



First
John

FE
BOOK
PUBLICATION
by Given O. Blakely

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Presents

The Book of 1st John

Commentary

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Lesson #1

Getting Our Bearings

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; 2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) 3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. 5 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. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 7 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. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” (1 John 1:1-10, KJV)

INTRODUCTION

OUTLINE

1. **First Hand Testimony** (Verse 1).
2. **The Life Made Known** (Verse 2);
3. **Declaring What Was Seen and Heard** (Verse 3A).

4. **The Reason for Declaring it** (Verse 3B).
5. **Fulness of Joy** (Verse 4).
6. **The Heart of the Message** (Verse 5).
7. **The Demands of Truth** (Verse 6).
8. **The Result of a Spiritual Walk** (Verse 7).
9. **The Child of God and Sin** (Verses 8-10)

Even though the writer of First John is never specified, it has been generally conceded throughout history it was written by the beloved Apostle John. Ultimately, of course it is an expression of the Holy Spirit of God, for “*All Scripture is inspired by God*” (2 Tim 3:16, NASB). The structural and doctrinal harmony of First John with the Gospel of John is remarkable, confirming God used the same man to give them to us. Without laboring this point, the following church fathers affirmed John to be the author of First John. Polycarp (70-156 A.D., himself a disciple of John), Irenaeus (125-195), Papias (60-130 A.D.), Clement of Alexandria (155-20 A.D.), Tertullian (161-225 A.D.), Origen (185-254 A.D.), Dionysius of Alexandria (Died in 264 A.D.), and Cyprian (200-258 A.D.). All of them quoted from this book, which confirms its unquestioned acceptance by both John’s generation and the ones immediately following.

It is generally understood that First, Second, and Third John were among the last books John wrote—the last inspired books given to the sons of men.

The Thrust of the Book

To briefly summarize the similarities between the Gospel of John and the Epistle of First John, both have two distinctive strata of thought. Both strata pertain to Deity: i.e., God as revealed through Jesus Christ. The two are “*light*” and “*life*.” Much of the teaching of both John and First John revolve around these key concepts.

These two words are found seventeen times in First John, and are pivots upon which the message of this book revolve (1:1,2,5,7; 2:8,9,10,16,25; 3:14,15,16; 5:11,12, 13,16,20). They appear no less than fifty-times in the Gospel of John. They are, to be sure, key words of Scripture.

Applied to Deity

“*Light*” and “*Life*” are both applied to Deity. The central message of this book, for example, is “*God is Light*” (1:5). The Lord Jesus is said to be “*in the light*” (1:7). The Lord Jesus is appropriately described as “*that Eternal Life, which was with the Father*” (1:2). Not only are the Father and the Son themselves “*light*” and “*life*,” they are the immediate Source of them for believers. Both terms speak of illumination and spiritual vitality. The Persons of God and the Son are the only Source of understanding, insight, and spiritual life and response. These cannot be achieved independently of Them.

Intended for the Redeemed

This book is written to bolster the confidence of believers—to assure them of who they are and what they have obtained in Christ Jesus. The statements to which we will be subjected are powerful, and thus effective to accomplish

this purpose.

Both “*light*” and “*life*” are intended to be experienced by the redeemed. In fact, they form the boundaries of spiritual life. Apart from them, there is no acceptance with God or triumph over the devil. Unlike the Old Covenant, the New Covenant is not a system of discipline and lifeless procedures. Understanding, receptivity, and response to God are imperative. Thus believers are said to “*walk in the LIGHT as He is in the LIGHT*” (1 John 1:7). It is further confirmed that our response to the people of God indicates whether or not we are “*in the light*” (2:9-10). Further the purpose of God for men, as revealed in Christ, is declared to “*eternal life*” (1 John 5:11).

This, then, is the THRUST, or EMPHASIS of this book: *light and life* . The discernment of saints, and their awareness they have eternal life is the point of its writing. Once we read the words, “*hereby we do KNOW*” (2:3). Twice we read, “*hereby we KNOW*” (3:19,24), and twice “*Hereby KNOW we*” (4:6,13). Once we read, “*by this ye KNOW*” (5:2), and once “*that ye may KNOW*” (5:13). Once we read “*Hereby KNOW ye*” (4:2). In addition to the above references we read “*we KNOW*” eight times (2:18; 3:2,14; 5:2,15,18,19,20), and “*ye KNOW*” seven times (2:20,21,29; 3:5,15).

Written to Bolster Confidence

This book is written to bolster the confidence of believers—to assure them of who they are and what they have obtained in Christ Jesus. The statements to which we will be subjected are powerful, and thus effective to accomplish this purpose. Recalling but a few of them will confirm this to be the case.

“But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and YOU KNOW all things” (2:20, NKJV).

“And YOU KNOW that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin” (3:5, NKJV).

“ WE KNOW that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death” (3:14, NKJV).

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that YOU MAY KNOW that you have eternal life” (5:13, NKJV).

“ WE KNOW that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (5:19, NKJV).

In all of these, and more, immediate and vital identity with both the Father and the Son are required. God will not allow His people to progress in the faith or obtain confidence independently of this involvement. Academic pursuits, however noble they may be, will not acquire these blessings. Nor, indeed, will the most rigorous personal discipline confirm to the heart what has been affirmed in these verses.

Spiritual confidence or assurance is not a luxury. It is necessity, an absolute requisite to obtaining Divine benefits and overcoming the world. Thus the Spirit identifies the nature of God and His salvation in this book. He also provides evidence of spiritual life, and assures our hearts that salvation comes with all of the resources required for both life and godliness. We must never allow the intrusion of any persuasion that takes these things from us. The body of Christ sorely needs the message of this Epistle. That, of course, is why it has been given to us. Let us receive it with joy and thanksgiving

FIRST HAND TESTIMONY

“I That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life.” The very first words of this wonderful Epistle elevate our minds to heavenly realms. In this manner, they remind us of the opening of the Gospel of John. *“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). In both the Gospel and First Epistle, the Spirit begins with a lofty statement about the Son of God. There is no easing into the subject, so to speak. There is no accommodation to the flesh, and no effort to meet people where they are, a hallowed practice among many in the professed church.

The Beginning

In both references, the Spirit refers to *“the beginning.”* Those words, of course, are used in the very first statement of inspired writing: *“In the beginning God . . . ”* (Gen 1:1). Whether we are referring to Genesis, John, or First John, the words mean the same thing. They are not speculative words, but an expression that tells us where to begin our thinking. They define the boundary line of our present knowledge. It all started with the creation—with the genesis, or beginning, of the heavens and the earth. They are the Divinely created and appointed arena for the enactment of the drama of redemption.

Here and there, glimpses of eternity prior to the creation of the heavens and earth are given. However, there is a consistent covering of obscurity spread over them. The phrase *“before the foundation of the world”* is an example. In His High Priestly prayer, Jesus said the Father loved Him *“before the foundation of the world”* (John 17:24). He also referred to the glory He had with the Father *“before the world was”* (John 17:5). Those in Christ Jesus are said to have been *“chosen in Him before the foundation of the world”* (Eph 1:4). In His redemptive capacity as the Lamb of God, our Savior was *“foreordained before the foundation of the world”* (1 Pet 1:20).

It is enough to know that Divine purpose did not begin with time. In the salvation of men, God is not reacting to the devil’s delusion, but carrying out an *“eternal purpose.”*

There are also allusions to *“the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation”* (Jude 6), whom *“God spared not”* (2 Pet 2:4). The fall of Satan himself is also mentioned. Jesus said he *“abode not in the truth”* (John 8:44). Both Isaiah and Ezekiel touch on the same subject (Isa 14:12-14; Ezek 28:13-18). In the Revelation, Jesus refers to our adversary as *“a great red dragon, who drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth”* (Rev 12:3-4). We assume this is a reference to the *“angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation.”*

But none of these things are called *“the beginning.”* They are not the point from which our thinking is to START. This means spiritual reasoning is not primarily philosophical. It is not speculative, compelling the individual to probe into areas concerning which little revelation is given. God has specified *“the beginning”* from which we proceed to consider the things of God, as well as our own persons.

We begin with the creation—with the forming of the environment we presently occupy. Jesus referred to *“the beginning”* in this sense (Matt 19:4,8; 24:21; Mk 10:6; 13:19; John 8:44). The Apostles also referred to *“the beginning”* in the same manner, taking us back to creation (Eph 3:9; 2

Thess 2:13; Heb 1:10; 2 Pet 3:4; 1 John 3:8).

Thus we begin with the revelation of God's purpose concerning humanity. Our reasoning is not to begin with the insurrection of the devil or the fall of the angels who sinned. Neither, indeed, are we to peer back into eternity past, developing our theology and spiritual views upon the basis of Divine choices and determinations made then. It is enough to know that Divine purpose did not begin with time. In the salvation of men, God is not reacting to the devil's delusion, but carrying out an "*eternal purpose*."

