).
 2. John is pointing out that the attitude of these brothers become the description of two types of families in this world – The children of God and the children of the world.
 3. Though brothers in the flesh, morally they served different masters – Cain, Satan and Abel, God.
 4. Cain killed his brother **because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous**.
- C. Cain is a good example of why the world hates God's people (v. 13).
 1. The wicked cannot bear the righteousness of good men and hate them prompting Jesus to warn his disciples they would be hated for his namesake (John 15:18-19).
 2. Even children do not like it when other children will not join them in their evil deeds and put pressure on the good children by calling them names and harassing them in other ways.
 3. Even today, it is possible to lose one's life by standing up for what is right.
- D. Passing from death to life is a term denoting salvation {born again} (v.14).
 1. Those dwelling in sin are still dead toward God.
 2. John says this new life is evidenced through our love for the brethren. The only way to discern spiritual life or death is by the actions of the individuals.
 3. John repeatedly states that one cannot be in the light (saved) and hate his brother.
- E. John speaks directly of hate as the opposite of love for brethren (v. 15).
 1. We can "murder" our brother in many ways other than take his physical life by gossip, etc.

THE RESULTS OF LOVE!

- A. After contrasting love and hate, John goes on to define the love he has been discussing (v. 16).
 1. The greatest demonstration of this love was by Jesus Christ laying down his life for us.
 2. If we love with the same love which Christ loved we will lay down our lives for the brethren.
 3. Evidently the disciple's imitating this love constitutes the "newness" of Jesus' "new commandment" to his disciples to love one another "even as I have loved you" (John 13:34).
- B. Few Christians will be called upon to make the ultimate act of love of dying for brethren (v. 17).
 1. However, there are many opportunities to show our love which are not so drastic.
 2. John point out one of these acts in the matter of providing for physical needs of needy brethren.
 - a. You say you would die for him, yet you will not feed him when he is hungry? (WRONG)
 2. We cannot love God and fail to provide for the needs of our brethren.
- C. Words without actions are worthless (v. 18).
 1. Love is expressed through actions, not words.
- D. John again emphasis the fact of knowing we are in the truth by practicing love as God commands (v. 19).
- E. God is greater than we and knows our hearts, even when we doubt ourselves from time to time (v. 20).
 1. God knows our intentions, he knows we love and have good intentions, he will forgive and make allowances as he has promised, even when our hearts do not.
 2. Paul states something similar in Romans 8:26, when he says that the indwelling Spirit, whose mind God knows, searches the heart and knows what we need and makes intercessions for us and helps our infirmities.
- F. When we live in such a way that we do not doubt our relationship with God, we are doubly blessed (v. 21).
 1. Our confidence is such that even in the prospect of standing face to face with God in judgment, we can have the fearless, joyful confidence of his acceptance. (Perfect love casts out fear 1 John 4:18).
- G. We can do this because we are obedient to the Lord (v. 22).
- H. John again makes the circle and repeats the main theme of the lesson, believe that Jesus is the Son of God and love the brethren as the Lord has commanded (v. 23).
- I. John again points out that those who obey God abide in God and God abides in them.
 1. We know this because the Christian has the Spirit of God living in him.

CONCLUSION

- A. Love is imperative for one to be saved through the blood of Jesus Christ.
- B. This love must be very evident in the life of the Christian.

Chapter Four -- Test 5: Testing the Spirits of False Teachers

1 John 4:1-6: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. {2} This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, {3} but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. {4} You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. {5} They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. {6} We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood."

Anyone who knows anything at all about Christianity knows that it puts great stress upon believing. Not believing myths and legends, as many seem to think, but believing facts. Faith is not a way of convincing yourself that something is true when you know it is not, as someone has defined it, but faith is believing something that is true. In order to be a Christian you must be a believer, because from faith comes life, strength, peace, and joy, and all else that the Christian life offers.

But, that being true, it is equally true that every Christian is also called to be an unbeliever. There is a time when unbelief is the right thing and the only right thing. The very same Scriptures which encourage us to believe likewise urge us not to believe. In fact, they not only urge us, they command us not to believe.

This is no contradiction, any more than to say that in order to live it is necessary both to inhale and to exhale. These are contradictory things: You cannot inhale and exhale at the same time, but both are absolutely necessary to maintaining life. You cannot inhale unless you exhale, and you cannot exhale unless you have inhaled.

It is the same with this matter of belief and unbelief. You cannot believe truth without rejecting error. You cannot love righteousness unless you are ready to hate sin. You cannot accept Christ without rejecting self. *"If any man come after me," Jesus says, "let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me," {cf, Matt 16:24, Mark 8:34}.*

You cannot follow good unless you are ready to flee from evil. So it is not surprising, therefore, that the Scriptures tell us we are not to believe, as well as to believe.

This section, you will notice, comes as a parenthesis in the discourse on love. It grows out of the word which we looked at last time, the last verse of Chapter 3, Verse 24: *"All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given to us."* It is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life that makes manifest the qualities of truth and love which reassure us that we are in Christ and "of the truth."

It is that presence of the Holy Spirit which makes all the difference. But John says not to believe every spirit. There is one true Spirit, but there are also other spirits as well, false spirits, deceiving spirits that have gone out into the world. It is significant that this warning comes in the midst of John's discourse about love, because it is rather evident that the false spirits which are abroad make a great deal of the subject of love.

It is significant and striking that every cult, every deviant group, every movement of our day that seeks to solicit support, religiously speaking, does so in the name of love. As we have already commented, this word is used in a thousand different ways to describe a thousand different reactions and impulses. Love means one thing to a hippie in Haight-Ashbury; love means quite something else when it is used by a psychologist in his counseling room. Love is still something different on the lips of a movie-struck teenager; love is different yet when used with reference to the relationship of nations.

There is no word, perhaps, in our language, that is capable of being stretched in so many directions as this word, *love*. Yet so many people seem utterly gullible about it. If someone comes talking about love, this to them is the earmark they must be of God, they must be "of the truth," despite the fact that the oldest trick in Satan's bag is to show a spirit of friendly concern and to appear to offer the fulfillment of love and desire.

Is that not what you see in the Garden of Eden? The devil comes to Eve and says, "Is it really true that God is so harsh, so difficult, so unloving toward you that he has forbidden you to eat certain fruit of a tree? Why, I think more of you than that. I'd never do anything like that to you. Could God actually say a thing like that and be God of love?" That is the implication of his argument, is it not? "Why," says the devil, "if you take of this fruit you will discover wonderful things. You will become as gods. You will enter a wonderful world that you've never dreamed of before. You will discover the thing you were made for, and which God is trying to keep you from. As your friend, as your counselor, I suggest you hold back no longer. Take of the fruit and eat it," {cf, Gen 3:1-5}.

Is that not his approach? Does that not sound familiar? That is exactly the line of approach that cults, 'isms, and schisms are using today, everywhere. "If you really want to *live*, try what we have in stock."

But the Scriptures warn us that the mark of childish immaturity is to be caught up and taken in by that kind of approach, *"to be tossed about by every wind of doctrine"* {Eph 4:14}, every new teaching that comes along. It is childish to gullibly swallow every slick line and go along with it. It is quite true, therefore, that a mark of maturity is unbelief, as well as belief.

It is as important that you do not believe certain things as it is that you do believe others, and John is making that clear. Notice, he indicates that this is a widespread problem. *"Many false prophets," he says, "have gone out into the world."*

In Matthew's Gospel, the Lord Jesus warned of this: *"beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves,"* {Matt 7:15}. Wolves in sheep's clothing -- outwardly appearing to be loving, tender, and concerned, but inwardly desiring only to wreck and ravish and to ruin. There are many false prophets, says John. Here again we have underlined for us the fact that we live in a world of deceit. We live, in many respects, in a hostile environment in which falsehoods are widely accepted, and we are greatly pressured to conform to these things.

In John's day, in the 1st century, there were teachers going about doing certain signs, perhaps giving predictions of things to come, or manifesting tongues, miracles and other such things. It is of this that John writes and says, "Do not believe these spirits -- until you have tested them." First test them. Don't be a sucker, don't believe anyone who comes along. It is important to note that there is here a very clear recognition of what the Bible teaches all the way through -- that behind the false prophet or false teacher is an evil spirit. Men simply do not speak out of their own intellectual attainments.

Quite unconscious to themselves they are being guided -- and misguided -- by an evil spirit, a "spirit of error" John calls it, an anti-Christian spirit which is behind these false prophets and teachers. There is a true Spirit, the Holy Spirit of truth, the Spirit of love, and just as he speaks through men, so evil spirits, false spirits, the spirits of error, also speak through men. When you hear men and women talking about religious things or values, do not gullibly swallow everything they say, especially if they appear to be attractively setting forth something about love and sweetness and light and concern for others. Especially test that line, for it is the usual approach of error. Recognize that behind the individual may be a spirit of error.

We moderns are in much greater danger than the ancients, for in the world of John and Paul's day, the 1st century, there was a widespread recognition of the existence of invisible spirits, the invisible realities behind the scenes of life. Everywhere the ancient world recognized these as gods and goddesses, and bowed down to them.

Though they seriously deformed and twisted these realities, making them into mythological and legendary figures and worshipping them as demigods, nevertheless there was a widespread recognition that man does not exist in the universe by himself; there are superior beings who influence the thinking and attitudes of men everywhere. This kind of teaching was, therefore, much easier to accept in the 1st century than it is in our day. In the 20th century, we pride ourselves upon the fact that we have grown beyond this, we have come of age. Man is intellectually unable to accept this kind of thing today. As a result we expose ourselves without my defense at all to the control of these evil spirits.

But if we are going to follow the words of Jesus Christ we must accept what he says is the explanation of the power behind evil in the world. He makes clear that it comes from a host of evil spirits. We have seen this before, in Paul. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, wicked spirits in high places" {Eph 6:12 KJV}, against the very headquarters of evil that is at work, affecting the minds of men. Part of the blindness of our generation, resulting in chaos and anarchy that is increasing on every side today, is a direct result of man in his arrogance and pride

saying, "I reject the whole concept of evil spirits and demons. It is intellectually unacceptable to me." The blindness of that attitude precludes any defense against it.

If we are going to be Christians we must look at the world as Christ sees it, we must understand it from his point of view. We must recognize that the pronouncements of men in this field of religion and spiritual teaching, no matter whether they be professors in seminaries or colleges, or whether they be ministers behind pulpits, or whatever they may be, are not a result of their keen logic or their academic training or their perceptive thinking, alone. These men are oftentimes unaware of the twist that is given to their thinking by the activity of evil spirits, spirits of error. The premises they adopt, which they never seem to examine, are often totally wrong, and in their blindness they base logical deductions upon illogical premises. But we so often seem to be unaware of this.

You must remember that you can never recognize this kind of error by listening and reading the arguments. I am not saying it is wrong to read the arguments, but you will not see the error in them that way. For if you read these books, and listen to the messages, they always sound clear, convincing and logical, taken by themselves. That is the way error makes its approach to us. The only way to discover it is to do as John says -- test it. Test these spirits, try them. Lay them alongside a measuring stick, and if they do not match, throw them out. Well, what is the test?

(4:1-6) **Introduction:** this is a critical passage of Scripture. It deals with true and false teachers, in particular with the spirit of truth or error that fills their hearts. This is the fifth test of our love for God. How do we know that we really love God? We can tell by the spirits of the teachers we are following. If we are following the spirit of a true teacher, then it is clear indication that we love God. If we are following the spirit of a false teacher, then it is clear indication that we do not love God. We must test the spirits of teaching throughout the world.

1. Test the spirits of teachers (v.1).
2. Test the confession of teachers (v.2-3).
3. Test yourselves (v.4).
4. Test the followers of teachers (v.5-6).

(4:1) **Teaching, False—Evil Spirits:** first, test the spirits of teachers; test them to make sure they are of God. This is a strong charge given to believers. Note the word *beloved*. This was John's tender address to the believers of the church. He is definitely addressing believers, and this tells us a significant fact: believers can be misled by the *spirits of false teachers*. What kinds of spirits dwell within a false teacher?

☐ A false teacher may have a *spirit of light*, especially in industrialized societies. The spirit presents a way of life that seems to be the truth, the very way to live. He presents a way of life that seems to be intelligent and full of knowledge and enlightenment.

☐ A false teacher may have a *spirit of righteousness*. He may preach and teach righteousness.

☐ A false teacher may stress *the life and teachings of Jesus Christ*—all the good qualities of life—all the traits that should characterize people. They may tell people to copy the life of Jesus and to focus their hearts upon the good qualities of life, and if they do, God will accept them.

False teachers make one fatal mistake. This is discussed in the next note. The point in this verse is that we must test the spirits of false teachers, test them to make absolutely sure they are of God. Note one other fact: there are "*many false prophets*." Scripture is not talking about a few, but many. If there were many in the days of John, think how many more there are today. Think how many more religions there are; how many cults have sprung up around Christianity; how many denominations and ministries have sprung up since John wrote these words. Just think of all the churches and pulpits and podiums that are being filled by the teachers of the world. In addition, think how many preachers and teachers claim to be true followers of Christ. There are many, thousands and thousands, of false teachers in the world today. Who are they? This is the discussion of this passage. This is what every person must test in order to keep from being misled.

(4:2-3) **Teachers—Teachers, False:** second, test the confession of teachers. What is it that makes a teacher true or false? Jesus Christ. What a man believes about Jesus Christ makes the teacher true or false. What a man confesses about Jesus Christ exposes his spirit, a spirit of truth or a spirit of error. And note what it is about Jesus Christ that exposes a teacher: the incarnation. That is, did Jesus Christ come in the flesh or not?

For John Christian belief could be summed up in one great sentence: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (*John* 1:14). Any spirit which denied the reality of the Incarnation was not of God.

John lays down two tests of belief.

(i) To be of God a spirit must acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. As John saw it, to deny that is to deny three things about Jesus. (a) It is to deny that he is the centre of history, the one for whom all previous history had been a preparation. (b) It is to deny that he is the fulfillment of the promises of God. All through their struggles and their defeats, the Jews had clung to the promises of God. To deny that Jesus is the promised Messiah is to deny that these promises were true. (c) It is to deny his Kingship. Jesus came, not only to sacrifice, but to reign; and to deny his Messiahship is to leave out his essential kingliness.

(ii) To be of God a spirit must acknowledge that Jesus has come in the flesh. It was precisely this that the Gnostics could never accept. Since, in their view, matter was altogether evil, a real incarnation was an impossibility, for God could never take flesh upon himself. Augustine was later to say that in the pagan philosophers he could find parallels for everything in the New Testament except for one saying-"The Word became flesh." As John saw it, to deny the complete manhood of Jesus Christ was to strike at the very roots of the Christian faith.

To deny the reality of the incarnation has certain definite consequences.

(i) It is to deny that Jesus can ever be our example. If he was not in any real sense a man, living under the same conditions as men, he cannot show men how to live.

(ii) It is to deny that Jesus can be the High Priest who opens the way to God. The true High Priest, as the writer to the Hebrews saw, must be like us in all things, knowing our infirmities and our temptations (*Hebrews* 4:14, 15). To lead men to God the High Priest must be a man, or else he will be pointing them to a road which it is impossible for them to take.

(iii) It is to deny that Jesus can in any real sense be Saviour. To save men he had to identify himself with the men he came to save.

(iv) It is to deny the salvation of the body. Christian teaching is quite clear that salvation is the salvation of the whole man. The body as well as the soul is saved. To deny the incarnation is to deny the possibility that the body can ever become the temple of the Holy Spirit.

(v) By far the most serious and terrible thing is that it is to deny that there can ever be any real union between God and man. If spirit is altogether good and the body is altogether evil, God and man can never meet, so long as man is man. They might meet when man has sloughed off the body and become a *disembodied* spirit. But the great truth of the incarnation is that here and now there can be real communion between God and man.

Nothing in Christianity is more central than the reality of the manhood of Jesus Christ.

1. The true Spirit, the Spirit of God Himself, confesses that Jesus Christ did come in the flesh, that the incarnation is true. If a teacher has the Spirit of God dwelling in him, then he confesses the incarnation, the wonderful truth that God did become Man and did come to earth to save man. The Spirit of God *cannot confess* anything other than the truth; therefore, every teacher who has the Spirit of God will confess the same truth. He cannot confess anything else because the Spirit of God Himself dwells within him. If he confesses anything else, then the spirit within him is not the Spirit of God. Now note the confession in detail, exactly what it is that a true teacher confesses: "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh."

a. The true teacher confesses *Jesus*. The name *Jesus* means *Savior*. It is believing that Jesus Christ did come from God to save man, to be the Savior of the world.

b. The true teacher confesses *Christ*. The name *Christ* means *Messiah*, the Anointed One of God. It is believing that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah of Scripture; that He is the fulfillment of all the prophecies of Scripture; that He is the Anointed Savior sent from God to earth.

c. The true teacher confesses that Jesus Christ is the *Son of God*; that God did send His Son *out of* (ek) heaven, out of the spiritual world and dimension into this world; that God sent His Son in human flesh to save man in fulfillment of Scripture. It means that Jesus Christ fulfilled the Scripture predicting the coming death, resurrection, and exaltation of the Messiah. Simply stated, it means that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came to earth to save man.

This is the confession of the true teacher and of every true believer. We must always remember that a true teacher is indwelt by the Spirit of God Himself. Therefore, the true teacher *will always* confess the incarnation, the wonderful truth that "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh."

2. The false spirit denies that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. He denies the incarnation. He does not believe that God took on human flesh and became a man.

a. The false teacher does not believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. He may accept Jesus Christ as a great teacher and a great religious leader, perhaps the greatest, but he does not believe that Jesus Christ is *the Savior*. He believes there are other ways to God, that other people who believe in God will be as acceptable to God as a follower of Jesus Christ.

b. The false teacher does not believe that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah and Anointed One from God. He does not believe the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God. He accepts them only as the writings of great religious people of the past; therefore, there are no prophetic promises of a Messiah, no promise of a coming Savior. To the false teacher, Jesus Christ is only a great religious teacher, only one way to reach God. He is not *the Anointed One* sent from God to save all men. He is not the only way to God.

c. The false teacher does not believe Jesus Christ has *come from God*. He does not believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that Jesus Christ came out of heaven, out from the spiritual world and dimension. He does not believe that God sent His Son into the world in human flesh as a man. Again, the false teacher believes that Jesus Christ is only a man just like all other men—a great man, perhaps the greatest, perhaps the man who got closer to God than any other man. Nevertheless, to the false teacher Jesus Christ was only a man who taught us how to worship and serve God.

The false teacher would say...

that Jesus Christ was not sinless. He lived close to God, but no man can achieve sinlessness.

that Jesus Christ died, but not as a substitute for man's sins. He died as a great martyr showing us how we should face death and how we should be willing to die for the great cause of righteousness.

that the resurrection of Jesus Christ did not take place. It is only a picture of the spiritual truth that man can live in God's presence.

Now, note the fatal mistake of the false teachers: to deny that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is to deny that man can ever be saved beyond this world. Why? Because man can never know for sure that God exists nor how to reach God if He does exist. No person has ever seen God or heaven, and they never will, not by physical and material technology. The physical world cannot penetrate or cross over into the spiritual world, no matter what some persons may claim. If man is ever to know God and the spiritual world, then God has to come to earth and reveal the truth to us. There is no other way. Therefore, to deny that God sent His Son into the world is to deny that we can ever be saved.