Another Sense of Beginning

There is yet another sense in which the word "*beginning*" is used. It also has to do with the commencement of the new creation. With the coming of Jesus into the world, a new work was initiated. He is appropriately called "*the Second Man*" and the "*Last Adam*" (1 Cor 15:45-47). Note, Jesus is not the second Adam, but the "*Second Man*." With the manifestation of the Son of God a new era of revelation began.

Frequently the Holy Spirit refers to the ministry of Jesus as "*the beginning*"—a fresh start. "*The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*" (Mk 1:1). Luke refers to the Apostles as men "*which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word*" (Lk 1:2). John says Jesus "*knew from the beginning who they were that believed not*" (John 6:64). Jesus said to His disciples, "*And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning*" (John 15:27).

A Combination of the Two

When John writes "*That which was from the beginning*," He encompasses both perspectives of "*the beginning*." The Person of Whom he writes is the One who was "*in the beginning*" with God. But He is also the One who was revealed, chose them, taught them, and commissioned them.

Mark this well, John is not going to expound the Law or the tradition of the elders. He will not take up an argument about keeping the Sabbath day, observing times and seasons, or adhering to dietary practices inculcated under the Law. The Person he reveals was before the Law. The teachings he will unfold were after the law. In other words, the Spirit is directing John to write concerning the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. He will assist the saints in obtaining confidence of who they are in Jesus, and the evidences of their status.

Jesus is the Heart of it All

As elementary as this may seem, much preaching is outside the circumference of the Gospel of Christ. Such things ought not to be. In "*these last days*" **God has nothing to say to humanity that is not said through Jesus, and in strict harmony with the Gospel**. The Epistles (Romans through Jude), for example, contain the name "*Jesus*" 276 times, "*Christ*" 453 times, "*Lord*" 333 times, and "*Son*" 54 times. By way of comparison, "*marriage*" is mentioned twice, "*husbands*" ten times, "*wives*" nine times, and "*money*" one time. There should be no question about the thrust of God's message in this "*day of salvation!*"

Further, all of God's dealings with humanity are in view of Christ—whether before the Law, during the Law, or after the Law. The polestar of the saints is not nature. It is not the Law of God, although it is holy, spiritual, and good. Men cannot gather a proper perspective by looking at themselves, the home, or their country. None of them shed enough light to brighten our path! The Lord Jesus Himself is the "*bright and Morning Star*" (Rev 22:16). If our attention

is not drawn to Him, we will go adrift. **God will not allow any person to have proper focus apart from His only begotten Son.**

Thus, John makes clear what His subject will be. He is going to expound the Lord Jesus Christ “*which was from the beginning.*” He is the preeminent One they “*heard,*” and the dominant sight they “*saw.*” He was “*God manifest in the flesh*” (1 Tim 3:16), Whom they “*touched,*” and upon Whose bosom John Himself reposed (John 13:23). The Lord Jesus is at once the Creator, Sustainer, Savior, and Mediator. He is the theme of this marvelous Epistle.

We Have Heard

The supreme experience of the senses was contact with the Lord Jesus Christ— particularly the risen Christ. As John looked back over time (nearly sixty years prior), he did not think of the fish he once held, or his father’s nets that he once mended. He considered the supreme touch to have been when he touched the Lord.

It is interesting to consider the placing of hearing before seeing. Such a placement should not surprise us, for “*faith cometh by hearing*” (Rom 10:217), not seeing. When John says “*which we have heard,*” he means hearing with discernment, not just being subjected to sounds. When Saul of Tarsus confronted the glorified Christ on the road to Damascus, some heard “*a voice,*” yet did not comprehend it (Acts 9:7; 22:9). No doubt special reference is being made to the post-resurrection teaching of Jesus, when for forty days He spoke to them “*of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*” (Acts 1:3).

We Have Seen

John was among those who were “*eyewitnesses*” of the incarnate Word. More than simply seeing Him as a man, they also were “*eyewitnesses of His majesty,*” particularly when He was transfigured before them (2 Pet 1:16-18). The extent of their exposure to Christ was specified by Peter when they prepared to choose an Apostle to take the place of fallen Judas. “*Beginning from the baptism of John , unto that same day that He was taken up from us . . .*” (Acts 1:22). Multitudes saw Jesus, but not in the sense the Apostles saw Him! They saw Him when He prayed. They Him in His glory. They saw Him after He was risen from the dead. They saw Him in storms, feeding multitudes, healing the sick, and having compassion on the multitudes.

We Have Looked Upon

Their vision of Jesus was an extended one. They “*looked upon,*” or looked more closely on Him, allowing their minds to come into synch with their sight. They were **looking** at Him when they said, “*What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!*” (Mk 8:27). They “*looked*” upon Him as He cleansed the temple, remembering “*that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up*” (John 2:17).

Our Hands Have Handled

The supreme experience of the senses was contact with the Lord Jesus Christ— particularly the risen Christ. As John looked back over time (nearly sixty years prior), he did not think of the fish he once held, or his father’s nets that he once mended. He considered the supreme touch to have been when he touched the Lord. He doubtless recalled Jesus’ when He appeared to them as they gathered in fear: “*Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and*

see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have” (Lk 24:39).

The Word of Life

What a term for the Lord Jesus! Later in this Epistle, He will again refer to Jesus as “*the Word*” Who is in heaven (5:7). It is the same “*Word*” which was “*in the beginning*” (John 1:14). Here he calls the Savior “*the Word of life.*” What does He mean?

He means the Lord Jesus CONFERS life—spiritual life. He is the One through Whom God makes people alive unto Himself. As Jesus said, “*For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself*” (John 5:26). That is, the risen Christ has been given charge of conferring life upon those who receive Him. He did say, “*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10).

Why Does He Speak in This Way?

There is good reason for this introduction. The Spirit knows our life depends upon the integrity of the Gospel. Therefore, He brings the Word to us through those closest to the Lord Himself. Mind you, this does not give the Word more power. It does, however, strengthen our spirits to hear the testimony from those who were selected by Jesus—who heard Him, saw Him, looked intently upon Him, and even touched Him. All of this does not accentuate the Apostle, but the message he now brings to us. The person of John is unique because of the message that He declared. The message set him apart, not vice versa. It is ever the Word that sanctifies.

THE LIFE MADE KNOWN

“ 2 (For the Life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that Eternal Life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us).” “*The Life*” and “*that Eternal life*” refer to the “*Word*” that was in the beginning—the pre-incarnate Savior. Throughout Scripture, wherever reference is made to the Lord Jesus Christ BEFORE He came into the world, general terms are used. No name, as we ordinarily think of names, is ascribed to Him before He came into the world. A few references will suffice to confirm this point.

- “**US**” --He is included in the expression, “*Let US make man in our image, after our likeness*” (Gen 1:26.)
- “**WORD**” --“*In the beginning was the WORD, and the WORD was with God, and the WORD was God*” (John 1:1)
- “**FORM**” --“*Who, being in the FORM OF GOD*” (Phil 2:6).
- “**LORD**” --“*The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool*” (Psa 110:1; Matt 22:42-45). “*And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands*” (Heb 1:10).
- “**I AM**”-- “*Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am*” (John 8:58).

He is making known what was NOT evident during the life and ministry of Jesus. He will

unfold the accomplishments that were never seen by those lacking spiritual vision.

These expressions confirm the transcendency of the Person of Christ, who IS greater than the revelation of Him. His real Being was concealed by His humanity, even though portions of it were made known. For this reason, Jesus is never called “the eternal Son,” as some creeds have said. He BEGAN to be the Son (Heb 1:5), but He Himself never had a beginning (Heb 7:3).

All of these are not to be viewed as theological technicalities. Rather, they are intended to assist us in considering Christ in the Spirit, and not in the flesh. As it is written, “*Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more*” (2 Cor 5:16). What Jesus did when He walked among men, together with His atoning death and resurrection, are to be understood in light of Who Jesus was BEFORE He came into the world.

Perhaps a brief elaboration will be helpful. The Lord Jesus Christ was not a revelation of the potential of man, but of the Person of God. He was not sent into the world to display what men could be, but to unveil God Himself, His love and His purpose.

Now, John refers to Him as “*the Life*” and “*that Eternal Life, which was with the Father.*” By this He means the Lord Jesus Christ is the fountain of life, “*whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting*” (Mic 5:2). To put it another way, the creation does not revolve around man, but around “*the Word,*” Who was in the beginning.

Do not miss what is being said here. In Jesus, Deity was made known. The Source and focus of life was revealed. Thus John says, “*The LIFE was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness.*” He is making known what was NOT evident during the life and ministry of Jesus. He will unfold the accomplishments that were never seen by those lacking spiritual vision. John will not tell us about the people Jesus healed, the storms He calmed, or the food He miraculously supplied. His wondrous works are not to be diminished, but we must see more than that to wage a successful warfare against the powers of darkness.

When He says of Jesus, “*that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us,*” He is not speaking of a recognition of the historical Jesus. Rather, he is referring to the understanding of Jesus ministered to them by the Father Himself. This experience was introduced when Peter perceived Who Jesus really was (Matt 16: 17-18). By referring to the Savior as “*that eternal life,*” He immediately associates Him with our salvation. It is another way of saying “*Christ, Who is our life*” (Col 3:4). The Lord Jesus Himself confirms the Father’s love for and interest in us. John and the other Apostles did not study Jesus diligently, finally figuring out Who He was. Rather, He was “*manifested,*” or “*made known*” to them. The word translated “*was manifested*” comes from the word **evfanerw,qh** (ephan-er-otha), which means *to make known, or cause to be seen*.

Notice with what care John presents the Lord Jesus Christ and the great salvation He has brought to us. He does not anchor our faith in his Apostleship, but in the God who has made Jesus known. He takes us back into the eternal realms from which our Savior came. In this, he is emphasizing Divine purpose above human need. He accentuates Divine initiative, not human response. It is essential to see this approach to Christ. At no point must men allow themselves or their accomplishments to supercede the Person of Christ Jesus. Only a proper understanding of the Son will yield a good understanding of other things. It is in His light that we see light. When God is more clearly seen, the shadows of delusion are scattered, and all

things become plain.

DECLARING WHAT WAS SEEN AND HEARD

“ 3A That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you. . . ” Both seeing and hearing are gifts from God. As it is written, *“The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them”* (Prov 20:12). This is not only true in nature, it is much more true in grace. The ability to perceive the Person of Christ and comprehend His word, comes from the Lord. In both nature and grace, God has *“planted the ear”* and *“formed the eye”* (Psa 94:9). Seeing this truth, David cried out, *“Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law”* (Psa 119:18 NKJV).

What, therefore, John writes to us is not his private opinion or interpretation of Christ Jesus. No Scripture, including First John, *“is a matter of one's own interpretation”* (2 Pet 1:20 NASB). He is going to declare to us what God enabled Him to see and hear. This book is NOT *“made by an act of human will, but”* John, being *“moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God”* (2 Pet 1:21).

At this point, there is an important Divine manner to perceive. Before Jesus left

Such objectives cannot be realized by philosophizing about truth, or sharing private perceptions of the Gospel. The statements about the Lord Jesus Christ must be precise and to the point

His disciples, He told them He was going to send the Spirit of Truth to them. *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”* (John 14:26). According to the way men think, the best time to record a matter is when it occurs—or at least as close to that time as possible. With men, time erodes recollection, and important details are soon forgotten, or even distorted.

But First John was NOT written right after Jesus ascended into heaven. Nor, indeed, were any New Covenant writings. It is generally conceded that Mark is the earliest New Covenant book. It was written 40-42 A.D., or 10-12 after the ascension. First John was written, so far as we know, somewhere between 80-95 A.D. **That is 50-65 years after the ascension!** Such a procedure is not the manner of this world.

Mark it well, this is a critical Epistle, written to bolster the confidence of believers, and assure them they have eternal life (1 John 5:13). Such objectives cannot be realized by philosophizing about truth, or sharing private perceptions of the Gospel. The statements about the Lord Jesus Christ must be precise and to the point (1:3,7; 2:1; 4:9,10,14; 5:5,6). The benefits accruing from His achievements must also be flawless and clear (1:7; 2:20,27; 4:2).

Here is where the Holy Spirit comes into the picture. Over half a century after Jesus ascended into heaven and was seated on the right hand of God, the Spirit brings such recollection and insight to John that he is able to effectively minister to *“God's heritage”* (1 Pet 5:3). John is not depending upon his memory to declare what He has *“seen and heard.”* Even as in the beginning of his ministry, he could not help but speak the things he had *“seen and heard”* (Acts 4:20)—but he did so under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit did not move men along like robots, however. First, He worked with *“holy men.”* Second, He used those who had been exposed to the Person, words, and works of the Savior of the world. In the writing of Scripture, experience and insight are woven together by the Spirit of God. The personal seeing and hearing of these things enabled the Apostle to write with both joy and

zeal. The insight empowered him to write with confidence and power.

THE REASON FOR DECLARING IT

“*3B . . . that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.*” What a glorious summary of the intent of this precious book! Tasting of the goodness of the Lord provokes the desire for the fellowship of the saints. That fellowship, however, is not based on identity with a religious organization—a flawed touchstone that is altogether too common in our time. The primary fellowship, as we will see, is with the Father and His Son. It is not possible for those involved in such fraternity to be companions of those outside of that association.

At this point, there is another aspect of salvation that can be seen. The Apostles, while placed “*first*” in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:28), are, notwithstanding, still a part of that body. They are to be held in high regard because of their preeminent role, but they are still part of the body. Paul states this case with unusual strength. “*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?*” (1 Cor 3:5). And again, “*Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's. Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God*” (1 Cor 3:21-4:1).

The spirit of these texts is reflected in John’s reason for writing: “*that ye also may have fellowship with us.*” Herein is a marvelous depiction of the nature of life in Christ Jesus! What believers of all ages experience is not only harmonious with what the Apostles received, it is of precisely the same order. Peter states the case well. “*Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Pet 1:1 RSV). The NASB refers to this faith as “*of the same kind as ours.*” Candidly, this is a refreshing thought. It bolsters the confidence of believers to know there is nothing about their standing in Christ that is inferior. While we are not able to do “*the signs of an Apostle*” (2 Cor 12:12), our faith is not inferior to their’s. Our acceptance is just as sure as their’s was.

Fellowship

“*Fellowship*” involves having a kindred spirit and a preference for the same things. There is an effective mutuality in “*fellowship*” that finds those involved sharing with one another. This is not the mere sharing of earthly goods, although when that is required believers gladly do so. This is a “*fellowship*” that is created by faith and fed by love. It is “*dwelling together in unity,*” an environment that is blessed by God Himself (Psa 133:1-3). The spirits of those in spiritual fellowship have been merged. They are thus equipped to bear one another’s burdens, and share each another’s joys (Gal 6:2; Rom 12:12).

Fellowship cannot be legislated . It is not an objective of itself, but the result of something higher and more noble. In our text, it is the targeted result of proclaiming “*that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto*” John and the Apostles.

A Subordinate Fellowship

But John, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, is not rallying believers to himself, or making an attempt to establish The Saint John Christian Church. The fellowship into which he is drawing the people is a subordinate one. The primary thing was not fellowship with John, or any of the other Apostles. The aged Apostle was actually calling them into

involvement with the Father and the Son!

Ponder the excellence of this word: “*and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*” Here is an aspect of salvation, common to all believers. This is not a description of a uniquely Apostolic privilege. While I know of no one who categorically teaches such a thing, there seems to be an attitude in the Christian community that assumes this to be the case.

In salvation, we are called by God “*into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord*” (1 Cor 1:9). This fellowship is effectual. As it is written, “*But by His (God’s) doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption*” (1 Cor 1:30). This is the very unity for which Jesus prayed in Gethsemane—a unity between the Father, the Son, and believers. “*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me*” (John 17:20-21 NIV).

Where this “*fellowship*” is not realized, the grace of God has been frustrated, and the intent of salvation unrealized. A religion that allows for an absence of Divine fellowship is impotent, and is a tool of the devil. Hear the Lord Jesus state the case again. “*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 . . . If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him*” (John 14:21,23 NASB).

Fellowship with the Father and the Son involves receiving from Them and working together with Them. Here there is participation in the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4) This is the fellowship John is targeting. He is not merely passing along lifeless information. He knows no soul will be able to arrive safely in the glory apart from fellowship with the Father and the Son. Regardless of the seeming precision of a person’s theology, if he is not in fellowship with the Father and the Son, he is in jeopardy of being cut off, as Ephesus (Rev 2:1-4). Oh, that more were convinced of this truth! Altogether too much professed *New Testament Christianity* allows its constituents to remain out of fellowship with the Father and the Son.

What Is Fellowship with Deity?

What is involved in the fellowship of reference? It is more than simply being around Jesus, like the multitudes were when He “*dwelt among us.*” Being in a place where the presence of Jesus is confirmed is by no means being in fellowship with Him. Knowing there is one God is not to be equated with being in fellowship with Him.

Note, our text does not say the Father and Son are in fellowship with men, but that men are in fellowship with Them. This is a fellowship of involvement—one in which the purposes and intentions of God are embraced by the individual. Such glorious fraternity involves the abandonment of a personal agenda, counting all things “*loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus*” (Phil 3:8). In hearty agreement, those in fellowship with the Father and the Son acquiesce to be separated from this world in order to obtain an “*eternal inheritance*” (Heb 9:15). This is a fellowship of understanding, joy, and confidence in the Lord. The accomplishment of such glorious fellowship is the objective of this letter. The truth expounded will, if believed and embraced, yield the intended benefits. Fulness of joy and a strong confidence that we have eternal life are within your grasp.