There is another fact that needs to be noted as well, that of perfection. God is perfect and man is imperfect. Therefore, God could never let man penetrate or cross over into perfection. Why? Because man's imperfection would affect the perfect world of God. Heaven would no longer be heaven; it would no longer be perfect if God allowed imperfect beings to enter it. No matter what some people may claim about penetrating heaven, they have not. Imperfection just cannot cross over into perfection. The fatal mistake of false teachers is just that, *fatal*—fatal and eternally dooming. The consequences of denying the incarnation of Jesus Christ are terrible.

If Jesus Christ has not come in the flesh, then it means...

that God has not loved us enough to reveal Himself to us (1 John 1:2).

that God has not loved us enough to send us the Word of life (1 John 1:1).

that God has not loved us enough to show us eternal life (1 John 1:2).

that there is no eternal life (1 John 1:2).

that there is no fellowship with God, not for sure (1 John 1:3).

that the message of hope and of Scripture are not true, not for sure (1 John 1:3).

that there is no joy beyond this life, not for sure, no fulness of joy (1 John 1:4).

that Jesus Christ is not our Advocate (1 John 2:2).

that there is no forgiveness of sin (1 John 1:9; 1 John 2:2).

that there is no perfect sacrifice for sin (1 John 2:2).

On and on the list could go, but the point is clearly seen. The false teacher destroys the hope of salvation and of eternity with God. We are left without hope and without God in this world unless God has loved us, loved us so much that He sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world. Jesus Christ is the crux of the message of the gospel. Note that the spirit of the false teacher is the spirit of antichrist. If a teacher confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, he is a true teacher. If not, he is a false teacher who promotes the very spirit of antichrist. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits" (1 John 4:1).

(4:4) **Believers:** third, test yourselves. How? There are two ways.

1. Ask yourself if you are *of God*; that is, have you been born of God?

2. Ask yourself if you are overcoming the spirits of false teachers? The Spirit of God is in you, and He is far greater than the evil spirits of false teachers. He enables you to conquer false teachers. Therefore, if you are following a teacher who denies the incarnation, that the Son of God has come in the flesh, then you are *not of God*. You are not born of God. But if you have rejected the teachings of men who deny the incarnation of Jesus Christ, then you are born of God.

Many false teachers are persuasive. They are very personable, attractive, and appealing—full of charisma. Their ideas and teachings sound reasonable and appealing. But if a person has been truly born of God, he has the Holy Spirit to help him see the error of the teaching. And note the words "you have overcome them." The Spirit of God does not fail. Therefore, if a person is following some strange teaching about Jesus Christ, he is most likely not *born of God*. Those who are truly *born of God* confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who has come in the flesh.

They confess...

the incarnation

the righteousness and sinlessness of Jesus Christ

the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ

the ascension and exaltation of Jesus Christ

John lays down a great truth and faces a great problem.

(i) The Christian need not fear the heretic. In Christ the victory over all the powers of evil was won. The powers of evil did their worst to him, even to killing him on a Cross, and in the end he emerged victorious. That victory belongs to the Christian. Whatever things may look like, the powers of evil are fighting a losing battle. As the Latin proverb has it: "Great is the truth, and in the end it will prevail." All that the Christian has to do is remember the truth he already knows and cling to it. The truth is that by which men live; error is ultimately that by which men die.

(ii) The problem remains that the false teachers will neither listen to, nor accept, the truth which the true Christian offers. How is that to be explained? John returns to his favourite antithesis, the opposition between the world and God. The world, as we have seen before, is human nature apart from, and in opposition to, God. The man whose source is God will welcome the truth; the man whose source is the world will reject it.

When we come to think of it, that is an obvious truth. How can a man whose watchword is competition even begin to understand an ethic whose key-note is service? How can a man whose aim is the exaltation of the self and who holds that the weakest must go to the wall, even begin to understand a teaching whose principle for living is love? How can a man who believes that this is the only world and that, therefore, material things are the only ones which matter, even begin to understand life lived in the light of eternity, where the unseen things are the greatest values? A man can hear only what he has fitted himself to hear and he can utterly unfit himself to hear the Christian message.

That is what John is saying. We have seen again and again that it is characteristic of him to see things in terms of black and white. His thinking does not deal in shades. On the one side there is the man whose source and origin is God and who can hear the truth; on the other side there is the man whose source and origin is the world and who is incapable of hearing the truth. There emerges a problem, which very likely John did not even think of. Are there people to whom all preaching is quite useless? Are there people whose defences can never be penetrated, whose deafness can never hear, and whose minds are for ever shut to the invitation and command of Jesus Christ?

The answer must be that there are no limits to the grace of God and that there is such a person as the Holy Spirit. It is the lesson of life that the love of God can break every barrier down. It is true that a man can resist; it is, maybe, true that a man can resist even to the end. But what is also true is that Christ is always knocking at the door of every heart, and it is possible for any man to hear the voice of Christ, even above the many voices of the world.

(4:5-6) **Teachers—Teachers, False:** fourth, test the followers of teachers. We can look at the people who follow teachers and tell whether a teacher is false or not.

1. False teachers are followed by people who are worldly. Note the three things said:

a. False teachers are of the world. They have only a natural birth; they have never been born of God, never been spiritually born. The Spirit of God, the divine nature of God, is not dwelling within their hearts.

b. False teachers speak of the world. What does this mean? It means they teach a worldly or human approach to God:

that man reaches God by being good and doing good.

that man secures God's approval by combining his spirit with God's Spirit through communion and through righteous deeds.

Note: such approaches to God center and focus upon man and what he does. They are centered in the world, not in God and what God has done to save man. Man saves himself, not God through His Son Jesus Christ.

c. The world hears false teachers. The message of false teachers appeals to man. For if the Son of God has not come to earth, then there is no absolute and infallible rule to govern man. Therefore, we are somewhat free to find our own way to God the best we can. If we stumble here and there, it will not matter that much. God will understand, for He has left us to find our own way.

This teaching, of course, tends...

to excuse sin

to exalt man as his own savior

to stress ego and self-image over the power of God and His Spirit

to give man the right to gain personal authority and power over others

to give man the right to focus upon success, position, money, pleasures, and possessions

to stress man and his inner power [will] over God's power

to exalt man and his importance over God

to focus upon the discipline and control of the flesh over the power of God's Spirit

2. True teachers are followed by people who know God. They know and confess that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come in the flesh. Therefore, they follow the teacher who proclaims...

the incarnation of God, that is, the virgin birth, that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that He did live a sinless life when He was upon earth and thereby secured righteousness for man.

the death of Jesus Christ, that He died for man's sins, that He was the perfect sacrifice for sin, wholly and perfectly acceptable to God.

the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that He arose and conquered death for all men and made it possible for man to live a new life, a new life that conquers all the forces of evil and that infuses into man the seed of eternal life.

Note what the verse says: those who *know God* are the followers of the true teacher, but those who *are not of God* do not hear the true teacher. This is the way we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

We can tell a true teacher by the people who follow him. Our task is to look at the followers of any teacher. What kind of life do they live—a worldly or righteous life?

Test 6: Loving One Another

1 John 4:7-21: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. {8} Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. {9} This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. {10} This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. {11} Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. {12} No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. {13} We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. {14} And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. {15} If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. {16} And so we know and rely on the love

God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. {17} In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. {18} There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. {19} We love because he first loved us. {20} If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. {21} And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."

For the third time, we are considering the subject of love!

This does not mean John has run out of ideas and has to repeat himself. It means that the Holy Spirit, who inspired John, presents the subject once more, from a deeper point of view.

First, love for the brethren has been shown as proof of *fellowship with God* (1 John 2:7-11); then it has been presented as proof of *sonship* (1 John 3:10-14). In the earlier passage, love for the brethren is a matter of light or darkness; in the second it is a matter of life or death.

But in 1 John 4:7-16, we get down to the very foundation of the matter. Here we discover *why* love is such an important part of the life that is real. Love is a valid test of our fellowship and our sonship because "God is love." Love is part of the very being and nature of God. If we are united to God through faith in Christ, we share His nature. And since His nature is love, love is the test of the reality of our spiritual life.

A navigator depends on a compass to help him determine his course. But *why* a compass? Because it shows him his directions. And *why* does the compass point north? Because it is so constituted that it responds to the magnetic field that is part of the earth's makeup. The compass is responsive to the nature of the earth.

So with Christian love. The nature of God is love. And a person who knows God and has been born of God will respond to God's nature. As a compass naturally points north, a believer will naturally practice love because love is the nature of God. This love will not be a forced response; it will be a natural response. A believer's love for the brethren will be proof of his sonship and fellowship.

Three times, in this section, John encourages us to love one another (1 John 4:7, 11-12). He supports these admonitions by giving us three foundational facts about God.

Do we really love God? This is the sixth test, the one sure way to measure whether or not we love God: Do we love one another? Do we really love our neighbors, all of our fellow men? No matter who they are, do we love them? If we love our fellow man, this proves that we love God. Loving one another proves seven things.

1. Loving one another proves that we are born of God and know God (v.7-8).
2. Loving one another proves that we see God's love (v.9-11).
3. Loving one another proves that God's Spirit is within us (v.12-13).
4. Loving one another proves that our testimony and confession are true (v.14-16).
5. Loving one another proves that God is going to deliver from judgment (v.17).
6. Loving one another proves that God delivers us from fear (v.18).
7. Loving one another proves that we love God (v.19-21).

(4:7-8) **Love—New Birth:** loving one another proves that we are born of God and that we know God.

This is the third of three expressions in John's writings that help us understand the nature of God: "God is spirit" (John 4:24, NASB); "God is light" (1 John 1:5); and "God is love." None of these is a *complete* revelation of God, of course, and it is wrong to separate them.

God is spirit as to His essence; He is not flesh and blood. To be sure, Jesus Christ now has a glorified body in heaven, and one day we shall have bodies like His body. But being by nature spirit, God is not limited by time and space the way His creatures are.

God is light. This refers to His holy nature. In the Bible, light is a symbol of holiness and darkness is a symbol of sin (John 3:18-21; 1 John 1:5-10). God cannot sin because He is holy. Because we have been born into His family, we have received His holy nature (1 Peter 1:14-16; 2 Peter 1:4).

God is love. This does *not* mean that “love is God.” And the fact that two people “love each other” does not mean that their love is necessarily holy. It has accurately been said that “love does not define God, but God defines love.” God is love and God is light; therefore, His love is a *holy* love, and His holiness is expressed in love. All that God *does* expresses all that God *is*. Even His judgments are measured out in love and mercy (Lam. 3:22-23).

Much that is called “love” in modern society bears no resemblance or relationship to the holy, spiritual love of God. Yet we see banners saying “God is love!” displayed at many festivals, particularly where young people are “doing their own thing”—as if one could dignify immorality by calling it “love.”

Christian love is a special kind of love. First John 4:10 may be translated: “In this way is seen the true love.” There is a false love, and this kind of love God must reject. Love that is born out of the very essence of God *must* be spiritual and holy, because “God is spirit” and “God is light.” This true love is “poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom. 5:5, NASB).

Love, therefore, is a valid test of true Christian faith. Since God is love, and we have claimed a personal relationship with God, we must of necessity reveal His love in how we live. A child of God has been “born of God,” and therefore he shares God’s divine nature. Since “God is love,” Christians ought to love one another. The logic is unanswerable!

Not only have we been “born of God,” but we also “know God.” In the Bible, the word *know* has a much deeper meaning than simply intellectual acquaintance or understanding. For example, the verb *know* is used to describe the intimate union of husband and wife (Gen. 4:1). To know God means to be in a deep relationship to Him—to share His life and enjoy His love. This knowing is not simply a matter of understanding facts; it is a matter of perceiving truth (cf. 1 John 2:3-5).

We must understand “he that loveth not knoweth not God” (1 John 4:8) in this light. Certainly many unsaved people love their families and even sacrifice for them. And no doubt many of these same people have some kind of intellectual understanding of God. What, then, do they lack? They lack a *personal experience* of God. To paraphrase 1 John 4:8, “The person who does not have this divine kind of love has never entered into a personal, experiential knowledge of God. What he knows is in his head, but it has never gotten into his heart.”

What *God* is determines what we ought to be. “As He is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17). The fact that Christians love one another is evidence of their fellowship with God and their sonship from God, and it is also evidence that they *know God*. Their experience with God is not simply a once-for-all crisis; it is a daily experience of getting to know Him better and better. True theology (the study of God) is not a dry, impractical course in doctrine—it is an exciting day-by-day experience that makes us Christlike!

A large quantity of radioactive material was stolen from a hospital. When the hospital administrator notified the police, he said: “Please warn the thief that he is carrying death with him, and that the radioactive material cannot be successfully hidden. As long as he has it in his possession, it is affecting him disastrously!”

A person who claims he knows God and is in union with Him must be personally affected by this relationship. A Christian ought to become what God is, and “God is love.” To argue otherwise is to prove that one does not really know God!

Note two things.

1. God is love; His very nature is love (1 John 4:7). Therefore, if a person loves God, he becomes a loving person; he takes on the very nature of God. If a person really loves God, then he does what God does: he loves everyone. Note exactly what the verse says. When we love one another, people see two things:

□ People see that we are born of God. They see that we have the nature of God, that God has put His divine nature into us. How do they see God’s nature in us? By our love. They see us doing the very same thing that God does—loving people. They see us loving everyone: the rich and poor, healthy and suffering, deserving and undeserving, acceptable and unacceptable, good and bad. They see us loving everyone, no matter who they are.

People see that we know God. They see that we have been talking to God and learning about God; that we are doing what God says, carrying out His instructions. They see that we know God, fellowship and commune with Him; that we are living godly lives, and that we are actually taking on the very nature of God. How do they see all this? By our love. They see that we are loving and caring just as God is loving and caring.

2. But note a significant fact: the person who does not love others reveals something as well: he does not know God (1 John 4:8). Who is this person? Who is it that does not know God? The person who...

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> lives selfishly | <input type="checkbox"/> steals |
| <input type="checkbox"/> hoards and banks | <input type="checkbox"/> neglects others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> discriminates | <input type="checkbox"/> abuses |
| <input type="checkbox"/> is prejudiced | <input type="checkbox"/> criticizes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> elevates himself | <input type="checkbox"/> backbites |
| <input type="checkbox"/> gossips | <input type="checkbox"/> hates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> curses | <input type="checkbox"/> murders |
| <input type="checkbox"/> gets angry | |

This person does not know God. God is love and this person is not loving. He is not living like God lives; he is not demonstrating love for other people, not showing concern and care and not helping and ministering to people's needs. He is not blessing other people; he is causing hurt and pain and destroying them. And this is not God's nature; God is love. God blesses people; He does not hurt and destroy them.

(4:9-11) **God, Love of—Jesus Christ, Death—Propitiation**: loving one another proves that we see God's love.

Because God is love, He must communicate—not only in words but in deeds. True love is never static or inactive. God reveals His love to mankind in many ways. He has geared all of creation to meeting men's needs. Until man's sin brought creation under bondage, man had on earth a perfect home in which to love and serve God.

God's love was revealed in the way He dealt with the nation of Israel. "The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people. But because the Lord loved you . . . hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand" (Deut. 7:7-8).

The greatest expression of God's love is in the death of His Son. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8, NASB).

The word *manifested* means "to come out in the open, to be made public." It is the opposite of "to hide, to make secret." Under the Old Covenant, God was hidden behind the shadows of ritual and ceremony (Heb. 10:1); but in Jesus Christ "the life was manifested" (1 John 1:2). "He that hath seen Me," said Jesus, "hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Why was Jesus Christ manifested? "And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins" (1 John 3:5). "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). Where did Jesus take away our sins and destroy (render inoperative) the works of the devil? *At the cross!* God manifested His love at the cross when He gave His Son as a sacrifice there for our sins.

This is the only place in the epistle where Jesus is called God's only-begotten Son. The title is used in John's Gospel (John 1:14). It means "unique, the only one of its kind." The fact that God *sent* His Son into the world is one evidence of the deity of Jesus Christ. Babies are not *sent* into the world from some other place; they are *born* into the world. As the perfect Man, Jesus was born into the world, but as the eternal Son, He was sent into the world.

But the sending of Christ into the world, and His death on the cross, were not prompted by man's love for God. They were prompted by His love for man. The world's attitude toward God is anything but love!

Two purposes are given for Christ's death on the cross: that we might live through Him (1 John 4:9) and that He might be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10). His death was not an accident; it was an appointment. He did not die as a weak martyr, but as a mighty conqueror.

Jesus Christ died that we might live “through Him” (1 John 4:9), “for Him” (2 Cor. 5:15), and “with Him” (1 Thes. 5:9-10). A sinner’s desperate need is for *life*, because he is “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). It is something of a paradox that Christ had to die so that we may live! We can never probe the mystery of His death, but this we know: He died for us (Gal. 2:20).

The death of Christ is described as a “propitiation.” John has used this word before (1 John 2:2), so there is no need to study it in detail again. We should remember that propitiation does not mean that men must do something to appease God or to placate His anger. Propitiation is something God does to make it possible for men to be forgiven. “God is light,” and therefore He must uphold His holy Law. “God is love,” and therefore He wants to forgive and save sinners. How can God forgive sinners and still be consistent with His holy nature? The answer is the cross. There Jesus Christ bore the punishment for sin and met the just demands of the holy Law. But there, also, God reveals His love and makes it possible for men to be saved by faith.

It is important to note that the emphasis is on the *death* of Christ, not on His birth. The fact that Jesus was “made flesh” (John 1:14) is certainly an evidence of God’s grace and love, but the fact that He was “made sin” (2 Cor. 5:21) is *underscored* for us. The example of Christ, the teachings of Christ, the whole earthly life of Christ, find their true meaning and fulfillment in the cross.

For the second time, believers are exhorted to “love one another” (1 John 4:11). This exhortation is a commandment to be obeyed (1 John 4:7), and its basis is the nature of God. “God is love; we know God; therefore, we should love one another.” But the exhortation to love one another is presented as a privilege as well as a responsibility: “If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 John 4:11). We are not saved by *loving* Christ; we are saved by *believing on* Christ (John 3:16). But after we realize what He did for us on the cross, our normal response ought to be to love Him and to love one another.

It is important that Christians progress in their understanding of love. To love one another simply out of a sense of duty is good, but to love out of appreciation (rather than obligation) is even better.

This may be one reason why Jesus established the Lord’s Supper, the Communion service. When we break the bread and share the cup, we remember His death. Few men, if any, want their deaths remembered! In fact, we remember *the life* of a loved one and try to forget the sadness of his death. Not so with Christ. He *commands* us to remember His death: “This do in remembrance of Me!”

We should remember our Lord’s death in a spiritual way, not merely sentimentally. Someone has defined sentiment as “feeling without responsibility.” It is easy to experience solemn emotions at a church service and yet go out to live the same defeated life. True spiritual experience involves the whole man. *The mind* must understand spiritual truth; *the heart* must love and appreciate it; and *the will* must *act on it*. The deeper we go into the meaning of the Cross, the greater will be our love for Christ and the greater our active concern for one another.

We have discovered what God is and what God has done; but a third foundation fact takes us even deeper into the meaning and implications of Christian love.

1. Note God’s love (1 John 4:9). In fact this is the very way that we know that God is love. If someone asks, “How do we know that God is love? The world is full of so much evil and bad, how can we be sure God loves us?” Note the Scripture: this is the way God revealed that He loves us. “God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.” The world is full of evil and bad.

But this is the glorious love of God. God still loves man and still wants to help and to take care of man. Man has the most serious problem imaginable: not only is he engulfed with all the evil of the world, but he dies and ceases to be on this earth. He lives at most for just a few short years and then he is gone forever from the earth. But as stated, God is love and He has proven His love. He has sent His only Son into the world so that man might live through Him.

2. Note how we know the love of God: by salvation. We know that God loves us because God saves man. How can we live through Christ? How does God give us life through Christ? By sending Christ to be the propitiation for our sins.