FULLNESS OF JOY

“4 And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.” Fulness of joy is NOT a carnal experience. It is not fleshly exhilaration, although it does saturate the entire person. The nature of spiritual life requires this type of joy, or spiritual cheerfulness and delight. The bitter herbs of human experience are neutralized by the powerful influence of fulness of joy. It is not often we are confronted with someone seeking to increase our joy in the Lord. That is a rare occasion, indeed. Imagining they offer advantages to the people of God, some are convinced humor and levity are actually a ministry to the spirit of the redeemed. Such a thought is only an imagination. Whatever value such things may have, it is short-lived, and not to be compared with having your joy made “full.”

There is a fulness of joy that has not yet been experienced. Thus it is written, *“in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore”* (Psa 16:11). That is the ultimate joy that can be experienced. The closer we come to the Father and the Son in our hearts, or the more extensive our fellowship with Them, the more full our joy becomes.

Joy and Faith

And how will the Spirit contribute to our joy being made “full.” He will move John to write about the Father and the Son. He will tell us *“God is light,”* and that provision has been made for us to *“walk in the light.”* He will remind us why Jesus came into the world, and what He is doing now in our behalf. In short, He will clarify salvation.

Notice that a fulness of joy comes from something that is *“written,”* not a profound circumstance of life. The reason for this is apparent. Joy springs out of the rich soil of faith, and faith comes by hearing. For this reason, spiritual joy is called *“joy of faith,”* or *“joy in the faith”* (Phil 1:25). Such marvelous joy is helped along by the faithful communication of realities in Christ Jesus. Like Paul, therefore, John is a helper of our joy (2 Cor 1:24), assisting us to rise into the heavenly realms where joy is *“unspeakable and full of glory”* (1 Pet 1:8).

The word *“joy”* depicts a very large experience. Thorough satisfaction is implied. As it is written, *“The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage”* (Psa 16:5-6). This is what Jesus alluded to when he told the Samaritan woman, *“But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life”* (John 4:14).

“Full joy” is like the eruption of faith through the gate of human emotion. It is the result of comprehending we are in the world, but are not of it (John 15:19; 17:14,16). True joy enables us to hold our heads high during the most adverse of human experiences, knowing it is only *“a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry”* (Heb 10:37). This joy brings us to rejoice in the future, something those that are of this world cannot do. For them the future is dark with mystery, and uncertainty as well. However, the good news of the Gospel has clarified the future for us, bringing us a fulness of joy.

Joy and Strength

Believers must learn it is difficult enough to traverse these lowlands of sin and sorrow without doing so with our joy being incomplete and crippled. **If any part of us has to hobble or limp, let it be the flesh!** Full joy belongs to our spirits, which must not be weak. We will find it to be true, even as Nehemiah told his workers, *“the joy of the LORD is your strength”* (Neh 8:10). The reason for this is quite simple. As we come into a closer fellowship with the Lord, our experience of Him converts into joy. This is described by David in the twenty-eighth Psalm. *“The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him”* (V 7).

And how will the Spirit contribute to our joy being made “full.” He will move John to write about the Father and the Son. He will tell us “*God is light,*” and that provision has been made for us to “*walk in the light.*” He will remind us why Jesus came into the world, and what He is doing now in our behalf. In short, He will clarify salvation.

In this short, but profound, Epistle, the Spirit is bringing the well of salvation within our reach. There are profound pleasures and rich satisfaction to be realized as we draw from this well. As Isaiah prophesied, “*Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation*” (Isa 12:3). That “*joy,*” being “*full of glory,*” buoys up the soul in the good fight of faith. Suffice it to say, without this fulness of joy, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Tit 2:12). Fulness of joy is a powerful means to overcoming the wicked one and living triumphantly.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

“*5 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.*” In any major translation of Scripture, this is **only** place where the phrase “*GOD IS LIGHT*” is found. He does not say God “*gives light,*” as in Psalm 119:130, or that He “*commands light to shine,*” as in 2 Corinthians 4:6). Daniel came close to saying the same thing when he said, “*light dwells with Him*” (Dan 2:22).

“*Light*” is also the manner in which the Word entering into the world was described. “*4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. 6 There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light. 9 There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man*” (John 1:4-9). There is a slight difference between these expressions and that of our text. In the Gospel of John, the Word made flesh is called “*THE light.*” However, our text says “*God IS light,*” NOT “*God is the light.*” The difference between the two expressions is simply this. The Savior was a revelation of God. He is the solitary Source of acquaintance with God. In Him, the Divine nature was brought within the range of mankind.

By saying “*God IS light,*” the Spirit shows this is His nature. He is not merely a Dispenser of light, but is Light itself. This is a profound consideration, revealed only through John. Other’s wrote of God being the “*Father of lights*” (James 1:17), One who possesses “*marvelous light*” (1 Pet 2:9), and Who dwells in the light (1 Tim 6:16). We are taught to relate light with Him, not with nature. “*Light*” is like a garment with which God covers Himself: “*Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment*” (Psa 104:2). Light dwells in Him, and is never to be considered apart from Him (Dan 2:22).

But our text states “*GOD IS LIGHT.*” Not only does it state this, it affirms “*This is the message we have heard from Him.*” It is the kernel, or heart, of the message. It is the truth from which other insights spring, and with which all valid knowledge is connected. Yet, this is the only place in all of Scripture where this affirmation is made.

We conclude, therefore, that this is the point clarified by the incarnate Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. When you take everything Jesus said and did, and boil it down to its essence, it is this: “*GOD IS LIGHT!*” Salvation rescues men from the snare of sin, but that rescue is not the heart of the message: **God is the heart of the message** . Men may come to possess what they conceive to be a good understanding of human duties. But until they comprehend God to a measurable degree, they have missed the message! The message is “*GOD IS LIGHT!*”

The very expression “*God is Light*” is fraught with mystery. There are some things we know about

light, but precious little when we consider that **“GOD IS LIGHT.”**

Corporeally, or as it appears, light has **SPLENDOR** . It draws attention to itself, and diffuses a glory that draws attention away from all that surrounds it. When it comes to the Living God, His Person and His work cause all competing persons and works to pale away in unimportance.

Intellectually, and I speak as a man, light is **KNOWLEDGE** . It speaks of enlightenment, illumination, clarification, and explanation. When God is perceived, everything else is made clearer. As it is written, *“in thy light shall we see light”* (Psa 36:9). Conversely, nothing is seen correctly apart from the Lord. A failure to comprehend Him brings distortion to everything else.

The Scriptures, strictly speaking, are an unfolding of the Person of God. It is His purpose that is delineated, and His will that is expounded.

Morally, light is **PURITY** . There is no taint in light, no defilement, no contamination. Our text states it this way, *“and in Him is no darkness at all.”* What He says and does is always right. His purposes are perfect and uncorrupted, and not to be questioned.

By nature, light **GIVES LIFE** . Little wonder the Spirit said of Jesus, *“In him was life; and the life was **the light of men** ”* (John 1:4). He is the Source of all life. Again, Jesus said, *“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).

Alas, it seems we only beat around the bush in our comments about **“GOD IS LIGHT!”** Beyond all question, it is a profound utterance. It brings out the inadequacy of human wisdom and the frailty of human speech. Perhaps this is the compelling point that is being made. **“GOD IS LIGHT!”** That is the message! He is at once the heart and substance of the message. All revelation, whether given to Abraham, Moses, the Prophets, or the Apostles, had the Living God as its center Point.

And when it comes to the Lord Jesus, in whom *“the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily”* (Col 2:9), we have the ultimate revelation of God. There, in the Son of God, the Person of God was more clearly made known than ever before. In fact, Jesus was the appointed Expositor of God. He alone knows the Father, and thus He alone can show Him to us (Matt 11:27). Coming from *“the bosom of the Father,”* the Savior declared **“HIM”** (John 1:18). He operated within the strict confines of the Father’s agenda, doing *“nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise”* (John 5:19).

It is possible to read the Scriptures with entirely the wrong motive. The astute Jews of Jesus’ day were guilty of doing this. Thus, Jesus said to them, *“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me. And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life”* (John 5:39-40). For them, perceived duty was the primary thing. They imagined if they measured up to everything required of them they had obtained the blessing. But this was not at all the case.

The Scriptures, strictly speaking, are an unfolding of the Person of God. It is His purpose that is delineated, and His will that is expounded. In Christ, bountiful provisions of His grace are made known, together with the glorious things He has prepared for those who love Him. Those who look for patterns and secrets in the Bible that enable them to be separate from all others are stumbling over the stumbling stone (Rom 9:32).

If, in their hearts, men are not turned to God, they will come into condemnation. He is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all. There can be no substitutes for Him, no diversions from His Person, and no ignoring of His promises. Jesus was sent by God to offer Himself without spot to Him, and bring us to God. Jesus has no significance whatsoever apart from God! He is “*the Son OF GOD,*” the “*Lamb OF GOD,*” and the “*Word OF GOD*” (John 1:29,34; Rev 19:13). He is called “*the Power OF GOD*” and the “*Wisdom OF GOD*” (1 Cor 1:24).

The message, then, is not what man is, but who God is! It is not what the church is, but what God is! It does not center in duty, but in Deity. “*God is light,*” pure and unalloyed—unmixed with anything. He is not a composite of a number of things, as we are. This means there is no diminishment or decline with God, only ever increasing glory.

THE DEMANDS OF TRUTH

“6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” Although men are prone to take faith for granted, God is not. “*God is light, and in Him is not darkness at all!*” That has a direct bearing upon the profession of men. There is such a thing as claiming identity with God, yet living in darkness. This condition is largely accepted by the professed church, and treated as a form of mere weakness.

What does it mean to “*walk in darkness?*” Primarily, it is living apart from Divine influence—conducting our lives outside the circumference of Divine fellowship. It is another way of saying walking “*after the flesh,*” setting the mind upon the flesh (Rom 8:5). “*Darkness*” is the state of nature from which we were delivered in Jesus Christ (Col 1:13). It is a condition where an ignorance of God dominates the soul, thereby alienating the individual from God (Eph 4:18).

Darkness is the realm ruled by Satan because God is absent from it. Thus we read of “*the power of darkness*” (Lk 22:53; Col 1:13), and “*the rulers of the darkness of this world*” (Eph 6:12). From one perspective, darkness is the absence of light. Considering our text, darkness is where God cannot be found. There are “*works of darkness*” (Rom 13:12)—works that are done in ignorance of God and out of the energy of the flesh. In salvation, God effectively called us “*out of darkness into His marvelous light*” (1 Pet 2:9). That is what occurs every time a person is born again, receives Christ, is baptized into Christ, or puts on Christ—however you prefer to state it. There are no new births into darkness. There is no affinity with God in darkness—none at all!

It Cannot Be Done

The Spirit is forthright on this matter, leaving no question about His meaning. “*If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth*” (RSV). Notice, it does not say “*If we say we are Christians,*” or “*If we say we are saved,*” “*If we say we are believers.*” Because we have been “*called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord*” (1 Cor 1:9), he refers to having “*fellowship with Him.*” This does not mean the individual says these actual words. Any claim to an association with the Lord falls into this category: i.e., born again, saved, Christian., member of Christ’s body, etc.

Viewed From Zion

Throughout this book, the Spirit will show us evidences—evidences of both light and darkness. In this particular verse He is affirming that there is no spiritual life where the

individual has not been effectively taught by grace.

This expression is to be viewed from Mount Zion, not Mount Sinai. While holiness is a requisite for all of us, the Spirit is not, so to speak, commanding us to be holy. Rather, He is revealing to us the manner in which the grace of God works. There is such a thing as knowing, or comprehending, “*the grace of God in truth*” (Col 1:6). When this occurs, grace teaches, or instructs us “*to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus*” (Tit 2:11-13). That is a vivid description of walking in the light. This is what occurs when the human spirit is “*joined to the Lord*” (1 Cor 6:17).

Throughout this book, the Spirit will show us evidences—evidences of both light and darkness. In this particular verse He is affirming that there is no spiritual life where the individual has not been effectively taught by grace. It is not possible to experience oneness with the Living God, Who is Light, and remain in a state of spiritual darkness of ignorance. Our very conversion is described as an enlightening experience. “*For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has **shone 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 NKJV). That is a marvelous circumstance experienced by everyone who is born again.

Any individual who professes he is in fellowship, or company, with God, yet walks in spiritual ignorance, is lying. No explanation is needed. The individual’s life contradicts his profession, and therefore the profession is not true.

It is not necessary for us to pass eternal judgment on such persons. That is not our prerogative. The point of the passage is that union with God is not based upon a one time decision, or a single magical event or act of obedience. Fellowship with God yields a life that grows brighter and brighter unto the perfect day (Prov 4:18). A process is taking place in God’s people in which they “*are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit*” (2 Cor 3:18 NASB). Where this is not happening, there must be no profession of allegiance to or affinity with God.

Notice how the Spirit phrases this statement. He does not call upon us to begin evaluating everyone around us. Rather He says, “*If **we** say that **we** have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, **we** lie, and do not the truth.*” This is intended to provoke us to self-evaluation. As it is written elsewhere, “*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?*” (2 Cor 13:5 NASB).

If we want to be assured that we have eternal life we will be required to test ourselves. We must examine our own lives to see if our profession is valid.

Not Doing the Truth

Herein is an intriguing expression: “*we lie, and do not the truth.*” The NKJV and NASB read, “*do not practice the truth*” The NIV reads, “*and do not live by the truth.*” The RSV says, “*do not live according to the truth,*” and the NRSV reads “*do not do what is true.*” An interesting expression is found in the Basic Bible English paraphrase: “*our words are false and our acts are untrue.*”

Jesus spoke of the person who does the truth. “*But he who **does the truth** comes to the light, that*

his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God ” (John 3:21). This is a striking phrase, indeed: **doing the truth** ! Christ’s words confirm it is evidence that God is working in the individual: “*what he has done has been done through God*” (NIV) . This is the very process described in Philippians 2:12-13. “*Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*”

Fellowship with God involves Him working in us, for God has no fellowship with anyone in whom He cannot work! If, therefore, God is not working in us, it is because we are not in fellowship with Him. That is why the truth cannot be **done** , or wrought, in us. For if God does not do work in us to do the truth, it simply cannot be done. Further, He only so works in those who by faith are in fellowship with Him. Salvation calls us into affiliation with God, enabling Him to work in us. This is a marvelous consideration, and promotes great confidence in those so blessed. They will be better suited to fight a good warfare who know these things.

THE RESULT OF A SPIRITUAL WALK

“ *7 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.*” As we proceed through this book, it will become apparent there is absolutely no conjecture or philosophizing in it whatsoever. There are strong affirmations, both favorable and unfavorable. Remember the assertions we have already heard.

- *That which was from the beginning.*
- *Which we have heard*
- *Which we have seen with our eyes*
- *Which we have looked upon*
- *Our hands have handled*
- *The life was manifested*
- *We have seen it*
- *That Eternal Life which was with the Father*
- *That Eternal Life . . . was manifested to us*
- *We have seen and heard*
- *Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ*
- *God is light*
- *In Him is no darkness at all*
- *If we say we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth.*

This differs radically from the writings of mere men. Only the Spirit of God can speak in such a manner, “*for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God,*” and “*the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God*” (1 Cor 2:10-11). While the Apostle John is himself convinced of these realities, and speaks out of that persuasion, they have been shown to him by the Spirit of God. That is why he writes with such power.

Remember, this Epistle is written so we may also have fellowship with the Father and the

Son, and those in fellowship with Them. Too, it is written so our joy may be full, and in order that we may know we have eternal life. Those objectives cannot be served by ambiguous statements, mere intellectual novelties, or personal opinions. Faith must have a rock-solid foundation upon which to build. That is the reason for these strong statements.

IF – IF – IF

“But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light.” In Scripture, the word “*if*” is not intended to produce doubt, or lead believers to think they are not safe in Christ. Rather, it is a word encouraging self-examination. It teaches us that in this world we are subject to contradicting influences, and thus are in the realm of jeopardy. What we have in Christ is firm and unshakeable, as we will see. Yet, it is not to be taken for granted. We will be richly rewarded with confidence and peace if we invest ourselves in this great salvation.

Whenever we read the word “*IF*,” human response is the point at issue. Strictly speaking, there are no “ifs” with God. With Him there is “*no variableness, neither shadow of turning*” (James 1:17). Too, wherever human response is the issue, there is always grace to enable the required response. It is essential that every believer be convinced of this reality.

Walking In the Light

The word “*walking*” denotes living in a preferred pattern, and with personal objectives in mind. For the believer “*walking*” is progression to glory. For the unbeliever it is retrogressing to perdition. Every person, saved or lost, is living in a certain direction. For those in Christ, there is an acute awareness of that direction. For the unbeliever, the end of their life is hidden to them, and they are unaware of where they are headed.

Notice the precision of the Spirit’s statement. He does not refer to walking in the light, but to walking in the light “*as He is in the light.*” Walking in the light equates to living in purity and with spiritual understanding. It is living in the power of the “*new creation,*” and in possession of the “*Divine nature*” (2 Cor 5:17Gal 6:15; 2 Pet 1:4). Salvation not only involves God doing something WITH US, it also includes doing something IN US. Divine power was exerted upon us when we were “*delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the Kingdom of God’s dear Son*” (Col 1:13). In a sense, we were wrested from the hands of the devil and the powers of darkness. It can be said of every person in Christ, just as surely as it was said of Joshua the high priest, “*And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire*” (Zech 3:2)? Independently of our own strength, the Lord wrought salvation upon us. He did something TO us, even as He did with Joshua the high priest. “*Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair miter upon his head. So they set a fair miter upon his head, and clothed him with garments*” (Zech 3:4-5).