3. The conclusion is compelling: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11). If God loved us when we opposed and did things against Him, when we disobeyed and ignored Him, then there is no person we should not love. If God went to such great lengths to give His very own Son to die for us, then we should go to the same length to love one another.

No matter who the person is, God loves him and has shown in the most supreme way possible that He loves him. Therefore, we are to love that person and demonstrate our love for him. We are to sacrifice ourselves and try to bring life to him. This we do by loving him, by showing him there is a better way, the way of love.

Before we leave this passage we must note that it has also great things to say about Jesus Christ.

(i) It tells us that Jesus is *the bringer of life*. God sent him that through him we might have life (verse 9). There is a world of difference between existence and life. All men have existence but all do not have life. The very eagerness with which men seek pleasure shows that there is something missing in their lives. A famous doctor once said that men would find a cure for cancer more quickly than they would find a cure for boredom. Jesus gives a man an object for which to live; he gives him strength by which to live; and he gives him peace in which to live. Living with Christ turns mere existence into fullness of life.

(ii) It tells us that Jesus is *the restorer of the lost relationship with God*. God sent him to be the atoning sacrifice for sin (verse 10). We do not move in a world of thought in which animal sacrifice is a reality. But we can fully understand what sacrifice meant. When a man sinned, his relationship with God was broken; and sacrifice was an expression of penitence, designed to restore the lost relationship. Jesus, by his life and death, made it possible for man to enter into a new relationship of peace and friendship with God. He bridged the awful gulf between man and God.

(iii) It tells us that Jesus is *the Saviour of the world* (verse 14). When he came into the world, men were conscious of nothing so much as their own weakness and helplessness. Men, said Seneca, were looking *ad salutem*, for salvation. They were desperately conscious of "their weakness in necessary things." They wanted "a hand let down to lift them up." It would be quite inadequate to think of salvation as mere deliverance from the punishment of hell. Men need to be saved from themselves; they need to be saved from the habits which have become their fetters; they need to be saved from their temptations; they need to be saved from their fears and their anxieties; they need to be saved from their follies and mistakes. In every case Jesus offers men salvation; he brings that which enables them to face time and to meet eternity.

(iv) It tells us that Jesus is *the Son of God* (verse 15). Whatever that may mean, it certainly means that Jesus Christ is in a relationship to God in which no other person ever stood or ever will stand. He alone can show men what God is like; he alone can bring to men God's grace, love, forgiveness and strength.

One other thing emerges in this passage. It has taught us of God and it has taught us of Jesus; and it teaches us of the Spirit. In verse 13 John says it is because we have a share of the Spirit that we know that we dwell in God. It is the work of the Spirit that in the beginning makes us seek God at all; it is the work of the Spirit that makes us aware of God's presence; and it is the work of the Spirit that gives us the certainty that we are truly at peace with God. It is the Spirit in our hearts which makes us dare to address God as Father (*Romans* 8:15, 16).

The Spirit is the inner witness who, as C. H. Dodd puts it, gives us the "immediate, spontaneous, unanalysable awareness of a divine presence in our lives."

"And his that gentle voice we hear, Soft as the breath of even,
That checks each fault, that calms each fear, And speaks of heaven.
And every virtue we possess, And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness, Are his alone."

(4:12-13) **Love—Holy Spirit—Indwelling Presence**: loving one another proves that God's Spirit is within us.

At this point it would be good for us to review what John has been saying about the basic truth that "God is love."

This truth is revealed to us in the Word, but it was also revealed on the cross, where Christ died for us. "God is love" is not simply a doctrine in the Bible; it is an eternal fact clearly demonstrated at Calvary. God has said something *to us*, and God has done something *for us*.

But all this is preparation for the third great fact: God does something *in us!* We are not merely students reading a book, or spectators watching a deeply moving event. We are *participants* in the great drama of God's love!

In order to save money, a college drama class purchased only a few scripts of a play and cut them up into the separate parts. The director gave each player his individual part in order and then started to rehearse the play. But nothing went right. After an hour of missed cues and mangled sequences, the cast gave up.

At that point, the director sat the actors all on the stage and said: "Look, I'm going to read the entire play to you, so don't any of you say a word." He read the entire script aloud, and when he was finished, one of the actors said: "So that's what it was all about!" And when they understood the entire story, they were able to fit their parts together and have a successful rehearsal. When you read 1 John 4:12-16, you feel like saying, "So that's what it's all about!" Because here we discover what God had in mind when He devised His great plan of salvation.

To begin with, God's desire is to *live in us*. He is not satisfied simply to *tell* us that He loves us, or even *show* us that He loves us.

It is interesting to trace God's dwelling places as recorded in the Bible. In the beginning, God had fellowship with man in a personal, direct way (Gen. 3:8), but sin broke that fellowship. It was necessary for God to shed the blood of animals to cover the sins of Adam and Eve so that they might come back into His fellowship.

One of the key words in the Book of Genesis is *walked*. God walked with men, and men walked with God. Enoch (Gen. 5:22), Noah (Gen. 6:9), and Abraham walked with God (Gen. 17:1; 24:40).

But by the time of the events recorded in Exodus, a change had taken place: God did not simply *walk* with men, He *lived*, or dwelt, with them. God's commandment to Israel was, "And let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8). The first of those sanctuaries was the tabernacle. When Moses dedicated it, the glory of God came down and moved into the tent (Ex. 40:33-35).

God dwelt in the camp, but He did *not* dwell in the bodies of the individual Israelites.

Unfortunately, the nation sinned and God's glory departed (1 Sam. 4:21). But God used Samuel and David to restore the nation; and Solomon built God a magnificent temple. When the temple was dedicated, once again the glory of God came to dwell in the land (1 Kings 8:1-11).

But history repeated itself, and Israel disobeyed God and was taken into Captivity. The gorgeous temple was destroyed. One of the prophets of the Captivity, Ezekiel, saw the glory of God depart from it (Ezek. 8:4; 9:3; 10:4; 11:22-23).

Did the glory ever return? Yes—in the Person of God's Son, Jesus Christ! "And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us, and we beheld His glory" (John 1:14, lit.). The glory of God dwelt on earth in the body of Jesus Christ, for His body was the temple of God (John 2:18-22). But wicked men nailed His body to a cross. They crucified "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8). All this was part of God's thrilling plan, and Christ arose from the dead, returned to heaven, and sent His Holy Spirit *to dwell in men*.

The glory of God now lives in the bodies of God's children. "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" (6:19, NASB) The glory of God departed from the tabernacle and the temple when Israel disobeyed God, but Jesus has promised that the Spirit will abide in us *forever* (John 14:16).

With this background, we can better understand what 1 John 4:12-16 is saying to us. God is invisible (1 Tim. 1:17), and no man can see Him in His essence. Jesus is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15). By taking on Himself a human body, Jesus was able to reveal God to us. But Jesus is no longer here on earth. How, then, does God reveal Himself to the world?

He reveals Himself through the lives of His children. Men cannot see God, *but they can see us*. If we abide in Christ, we will love one another, and our love for one another will reveal God's love to a needy world. God's love will be experienced *in us* and then will be expressed *through us*.

That important little word *abide* (or *dwell*, KJV) is used six times in 1 John 4:12-16. It refers to our personal fellowship with Jesus Christ. To abide in Christ means to remain in spiritual oneness with Him, so that no sin comes between us. Because we are “born of God,” we have *union* with Christ; but it is only as we trust Him and obey His commandments that we have *communion* with Him. Much as a faithful husband and wife “abide in love” though they may be separated by miles, so a believer abides in God’s love. This abiding is made possible by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:13).

Imagine the wonder and the privilege of having God abide in you! The Old Testament Israelite would look with wonder at the tabernacle or temple, because the presence of God was in that building. No man would dare to enter the holy of holies, where God was enthroned in glory! But *we* have God’s Spirit *living in us!* We abide in this love, and we experience the abiding of God in us. “If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him” (John 14:23).

God’s love is *proclaimed* in the Word (“God is love”) and *proved* at the cross. But here we have something deeper: God’s love is *perfected* in the believer. Fantastic as it may seem, God’s love is not made perfect in angels, but in sinners saved by His grace. We Christians are now the tabernacles and temples in which God dwells. He reveals His love through us.

The life of a Christian who abides in God’s love is a potent witness for God in the world. Men cannot see God, but they can see His love moving us to deeds of helpfulness and kindness.

Three different witnesses are suggested in these verses: 1. The witness *of* the believer that Jesus Christ is God’s Son (1 John 4:15); 2. the witness *in* the believer by the Spirit (1 John 4:13); and 3. the witness *through* the believer that God is love and that He sent His Son to die for the world (1 John 4:14).

These witnesses cannot be separated. The world will not believe that God loves sinners until they see His love at work in His children’s lives.

Jesus did not simply preach the love of God; He proved it by giving His life on the cross. He expects His followers to do likewise. If we abide in Christ, we will abide in His love. If we abide in His love, we must share this love with others. Whenever we share this love, it is proof in our own hearts that we are abiding in Christ. In other words, there is no separation between a Christian’s inner life and his outer life.

Abiding in God’s love produces two wonderful spiritual benefits in the life of a believer: 1. He grows in knowledge, and 2. He grows in faith (1 John 4:16). The more we love God, the more we understand the love of God. And the more we understand His love, the easier it is for us to trust Him. After all, when you know someone intimately and love him sincerely, you have no problem putting your confidence in him.

A man standing in the greeting card section of a store was having trouble picking out a card. The clerk asked if she could help, and he said: “Well, it’s our fortieth wedding anniversary, but I can’t find a card that says what I want to say. You know, forty years ago it wouldn’t have been any problem picking out a card, because back then I thought I knew what love was. But we love each other so much more today, I just can’t find a card that says it!”

This is a growing Christian’s experience with God. As he abides in Christ and spends time in fellowship with Him, he comes to love God more and more. He also grows in his love for other Christians, for the lost, and even for his enemies. As he shares the Father’s love with others, he experiences more of the Father’s love himself. He understands the Father’s love better and better.

“God is love,” then, is not simply a profound biblical statement. It is the basis for a believer’s relationship with God and with his fellowman. Because God is love, *we* can love. His love is not past history; it is present reality. “Love one another” begins as *a commandment* (1 John 4:7), then it becomes *a privilege* (1 John 4:11). But it is more than a commandment or a privilege. It is also the thrilling *consequence* and evidence of our abiding in Christ (1 John 4:12). Loving one another is not something we simply *ought* to do; it is something we *want* to do.

Some practical applications grow out of this basic truth:

First, the better we know God’s love, the easier it will be to live as a Christian. Bible knowledge alone does not take the place of personal experience of God’s love. In fact, it can be a dangerous substitute if we are not careful.

Helen came home from a youth retreat greatly enthused over what she had learned. “We had some terrific sessions on how to have personal devotions,” she told her sister Joyce. “I plan to have my devotions every single day.” A week later, while Joyce was running the vacuum cleaner, she heard Helen screaming, “Do you have to make all that noise? Don’t you know I’m trying to have my devotions?” And the verbal explosion was followed by the slamming of a door.

Helen still had to learn that personal devotions are not an end in themselves. If they do not help us love God and love one another, they are accomplishing little. The Bible is a revelation of God’s love; and the better we understand His love, the easier it should be for us to obey Him and love others.

A second consideration is that unless we *love* the lost, our verbal witness to them will be useless. The Gospel message is a message of love. This love was both declared and demonstrated by Jesus Christ. The only way we can effectively win others is to declare the Gospel and demonstrate it in how we live. Too much “witnessing” today is a mere mouthing of words. People need an expression of love.

One reason why God permits the world to hate Christians is so that Christians may return love for the world’s hatred. “Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. . . . But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:11, 44, NASB).

In this paragraph of his letter, John has taken us to the very foundation of Christian love. But he still has more to teach us. In the next section, he deals with our own personal love for God and how God perfects that love in us.

These two aspects of Christian love cannot be separated from one another: if we love God, we will love one another; and if we love one another, we will grow in our love for God.

And both statements are true because “God is love.”

1. God is not known by sight (1 John 4:12). No person has ever seen God face to face. No person has ever penetrated the spiritual world and crossed over into heaven and seen God. No matter what some claim, Scripture is clear—no person has ever seen God. Even Jesus Christ Himself declared the same fact:

“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18).

2. How then can we know God (1 John 4:12)? God is known only by love, only by His Spirit who dwells within believers. When a person believes in the love of God, that God loves us so much that He gave His Son to die for our sins, it pleases God supremely. God is perfectly pleased, for God loves His Son with a perfect love. Therefore, when a person honors God’s Son by believing in Christ, God takes that person and puts His Spirit into the person. God actually implants His divine nature, the Holy Spirit, into the life of the believer. He does this so that His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, will have many followers, followers who will honor Christ by living and loving just as He lived and loved.

Simply stated, we know God by love. If we love God, then we accept what God has done for us in Christ. When we accept Christ through our baptism for remission of sins, God puts His Spirit in us. It is that simple. We simply know God by loving Him, loving Him for all that He has done for us in Christ. And when we love Him and love His Son, God just floods our being with His precious Holy Spirit.

Now note what happens when God begins to dwell within us (1 John 4:12). We love one another and God’s love becomes perfected, that is, complete and fulfilled in us. We just grow and grow in love. We mature more and more, ever completing and perfecting the love of God upon earth.

3. Note one other thing: How do we know that we dwell in God and He in us (1 John 4:13)? By the Holy Spirit whom He has given to us. If we have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, He bears witness with our spirit. It is impossible for God to be living within the body and life of a person and the person not know it. It is the Spirit of God who tells us that we have been saved and are in God and God in us.

If a person does not have the witness of God’s Spirit within him, he needs to evaluate his conversion. The likelihood is that he has never been saved. Even if he is temporarily in a backslidden state, the Holy Spirit is convicting and bugging him to repent and turn back to God.

(4:14-16) **Testimony—Confession—Love**: loving one another proves that our testimony and confession are true. This is the great testimony of John. But note how it is the testimony of every genuine believer as well.

1. There is John's declaration: that he and the early believers had seen and do testify that the Father sent His Son to be the Savior of the world.

2. There is the great promise to the whole human race: "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him and he in God"

3. There is the great testimony and confession of John himself and the early believers: "we have known and believed the love that God has to us" (1 John 4:16). What is it that they knew and believed? Three things, and all three are critical. Note them closely.

a. "God is love." God has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. This is the way we know that God is love.

b. Believers must love. They must *dwell in love* ; that is, they must live in love, love one another with all their hearts.

c. Loving one another is the way we can tell that we are saved. If we dwell in love, then we dwell in God and God in us. The way we know that we dwell in God and God in us is by our love. If we love one another, then we are demonstrating the nature of God. If we are *not loving* one another, then we are demonstrating that we *do not have* the nature of God. Loving one another shows whether or not God is in us.

God is love; therefore, if we have the nature of God, we are loving people—all people—just as God loves them.

God is love, therefore, if we are *not loving* people, we *do not have* the nature of God. We *are not saved* no matter what we claim. The proof that we are saved, that we have the nature of God, is loving others.

(4:17) **Assurance—Judgment—Boldness—Love**: loving one another proves that God is going to deliver us from judgment.

The prospective bridegroom was extremely nervous as he and his fiancée were discussing their wedding plans with their minister. "I'd like to see a copy of the wedding vows," the young man said; and the minister handed him the service. He read it carefully, handed it back, and said, "That won't do! There's nothing written in there about her obeying me!" His fiancée smiled, took his hand, and said, "Honey, the word *obey* doesn't have to be written in a book. It's already written in love in my heart."

This is the truth in view in this portion of 1 John. Up to this point, the emphasis has been on Christians loving *one another* ; but now we turn to a deeper—and more important—topic: a believer's love *for the Father* . We cannot love our neighbor or our brother unless we love our Heavenly Father. We must first love God with all our hearts; then we can love our neighbor as ourselves.

The key word in this section is *perfect* . God wants to perfect in us His love for us and our love for Him. The word *perfect* carries the idea of *maturity* and *completeness* . A believer is not only to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:18), but he is also to grow in his love for the Father. He does this in response to the Father's love for him.

How much does God love us? Enough to send His Son to die for us (John 3:16). He loves His children in the same way as *He loves Christ* (John 17:23). And Jesus tells us that the Father wants the love with which He loved the Son to be in His children (John 17:26).

In other words, the Christian life is to be a daily experience of growing in the love of God. It involves a Christian's coming to know his Heavenly Father in a much deeper way as he grows in love.

It is easy to fragment the Christian life and become preoccupied with individual pieces instead of the total picture. One group may emphasize "holiness" and urge its members to get victory over sin. Another may stress witnessing, or "separation from the world." But each of these emphases is really a by-product of something else: a believer's growing love for the Father. Mature Christian love is the great universal need among God's people.

Two brand-new words come into John's vocabulary here: *fear* and *torment* . And this is written to *believers!* Is it possible that Christians can actually live in fear and torment? Yes, unfortunately, many professed believers experience both fear and torment day after day. And the reason is that they are not growing in the love of God.

The word *boldness* can mean “confidence” or “freedom of speech.” It does not mean brazenness or brashness. A believer who experiences perfecting love grows in his confidence toward God. He has a reverential fear of God, not a tormenting fear. He is a son who respects his Father, not a prisoner who cringes before a judge.

We have adopted the Greek word for *fear* into our English vocabulary: *phobia*. All sorts of phobias are listed in psychology books; for instance, *acrophobia*—“fear of heights,” and *hydrophobia*—“fear of water.” John is writing about *krisisphobia*—“fear of judgment.” John has already mentioned this solemn truth in 1 John 2:28; and now he deals with it again.

If people are afraid, it is because of something in the past that haunts them, or something in the present that upsets them, or something in the future that they feel threatens them. Or it may be a combination of all three. A believer in Jesus Christ does not have to fear the past, present, or future, for he has experienced the love of God and this love is being perfected in him day by day.

“It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). But a Christian does not fear future judgment, because Christ has suffered his judgment for him on the cross. “Truly, truly I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24, NASB). “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1, NASB). For a Christian, judgment is not future; *it is past*. His sins have been judged already at the cross, and they will never be brought against him again.

The secret of our boldness is, “As He is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17). We know that “we shall be like Him” when He returns (1 John 3:1-2), but that statement refers primarily to the glorified bodies believers will receive (Phil. 3:20-21). *Positionally*, we are right now “as He is.” We are so closely identified with Christ, as members of His body, that our position in this world is like His exalted position in heaven.

This means that the Father deals with us as He deals with His own beloved Son. How, then, can we ever be afraid?

We do not have to be afraid of *the future*, because our sins were judged in Christ when He died on the cross. The Father cannot judge our sins again without judging His Son, for “as He is, so are we in this world.”

We do not have to be afraid of *the past*, because “He first loved us.” From the very first, our relationship to God was one of love. It was not that we loved Him, but that He loved us (cf. 1 John 4:10). “For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:10, NASB). If God loved us when we were outside the family, disobeying Him, how much more does He love us now that we are His children!

We do not need to fear *the present* because “perfect love casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18). As we grow in the love of God, we cease to be fearful of what He will do.

Of course there is a proper “fear of God,” but it is not the kind of fear that produces torment. “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons, by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Rom. 8:15, NASB) “For God hath not given us a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7).

Fear is actually the beginning of torment. We torment ourselves as we contemplate what lies ahead. Many people suffer acutely when they contemplate a visit to the dentist. Think of how an unsaved person must suffer as he contemplates the day of judgment. But since a Christian has boldness in the day of judgment, he can have boldness as he faces life today, for there is no situation of life today that begins to compare with the terrible severity of the day of judgment.

God wants His children to live in an atmosphere of love and confidence, not fear and torment. We need not fear life or death, for we are being perfected in the love of God. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things

present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35, 37-39, NASB).

Imagine! Nothing *in all creation*—present or future—can come between us and God's love!

The perfecting of God's love in our lives is usually a matter of several stages. When we were lost, we lived in fear and knew nothing of God's love. After we trusted Christ, we found a perplexing mixture of both fear and love in our hearts. But as we grew in fellowship with the Father, gradually the fear vanished and our hearts were controlled by His love alone. An immature Christian is tossed between fear and love; a mature Christian rests in God's love.

A growing confidence in the presence of God is one of the first evidences that our love for God is maturing. But confidence never stands alone; it always leads to other moral results.

Judgment is coming—a day of universal judgment when all persons will be brought before the great Judge Himself, even the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the clear declaration of Scripture:

"But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36).

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matthew 16:27).

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:31-32).

But note the most wonderful thing: we can be delivered from judgment. We can face the great day of judgment boldly without dread and fear. How? By living a life of love, by loving one another perfectly. In fact, the fruit of love is having boldness in the day of judgment. If we love perfectly—if we allow our love to be complete and fulfilled—if we allow love to *live itself out* through us—then we will have boldness in the day of judgment. God will give us assurance that we shall not be judged, but on the contrary, we shall be rewarded.

How, then, is it possible to perfect our love while on earth? By living in the world just as Jesus lived. Even as He was in the world, so we are to be in the world. That is, Jesus Christ loved when He was in the world; He walked in love. Therefore, we are to love one another while in the world. We are to bear witness and proclaim the love of God and love one another just as Christ did. This is to be the consuming passion of our lives. The more we love, the more we grow and become perfected in love; and the more we grow and become perfected in love, the more assurance and boldness we have about the future judgment. The more we love, the more assurance God gives us that we shall not be judged in that day.

Most people, even believers, are wrong in their ideas about the return of Christ. He is Judge as well as Savior. And believers are to be judged at the judgment seat of Christ. Some will be weeping even as others will be joyful. It all depends upon how we have lived, what we have done in our bodies and in our works for Him.

The only way to be assured of deliverance from judgment, of having boldness to stand with uplifted face, is to live a life of love—to love everyone more and more while on earth.

(4:18) **Fear—Fearlessness—Love**: loving one another proves that God delivers us from fear. This is an excellent verse on fear and how to conquer fear. Note the four things said.

1. There is no fear in love. If we really love someone, there is no need to fear him. In fact, we will not fear him. If we love the person, sacrificially give him our very best, then we have done all we can. Our lives and what we have done are in God's hands. We will rest assured that we can do no more. A peace, an assurance, will sweep over our soul. Note this, for it is the promise of God: when we really love someone, really give sacrificially all that we can, God will give us a peace and an assurance of soul that erases all fear. Our souls will know no fear, only peace and assurance of God's care. This is the promise of God even if some people react against us and persecute us and martyr us. God will give us such a deep sense of His presence—so deep that we will be flooded with peace and assurance. This is what Peter calls "the spirit of glory and of God" that rests upon the believer when he is reproached.

2. Perfect love casts out fear. This is critical to note, for only a love that is growing and growing will be blessed by God. A believer cannot love one person and hold feelings against another person. This is not love. True love is impartial. A person who really loves loves everyone. There is no such thing as a heart filled with love and hate. The two are incompatible. Therefore, the only believer who knows the peace and assurance of God is the believer who is being perfected in love, the believer who is growing and growing in love, fulfilling and completing his love.

3. Fear has torment; that is, it thinks about and expects punishment or suffering or loss. A person feels that something is going to happen to him. Such feelings, of course, cause all kinds of disturbance and problems for people, all to varying degrees.

People fear all kinds of things:

- suffering
- economic slump
- divorce
- the future
- loss of health
- God and His judgment
- loss of wealth
- loss of a loved one
- loss of a job
- heights, darkness, etc.

Fear causes anxiety, dread, alarm, fright, panic, and terror. It causes all kinds of unpleasant emotions, phobias, neurosis, and even the more serious psychotic disorders. The torment of fear is one of the worst problems faced by man.

4. Fear means that a person is not perfected in love.

The person is not fully grasping (perfected) the love and care of God for him (see note— 1 John 4:9-11 for more discussion).

The person is not loving other people like he should; he is not growing more and more in love. His eyes are upon himself, not upon God and others like they should be.

In summary, fear can be cast out only by the perfect love of God. The more we know of God's love and care and the more we love other people, the more fear is conquered in our lives. The reason is clearly seen in the promises of God. God loves us so much that He will take care of us through all the trials and temptations of life, no matter what they are.

There is no need to fear people, the evil that they can do to us; God will strengthen and deliver us even through death. *"At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever"* (2 Tim. 4:16-18).

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

"The lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" (Psalm 118:6).

There is no need to fear judgment. God delivers us from judgment. *"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"* (Romans 8:34-35).

There is no need to fear the dark or the enemies of the dark. God will take care of us. *"But thou, o lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. I cried unto the lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah. I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the lord sustained me"* (Psalm 3:3-5).

"Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day" (Psalm 91:5).

There is no need to fear not having food to eat or clothing.

"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:31-33).

(4:19-21) **Love:** loving one another proves that we love God. How do we know that we love God? There are three ways.

1. We know that we love God because we know God's love for us (1 John 4:19). He loves us and we have seen His love; therefore, we love Him.

2. We know that we love God because we do not hate our brother. If we love God, it is impossible to hold feelings against our brother. Why? Because God is love. If we have the nature of God in us, then we love our brothers. Note how strong this verse states the fact.

"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20).

We cannot see God, but we can see our brothers. It is far easier to love someone in this world whom we can see than it is to love someone whom we cannot see. Therefore, if we say that we love God and hate those whom we see, we are lying.

3. We know that we love God because we keep His commandment. What is His commandment? If we love God, we are to love our brothers also.

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35).

"He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep" (John 21:16).

In this passage there occurs what is probably the greatest single statement about God in the whole Bible, that *God is love*. It is amazing how many doors that single statement unlocks and how many questions it answers.

(i) It is the explanation of *creation*. Sometimes we are bound to wonder why God created this world. The disobedience, and the lack of response in men is a continual grief to him. Why should he create a world which was to bring him nothing but trouble? The answer is that creation was essential to his very nature. If God is love, he cannot exist in lonely isolation. Love must have someone to love and someone to love it.

(ii) It is the explanation of *free-will*. Unless love is a free response it is not love. Had God been only law he could have created a world in which men moved like automata, having no more choice than a machine. But, if God had made men like that, there would have been no possibility of a personal relationship between him and them. Love is of necessity the free response of the heart; and, therefore, God, by a deliberate act of self-limitation, had to endow men with free will.

(iii) It is the explanation of *providence*. Had God been simply mind and order and law, he might, so to speak, have created the universe, wound it up, set it going and left it. There are articles and machines which we are urged to buy because we can fit them and forget them; their most attractive quality is that they can be left to run themselves. But, because God is love, his creating act is followed by his constant care.

(iv) It is the explanation of *redemption*. If God had been only law and justice, he would simply have left men to the consequences of their sin. The moral law would operate; the soul that sinned would die; and the eternal justice would inexorably hand out its punishments. But the very fact that God is love meant that he had to seek and save that which was lost. He had to find a remedy for sin.

(v) It is the explanation of the *life beyond*. If God were simply creator, men might live their brief span and die for ever. The life which ended early would be only another flower which the frost of death had withered too soon. But the fact that God is love makes it certain that the chances and changes of life have not the last word and that his love will readjust the balance of this life.

Here it is for the seventh time: "If a man say. . . !"

We have met this important phrase several times, and each time we knew what was coming: a warning against pretending.

Fear and pretense usually go together. In fact, they were born together when the first man and woman sinned. No sooner did Adam and Eve sense their guilt than they tried to hide from God and cover their nakedness. But neither their coverings nor their excuses could shelter them from God's all-seeing eye. Adam finally had to admit, "I heard Thy voice in the Garden, and I was afraid" (Gen. 3:10).

But when our hearts are confident toward God, there is no need for us to pretend, either to God or to other people. A Christian who lacks confidence with God will also lack confidence with God's people. Part of the torment that fear generates is the constant worry, "How much do others really know about me?" But when we have confidence with God, this fear is gone and we can face both God and men without worry.

"How many members do you have in your church?" a visitor asked the minister. "Somewhere near a thousand," the minister replied. "That certainly is a lot of people to try to please!" the visitor exclaimed.

"Let me assure you, my friend, that I have never tried to please all my members, or even some of them," the minister said with a smile. "I aim to please *one* Person—the Lord Jesus Christ. If I am right with Him, then everything should be right between me and my people."

An immature Christian who is not growing in his love for God may think he has to impress others with his "spirituality." This mistake turns him into a liar! He is professing something that he is not really practicing; he is playing a role instead of living a life.

Perhaps the best example of this sin is seen in the experience of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). They sold a piece of property and brought *part* of the money to the Lord, but they gave the impression that they were bringing *all* the money. The sin of this couple was not in taking money from God, for Peter made it clear that the disposal of the money was up to them (Acts 5:4). Their sin was hypocrisy. They were trying to make people think they were more generous and spiritual than they really were.

Pretending is one of the favorite activities of little children, but it is certainly not a mark of maturity in adults. Adults must *know* themselves and *be* themselves, fulfilling the purposes for which Christ saved them. Their lives must be marked by honesty.

Spiritual honesty brings peace and power to the person who practices it. He does not have to keep a record of the lies he has told, and he is not using his energy to cover up. Because he lives in open honesty with the Father, he can live in honesty with other people. Love and truth go together. Because he knows God loves him and accepts him (even with all his faults), he is not trying to impress others. He loves God, and therefore he loves his fellow Christians.

Jerry's grades were far below his usual performance and, on top of that, his health seemed to be failing. His new roommate was concerned about him and finally persuaded him to talk to the campus psychologist. "I can't figure myself out," Jerry admitted. "Last year I was sailing through school, and this year it is like fighting a war."

"You're not having trouble with your new roommate, are you?" the counselor asked. Jerry did not reply right away, and this gave the counselor a clue. "Jerry, are you concentrating on living your life as a good student, or on trying to impress your new roommate with your abilities?"

"Yeah, I guess that's it," Jerry answered with a sigh of relief. "I've worn myself out acting and haven't had enough energy left for living."

Confidence toward God and honesty with others are two marks of maturity that are bound to show up when our love for God is being perfected.

Chapter Five – The Proof That One Really Believes in God: Four Tests

Test 1: Being Born Again, 5:1-5

1 John 5:1-5: "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. {2} This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. {3} This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, {4} for everyone born of God

overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. {5} Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

(5:1-5) Introduction: As John wrote this passage, there were two things in the background of his mind:

(i) There was the great fact which was the basis of all his thinking, the fact that love of God and love of man are inseparable parts of the same experience. In answer to the questioning scribe Jesus had said that there were two great commandments. The first laid it down that we must love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength; and the second laid it down that we must love our neighbour as ourselves. Than these commandments there are none greater (*Mark 12:28-31*). John had in mind this word of his Lord.

(ii) But he also had in mind a natural law of human life. Family love is a part of nature. The child naturally loves his parents; and he just as naturally loves his brothers and sisters. The second part of verse 1 literally runs: "Everyone who loves him who begat, loves him who was begotten of him." Put much more simply that is: "If we love a father, we also love his child." John is thinking of the love which naturally binds a man to the father who begat him and to the other children whom the father has begotten.

John transfers this to the realm of Christian thought and experience. The Christian undergoes the experience of being reborn; the father is God; and the Christian is bound to love God for all that he has done for his soul. But birth is always into a family; and the Christian is reborn into the family of God. As it was for Jesus, so it is for him—those who do the will of God, as he himself does, become his mother, his sisters and his brothers (*Mark 3:35*). If, then, the Christian loves God the Father who begat him, he must also love the other children whom God has begotten. His love of God and his love of his Christian brothers and sisters must be parts of the same love, so closely interlocked that they can never be separated.

It has been put: "Man is not only born *to love*, he is also born *to be loved*." A. E. Brooke put it: "Everyone who has been born of God must love those who have been similarly ennobled."

Long before this the Psalmist had said that, "God gives the desolate a home to dwell in" (*Psalms 68:6*). The Christian by virtue of his rebirth is set within the family of God and as he loves the Father, so must he also love the children who are of the same family as he is.

Practically every person claims that he believes in God. Few people claim to be atheistic or agnostic. Most people claim to believe in God and claim to have some idea in their minds about what God is like. But note this: people's beliefs and ideas differ. Quickly think across the world at the different beliefs and ideas of God, the beliefs and ideas of the Muslims, the Buddhists, the Jews, the Hindus, the Christians and so on. In reality, there are just about as many ideas about God as there are people upon earth, for every person has his own mind, and within his mind his own idea of God.

This fact brings about a critical question: Who is right? Whose belief and idea of God is correct? One thing is sure: if God really exists, then it is of utmost importance that we be correct in what we believe and think about Him. For someday we shall all stand before Him and give an account to Him.

How can we tell if we believe in God, if our beliefs and concepts of God are accurate? How can we tell if we really believe in the *only living and true God*? This is the discussion of 1 John 5. There are four tests that will show us. The first test is basic: Have we been born of God? If we have been born of God, then we definitely believe in God. God would not have given His divine nature to a person who does not believe in Him. Therefore, if we have the divine nature of God, if we have been truly born again, then we believe in God, in the living and true God. But how can we tell if we have been born of God?

There are three proofs.

1. Proof 1: believing Jesus is the Christ (v.1).
2. Proof 2: obeying and keeping God's commandments (v.2-3).
3. Proof 3: conquering the world (v.4-5).

(5:1) **New Birth—Belief**: the first proof of the new birth is this: believing that Jesus is the *Christ*. The word *Christ* means *Messiah* or *Anointed One*. Jesus Christ is the Son of God anointed to be the Savior of the world. He was anointed by God for a very special mission, the mission of coming to earth to save man and to give man eternal life. The person who

believes that Jesus is the *Anointed One* of God, that He was sent into the world to save man, that person is given a new birth by God.

He is "born of God."

"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him" (1 John 5:1).

He is "born again."

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3-5).

He is made into "a new creature."

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

He is made into "a new man."

"And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephes. 4:24).

"And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:10).

Note two significant facts.

1. A person who is "born of God" loves God. He cannot help loving God, for God does this most wonderful thing for him. God recreates him into a new creature who will live forever in God's presence. When we really think about what God has done for us in Christ, that God sacrificed His Son to save us, our hearts just flood with love for God.

We should often get alone and meditate on the great love of God. The very thought that God sacrificed His Son to bear our sins is enough to break us in humble adoration. But we must take time to get alone and study the Scriptures that cover God's love and sacrifice. We must take time to meditate upon the great truth in order to see and understand it in all its depth and meaning.

2. A person who loves God will love other believers as well. Note why: because God has given other believers a spiritual birth as well. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ. They too have been born of God and made into new creatures. We are all of the family of God; God is our Father who has given birth to us all. Therefore, we are brothers and sisters of one another.

We share...

the same God

the same Father

the same rebirth

the same divine nature

the same adoption

The point is that we love one another. If we have truly been "born of God" and love God, then we love the whole family of God. We love all those who have been *born of God*; we love all our brothers and sisters in Christ.

True believers love one another. There are no believers who do not love their brothers and sisters in Christ. How can we say this? Because a true believer has the nature of God, and God is love. If a person has the nature of God (been born of God), then he loves: he loves the family of God.

Differences do not matter, differences of...

opinion

class

color

neighborhood

position

denomination

race

social status

Nothing keeps us from loving one another if we have truly been born of God. The person who is born of God loves God, and he loves all those who love God. He loves his brothers and sisters in the Lord.

(5:2-3) **Commandments—Love:** the second proof of the new birth is obedience. John reverts to an idea which is never far from the surface of his mind. *Obedience is the only proof of love.* We cannot prove our love to anyone other than by seeking to please him and bring him joy. Then John quite suddenly says a most surprising thing. God's commandments, he says, are not heavy. We must note two general things here.

He certainly does not mean that obedience to God's commandments is easy to achieve. Christian love is no easy matter. It is never an easy thing to love people whom we do not like or people who hurt our feelings or injure us. It is never an easy thing to solve the problem of living together; and when it becomes the problem of living together on the Christian standard of life, it is a task of immense difficulty.

Further, there is in this saying an implied contrast. Jesus spoke of the Scribes and Pharisees as "binding heavy burdens and hard to bear, and laying them on men's shoulders" (*Matthew 23:4*). The Scribal and Pharisaic mass of rules and regulations could be an intolerable burden on the shoulders of any man. There is no doubt that John is remembering that Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (*Matthew 11:30*).

How then is this to be explained? How can it be said that the tremendous demands of Jesus are not a heavy burden?

There are three answers to that question.

(i) It is the way of God never to lay a commandment on any man without also giving him the strength to carry it out. With the vision comes the power; with the need for it comes the strength. God does not give us his commandments and then go away and leave us to ourselves. He is there by our side to enable us to carry out what he has commanded. What is impossible for us becomes possible with God.

(ii) But there is another great truth here. Our response to God must be the response of love; and for love no duty is too hard and no task too great. That which we would never do for a stranger we will willingly attempt for a loved one. What would be an impossible sacrifice, if a stranger demanded it, becomes a willing gift when love needs it.

There is an old story which is a kind of parable of this. Someone once met a lad going to school long before the days when transport was provided. The lad was carrying on his back a smaller boy who was clearly lame and unable to walk. The stranger said to the lad, "Do you carry him to school every day?" "Yes," said the boy. "That's a heavy burden for you to carry," said the stranger. "He's no' a burden," said the boy. "He's my brother."

Love turned the burden into no burden at all. It must be so with us and Christ. His commandments are not a burden but a privilege and an opportunity to show our love.

Difficult the commandments of Christ are, burdensome they are not; for Christ never laid a commandment on a man without giving him the strength to carry it; and every commandment laid upon us provides another chance to show our love.

The person who is born of God keeps God's commandments.

□ Do we really believe God? Yes, if we keep His commandments. No, if we do not keep His commandments. The person who *really believes* God, who *really casts himself* upon God and relies upon God, does what God says. He depends upon God's Word; he believes that God's Word works. Therefore, he obeys God.

□ Do we really love God (1 John 5:2)? Yes, if we keep His commandments. No, if we do not keep His commandments. If we really love God, really care for Him, then we want to please Him. We want to do what He says. Therefore, the person who really loves God is the person who keeps His commandments.

Now note what these two verses say:

1. Our obedience and love for God prove that we love the children of God. God commands us to love our brothers and sisters in Christ; therefore, if we obey God, we *must* love them. If we love God, then we obey Him and love one another.

A person has no choice; this is not an optional commandment. If a person is going to love God...

☐ he must obey God.

☐ he must obey by loving the other children of God—all of them no matter who they are.

2. Our obedience to God proves our love for God (1 John 5:3). In fact, this is the love of God, that we keep His commandment. Keeping God's commandment proves...

☐ that we *love* God

☐ that we *are loving* God

☐ that we *possess love* for God

☐ that we *lift up our hearts in love* to God

There is no other way to show God that we love Him except by doing what He says. Note: some people feel that God's commandments are grievous, a real burden. They feel that the commandments of Scripture restrict them too much, and keep a person from the pleasures and possessions of the world. They feel that to be a Christian disallows a person from having fun and enjoying life. To them the demands of God are just too large a price to pay, that demanding all one is and has is too much to ask of a person. But the exact opposite is true: Scripture declares that God's commandments are not grievous. They are not too large a burden for men to carry. How could this be, for there is no question: God demands the total allegiance of all one is and has.