Much of Christendom allows their view of salvation to end with this perspective. But this is the beginning of our dealing with the Lord, and not the whole of it. We now enter into fellowship with Him—a fellowship that is expressed in life—“*walking.*” Walking in the light is living in harmony with the Lord, in an acute awareness of Him, and in joyful union with Him. It is living by faith and walking in the Spirit. It is the opposite of living in the flesh.

By saying “*as He is in the light,*” the Spirit emphasizes we are living according to God’s agenda. Heavenly influences dictate our path, and Jesus is our focus. This is also *doing the truth* .

Evidence, Not Cause

A critical distinction must be made here. Walking in the light is NOT the cause of our acceptance, but the EVIDENCE of it! God does not accept us because we walk in the light, but we walk in the light because He has accepted us. Because Christ “*has received us to the glory of God*” (Rom 15:7), we are empowered to “*walk in the light as He is in the light.*”

This is why it is so sinful for a professed believer to walk in darkness. For those who have come to Christ to revert back to walking in darkness requires the quenching, grieving, and resisting of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 5:19; Eph 4:30; Acts 7:51). Such must refuse Him who is speaking from heaven (Heb 12:25). They must harden their hearts (Heb 3:8), make a place for the devil (Eph 4:27), and ignore the escape route provided by God when tempted (1 Cor 10:13). It is never a light thing when someone who has received Christ allows “*an evil heart of unbelief*” to rise within them (Heb 3:12).

If believers will learn to recognize the work of God within them (Phil 2:12-13), it will bring great confidence to them. That will be abundantly confirmed in the statements of this marvelous verse.

Fellowship With One Another

Continual cleansing takes place when we walk in the light as He is in the light. God is pleased by such a walk—so much so that He refuses to impute sin to the individual.

John has already stated he is writing so we may have fellowship with them (the Apostles). That fellowship is realized by believing the Word they have given by the Spirit of God. Jesus spoke of this fellowship in His high priestly prayer. “*I do not pray for these alone, but also for **those who will believe in Me through their word**; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that **they also may be one in Us**, that the world may believe that You sent Me*” (John 17:20-21). **That fellowship extends to all others who are in Christ Jesus. They are all “ONE” in the Father and in the Son, as Jesus prayed.**

Now John tells us how that fellowship will be realized—by us walking “*in the light as He is in the light.*” Institutionalism allows for camaraderie among those whose walks are not in the light. The Spirit, however, makes no such allowances. **Our fellowship is not only based upon WHO we are, but WHERE we are!** Because we are sons of God, we have fellowship with one another. That fellowship is also realized because we are living in spiritual illumination—walking in the light.

“*Fellowship,*” in this case, is infinitely more than being under the same denominational banner. It is a life of interinvolvement. There is a sharing of life, where one life penetrates the other, enabling the mutual bearing of burdens and sharing of joys. First Corinthians 12:26 states it this way. “*And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it*” (NKJV) . That is having fellowship with one another!

This fellowship is not an objective to be attained. Rather, it is the result of a walk in the light. If this fellowship is not realized, it is really pointless to launch a special unity-program to cause it to happen. The reason for the absence of “*fellowship one with another*” is because someone is not walking in the light. Someone is not seeing things like God sees them. Someone does not have their eye set on the appointed goal. Someone is living in the flesh and walking in darkness—

profession notwithstanding.

The only effective antidote for this is **walking in the light as He is in the light**. That will only come when our joy is made full and we know we have eternal life.

Cleansing From All Sin

“ . . . and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” Here is a statement that soars far beyond the capacity of the human mind. Here cleansing is associated with the life of one in Christ Jesus. He is not speaking of our initial entrance into Christ, when our sins were “*washed away*” (Acts 22:16). That was a glorious and needful beginning, to be sure. But cleansing must be maintained if Divine acceptance is to be sustained. God could not receive us in a defiled state before we were in Christ, and He cannot receive us in such a condition after we are in His Son!

Continual cleansing takes place when we walk in the light as He is in the light. God is pleased by such a walk—so much so that He refuses to impute sin to the individual. Rather, He cleanses the person of “*all sin*.” In this, the saying of David is fulfilled, “*Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity*” (Psa 32:2). Taking this matter further, the Holy Spirit thus elaborates. “*Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin*” (Rom 4:6-8). What child of God is there that is not heartened by that word?

This is experienced at the moment we are buried with Christ by baptism into death, and raised to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4). It also continues as we do, in fact, “*WALK in newness of life*.” That “*walk*” is the same one of which John speaks: walking in the light as He is in the light. In that walk a continual cleansing takes place—a cleansing that is required as we are being changed from one stage of glory to another, even as by the Spirit of our God (2 Cor 3:18).

As we will see, this does not mean we have no need to confess our sins. There are, however, numerous deficiencies and shortcomings of which we may not even be aware. Under the Law, there was a sacrifice for sins committed in ignorance (Lev 5:15-18; Num 15:24-27). Our text is the New Covenant parallel to that offering. In Christ continual cleansing from all sin takes place when we walk in fellowship with God. You may rest assured, such a provision would not have been made if there was not a need for it. By stating this benefit, the Spirit provides further incentive to walk in the light. Blessed be God for this benefit! Let every child of God be encouraged to confidently exert themselves to walk in the light as He is in the light.

THE CHILD OF GOD AND SIN

Again, the unwavering firmness of the statement confirms its importance to the believer. We will now confront the fact that those in Christ continue to deal with sin. What is more, they are often overcome by it, even though they sorely wish that was not the case. Remember, the intent of these statements is to make our joy full, and convince us we have eternal life.

If We Say We Have No Sin

“ **8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.** There is no point in the life of faith where we cease to require the grace and mercy of God! That is, there is no point where we are, in reality, absolutely free from all impurity and contamination. One might argue that forgiveness is full. This is true, yet righteousness is “*imputed,*” or “*counted*”

to the believer upon the basis of his faith, not his purity. Whatever we may think of the salvation of God, we had best not adopt a theology that declares us sinless, for that is not the case at all.

By saying “*have no sin*,” the Spirit means no guilt, no contamination, no need for cleansing. No honest and informed person would say this, but all people are not in that category. Some denominations have even concocted a doctrine called “sinless perfection,” or sometimes called “total sanctification.” They imagine that believers can arrive at a state where it is no longer possible for them to sin. Their doctrine thus contradicts the testimony of the Spirit.

Let us hear from one of the champions of the faith—from one who excelled as an Apostle, which category was placed “*first*” in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:28). As Paul said, speaking for all who are in Christ Jesus, “*But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*” (Rom 7:23-24). Paul would be the first to tell you he was forgiven, having “*obtained mercy*” (1 Tim 1:13,16). But he would NOT tell you he was sinless.

Who among us is not able to associate Solomon’s observation with their own struggles against sin. “*Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands?*” (Eccl 5:6).

We Deceive Ourselves

The Spirit is forthright about this matter, and we must be also. If we say we have no sin, “*we deceive ourselves*.” In this case, we cannot even claim the devil has deceived us, as in Revelation 20:10. In such a case, our own words have clouded our understanding and thrust us into conflict with the Almighty. Simultaneous with that deception, we have loudly stated we have no need of grace or mercy. We no longer need an Intercessor, or the ministry of the Holy Spirit or angels. What a serious deception, indeed!

The Truth Is Not In Us

For those daring to affirm they have no sin, truth may be near to them, but it has found no home within them. Truth does not exert its power from without, but from within. Further, truth flees like a wounded dove from the one who dares to affirm their own self-sufficiency. At the point the soul declares itself free from any need of mercy, truth can no longer remain. “*Mercy and truth*” have joined together in Christ Jesus, and cannot be separated (Psa 85:10). Thus, where one is no longer required, the other is also forfeited.

If We Confess Our Sins

“***9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*** Here is one of the most comforting statements in Scripture. I cannot go a day without being reminded of its glory and necessity. I also find this to be one of the most difficult things to grasp by a person in Christ who has sinned. We must allow the Spirit to convince us of the truth of this affirmation.

Confess Our Sins

This word is for believers, not for alien sinners who have not yet received Christ (John 1:12). Here forgiveness is placed within the reach of every child of God. It is promised upon the

basis of our acknowledgment of sin, as heart-breaking as that confession may be. Throughout the Scriptures people have confessed, ***“I have sinned.”*** When David, a man after God’s own heart, was convicted of his sin against Uriah the Hittite, he cried out *“I have sinned against the Lord!”* (2 Sam 12:13). As grievous as that sin was, the Lord *“put away”* his sin (1 Sam 12:13b). When this man of God numbered Israel, he once again was smitten in conscience and cried out, *“Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly”* (2 Sam 24:17).

The words spoken by Elihu to Job were true. *“He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light”* (Job 33:27-28).

We must not allow our sins to keep us from the Lord, or build an impenetrable wall between us and our Savior. Quickness to confess our sins, admitting them freely to the Lord, will bring forgiveness!