☐ Jesus Christ gives rest to the soul. All the restlessness, disturbance, distress, pain, and suffering that man experiences in this world is replaced by peace when a person turns his life over to God and begins to love and obey God.

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

☐ Jesus Christ never allows a trial or temptation to come upon a person beyond what the person can bear. Christ always provides the strength or the way to escape.

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

☐ Jesus Christ gives a person the greatest hope in all the world; He gives us the greatest promises of reward. Therefore, when a person keeps his eyes upon the hope, the commandments of God become light and easy to bear.

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2-3).

"Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:12-13).

☐ God gives all true believers His Spirit, and the Spirit gives all the assurance, confidence, and security, and all the love, joy, and peace that one could ever need or want. The believer is filled with life and all the real and meaningful things of life. Therefore, the believer never thinks of God's commandments as being grievous. They are a joy to him, for they bring abundant life to him.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Cor. 2:12).

"If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:15-18).

☐ God gives the true believer fellowship with Himself and with Christ, then He floods the heart of the believer with joy.

"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11).

"And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full" (1 John 1:4).

Not simply *obedience*—but *joyful* obedience! "His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3, nasb). Everything in creation—except man—obeys the will of God. "Fire and hail, snow, and vapor, stormy wind fulfilling His Word" (Ps. 148:8). In the Book of Jonah, you see the winds and waves, and even the fish, obeying God's commands; but the prophet persisted in disobeying. Even a plant and a little worm did what God commanded. But the prophet stubbornly wanted his own way.

Disobedience to God's will is a tragedy—but so is reluctant, grudging obedience. God does not want us to disobey Him, but neither does He want us to obey out of fear or necessity. What Paul wrote about *giving* also applies to *living*: "not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7, nasb).

What is the secret of *joyful* obedience? It is to recognize that obedience is a family matter. We are serving a loving Father and helping our brothers and sisters in Christ. We have been born of God, we love God, and we love God's children. And we demonstrate this love by keeping God's commandments.

A woman visited a newspaper editor's office, hoping to sell him some poems she had written. "What are your poems about?" the editor asked. "They're about love!" gushed the poetess. The editor settled back in his chair and said, "Well, read me a poem. The world could certainly use a lot more love!" The poem she read was filled with *moons* and *Junes* and other sticky sentiments, and it was more than the editor could take.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but you just don't know what love is all about! It's not moonlight and roses. It's sitting up all night at a sickbed, or working extra hours so the kids can have new shoes. The world doesn't need your brand of poetical love. It needs some good old-fashioned *practical* love."

D.L. Moody often said, "Every Bible should be bound in shoe leather." We show our love to God, not by empty words but by willing works. We are not slaves obeying a master; we are children obeying a Father. And our sin is a family affair.

One of the tests of maturing love is our personal attitude toward the Bible, because in the Bible we find God's will for our lives revealed. An unsaved man considers the Bible an impossible book, mainly because he does not understand its spiritual message (1 Cor. 2:14). An immature Christian considers the demands of the Bible to be burdensome. He is somewhat like a little child who is learning to obey, and who asks, "*Why* do I have to do that?" or "Wouldn't it be better to do *this*?"

But a Christian who experiences God's perfecting love finds himself enjoying the Word of God and truly loving it. He does not read the Bible as a textbook, but as a love letter.

The longest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 119, and its theme is the Word of God. Every verse but two (Ps. 119:122, 132) mentions the Word of God in one form or another, as "law," "precepts," "commandments," etc. But the interesting thing is that the psalmist *loves* the Word of God and enjoys telling us about it! "O how love I Thy Law!" (Ps. 119:97) He rejoices in the Law (Ps. 119:14, 162) and delights in it (Ps. 119:16, 24). It is honey to his taste (Ps. 119:103). In fact, he turns God's Law into a song: "Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage" (Ps. 119:54).

Imagine turning *statutes* into *songs*. Suppose the local symphony presented a concert of the traffic code set to music! Most of us do not consider laws a source of joyful song, but this is the way the psalmist looked at God's Law. Because he loved the Lord, he loved His Law. God's commandments were not grievous and burdensome to him. Just as a loving son or daughter happily obeys his father's command, so a Christian with perfecting love joyfully obeys God's command.

At this point, we can review and understand the practical meaning of "maturing love" in our daily lives. As our love for the Father matures, we have confidence and are no longer afraid of His will. We also are honest toward others and lose our fear of being rejected. And we have a new attitude toward the Word of God: it is the expression of God's love, and we enjoy obeying it. Confidence toward God, honesty toward others, and joyful obedience are the marks of perfecting love and the ingredients that make up a happy Christian life.

We can see too how sin ruins all this. When we disobey God we lose our confidence toward Him. If we do not immediately confess our sin and claim His forgiveness (1 John 1:9), we must start pretending in order to cover up. Disobedience leads to dishonesty, and both turn our hearts away from the Word of God. Instead of reading the Word with joy to discover the Father's will, we ignore the Word or perhaps read it in a routine way.

The burden of religion (man trying to please God in his own strength) is a grievous one (cf. Matt. 23:4); but the yoke that Christ puts on us is not burdensome at all (Matt. 11:28-30). Love lightens burdens. Jacob had to work for seven years to win the woman he loved, but the Bible tells us that "they seemed unto him a few days, for the love he had to her" (Gen. 29:20). Perfecting love produces joyful obedience.

(5:4-5) **Faith—New Birth—Victory—World**: the third proof of the new birth is this—we are overcoming the world. These two verses are two of the great verses of Scripture, verses that should be memorized and lived by every believer. Note that the same point is being made in every statement; the very same thing is being said three times. What emphasis! The point is to be understood and followed.

□ The person who is *born of God* overcomes the world.

□ The victory that overcomes the world is our *faith*.

□ The person who overcomes the world is the person who *believes* that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Who is it that is *born of God*? It is the person who *believes* that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The world is overcome by faith. Victory is gained over the world by faith in Jesus Christ, by believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

We have seen that the commandments of Jesus Christ are not grievous because with the commandment there comes the power and because we accept them in love. But there is another great truth. There is something in the Christian which makes him able to conquer the world. The *kosmos* is the world apart from God and in opposition to him. That which enables us to conquer the *kosmos* is *faith*.

John defines this conquering faith as the belief that Jesus is the Son of God. It is belief in the Incarnation. Why should that be so victory-giving? If we believe in the incarnation, it means that we believe that in Jesus God entered the world and took our human life upon himself. If he did that, it means that he *cared* enough for men to take upon himself the limitations of humanity, which is the act of a love that passes human understanding. If God did that, it means that he *shares* in all the manifold activities of human life and knows the many and varied trials and temptations and sorrows of this world. It means that everything that happens to us is fully understood by God and that he is in this business of living along with us. Faith in the incarnation is the conviction that God shares and God cares. Once we possess that faith certain things follow.

(i) We have a defence to resist the infections of the world. On all sides there is the pressure of worldly standards and motives; on all sides the fascinations of the wrong things. From within and without come the temptations which are part of the human situation in a world and a society not interested in and sometimes hostile to God. But once we are aware of the presence of God in Jesus Christ ever with us, we have a strong prophylactic against the infections of the world. It is a fact of experience that goodness is easier in the company of good people; and if we believe in the incarnation, we have the continual presence of God in Jesus Christ.

(ii) We have a strength to endure the attacks of the world. The human situation is full of things which seek to take our faith away. There are the sorrows and the perplexities of life; there are the disappointments and the frustrations of life; there are for most of us the failures and discouragements of life. But if we believe in the incarnation, we believe in a God who himself went through all this, even to the Cross and who can, therefore, help others who are going through it.

(iii). We have the indestructible hope of final victory. The world did its worst to Jesus. It hounded him and slandered him. It branded him heretic and friend of sinners. It judged him and crucified him and buried him. It did everything humanly possible to eliminate him—and *it failed*. After the Cross came the Resurrection; after the shame came the glory. That is the Jesus who is with us, one who saw life at its grimmest, to whom life did its worst, who died, who conquered death, and who offers us a share in that victory which was his. If we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we have with us always Christ the Victor to make us victorious.

The Greek goddess of victory was Nike, which also happens to be the name of a United States aerial missile. Both of them are named for the Greek word *nike* (NEE-kay) which simply means victory. But what does victory have to do with maturing love?

Christians live in a real world and are beset with formidable obstacles. It is not *easy* to obey God. It is much easier to drift with the world, disobey Him, and "do your own thing."

But the Christian is "born of God." This means he has the divine nature within him, and it is impossible for this divine nature to disobey God. "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world" (1 John 5:4, nasb). If the old nature is in control of us, we disobey God; but if the new nature is in control, we obey God. The world appeals to the old nature (1 John 2:15-17) and tries to make God's commandments seem burdensome.

Our *victory* is a result of *faith*, and we grow in faith as we grow in love. The more you love someone, the easier it is to trust him. The more our love for Christ is perfected, the more our faith in Christ is perfected too; because faith and love mature together.

The word *overcome* is a favorite with John; he uses it in 1 John 2:13-14 with reference to overcoming the devil. He uses it seven times in Revelation to describe believers and the blessings they receive (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). He is not describing a special class of believers. Rather, he is using the word *overcomer* as a name for the true Christian. Because we have been born of God, we are overcomers.

We are told that a soldier in the army of Alexander the Great was not acting bravely in battle. When he should have been pressing ahead, he was lingering behind. The great general approached him and asked, "What is your name, soldier?" The man replied, "My name, sir, is Alexander." The general looked him straight in the eye and said firmly: "Soldier, get in there and fight—or change your name!"

What is *our* name? "Children of God—the born-again ones of God." Alexander the Great wanted his name to be a symbol of courage; our name carries with it assurance of victory. To be born of God means to share God's victory.

This is a victory of faith, but faith in what? Faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God! The person who overcomes the world is the one "who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John 5:5, nasb). It is not faith in ourselves, but faith in Christ, that gives us the victory. "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Identification with Christ in His victory reminds us of the several times we have read "as He is" in John's letter. "As He is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17). We should walk in the light "as He is in the light" (1 John 1:7). If we claim to abide in Him, then we should conduct ourselves as He conducted Himself (1 John 2:6). His children are to be, on earth, what He is in heaven. It is only necessary for us to claim this wonderful position *by faith*—and to *act* on it.

When Jesus Christ died, we died with Him. Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20, nasb). When Christ was buried, we were buried with Him. And when He arose, we arose with Him. "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4, nasb).

When Christ ascended to heaven, we ascended with Him and are now seated with Him in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). And when Christ returns, we shall share His exaltation. "When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4, nasb).

All these verses describe our spiritual position in Christ. When we claim this position by faith, we share His victory. When God raised Jesus from the dead, He "seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named . . . and He put all things in subjection under His feet" (Eph. 1:20-22, nasb). This means that, positionally, each child of God is privileged to sit far above all his enemies!

Where a man sits determines how much authority he may exercise. The man who sits in the general manager's chair has a restricted sphere of authority; the man who sits in the vice president's chair exercises more control. But the man behind the desk marked *president* exercises the most authority. No matter where he may be in the factory or office, he is respected and obeyed because of where he sits. His power is determined by his position, not by his personal appearance or the way he feels.

So with a child of God: his authority is determined by his position in Christ. When he trusted Christ, he was identified with Him by the Holy Spirit and made a member of His body (1 Cor. 12:12-13). His old life has been buried and he has been raised to a new life of glory. In Christ, he is sitting on the very throne of the universe!

A Civil War veteran used to wander from place to place, begging a bed and bite to eat and always talking about his friend "Mr. Lincoln." Because of his injuries, he was unable to hold a steady job. But as long as he could keep going, he would chat about his beloved President.

"You say you knew Mr. Lincoln," a skeptical bystander retorted one day. "I'm not so sure you did. Prove it!" The old man replied, "Why, sure, I can prove it. In fact, I have a piece of paper here that Mr. Lincoln himself signed and gave to me."

From his old wallet, the man took out a much-folded piece of paper and showed it to the man.

"I'm not much for reading," he apologized, "but I know that's Mr. Lincoln's signature."

"Man, do you know what you have here?" one of the spectators asked. "You have a generous federal pension authorized by President Lincoln. You don't have to walk around like a poor beggar! Mr. Lincoln has made you rich!"

To paraphrase what John wrote: "You Christians do not have to walk around defeated, because Jesus Christ has made you victors! He has defeated every enemy and you share His victory. Now, *by faith*, claim His victory."

The key, of course, is *faith*, but this has always been God's key to victory. The great men and women named in Hebrews 11 all won their victories "by faith." They simply took God at His word and acted on it, and He honored their faith and gave them victory. Faith is not simply *saying* that what God says is true; true faith is *acting* on what God says because it is true. Someone has said that faith is not so much believing in spite of evidence, but obeying in spite of consequence.

Victorious faith is the result of maturing love. The better we come to know and love Jesus Christ, the easier it is to trust Him with the needs and battles of life. It is important that this maturing love become a regular and a practical thing in our daily lives.

How does a believer go about experiencing this kind of love and the blessings that flow from it?

To begin with, this kind of love must be cultivated. It is not the result of a hit-or-miss friendship! A previous study pointed out that a believer slips back into the world by stages:

1. Friendship with the world (James 4:4)
2. Spotted by the world (James 1:27)
3. Loving the world (1 John 2:15-17)
4. Conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2)

Our relationship to Jesus Christ, in a similar way, grows by stages. Now note: the one thing that man needs is victory over the world. Why?

Because the world is full of..

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> suffering | <input type="checkbox"/> immorality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> disease | <input type="checkbox"/> destroyed families |
| <input type="checkbox"/> accidents | <input type="checkbox"/> wickedness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> corruption | <input type="checkbox"/> drugs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> hate | <input type="checkbox"/> drunkenness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> bitterness | <input type="checkbox"/> envy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> murder | <input type="checkbox"/> hunger |
| <input type="checkbox"/> war | <input type="checkbox"/> homelessness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> arguments | <input type="checkbox"/> pain |
| <input type="checkbox"/> backbiters | <input type="checkbox"/> hurt |
| <input type="checkbox"/> pride | <input type="checkbox"/> selfishness |

☐ arrogance

☐ greed

Then there is the most fatal blow of all: corruption and death. Without exception we are all corrupt and we all die. The one thing that man needs above all else is victory over the world with all its corruption and death. How then can he triumph and conquer the world? How can he overcome the world? By believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. When a person believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, God gives him a new heart. He is "born of God"—*spiritually born of God*. It is his faith that overcomes the world.

What does this mean?

☐ It means that God gives the believer victory over all the trials and temptations of life.

"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

"There hath no temptation [trial] taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

☐ It means that God gives the believer victory over all the forces and difficulties of life.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35, 37-39).

☐ It means that God gives the believer victory over sin.

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him" (Romans 6:6-8).

"Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:11-14).

☐ It means that God gives the believer victory over death.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14-15).

☐ It means that God gives the believer victory over judgment.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:16-18).

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Romans 5:8-10).

☐ It means that God gives the believer victory over fear and despair and fills him with love, joy, and peace.

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (Romans 5:10-11).

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

□ It means that God gives the believer victory over Satan and all other spiritual forces.

"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Ephes. 6:11-13).

"And having spoiled principalities and power, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15).

Test 2: Believing the Witness About Christ: That He is the Son of God

1 John 5:6-8: "This is the one who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. {7} For there are three that testify: {8} the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement."

"Nothing is certain but death and taxes."

Benjamin Franklin wrote those words in 1789. Of course, a wise man like Franklin knew that many other things are also certain. The Christian also knows that there are many certainties. Of spiritual truth, Christians are not afraid to say, "We know!" In fact, the word *know* occurs thirty-nine times in John's brief letter, eight times in this closing chapter.

Man has a deep desire for certainty, and he will even dabble in the occult in his effort to find out something for sure. A businessman having dinner with his minister said to him, "Do you see those offices across the street? In them sit some of the most influential business leaders in this town. Many of them used to come over here regularly to consult a fortune-teller. She isn't here anymore, but a few years ago you could count up the millions of dollars in this room as men waited to consult her."

The life that is real is built on the divine certainties that are found in Jesus Christ. The world may accuse the Christian of being proud and dogmatic, but this does not keep him from saying, "I know!"

(5:6-8) **Introduction:** Do we really believe in God? There are four tests that will show us. The second test is striking: Do we believe the witness about Christ? There are several witnesses to Christ, strong witnesses.

The question arises: Is Jesus *the Christ*, the true Messiah, the promised Messiah of the Old Testament prophecies? Is Jesus Christ really the Savior of men, the One sent by God to earth to save men and to give them life? Is Jesus Christ really, beyond any question, the Son of God? There are very strong witnesses that emphatically declare, "Yes!" If a person believes these witnesses, then he believes in God. If he does not accept the witnesses to Jesus Christ, then he does not believe in God, not in the true and living God.

Whatever *god* the person believes in, that *god* is a *god* of his own imagination. Why do we say this? Because God, the true and living God, loves man—loves him so much that He has sent His Son into the world to save man. And in addition to this glorious demonstration of love, God has given witness after witness that His Son has come into the world. All men are, therefore, without excuse if they reject the witnesses to Jesus Christ. The task of man is to receive the testimony of the witnesses, to believe the testimony about His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. There is the mission of Jesus Christ (v.6).
2. There is the witness of the Holy Spirit (v.6).
3. There are the witnesses of heaven (v.7).
4. There are the witnesses of earth (v.8).

(5:6) **Jesus Christ, Mission:** there is the mission of Jesus Christ. Note how John declares the mission of Christ:
"This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood" (1 John 5:6).

This may seem like a strange way to state the mission of Christ, to say that Jesus "came by water [His baptism] and blood [His death]." But remember what has just been said in 1 John 5:5: a person must "believe that Jesus is the Son of God." Here in 1 John 5:6 John is declaring that beyond any question Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He was declared to be the Son of God...

- ☐ by His baptism, by the water.
- ☐ by His death, by the blood.

Both the water (His baptism) and the blood (His death) declare Him to be the Son of God. Both are extremely important.

1. The baptism of Jesus Christ is a great witness to Jesus Christ. It launched His mission upon earth. Two things happened at the baptism that were most unusual.
 - a. The Spirit of God came upon Christ in the form of a dove. Remember that John the Baptist was to be the forerunner of the Messiah. In order to point to the Messiah, John had to know who the Messiah was and to know beyond any question. Therefore, God told John that He would give him a sign, the sign of a dove. God would cause the Spirit of God to come upon His Son in the form of a dove. By this sign John would know the Messiah.

Note how emphatic John is. He states the glorious truth as forcefully as he can: "I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God." The water, the baptism of Jesus Christ, declares emphatically that Jesus is the Son of God.

- b. The *voice of God* proclaimed Jesus Christ to be the Son of God.

☐ Matthew testifies that God's voice called Jesus Christ His Son.

"And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

☐ Mark testifies that God's voice called Jesus Christ His Son.

"And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11).

☐ Luke testifies that God's voice called Jesus Christ His Son.

"And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22).

2. The blood of Jesus Christ, His death and cross, declares Him to be the Son of God. It is by His death and cross that our sins are forgiven. He bore our sins upon the cross, took our judgment and suffered the punishment for us. This is what He was doing upon the cross. And this is the glorious gospel. Since Jesus Christ took our sins and died for them, sin is removed from us. Christ has taken them off of us. We are free of sin; therefore, we become acceptable to God. Through the death of Jesus Christ, we are able to stand righteous and perfect before God. We are able to stand before God being free of sin, free because Jesus Christ took our sins and bore the judgment for them.