Faithful and Just

The forgiveness of the Lord is as faithful and just as His condemnation of sin. The same God who will not allow sin to go unrebuked, will not permit confessed sin to go unforgiven. His character will not let Him ignore the confession of sin. The timorous soul that is smitten with guilt can count on God being faithful to Himself, His Word, and the individual who confesses his sin.

The vicarious atonement of Christ makes it just, or right, for the Lord to forgive sin upon the basis of its confession, or acknowledgment. That means it would be unjust for the Lord to allow us to carry guilt and condemnation after we had confessed our transgression to Him. All of salvation, every single aspect of it, is righteous as well as merciful. From beginning to end, the Lord is, in truth, *“just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus”* (Rom 3:26).

Someone has said, **“It is a great moment to be fully persuaded, that when we have sinned, there is a reconciliation with God, ready and prepared for us”** John Calvin . A great moment, indeed. In that moment the devil is overcome, the power of sin neutralized, and the grace of God lavished upon the soul!

If We Say We Have Not Sinned

“ 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.” The phrase *“we have no sin”* speaks more to the guilt and effects of sin. It is a denial of our natural condition. The expression *“we have not sinned”* addresses the actual transgression itself. This is the deviation from the truth, being captured by the law of sin within our members, and committing the trespass. Surely no sensitive soul will dare to affirm such a thing—and yet the warning is issued, because such a thing is, indeed, possible. Whether we are assessing our entire lives, the whole of our existence in Christ, or today—let no person dare to say *“I have not sinned.”* There is no place for this utterance in the Kingdom of God! It is one prompted by alienation.

The vicarious atonement of Christ makes it just, or right, for the Lord to forgive sin upon the basis of its confession, or acknowledgment. That means it would be unjust for the Lord to allow us to carry guilt and condemnation after we

had confessed our transgression to Him.

Should a person be so foolish as to make such a statement, he has also affirmed a number of other things. If one has not sinned, there is no need for forgiveness, no demand for grace, and no requirement for a heavenly Intercessor. There is no need for the work of the Holy Spirit, a New Covenant, or the ministry of holy angels. Thus, there is no necessity for the gift of righteousness, the exceeding great and precious promises of God, or faith itself. All of these things presuppose the existence of both the sinful nature and sin itself.

We Make Him A Liar

The Spirit does not let the matter rest here, leaving us thinking only of the absurdity of such a thought. He confirms to us that God takes personally such brash and foolish statements. It is not that such a thing is possible, for God cannot lie (Tit 1:2). It is as though those saying they have not sinned have written a new Bible, and have thrown away the good Word of God. They have held out God as though He were a liar, saying things that are not so, and providing things that are not needed.

In the end, of course, the assembled universe will know who is really the liar. As it is written, *“Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: ‘That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged’”* (Rom 3:4; Psa 51:4 NKJV).

His Word Is Not In Us

This is most serious condition. Note, the Spirit does not say the Word **may not** be in those saying that have not sinned, but it **IS NOT** . Jesus condemned His critics, saying, *“ye have not His word abiding in you”* (John 5:38). He further stated they sought to kill Him *“because My word hath no place in you”* (John 8:37). This is, then, no light matter!

Knowing these things, the admonition of Colossians 3:16 leaps into life: *“ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . . ”* Later in this very Epistle, John will commend faithful *“young men”* because *“the word of God abideth in you”* (1 John 2:14). You may recall Jesus promised prayer would be answered upon the basis of His words abiding in us. *“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).

The person who says *“I have not sinned,”* by that very statement, acknowledges that God’s Word is not in him. It makes no difference what profession is made, or what church affiliation is claimed. The Word of God cannot and will not remain in a person who says they have not sinned.

Confidence Is Building

In these expressions, the Spirit is building the confidence of those who admit they are sinners, and that they have sinned. If those saying they have no sin are deceived and the truth is not in them, then those who say they have sin are NOT deceived and the truth IS in them. If those affirming they have not sinned make God a liar, and His Word is not in them, then those acknowledging they have sinned JUSTIFY God, and His Word IS in them. May your heart take hold on this. This truth is to be possessed.

CONCLUSION

Thus the Spirit has helped us get our bearings. He has adjusted our spiritual vision, and

brought us into a frame of spirit that will produce both joy and confidence. He has anchored our faith in He who was "*in the beginning.*" He has reminded us that Jesus Christ is "*Life*" and "*Eternal life*" personified. Thus, the person possessing Christ is alive and possesses eternal life. We have also been reminded that God was on the initiative to reveal this Life to us—that the Life was heard, seen, and touched in the Person of Christ. It is no mere human tradition that is being placed before us.

What is more, we are not being exposed to a mere academic lesson. There are glorious results to be realized.

- Fellowship with the Father and the Son.
- Fulness of joy.
- Fellowship with one another.
- Cleansing from all sin.

Who cannot fail to see the need of this message? While we remain in the body, and in a sinful and cursed world, we need to have a sure foundation. We need to know about continual cleansing, and fellowship with the Father, the Son, and all who also have fellowship with them. Let us prepare ourselves for a marvelous and edifying experience that will yield full assurance.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Book of 1st John

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #2

WHO ARE the REAL BELIEVERS ?

“ 1 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. 3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. 6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. 7 Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. 8 Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. 9 He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. 10 He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. 12 I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake. 13 I write to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, Because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, Because you have known the Father. 14 I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is 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 wicked one.” (1 John 2:1-14, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel announces a remedy for sin, and the imputation of the righteousness of God. All of this is designed to familiarize us with God's absolute and total intolerance of sin. This Divine trait necessitated the incarnation, humbling, cursing, and death of the Son of God. It was not a mere formality, but was driven by the Divine nature. That Nature has two sides. One is indignation with sin and transgression, because it contradicts God, and is rebellion against Him. The other is His profound love for humanity, created in His own image. Because neither of these qualities can be compromised or abandoned, both are expressed in God's great salvation. His wrath was poured out on the Son, who *“bare our sins in his own body on*

the tree” (1 Pet 2:24). His love is lavished upon those who, having received the reconciliation, have their lives “*hid with Christ in God*” (Col 3:3). At no point, however, does the position of those in Christ neutralize or diminish God’s hatred for sin. Nor, indeed, does the wickedness of sinners reduce His love for the saints. Both traits are expressions of His nature, and are not mere technicalities, or legal points.

OUTLINE

1. **Sin and Our Advocate (Verse 1)**
2. **The Propitiation for Sin (Verse 2)**
3. **What About His Commandments (Verses 3-5)**
4. **Abiding and Walking (Verse 6)**
5. **An Old Commandment (Verse 7)**
6. **A New Commandment (Verse 8)**
7. **Light and Love (Verses 9-11)**
8. **Your Sins Are Forgiven (Verse 12)**
9. **Knowing Him Who Is From the Beginning (Verses 13a, 14a)**
10. **Overcoming the Wicked One (Verse 15b)**
11. **You Have Known the Father (Verse 13c)**
12. **Strength, the Abiding Word, and Overcoming (Verse 14b)**

Hatred for Sin Expressed

With remarkable consistency God has expressed His absolute detestation of sin. That is precisely the cause for the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, and Divine fellowship as well. It is what provoked Him to destroy the world in the Noahic flood. In faithfulness He warned ancient Israel not to imagine evil against their neighbor or to love a false oath, “*for all these are things that I hate*” (Zech 8:17). With unquestionable clarity David was inspired to write, “*You hate all workers of iniquity,*” and “*The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man*” (Psa 5:5-6). With a fervency of which only Deity is capable, the Lord pleaded with Israel to renounce its evil ways. “*I have sent to you all My servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, ‘Oh, do not do this abominable thing that I hate!’*” (Jer 44:4). Such expressions are found throughout Scripture, acquainting us with the character of our God—a character that cannot be altered, denied, or pushed into the background.

The Father and the Son

The Father said this of the Son: “*Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows*” (Heb 1:9). Although, in coming into the world, the Savior “*emptied Himself*” (Phil 2:7 NASB), He maintained this Divine quality—a hatred for sin, iniquity, lawlessness, and transgression. It is inconceivable that He would be tolerant of any other frame of mind in those who have been joined to Him.

Experienced by the Spiritual

With a consistency that cannot be denied, those who drew close to the Lord developed a revulsion for sin. When they were acutely aware of Him, and were walking in the light, sin became repulsive to them. How frequently the man after God’s own heart expressed this. “*I*

hate the work of them that turn aside . . . I hate every false way . . . I hate vain thoughts . . . I hate every false way . . . I hate and abhor lying” (Psa 101:3; 119:104, 113, 128, 163).

Admonitions

Little wonder the Lord urges upon His people to develop and maintain an absolute hatred for sin—an intolerance for it. “*You who love the LORD, hate evil! . . . Depart from evil . . . Abhor that which is evil*” (Psa 97:10; 34:14; Rom 12:9).