Now note: only the Son of God could do this; only the Son of God could die for man's sins. Why? Because God is perfect; He can accept only perfection. He can accept only the Ideal and Perfect Man. This is the reason God's Son had to come to earth and live as a Man. He had to come and live a sinless life; He had to secure the perfect and ideal righteousness; He had to become the Ideal and Perfect Man. By becoming such, He could then offer Himself as the perfect Sacrifice for man's sins. God would accept His sacrifice because it was the sacrifice of the Perfect and Ideal Man. It was the ideal that could cover and stand for every man.

This is the point: the blood of Jesus Christ, His cross and death, declare Him to be the Son of God who takes away the sins of the world. This is exactly what witness after witness declares.

(5:6) **Holy Spirit**: there is the witness of the Holy Spirit that declares Jesus Christ to be the Son of God. This is what the gospel is—what has happened upon the world scene of human history:

☐ God Himself has sent His Son into the world to save man from sin and death and condemnation.

☐ Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth, is actually the Son of God. He lived a sinless life—was the Perfect and Ideal Man who could die as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of men. And this He did when He died on the cross. He freed us from sin; therefore, we are now acceptable to God.

☐ But note: we have to do something. We have to believe in God's Son. Unless we honor Him by believing in Him, God does not accept us. We still carry our sins and their guilt and condemnation ourselves. This means we stand condemned by God and shall never be allowed to live with Him.

This is the glorious gospel. But how can God get men to listen? How can He stir men to believe in Christ? There is only one way. He must put His Spirit upon earth to work within the hearts of men. This is the point of what is now said:

"It is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth" (1 John 5:6).

Note: the Spirit of God is truth. He bears witness because He is truth. He can do nothing else but declare the truth. Jesus Christ is the Son of God sent into the world to save men; therefore, the Spirit of God must declare the truth. This is exactly what Jesus Christ promised.

How does the Spirit bear witness in the world? Scripture says several ways.

☐ The Holy Spirit bears witness by *convicting* the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:7-11).

☐ The Holy Spirit testifies by quickening—giving life to—men when they are willing to believe in Christ.

"It is the spirit that quickeneth [makes alive]; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

"Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Cor. 3:6).

☐ The Holy Spirit bears witness by giving the believer assurance and guaranteeing his salvation.

"Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:22).

"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest [guarantee] of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" (Ephes. 1:13-14).

"And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Ephes. 4:30).

☐ The Holy Spirit testifies by bearing witness with the heart of believers, assuring them that they are children of God.

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16).

"And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:6).

"And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us" (1 John 3:24).

"Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit" (1 John 4:13).

"This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth" (1 John 5:6).

☐ The Holy Spirit bears witness by teaching the believer about Christ.

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26).

"Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor. 2:13).

☐ The Holy Spirit bears witness by living within the believer and making his body a holy temple for God.

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16).

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

"That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us" (2 Tim. 1:14).

☐ The Holy Spirit bears witness by showing believers things to come.

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come" (John 16:13).

☐ The Holy Spirit bears witness by giving believers the power to witness.

"And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until he be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but [the spirit] of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God" (2 Tim. 1:7-8).

☐ The Holy Spirit testifies by proclaiming the things of God through believers.

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor. 2:12-13).

"For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say" (Luke 12:12).

"But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him" (1 John 2:27).

☐ The Holy Spirit bears witness by leading and guiding the believer.

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come" (John 16:13).

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14).

☐ The Holy Spirit bears witness by choosing believers for special ministry and gifting them for that ministry.

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you" (John 15:16).

"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2).

"Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit

is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (1 Cor. 12:4-11).

☐ The Holy Spirit bears witness by quickening (making alive) the mortal bodies of believers at death.

"But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Romans 8:11).

(5:7) **Witnessing—The Word—God:** there are the witnesses of heaven. There are three Persons in heaven who bear witness that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

1. There is the Father. How does the Father bear witness that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? There are primarily two ways.

a. The Father is behind everything: the whole plan of redemption is His plan and work. It is His Son who came to earth to make salvation possible. It is also His Spirit who is working upon earth convicting and trying to get men to repent and to trust the Son of God for salvation. The Father is bearing witness to His Son through everything that is happening in the hearts and lives of believers and in the life of the church.

b. The Father bore dynamic witness to Christ when Christ was upon the earth.

☐ He proclaimed Christ to be His Son at the baptism of Christ.

"And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

☐ He proclaimed Christ to be His Son by giving Him the Holy Spirit without measure so that Christ could *speak the Word of God*.

"For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him" (John 3:34).

☐ He proclaimed Christ to be His Son by enabling Him to do the very *works of God*.

"If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him" (John 10:37-38).

☐ He proclaimed Christ to be His Son by causing the very glory of God to shine through His person at the transfiguration.

"While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matthew 17:5).

☐ He proclaimed Christ to be His Son by raising Him from the dead.

"I go to my Father, and ye see me no more [being raised from the dead]" (John 16:10).

"And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4).

2. There is the witness of the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The Word, of course, refers to Jesus Christ. John declares this in both his Gospel and Epistle.

How does Christ as the Word bear witness? What does it mean to say that the Word bears witness in heaven? Remember what a word is: the expression of an idea, a thought, an image in the mind of a person. God had an idea, a thought, an image; that is, He had a message, a word that He wanted to say to the world. But He wanted to say it in person. Therefore, He sent His Son into the world to speak the Word of God. As the Son of God, Jesus Christ had the very nature of God. By nature He was perfect even as God the Father is perfect. He was God the Son sent to earth by God the Father. This means that everything Jesus Christ did was perfect. He was the very embodiment of God Himself. He was the very revelation of God. Jesus Christ was everything that God wanted to say to man; He was the very Word of God.

This glorious fact means the most wonderful thing: it means that the Word of God has come to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. Everything that Jesus Christ said and did is the very thought and idea of God. Jesus Christ is the very Word that God wanted to say to man. Jesus Christ, the Word of God, bears witness to Himself. We can look at His words and deeds

and see that He is the Son of God. We can look at the *picture of God*—the image, the idea, the expression of God—that Jesus Christ painted, and we can tell that He is the Son of God. All that He said, did, and was is the *perfect picture* of God. It is the *perfect description*, the *perfect Word* of God. The Word, Jesus Christ Himself, bears witness that He is the Son of God.

3. There is the Holy Spirit.

(Note: most scholars and most translations, almost without exception, agree that 1 John 5:7 was added by some copyist long after John wrote this epistle. Checking almost any translation of the Scripture will show that most Bibles omit the verse. The verse does not seem to be in any of the authentic Greek manuscripts.)

(5:8) **Witnessing**: there are the witnesses upon earth that declare Jesus Christ to be the Son of God. Note that all three of these witnesses agree; they have only one message that they declare—Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Therefore, man must believe that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (1 John 5:5). This is the only way that we can overcome and conquer the sin and death and condemnation of this world. Belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is the only way man can dwell forever with God.

1. There is the witness of the Spirit.

2. There is the witness of the water or baptism of Jesus Christ.

3. There is the witness of the blood or cross and death of Jesus Christ.

Test 3:

1 John 5:9-15: "We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. {10} Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. {11} And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. {12} He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. {13} I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. {14} This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. {15} And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him."

Behind this passage there are two basic ideas.

There is the Old Testament idea of what constitutes an adequate witness. The law was quite clear: "A single witness shall not prevail against a man for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offence that he has committed; only on the evidence of two witnesses, or of three witnesses, shall a charge be sustained" (*Deuteronomy 19:15; cp. 17:6*). A triple human witness is enough to establish any fact. How much more must a triple divine witness, the witness of the Spirit, the water, and the blood, be regarded as convincing.

Second, the idea of witness is an integral part of John's thought. In his gospel we find different witnesses all converging on Jesus Christ. John the Baptist is a witness to Jesus (*John 1:15; 1:32-34; 5:33*). Jesus's deeds are a witness to him (*John 5:36*). The Scriptures are a witness to him (*John 5:39*). The Father who sent him is a witness to him (*John 5:30-32, 37; 8:18*). The Spirit is a witness to him. "When the Counsellor comes. . . even the Spirit of truth. . . he will bear witness to me" (*John 15:26*).

John goes on to use a phrase which is a favourite of his in his gospel. He speaks of the man who "believes in the Son of God." There is a wide difference between *believing* a man and *believing in* him. If we *believe* a man, we do no more than accept whatever statement he may be making at the moment as true. If we *believe in* a man, we accept the whole man and all that he stands for in complete trust. We would be prepared not only to trust his spoken word, but also to trust ourselves to him. To believe in Jesus Christ is not simply to accept what he says as true; it is to commit ourselves into his hands, for time and for eternity.

When a man does that, the Holy Spirit within him testifies that he is acting aright. It is the Holy Spirit who gives him the conviction of the ultimate value of Jesus Christ and assures him that he is right to make this act of commitment to him. The man who refuses to do that is refusing the promptings of the Holy Spirit within his heart.

If a man refuses to accept the evidence of men who have experienced what Christ can do, the evidence of the deeds of Christ, the evidence of the Scriptures, the evidence of God's Holy Spirit, the evidence of God himself, in effect he is calling God a liar—and that is the very limit of blasphemy.

(5:9-15) **Introduction:** Do we really believe in God? We can tell by testing ourselves, by asking this one question: Do we believe the witnesses about Christ? This passage covers two dynamic witnesses.

1. There is the witness of God Himself (v.9-12).
2. There is the witness of John (v.13-15).

(5:9-12) **Witnesses—Eternal Life:** there is the witness of God. The key word in 1 John 5:6-10 is *witness*, sometimes translated "record" or "testifieth." God gave witness to His Son, but He has also given witness to His sons—to individual believers. We *know* that we have eternal life! Not only is there the witness of the Spirit within; but there is the witness of the Word of God. "These things have I written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13, nasb).

Eternal life is a gift; it is not something that we earn (John 10:27-29; Eph. 2:8-9). But this gift is a Person—Jesus Christ. We receive eternal life not only *from* Christ, but *in* Christ. "He who has the Son has the life" (1 John 5:12, nasb). Not just "life" but "*the* life"—the life "which is life indeed" (1 Tim. 6:19, nasb).

This gift is received by faith. God has gone on record in His Word as offering eternal life to those who will believe on Jesus Christ. Millions of Christians have proved that God's record is true. Not to believe it is to make God a liar. And if God is a liar, *nothing* is certain.

God wants His children to *know* that they belong to Him. John was inspired by the Spirit to write his Gospel to assure us that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31). He wrote this epistle so that we may be sure that we are the children of God (1 John 5:13).

It would be helpful at this point to review the characteristics of God's children:

- "Everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him" (1 John 2:29, nasb).
- "No one who is born of God practices sin" (1 John 3:9, nasb).
- "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14, nasb).
- "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7, nasb).
- "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world" (1 John 5:4).

If you bear these "birthmarks," you can say with confidence that you are a child of God.

When Sir James Simpson, the discoverer of chloroform, was on his deathbed, a friend asked him, "Sir, what are your speculations?" Simpson replied: "Speculations! I have no speculations! 'For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.'"

Note four significant points.

1. God's witness is greater, far greater than the testimony of men (1 John 5:9). We believe the testimony of men, we accept what they say as true.
 - Spouses believe the word of one another.
 - Children believe the word of parents and teachers.
 - Businessmen believe the word of employers.
 - Juries believe the testimony of witnesses.

We all accept reports of the news media and the word of friends every day. This being so, how much greater is the witness of God. Men interpret facts; they sometimes exaggerate and twist the facts. We are never completely free of personal opinion and interests. And some men even lie and deceive when sharing with us. But not God. God never exaggerates or twists the facts; He never lies or deceives. What God says is always true; it is the plain and simple truth. Therefore, God's record about His Son should be believed. Every human being should believe God's record of His Son. What is that witness? Note what the verse says: "This is the witness of God which He has testified of *His Son*." The witness is that Jesus Christ is *His Son*. Jesus Christ is the Son of God whom God sent into the world to save man. It is this that we should believe.

2. God's witness lives within the heart of the believer (1 John 5:10). When a person believes on the Son of God, God *implants the witness of God* within him. What is that witness? It is the *Spirit of God Himself*. The Holy Spirit seals and

guarantees the believer, gives him assurance that Jesus Christ has saved him from sin, death, and condemnation and has made him acceptable to God.

3. God's witness is rejected by unbelievers (1 John 5:10b). This is strong language, but the person who does not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God makes God a liar. How could this be? Note the verse: because he does not believe the record that God gave of His Son.

God has given witness after witness that Jesus Christ is His Son:

- the witness of the life of Christ, His works and words.
- the witness of the baptism of Christ.
- the witness of the blood, the cross and death, of Jesus Christ.
- the witness of the resurrection.
- the witness of the Scriptures.
- the witness of the Holy Spirit that convicts the human heart.
- the witness of believers who have experienced the power of Christ in their lives.

If a person does not believe the witness of God—all the great witnesses that God has given—if a person does not believe that God has sent His Son into the world to save man—then that person is in effect saying that *the record is a lie*. But note: God did send His Son, and God has borne witness to the truth. Therefore, to disbelieve the record is to say that God is lying; it is to call God a liar, for God did send Christ.

4. God's witness is clearly stated. Note how clearly and simply it is stated: "*And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life*" (1 John 5:11-12).

a. God has given us eternal life in His Son. The one thing man wants is to live forever. He does not want to die. But note: to live forever in a corruptible world such as ours would not necessarily be a good thing. This is a world of evil and corruption and death. Therefore, what we have now is not *real life*. It is not what life was meant to be. The life that God gives, eternal life, is the life that man was meant to live.

b. The person who has the Son has life, but the person who does not have the Son does not have life. Why is this so? Because Jesus Christ is *the righteous One*. He is the Son of God who came to earth and lived a sinless life as Man. He is the One who secured the *perfect and ideal righteousness* for man. Therefore, Jesus Christ is the *only Person* who has the right to stand before God. Why? Because God is perfect, and only a perfect person can stand in God's presence. This is the reason man must approach God through Jesus Christ: He and He alone is perfect and righteous. He and He alone has the right to stand in the court of God as the Advocate or attorney to represent man. There is no other righteousness, no other goodness that is acceptable to God; only the perfect and ideal righteousness of Christ has been approved to stand as the advocate in the court of heaven.

This means a most wonderful thing. God will never turn down a person who has Jesus Christ as his advocate. The person who has Jesus Christ to approach God for him will never be turned down, for Jesus Christ has the right to stand as the advocate before God in the court of heaven.

With this paragraph the letter proper comes to an end. What follows is in the nature of a postscript. The end is a statement that the essence of the Christian life is *eternal life*.

The word for eternal is *aionios*. It means far more than simply *lasting for ever*. A life which lasted for ever might well be a curse and not a blessing, an intolerable burden and not a shining gift. There is only one person to whom *aionios* may properly be applied and that is God. In the real sense of the term it is God alone who possesses and inhabits eternity. *Eternal life* is, therefore, nothing other than *the life of God himself*. What we are promised is that here and now there can be given us a share in the very life of God.

In God there is *peace* and, therefore, *eternal life* means *serenity*.

- It means a life liberated from the fears which haunt the human situation. In God there is *power* and, therefore, *eternal life* means *the defeat of frustration*.

- It means a life filled with the power of God and, therefore, victorious over circumstance. In God there is *holiness* and, therefore, *eternal life* means *the defeat of sin*.
- It means a life clad with the purity of God and armed against the soiling infections of the world. In God there is *love* and, therefore, *eternal life* means *the end of bitterness and hatred*.
- It means a life which has the love of God in its heart and the undefeatable love of man in all its feelings and in all its action. In God there is *life* and, therefore, *eternal life* means *the defeat of death*. It means a life which is indestructible because it has in it the indestructibility of God himself.

It is John's conviction that such a life comes through Jesus Christ and in no other way. Why should that be? If eternal life is the life of God, it means that we can possess that life only when we know God and are enabled to approach him and rest in him. We can do these two things only in Jesus Christ. The Son alone fully knows the Father and, therefore, only he can fully reveal to us what God is like. As John had it in his gospel: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (*John* 1:18). And Jesus Christ alone can bring us to God. It is in him that there is open to us the new and living way into the presence of God (*Hebrews* 10:19-23).

We may take a simple analogy. If we wish to meet someone whom we do not know and who moves in a completely different circle from our own, we can achieve that meeting only by finding someone who knows him and is willing to introduce us to him. That is what Jesus does for us in regard to God. Eternal life is the life of God and we can find that life only through Jesus Christ.

(5:13-15) **Witnessing—Assurance—John the Apostle:** there is the witness of John himself. John bears testimony to two glorious things.

1. He declares that a believer can be assured of eternal life. And note the force of his declaration: we can *know*, that is, be perfectly *assured by experience*, that we have eternal life. We can experience eternal life and all that life was ever meant to be, and we can experience it now upon earth as well as in the future throughout all of eternity. We can *know by experience* that we have eternal life, know beyond a shadow of doubt, know absolutely and perfectly. How? John says there are three ways.

a. We receive eternal life by heeding the Scripture. John emphatically declares that he has written his Epistle so that we can have eternal life and *know that we have it*.

b. We receive eternal life by believing on the name of Jesus Christ. Only the person who believes on the name of the Son has eternal life.

c. We receive eternal life by continuing to believe on the name of Jesus Christ. Note: John is writing to believers, and he says that he has written so that believers "may believe on the name of Jesus Christ." Do believers not already believe in Christ? Yes, but John is saying that we must continue to believe; we must endure in our belief, keep on believing and believing until the Lord takes us home. There is no such thing as a person believing and then ceasing to believe and then receiving eternal life. If a person forsakes Christ, it is clear evidence that he never received eternal life in the first place. If a person really knows the Son of God and has received eternal life, it is almost impossible for him to turn away from Christ for too long.

Experiencing Christ and life is too wonderful. If a person happens to turn back for too long, to the point that he will not return to Christ, then God will go ahead and take him on home.

The point is this: we must believe on the name of God's Son and keep on believing. We must persevere and endure in our belief.

2. John declares that a believer can be assured of answered prayer.

"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (1 John 5:14-15).

This is a great passage on prayer. The very basis of prayer is covered. It is one thing to know that Jesus is God and that we are God's children; but what about the needs and problems of daily life? Jesus helped people when He was here on earth;

does He still help them? Earthly fathers take care of their children; does the Heavenly Father respond when *His* children call on Him?

Christians have confidence in prayer, just as they have confidence as they await the judgment (1 John 2:28; 4:17). As we have seen, the word *confidence* means "freedom of speech." We can come to the Father freely and tell Him our needs.

Of course, there are conditions we must meet.

First, we must have a heart that does not condemn us (1 John 3:21-22). Unconfessed sin is a serious obstacle to answered prayer (Ps. 66:18). It is worth noting that differences between a Christian husband and his wife can hinder their prayers (1 Peter 3:1-7). If there is anything between us and any other Christian, we must settle it (Matt. 5:23-25). And unless a believer is abiding in Christ, in love and obedience, his prayers will not be answered (John 15:7).

Second, we must pray in God's will. "Thy will be done" (Matt. 6:10). "Prayer is a mighty instrument, not for getting man's will done in heaven, but for getting God's will done on earth," wrote Robert Law. George Mueller, who fed thousands of orphans with food provided in answer to prayer, said: "Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. It is laying hold of God's willingness."

There are times when we can only pray, "Not my will but Thine be done," because we simply do not know God's will in a matter. But most of the time we can determine God's will by reading the Word, listening to the Spirit (Rom. 8:26-27), and discerning the circumstances around us. Our very faith to ask God for something is often proof that He wants to give it (Heb. 11:1).

There are many promises in the Bible that we can claim in prayer God has promised to supply our needs (Phil. 4:19)—not our greeds! If we are obeying His will and really need something, He will supply it in His way and in His time.

"But if it is God's will for me to have a thing, then why should I pray about it?" Because prayer is the way God wants His children to *get* what they need. God not only ordains the end, but He also ordains the means to the end—prayer. And the more you think about it, the more wonderful this arrangement becomes. Prayer is really the thermometer of the spiritual life. God has ordained that I maintain a close walk with Him if I expect Him to meet my needs.

John does not write, "We *shall have* the requests," but, "We *know* that we have the requests" (cf. 1 John 5:15). The verb is present tense. We may not *see* the answer to a prayer immediately, but we have inner confidence that God has answered. This confidence, or faith, is "the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). It is God witnessing to us that He has heard and answered.

What breathing is to a physical man, prayer is to a spiritual man. If we do not pray, we "faint" (Luke 18:1). Prayer is not only the utterance of the lips; it is also the desire of the heart. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thes. 5:17) does not mean that a Christian is always saying an audible prayer. We are not heard for our much speaking (Matt. 6:7). No, "Pray without ceasing" suggests the attitude of the heart as well as the words of the lips. A Christian who has his heart fixed on Christ and is trying to glorify Him is praying constantly even when he is not conscious of it.

The pages of the Bible and the pages of history are filled with reports of answered prayer. Prayer is not spiritual self-hypnosis. Nor do we pray because it makes us feel better. We pray because God has commanded us to pray and because prayer is the God-appointed means for a believer to receive what God wants to give him. Prayer keeps a Christian in the will of God and living in the will of God keeps a Christian in the place of blessing and service. We are not beggars; we are children coming to a wealthy Father who loves to give His children what they need.

Though He was God in the flesh, Jesus depended on prayer. He lived on earth, as we must, in dependence on the Father. He arose early in the morning to pray (Mark 1:35), though He had been up late the night before healing the multitudes. He sometimes spent all night in prayer (Luke 6:12). In the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed with "strong crying and tears" (Heb. 5:7). On the cross He prayed three times. If the sinless Son of God needed to pray, how much more do we?

The most important thing about prayer is the will of God. We must take time to ascertain what God's will is in a matter, especially searching in the Bible for promises or principles that apply to our situation. Once we know the will of God, we can pray with confidence and then wait for Him to reveal the answer.

Note exactly what is said.

a. We can have confidence that God hears our prayers if we are *in Him*, that is, *in Christ* (1 John 5:14). We can approach God in Christ and in Christ alone. Christ alone is the *righteous One*, the only *perfect Person*; therefore He alone has the right to stand before God. Any person who wishes to approach God must come in the name of Jesus Christ. (See note—□ 1 John 2:1-2 for more discussion.) A person must believe on the name of the Son of God and approach God in His name. The name of Jesus Christ is the only acceptable name to God, the only name that can receive anything from God.

b. We can have confidence that God hears our prayer if we ask according to His will (1 John 5:14). God has revealed His will in His Word. His will for us includes all the great things of life.

□ It is the will of God for us to experience the fruit of the spirit.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

□ It is the will of God for us to have the provisions and necessities of life.

"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matthew 6:31-34).

□ It is the will of God for us to be protected and delivered through all the trials and temptations of life.

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

"So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Hebrews 13:6).

□ It is the will of God for us to be delivered from sin, death, condemnation, and the fear of death.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14-15).

□ It is the will of God for us to be delivered through severe persecution and trouble, to be delivered *into the very presence of God*.

"When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:54-56).

"And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever" (2 Tim. 4:18).

We could go on and on listing the glorious promises that God makes to us, promises that should fill our prayers as we face the various events and difficulties of life. The point is this: we can boldly know that God will hear us when we pray according to His will.

c. We can have confidence that God hears our prayers if we know that He hears (1 John 5:15). We have to know that He hears if we wish to receive what we ask. It is foolish to waste time asking God unless we believe that He will hear us. We must have confidence in God, believe that He loves us and will do what He promises for us. This is the declaration of Scripture time and again.

Here are set down both the basis and the principle of prayer.

(i) The *basis of prayer* is the simple fact that God listens to our prayers. The word which John uses for *confidence* is interesting. It is *parresia*. Originally *parresia* meant *freedom of speech*, that freedom to speak boldly which exists in a true

democracy. Later it came to denote any kind of confidence. With God we have freedom of speech. He is always listening, more ready to hear than we are to pray. We never need to force our way into his presence or compel him to pay attention. He is waiting for us to come. We know how we often wait for the knock of the postman or the ring of the telephone bell to bring us a message from someone whom we love. In all reverence we can say that God is like that with us.

(ii) The *principle* of prayer is that to be answered it must be *in accordance with the will of God*. Three times in his writings John lays down what might be called the conditions of prayer. (a) He says that *obedience* is a condition of prayer. We receive whatever we ask because we keep his commandments (1 *John* 3:22). (b) He says that *remaining in Christ* is a condition of prayer. If we abide in him and his words abide in us, we will ask what we will and it will be done for us (*John* 15:7). The closer we live to Christ, the more we shall pray aright; and the more we pray aright, the greater the answer we receive. (c) He says that to pray *in his name* is a condition of prayer. If we ask anything in his name, he will do it (*John* 14:14). The ultimate test of any request is, *can* we say to Jesus, "Give me this for *your* sake and in *your* name"?

Prayer must be *in accordance with the will of God*. Jesus teaches us to pray: "Thy will be done," not, "Thy will be changed." Jesus himself, in the moment of his greatest agony and crisis, prayed, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt. . . . Thy will be done" (*Matthew* 26:39, 42). Here is the very essence of prayer. C. H. Dodd writes: "Prayer rightly considered is not a device for employing the resources of omnipotence to fulfill our own desires, but a means by which our desires may be redirected according to the mind of God, and made into channels for the forces of his will." A. E. Brooke suggests that John thought of prayer as "including only requests for knowledge of, and acquiescence in, the will of God." Even the great pagans saw this. Epictetus wrote: "Have courage to look up to God and say, Deal with me as thou wilt from now on. I am as one with thee; I am thine; I flinch from nothing so long as thou dost think that it is good. Lead me where thou wilt; put on me what raiment thou wilt. Wouldst thou have me hold office or eschew it, stay or flee, be rich or poor? For all this I will defend thee before men."

Here is something on which to ponder. We are so apt to think that prayer is asking God for what we want, whereas true prayer is asking God for what he wants. Prayer is not only talking to God, even more it is listening to him.

Test 4: Living Free of Sin

1 John 5:16-21: "If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. {17} All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death. {18} We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. {19} We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. {20} We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true--even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. {21} Dear children, keep yourselves from idols."

There is no doubt that this is a most difficult and disturbing passage. Before we approach its problems, let us look at its certainties.

John has just been speaking about the Christian privilege of prayer; and now he goes on to single out for special attention the prayer of intercession for the brother who needs praying for. It is very significant that, when John speaks about one kind of prayer, it is not prayer for ourselves; it is prayer for others. Prayer must never be selfish; it must never be concentrated entirely upon our own selves and our own problems and our own needs. It must be an outgoing activity. As Westcott put it: "The end of prayer is the perfection of the whole Christian body."

Again and again the New Testament writers stress the need for this prayer of intercession. Paul writes to the Thessalonians: "Brothers, pray for us" (1 *Thessalonians* 5:25). The writer to the Hebrews says: "Pray for us" (*Hebrews* 13:18, 19). James says that, if a man is sick, he ought to call the elders, and the elders should pray over him (*James* 5:14). It is the advice to Timothy that prayer must be made for all men (1 *Timothy* 2:1). The Christian has the tremendous privilege of bearing his brother man to the throne of grace. There are three things to be said about this.

(i) We naturally pray for those who are ill, and we should just as naturally pray for those who are straying away from God. It should be just as natural to pray for the cure of the soul as it is to pray for the cure of the body. It may be that there is nothing greater that we can do for the man who is straying away and who is in peril of making shipwreck of his life than to commit him to the grace of God.

(ii) But it must be remembered that, when we have prayed for such a man, our task is not yet done. In this, as in all other things, our first responsibility is to seek to make our own prayers come true. It will often be our duty to speak to the man himself. We must not only speak to God about him, we must also speak to the man about himself. God needs a channel through which his grace can come and an agent through whom he can act; and it may well be that we are to be his voice in this instance.

(iii) We have previously thought about the basis of prayer and about the principle of prayer; but here we meet the limitation of prayer. It may well be that God wishes to answer our prayer; it may well be that we pray with heartfelt sincerity; but God's aim and our prayer can be frustrated by the man for whom we pray. If we pray for a sick person and he disobeys his doctors and acts foolishly, our prayer will be frustrated. God may urge, God may plead, God may warn, God may offer, but not even God can violate the freedom of choice which he himself has given to us. It is often the folly of man which frustrates our prayers and cancels the grace of God.

This passage speaks of the sin whose end is death and the sin whose end is not death. The Revised Standard Version translates "mortal" sin.

There have been many suggestions in regard to this.

The Jews distinguished two kinds of sins. There were the sins which a man committed unwittingly or, at least, not deliberately. These were sins which a man might commit in ignorance, or when he was swept away by some overmastering impulse, or in some moment of strong emotion when his passions were too strong for the leash of the will to hold. On the other hand, there were the sins of the high hand and the haughty heart, the sins which a man deliberately committed, the sins in which he defiantly took his own way in spite of the known will of God for him. It was for the first kind of sin that sacrifice atoned; but for the sins of the haughty heart and the high hand no sacrifice could atone.

Plummer lists three suggestions. (i) Mortal sins may be sins which are *punishable* by death. But it is quite clear that more is meant than that. This passage is not thinking of sins which are a breach of man-made laws, however serious. (ii) Mortal sins may be sins which God visits with death. Paul writes to the Corinthians that, because of their unworthy conduct at the table of the Lord, many among them are weak and many are asleep, that is, many have died (1 *Corinthians* 11:30); and the suggestion is that the reference is to sins which are so serious that God sends death. (iii) Mortal sins may be sins punishable with excommunication from the Church. When Paul is writing to the Corinthians about the notorious sinner with whom they have not adequately dealt, he demands that he should be "delivered to Satan." That was the phrase for excommunication. But he goes on to say that, serious as this punishment is and sore as its bodily consequence may be, it is designed to save the man's soul in the Day of the Lord Jesus (1 *Corinthians* 5:5). It is a punishment which does not end in death. None of these explanations will do.

There are three further suggestions as to the identification of this mortal sin.

(a) There is a line of thought in the New Testament which points to the fact that some held that there was no forgiveness for post-baptismal sin. There were those who believed that baptism cleansed from all previous sins but that after baptism there was no forgiveness. There is an echo of that line of thought in *Hebrews*: "It is impossible to restore again to repentance, those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy" (*Hebrews* 6:4-6). In early Christian terminology *to be enlightened* was often a technical term for *to be baptized*. It was indeed that belief which made many postpone baptism until the last possible moment. But the real essence of that statement in *Hebrews* is that restoration becomes impossible when penitence has become impossible; the connection is not so much with baptism as with penitence.

(b) Later on in the early church there was a strong line of thought which declared that apostasy could never be forgiven. In the days of the great persecutions some said that those who in fear or in torture had denied their faith could never have forgiveness; for had not Jesus said, "Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (*Matthew* 10:33; cp. *Mark* 8:38; *Luke* 9:26). But it must always be remembered that the New Testament tells of the terrible denial of Peter and of his gracious restoration. As so often happens, Jesus was gentler and more sympathetic and understanding than his Church was.

(c) It could be argued from this very letter of John that the most deadly of all sins was to deny that Jesus really came in the flesh, for that sin was nothing less than the mark of Antichrist (1 *John* 4:3). If the mortal sin is to be identified with any one sin that surely must be it. But we think that there is something more to it even than that.

First of all, let us try to fix more closely the meaning of the *mortal sin*. In the Greek it is the sin *pros thanaton*. That means *the sin which is going towards death*, the sin whose end is death, the sin which, if continued in, must finish in death. The terrible thing about it is not so much what it is in itself, as where it will end, if a man persists in it.

It is a fact of experience that there are two kinds of sinners. On the one hand, there is the man who may be said to sin against his will; he sins because he is swept away by passion or desire, which at the moment is too strong for him; his sin is not so much a matter of choice as of a compulsion which he is not able to resist. On the other hand, there is the man who sins deliberately, of set purpose taking his own way, although well aware that it is wrong.

Now these two men began by being the same man. It is the experience of every man that the first time that he does a wrong thing, he does it with shrinking and with fear; and after he has done it, he feels grief and remorse and regret. But, if he allows himself again and again to flirt with temptation and to fall, on each occasion the sin becomes easier; and, if he thinks he escapes the consequences, on each occasion the self-disgust and the remorse and the regret become less and less; and in the end he reaches a state when he can sin without a tremor. It is precisely that which is the sin which is leading to death. So long as a man in his heart of hearts hates sin and hates himself for sinning, so long as he *knows* that he is sinning, he is never beyond repentance and, therefore, never beyond forgiveness; but once he begins to revel in sin and to make it the deliberate policy of his life, he is on the way to death, for he is on the way to a state where the idea of repentance will not, and cannot, enter his head.

The mortal sin is the state of the man who has listened to sin and refused to listen to God so often, that he loves his sin and regards it as the most profitable thing in the world.

"We know that no one who is born of God sins" (1 John 5:18, nasb). "No one who is born of God practices sin" (1 John 3:9, nasb). Occasional sins are not here in view, but habitual sins, the practice of sin. Because a believer has a new nature ("God's seed," 1 John 3:9), he has new desires and appetites and is not interested in sin.

A Christian faces three enemies, all of which want to lead him into sin: the world, the flesh, and the devil. The world "lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19, nasb), Satan—the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:3-4, lit.) and the prince of this world (John 14:30). He is the spirit who works in the children of disobedience (Eph. 2:2).

Satan has many devices for leading a believer into sin. He tells lies, as he did to Eve (Gen. 3; 2 Cor. 11:1-3), and when men believe his lies they turn away from and disobey God's truth. Or, Satan may inflict physical suffering, as he did with Job and Paul (2 Cor. 12:7-9). In David's case, Satan used pride as his weapon and urged David to number the people and in this way defy God (1 Chron. 21). Satan is like a serpent who deceives (Rev. 12:9) and a lion who devours (1 Peter 5:8-9). He is a formidable enemy.

Then there is the problem of the *flesh*, the old nature with which we were born and which is still with us. True, we have a new nature (the divine seed, 1 John 3:9) within us, but we do not always *yield* to our new nature.

The *world* is our third enemy (1 John 2:15, 17). It is easy for us to yield to the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life! The atmosphere around us makes it hard for us to keep our minds pure and our hearts true to God.

Then *how* does a believer keep from sinning?

First John 5:18 gives the answer: Jesus Christ keeps the believer so that the enemy cannot get his hands on him. "He [Christ] who was born of God keeps him [the believer] and the evil one does not touch him" (nasb). The *Authorized Version* here gives the impression that a believer keeps himself from sin, but this is not what the verse says. Of course, it is true that a Christian must keep himself in the love of God (Jude 21); but it is not true that a Christian must depend on himself to overcome Satan.

Peter's experience with Satan helps us to understand this truth.

"Simon, Simon," said Jesus, "behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32, nasb).

To begin with, Satan cannot touch any believer without God's permission. Satan wanted to sift *all* the disciples, and Jesus gave him permission. But Jesus prayed especially for Peter, and His prayer was answered. Peter's faith did not ultimately fail, even though his courage failed. Peter was restored and became a mighty and effective soul-winner.

Whenever Satan attacks us, we can be sure that God gave him permission. And if God gave him permission He will also give us power to overcome, because God will never permit us to be tested above our strength (1 Cor. 10:13).

One of the characteristics of "spiritual young men" is their ability to overcome the evil one (1 John 2:13-14). Their secret? "The word of God abides in you" (1 John 2:14, nasb). Part of the armor of God is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17), and this sword overcomes Satan.

When a believer sins, he can confess his sin and be forgiven (1 John 1:9). But a believer dare not play with sin, because sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4, where "transgression of the Law" means "lawlessness"). A person who practices sin proves that he belongs to Satan (1 John 3:7-10). Furthermore, God warns that sin can lead to physical death!

"All unrighteousness is sin," but some sin is worse than other sin. *All* sin is hateful to God, and should be hateful to a believer; but some sin is punished with death. John tells us (1 John 5:16-17) about the case of a brother (a believer) whose life was taken because of sin.

The Bible mentions people who died because of their sin. Nadab and Abihu, the two sons of Aaron the priest, died because they deliberately disobeyed God (Lev. 10:1-7). Korah and his clan opposed God and died (Num. 16). Achan was stoned because he disobeyed Joshua's orders from God at Jericho (Josh. 6-7). A man named Uzzah touched the ark and God killed him (2 Sam. 6).

"But those are Old Testament examples!" someone may argue. "John is writing to New Testament believers who live under grace!"

To whom much is given, much shall be required. A believer today has a far greater responsibility to obey God than did the Old Testament saints. We have a complete Bible, we have the full revelation of God's grace, and we have the Holy Spirit living within us to help us obey God. But there are cases in the New Testament of believers who lost their lives because they disobeyed God.

Ananias and Sapphira lied to God about their offering, and they both died (Acts 5:1-11). Some believers at Corinth died because of the way they had acted at the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:30). And 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 suggests that a certain offender would have died had he not repented and confessed his sin (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

If a believer does not judge, confess, and forsake sin, God must chasten him. This process is described in Hebrews 12:1-13, which suggests that a person who does *not* subject himself to the Father *will not live* (Heb. 12:9). In other words, first God "spans" his rebellious children, and if they do not yield to His will, He may remove them from the world lest their disobedience lead others astray and bring further disgrace to His name.

"The sin unto death" is not some one *specific* sin. Rather, it is a *kind* of sin—it is the sort of sin that leads to death. With Nadab and Abihu, it was their presumption in taking the priest's office and entering the holy of holies. In the case of Achan it was covetousness. Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of hypocrisy and even of lying to the Holy Spirit.

If a Christian sees a brother committing sin, he should pray for him (1 John 5:16), asking that he confess his sin and return to fellowship with the Father. But if in his praying, he does not sense that he is asking in God's will (as instructed in 1 John 5:14-15), then he should not pray for the brother. "Therefore, pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to Me; for I will not hear thee" (Jer. 7:16).

James 5:14-20 somewhat parallels 1 John 5:16-17. James describes a believer who is sick, possibly because of his sin. He sends for the elders, who come to him and pray for him. The prayer of faith heals him and if he has sinned his sins are forgiven. "The prayer of faith" is prayer in the will of God, as described in 1 John 5:14-15. It is "praying in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 20).

Christians do not deliberately practice sin. They have the divine nature within; Jesus Christ guards them, and they do not want God's discipline.

(5:16-21) **Introduction:** Do we really believe in God? There are four tests that will clearly show us. This is the fourth and final test: Are we living free of sin or not? If we live in sin, it is clear proof we do not believe in God. But if we live in righteousness, live a life that is free of sin, then this is clear proof that we do believe in God. The person who wants to be acceptable to God must live a life of righteousness. He must live for God. No person should ever think that he can live a life of sin and be acceptable to God. The test of whether or not we believe God is the test of sin: Are we living in sin or not? This passage discusses the great subject of how to live free of sin.

1. By praying for a sinning brother (v.16).
2. By keeping oneself from sin (v.17-18).
3. By knowing that one is born of God and that the world is under the power of Satan (v.19).
4. By receiving the spiritual understanding that is given by Christ (v.21).
5. By keeping oneself from idols (v.21).

(5:16) **Sin—Prayer—Judgment:** How do we live free of sin? First, by praying for sinning brothers. If we are praying for believers who are living in sin, then we are concerned about sin, about living righteous lives. Scripture is clear: we are to pray for sinning brothers. But note: there is one time when we are not to pray for a sinning brother. When? When he has committed a "sin unto death"

(5:17-18) **Unrighteousness—Sin:** How do we live free of sin? By keeping ourselves free from sin and unrighteousness. Two things are essential in order to live free of sin.

1. We must know that *all unrighteousness* is sin. Too many people think too lightly of some sins. They rank sins, feeling that some sins are not so bad and are more acceptable to God. They feel that...

- some sins are small; others are big.
- some sins are white; others are black.
- some sins are more permissible; others are less permissible.
- some sins are more acceptable; others are less acceptable.

But note what Scripture says: "*all unrighteousness is sin.*" There is not a single act of unrighteousness that is not sin. There is only one sin that is ranked as a *sin unto death*. As seen above, that sin is either apostasy, denying that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, or else obstinate and persistent sin that just refuses to repent.

This is the ultimate sin, the unpardonable sin. But God does not list this sin to say that we can commit all the other sins and get away with them. He tells us about the *sin unto death* in order to warn us that we can sin too much. We can turn away from Christ too often, so often that we become engulfed and encrusted with sin—so hardened that we cannot break away. We doom ourselves if we continue to sin. All unrighteousness is sin; no matter how small and white or how permissible and acceptable we may think the act of unrighteousness is, it is sin to God. And if we persist in it, we are moving toward becoming so engulfed and encrusted in it that we border on the *sin unto death*.

The point is this: the way we live free of sin is to know that all unrighteousness is sin. There is not an act of unrighteousness that is not sin. No matter what we think, no matter how we may rank sin, there is no rank of sin with God. Sin is sin; unrighteousness is unrighteousness. We must repent and forsake all sin—know that all unrighteous acts are sin—if we are to live free of sin.

2. We must be born of God and put ourselves under the keeping power of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (1 John 5:18). This is a difficult verse. Looking at several translations will help us to see what it is saying.

The New American Standard says:

"We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He [the Son of God] who was born of God keeps him and the evil one does not touch him."

Williams says:

"We know that no one who is born of God makes a practice of sinning, but the Son who was born of God continues to keep him, and the evil one cannot touch him."

The Amplified New Testament says:

"We know [absolutely] that anyone born of God does not [deliberately and knowingly] practise committing sin, but the One Who was begotten of God carefully watches over and protects him - Christ's divine presence within him preserves him against the evil - and the wicked one does not lay hold (get a grip) on him or touch [him]."

Every person has sinned and is guilty of sin. We have all ignored God, neglected God, disbelieved God, disobeyed God, rebelled against God, and rejected God. Therefore, we are unacceptable to God. We are alienated and separated from God. We cannot live in God's presence. God is perfect, and no imperfect person can live in His presence.

But this is the glorious gospel. God sent His Son into the world to save man. Jesus Christ took our sins upon Himself and bore the guilt and judgment for them. Our sins are taken off of us, removed from us. Jesus Christ took them off. Therefore, we are free of sin. When we really believe in Jesus Christ, God counts the death of Christ for us. He counts our sins as having been paid by Christ. He counts us as being free of sin; He counts us as righteous. Therefore, we are acceptable to Him. But remember: it is all through Christ.

Now note this: when this happens, when we truly believe in Christ and we become free of sin, God does a most wonderful thing for us.

☐ He recreates our spirit, causes us to be born again.

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God....Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, 5).

"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:23).

☐ He makes us into a new creature.

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

☐ He recreates us into a new man.

"And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephes. 4:24).

"And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:10).

In the words of this verse, we are *born of God* (1 John 5:18). This is the way we keep ourselves from sin: being born of God. By being born of God, all of our past sins are removed from us. We are not guilty of a single sin because of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus Christ took our sins upon Himself, we are freed of sin. We stand acceptable to God.

But note: What about the sins we commit now and the sins we have committed since we first believed in Christ? How can we live free of them? Again, by the keeping power of God's Son. If we genuinely confess our sins, if we are sincere, if we struggle and struggle against sin, if we keep coming to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, then the blood of Jesus Christ continues to cleanse us from sin. Jesus Christ is eternal; He is the Ideal and Perfect Man, the Ideal Man who made the perfect sacrifice for sins. Therefore, His perfect sacrifice stands for and covers sin forever and ever.

The point is the most striking and wonderful news in all the world: we can be free of sin through Jesus Christ. All we have to do is cast ourselves upon Him continually. When we do this, He cleanses us from sin continually (1 John 1:9).

The word "keep" (tereo) means to keep a watchful eye over. Jesus Christ keeps His eye upon those who truly trust Him. He knows who they are, for they are...

☐ always coming to Him

☐ always walking with Him

☐ always fellowshiping and communing with Him

☐ always praying, praising, and confessing their shortcomings and sins

Note that the wicked one does not touch the genuine believer. This does not mean that the believer never sins. The word "touch" (hapto) means to lay hold of, grasp, and grip. The idea is that Satan cannot touch the believer to harm him. The genuine believer is under the keeping power of Jesus Christ; his sins are covered under the blood of Jesus Christ.

John draws to the end of his letter with a statement of the threefold Christian certainty.

(i) The Christian is emancipated from the power of sin. We must be careful to see what this means. It does not mean that the Christian never sins; but it does mean that he is not the helpless slave of sin. As Plummer put it: "A child of God may sin, but his normal condition is resistance to evil." The difference lies in this. The pagan world was conscious of nothing so much as moral defeat. It knew its own evil and felt there was no possible escape. Seneca spoke of "our weakness in necessary things." He said that men "hate their sins but cannot leave them." Persius, the Roman satirist, in a famous picture spoke of "filthy Natta, a man deadened by vice . . . who has no sense of sin, no knowledge of what he is losing, and is sunk so deep that he sends up no bubble to the surface." The pagan world was utterly defeated by sin.

But the Christian is the man who never can lose the battle. Because he is a man, he will sin; but he never can experience the utter moral defeatedness of the pagan. F. W. H. Myers makes Paul speak of the battle with the flesh:

"Well, let me sin, but not with my consenting, Well, let me die, but willing to be whole:
Never, O Christ-so stay me from relenting Shall there be truce betwixt my flesh and soul."

The reason for the Christian's ultimate undefeatedness is that *he who has his birth from God* keeps him. That is to say, Jesus keeps him. As Westcott has it: "The Christian has an active enemy, but he has also a watchful guardian." The heathen is the man who has been defeated by sin and has accepted defeat. The Christian is the man who may sin but never accepts the fact of defeat. "A saint," as someone has said, "is not a man who never falls; he is a man who gets up and goes on every time he falls."

(ii) The Christian is on the side of God against the world. The source of our being is God, but the world lies in the power of the Evil One. In the early days the cleavage between the Church and the world was much clearer than it is now. At least in the Western world, we live in a civilization permeated by Christian principles. Even if men do not practise them, they still, on the whole, accept the ideas of chastity, mercy, service, love. But the ancient world knew nothing of chastity, and little of mercy, and of service, and of love. John says that the Christian knows that he is with God, while the world is in the grip of the Evil One. No matter how the situation may have changed, the choice still confronts men whether they will align themselves with God or with the forces which are against God. As Myers makes Paul say:

"Whoso hath felt the Spirit of the Highest,
Cannot confound nor doubt him nor deny:
Yea with one voice, O World, tho' thou deniest,
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I."

(iii) The Christian is conscious that he has entered into that reality which is God. Life is full of illusions and impermanencies; by himself man can but guess and grope; but in Christ he enters into the knowledge of reality. Xenophon tells of a discussion between Socrates and a young man. "How do you know that?" says Socrates. "Do you know it, or are you guessing?" "I am guessing," is the answer. "Very well," says Socrates, "when we are done with guessing and when we know, shall we talk about it then?" Who am I? What is life? What is God? Whence did I come? Whither do I go? What is truth and where is duty? These are the questions to which men can reply only in guesses apart from Jesus Christ. But in Christ we reach the reality, which is God. The time of guessing is gone and the time of knowing has come.

(5:19) **World—Satan:** How do we live free of sin? By knowing that we are born of God and that the whole world is under the power of the evil one. What does this mean? How is the world under the power of Satan?

□ It means that Satan has *brought corruption and deterioration to the world*. The world is passing away. The world is corruptible and deteriorating and will eventually be destroyed. Therefore, do not become attached to the world; be attached to God and to heaven. Do not love the world so much that you desire to stay here more than you desire to be with God and in heaven.

□ It means that Satan has *affected the governments and societies of the world*. He has corrupted the hearts and minds, laws and rules of man. No government and no set of laws are perfect in governing the nations and societies of the earth. Therefore, believers must respect and be loyal to the good, but reject and stand against the bad. Believers must not love any organization more than they love God, not to the point that they are more attached to the systems of man's organizations than they are to God and heaven.

☐ It means that Satan has *injected and infected the world with sin and with lust, evil, pride, and rebellion against God*. The world is full of sinful people, people who are evil and full of lust and pride; it is full of people who are in rebellion against God. Do not love this sinful system of the world.

The world is not as God created it, neither the earth and heavens nor the people in them. They have all been corrupted in their very nature: they are aging, deteriorating, and passing away. And man himself has rebelled against God, become disobedient and unbelieving. He curses and rejects God with ever so many breaths, and he lives a selfish life, doing what he wants and seeking the pleasures and passions of the world. The end result is death and doom, utter destruction for both himself and his world.

The point is this: How does the believer live free of sin? How does he conquer and live victoriously over sin? By knowing that the world is in opposition to God, that it lies under the power of the wicked one. When the believer knows this, then he knows that he must not touch the world. He must separate himself from the worldliness of the world and live for God, for he is born of God.

(5:20) **Knowledge—Assurance**: How do we live free of sin? By receiving the spiritual understanding that is given by Christ. Note: the understanding being spoken about is the spiritual understanding that is given by Christ and by Christ alone. Understanding other areas of life will not deliver us from sin. Deliverance from sin is not found in understanding...

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| ☐ emotion | ☐ sociology |
| ☐ behavior | ☐ education |
| ☐ psychology | ☐ philosophy |
| ☐ medicine | ☐ religion |

All of these are important and have their place in society, but there is only one understanding that can deliver us from sin: the spiritual understanding that Jesus Christ gives. The human mind has to be enlightened to understand who Christ is. Our minds have to be quickened to receive Christ as our Savior from sin, quickened by Christ Himself.

Jesus Christ gives us spiritual understanding so that we can know three things.

1. Jesus Christ gives us the knowledge of God, to know that God is true: that God does exist; that God is behind all things; that God is the Maker and Creator of all things—both heaven and earth and all that is therein.
2. Jesus Christ gives us the knowledge that we are in God and in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ; that we have been born of God; that God has placed us in Him and in His Son; that we live, move, and have our being in God and in Christ; that we are secure forever and ever in God and His dear Son because we are in the very divine nature of God Himself.
3. Jesus Christ gives us the knowledge that we know the true God who lives eternally: that we are in Him; that we have eternal life; that we will never die, but will live with God forever and ever.

(5:21) **Idolatry**: How do we live free of sin? By keeping ourselves from idols. This exhortation closes the Epistle of 1 John. Note the tenderness with which John speaks: he calls the believers "little children." He is the aged and faithful minister who has served God for decade after decade. He has served God by reaching people for Christ and by building up the believers of the Lord's church. He loves every believer, loves them ever so dearly. He counts them as his *little children* in the faith.

Note another fact as well: this exhortation is directed to believers. It is believers who must guard and keep themselves from idols. What does John mean?

An idol is anything that takes first place in a person's life, anything that a person puts before God. An idol is anything that consumes man's focus and concentration, that consumes his energy and efforts more than God. A person can make an idol out of anything in this world; a person can take anything and worship it before God; he can allow it to consume his mind and thoughts and life:

- | | |
|------------|----------|
| ☐ houses | ☐ cars |
| ☐ lands | ☐ boats |
| ☐ job | ☐ sports |
| ☐ position | ☐ money |

- ☐ wives
- ☐ children
- ☐ sex
- ☐ food
- ☐ power
- ☐ comfort
- ☐ television
- ☐ possessions
- ☐ pleasures
- ☐ recreation

With this sudden, sharp injunction John brings his letter to an end. Short as it is, there is a world of meaning in this phrase.

(i) In Greek the word *idol* has in it the sense of unreality. Plato used it for the illusions of this world as opposed to the unchangeable realities of eternity. When the prophets spoke of the idols of the heathen, they meant that they were counterfeit gods, as opposed to the one true God. This may well mean, as Westcott has it, "Keep yourselves from all objects of false devotion."

(ii) An idol is anything in this life which men worship instead of God and allow to take the place of God. A man may make an idol of his money, of his career, of his safety, of his pleasure. Again to quote Westcott: "An idol is anything which occupies the place due to God."

(iii) It is likely that John means something more definite than either of these two things. It was in Ephesus that he was writing, and it was of conditions in Ephesus that he was thinking. It is likely that he means simply and directly, "Keep yourselves from the pollutions of heathen worship." No town in the world had so many connections with the stories of the ancient gods; and no town was more proud of them. Tacitus writes of Ephesus: "The Ephesians claimed that Diana and Apollo were not born at Delos, as was commonly supposed; they possessed the Cenchrean stream and the Ortygian grove where Latona, in travail, had reposed against an olive tree, which is still in existence, and had given birth to these deities. . . . It was there that Apollo himself, after slaying the Cyclops, had escaped the wrath of Jupiter: and again that father Bacchus in his victory had spared the suppliant Amazons who had occupied his shrine."

Further, in Ephesus there stood the great Temple of Diana, one of the wonders of the ancient world. There were at least three things about that Temple which would justify John's stern injunction to have nothing to do with heathen worship.

(a) The Temple was the centre of immoral rites. The priests were called the *Megabyzi*. They were eunuchs. It was said by some that the goddess was so fastidious that she could not bear a real male near her; it was said by others that the goddess was so lascivious that it was unsafe for any real male to approach her. Heraclitus, the great philosopher, was a native of Ephesus. He was called the weeping philosopher, for he had never been known to smile. He said that the darkness to the approach of the altar of the Temple was the darkness of vileness; that the morals of the Temple were worse than the morals of beasts; that the inhabitants of Ephesus were fit only to be drowned, and that the reason that he could never smile was that he lived in the midst of such terrible uncleanness. For a Christian to have any contact with that was to touch infection.

(b) The Temple had the right of asylum. Any criminal, if he could reach the Temple of Diana, was safe. The result was that the Temple was the haunt of criminals. Tacitus accused Ephesus of protecting the crimes of men and calling it the worship of the gods. To have anything to do with the Temple of Diana was to be associated with the very dregs of society.

(c) The Temple of Diana was the centre of the sale of Ephesian letters. These were charms, worn as amulets, which were supposed to be effective in bringing about the wishes of those who wore them. Ephesus was "pre-eminently the city of astrology, sorcery, incantations, amulets, exorcisms, and every form of magical imposture." To have anything to do with the Temple at Ephesus was to be brought into contact with commercialized superstition and the black arts.

It is hard for us to imagine how much Ephesus was dominated by the Temple of Diana. It would not be easy for a Christian to keep himself from idols in a city like that. But John demands that it must be done. The Christian must never be lost in the illusions of pagan religion; he must never erect in his heart an idol which will take the place of God; he must keep himself from the infections of all false faiths; and he can do so only when he walks with Christ.

Jesus Christ is the true God. We know Him who is true, and we are *in* Him who is true. We have "the real thing"! "We know that our real life is in the true One, and in His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the real God and this is real, eternal life" (1 John 5:20, ph). *Reality* has been the theme throughout John's letter, and now we are reminded of it again.

John was probably writing to believers in the city of Ephesus, a city given over to the worship of idols. The temple of Diana, one of the wonders of the ancient world, was located in Ephesus, and the making and selling of idols was one of the chief occupations of the people there (Acts 19:21-41). Surrounded by idolatry, Christians there were under tremendous pressure to conform.

But "we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one" (1 Cor. 8:4, nasb). That is, "an idol has no real existence" (nasb, marg.). The tragedy of idolatry is that a dead image can do a worshiper no good because it is not genuine. Hebrew writers in the Old Testament called idols "nothings, vain things, vapors, emptiness." An idol is a lifeless, useless *substitute* for the real thing.

The Psalms contain caustic indictments of idolatry (Pss. 115:1-8; 135:15-18). To human vision, an idol looks real—eyes, ears, mouth, nose, hands, feet—but these are but useless imitations of the real thing. The eyes are blind, the ears are deaf, the mouth is silent, the hands and feet are paralyzed. But the real tragedy is that "those who make them will become like them; everyone who trusts in them" (Ps. 115:8, nasb). We become like the god we worship!

This is the secret of the life that is real. Because we have met the true God, through His Son Jesus Christ, we are in contact with reality. Our fellowship is with a God who is genuine. As we have seen, the word "real" means "the original as opposed to a copy" and "the authentic as opposed to an imitation." Jesus Christ is the true Light (John 1:9), and true Bread (John 6:32), and true Vine (John 15:1), and Truth itself (John 14:6). He is the Original; everything else is a copy. He is authentic; everything else is only an imitation.

Christians live in an atmosphere of reality. Most unsaved people live in an atmosphere of pretense and sham. Christians have been given spiritual discernment to know the true from the false, but the unsaved do not have this understanding. Christians do not simply choose between good and bad; they choose between true and false. An idol represents that which is false and empty; and a person who lives for idols will himself become false and empty.

Few people today bow to idols of wood and metal. Nevertheless, other idols capture their attention and affection. *Covetousness*, for example, is idolatry (Col. 3:5). A man may worship his bankbook or his stock portfolio just as fervently as a so-called heathen worships his ugly idol. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:10). *The thing we serve is the thing we worship!* Whatever controls our lives and "calls the signals" is our god.

This explains why God warns us against the sin of idolatry. Not only is it a violation of His commandment (Ex. 20:1-6), but it is a subtle way for Satan to take control of us. When "things" take God's place in our lives, we are guilty of idolatry. This means we are living for the *unreal* instead of for the *real*.

To a man of the world, the Christian life is unreal and the worldly life is real. This is because a man of the world lives by what he sees and feels (things) and not by what God says in His Word. An idol is a temporal *thing*, Jesus Christ is eternal God. "For the *things* which are seen are temporal, but the things which are *not seen* are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18, nasb).

Like Moses, a Christian endures "as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). Faith is "the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Noah had never seen a flood, yet by faith he "saw" it coming and did what God told him to do. Abraham "saw" a heavenly city and country by faith, and was willing to forsake his own earthly home to follow God. All of the great heroes of faith named in Hebrews 11 accomplished what they did because they "saw the invisible" by faith. In other words, they were in contact with reality.

The world boasts of its enlightenment, but a Christian walks in the *real* light, because God is light. The world talks about love, but it knows nothing of the *real* love which a Christian experiences because "God is love." The world displays its wisdom and learning, but a Christian lives in truth because "the Spirit is truth." God is light, love, and truth; and these together make a life that is *real*.

"But it makes no difference what a man believes so long as he is sincere!" This popular excuse hardly needs refutation. Does it make any difference what the pharmacist believes, or the surgeon, or the chemist? It makes all the difference in the world! Shed a tear for Jimmy Brown; Poor Jimmy is no more. For what he thought was H₂O* was H₂SO₄!* (* Water, Sulphuric acid)

A Christian has "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thes. 1:9). Idols are dead, but Christ is the living God. Idols are false, but Christ is the true God. This is the secret of the life that is real!
So John's admonition, "Keep yourselves from idols," can be paraphrased, "Watch out for the imitation and the artificial and be real!"