These admonitions reflect the character of God and the nature of salvation. Salvation is extrication from enslavement to sin. It not only involves deliverance from the guilt and power of sin, but includes a hatred for it as well. Thus, when sinful notions rise in our minds, we confess with Paul, “*For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but **what I hate**, that I do*” (Rom 7:15). Sin has no part with God, and cannot remain in His presence. The justified soul knows this, and delights in it as well. Even the temptation to sin becomes abhorrent to those in Christ Jesus. In fact, that very circumstance is what keeps them from again becoming servants of sin. When that abhorrence diminishes, sin becomes proportionately more attractive, and access to God less desirable.

Connected With Our Text

All of this is, indeed, connected with our text. In identifying the real believers, the Spirit will point out the total unacceptability of sin. He will speak to us in order that we refrain ourselves from involvement in sin. He will also confirm to our hearts that those who continue to walk in sin do so because they are NOT in fellowship with the Father and the Son. Such are NOT in the light.

If this message was imperative for believers in the first century, it is certainly no less so for those of our day. A certain toleration for sin has arisen in the professed church that is most serious. It simply is not hated, and is too easily explained. We will find in this short, but pungent Epistle, that such attitudes are not acceptable to our Lord. They reveal an unlawful affiliation with, and love for, this present evil world. Conversely, they confirm that a distance has formed between those with a forbearing attitude toward sin, and the Lord, Who is intolerant with it. He simply will not allow iniquity in His presence.

SIN AND OUR ADVOCATE

“ I My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” At once you can see the nature of the truth. Like an arrow, it is aimed at the heart. It is stripped of all ambiguity as it strikes at our thought processes. We are addressed in strict compartment with who we are— *“little CHILDREN .”* The objective for the Spirit’s message is clearly identified— *“that you may not sin.”* The liabilities associated with living in the world are made clear— *“If anyone SINS .”* That sin is an exception to, and violation of, spiritual life is also affirmed— *“ IF anyone sins.”* There is no favoritism with the Lord in this matter— *“If ANYONE sins.”* Care is taken to assure us that there is present provision for sin, should we be overtaken by it— *“we have an ADVOCATE .”* That the issue with sin is that it drives a wedge between us and God, is declared— *“we have an Advocate WITH THE FATHER .”* It is also affirmed that God has provided an Advocate for us that is well pleasing to Him— *“Jesus Christ THE RIGHTEOUS .”*

In all of these things, there is no room for variant thinking—no possibility that what is said is

not true, or that it is not applicable to us. This is not the presentation of a strain of theological thought that is open to human interpretation.

The Spirit moved John to write in order that men might join in fellowship with both the Father and the Son. He wrote that their joy might be made full, and that they might know they have eternal life. Now he will show that, within that context, men must come to grips with the issue of sin. Salvation has not brought us into a realm where iniquity may be ignored, or where we are not subject to the dangers of committing sin. As clear as this may seem, there are whole bodies of theological thought that deny this. Such teachings leave men imagining there is no jeopardy for the believer—no danger of falling once again into the very thing from which grace has delivered them. We will see, however, that God makes no provision where there is no need for that provision. He does not warn us where there is no need for warning. He declares provisions that are required, and seeks to convince us of both their reality and our need for them.

Little Children

The term “*little children*” is an affectionate term, not one denoting childishness, smallness, or spiritual juvenileness. Apart from this Epistle, there is one other place it is used in Scripture. In His last evening with His Disciples, prior to His death, Jesus said to them: “*Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer . . .*” (John 13:33). John uses this expression no less than seven times in First John (2:1,12,28; 3:7,18; 4:4; 5:21). He is speaking to them as a father to his dear children. He may very well have been the spiritual father of those to whom he wrote.

At any rate, John does not write without involving his own person in the writing. While the Spirit moved holy men to write Scripture, he did not do so without the involvement of their hearts. They were endeared to the people to whom they wrote. In this regard, they participated in the Divine nature, for Christ “*loved the church, and gave Himself for it*” (Eph 5:25).

In all of these things, there is no room for variant thinking—no possibility that what is said is not true, or that it is not applicable to us. This is not the presentation of a strain of theological thought that is open to human interpretation.

I have lived long enough to know Satan will tempt ministers of the Gospel to speak to people without having a personal affection for them. The enemy of our souls knows that addressing the people of God without possessing a deep love for them, will bring a certain crudeness to our speech. It also will tend to repulse the Holy Spirit, so that He will not work with the message, touching the hearts of the listeners or readers. Those who speak or write for God are not only His messengers, in Jesus they are also related to the ones to whom they speak.

If John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, spoke in this manner, how much more should we. Believe me, beholding the people of God as endeared children will have an impact on what we say and how we say it.

That You May NOT Sin

There is a remarkable consistency throughout the New Covenant writings on this matter. From one vantage point, almost the whole of sound doctrine is for us to depart from sin,

leaving it far behind us. In our baptism into Christ, we died to sin, making it wholly unreasonable to live any longer in it (Rom 6:2). Our “*old man*” was then crucified—placed upon the cross by God Himself. This was done in order that we no longer “*serve sin*” (Rom 6:6). That is how every person began in the “*newness of life*” (Rom 6:4).

Living unto God necessitates being dead unto sin. Thus it is written, “*Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom 6:11). There simply is no room for sin in Jesus Christ. God has made no provision for even the smallest measure of it. If men choose to sin, it is not because Christ or the Gospel offered any encouragement to do so.

A Difficult Statement

For some, this is a difficult statement. First, the Spirit has warned us not to say we have no sin, or that we have not sinned (1:8,10). Now He makes no allowance for sin at all, even though He has made clear that we all struggle with it.

The difficulty of the statement is not found in the truth itself, but in man’s ability to grasp it. Our spirits are, as it were, wrapped in a frail and vulnerable tent. We still carry about a fallen nature which is not only prone to sin, but can **ONLY** sin. Those remaining “*in the body*” (Heb 13:3), will find in themselves “*another law . . . warring against the law of [their] mind, and bringing [them] into captivity to the law of sin which is in [their] members*” (Rom 7:23). While this offers no justification for sin, it does alert us to a very real tendency to sin. This is why the Spirit warns us not to say we have no sin, or that we have not sinned.

The nature of spiritual warfare demands that we be exhorted to extend ourselves in the good fight of faith. As we walk in the light, a settled determination **NOT** to sin is realized. In order to assist us in appropriating this mind-set, we are told, “*these things write I unto you, that ye sin not.*” See, there is a mode of thought that imagines the grace of God provides a license to sin. Early believers confronted this imagination. “*What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid*” (Rom 6:1). In a moment of temptation, the mind will fancy sin can be committed with impunity. But this is an imagination to be cast down with spiritual violence (2 Cor 10:4-5).

One of the primary purposes of Scripture is to encourage us to “***sin not!***” Sin is always out of order for the believer, and never to be excused or justified. It always impacts upon our fellowship with God, dulls our spiritual senses, and quenches the Spirit. O, that men were more aware of these stark realities!

We Have An Advocate

After solemnly informing us that He has written that we “*sin not,*” the Spirit now declares a provision for sin has been granted by our God. All of this makes no sense to the flesh, or the natural part of us. The “*old man*” is wholly incapable of seeing the need for such an affirmation. However, the person who possesses a new heart and the indwelling Spirit is painfully aware of the need for such a marvelous provision.

Note with what care the gracious condition is announced. He does not say “**WHEN** any man sins,” but “***IF any man sin.***” The Spirit will not allow us to approach sin as though it was a necessity. Even though He will not permit us to say we have **no** sin, or that we have **not** sinned, the Spirit quickly announces the Gospel meets us where we are. Not only is the flesh “*weak,*” profiting “*nothing*” (Matt 26:41; John 6:63), it remains influential, often dragging us into the quagmire of sin. The spiritually sensitive soul rejoices when this word pierces through guilt and sorrow: “***And if any***

man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

The Advocate Is in Place Now

When sin has snared us, we do not need some philosophical statement about what we should have done. We need to hear what has been provided for our situation. Right now, even with the shroud of guilt covering us, “*WE have an Advocate with the Father.*” He is presently functioning in this capacity. “*We HAVE an Advocate with the Father.*” He is NOW appearing “*in the presence of God for us*” (Heb 9:24). He is there, as an Advocate, because we NEED Him! It is not a mere formality, but something required for us to maintain fellowship with God. Should our minds ever be tempted to imagine our connection with God is mechanical, requiring no involvement on our part or the part of Jesus, we must take hold of this expression: “*We have an Advocate with the Father.*”

What Is An Advocate?

The deadly nature of sin is thus confirmed to our hearts. When men are tempted to take sin casually, presuming that God remains the same toward them even when they fall, this word comes through with great strength

Nearly every major translation of the Scripture uses this word: “*Advocate.*” The NIV, using more freedom, says “*One who speaks to the Father in our defense.*” The word “*Advocate*” comes from the Greek word **para,klhton** (par-ak'-lay-ton), which means *one called along side to help (basic meaning), one who appears in another's behalf, defender, intercessor (legal), or one who gives protection, help, and security* Thayer . In this case, the Advocate is “*along side*” the Living God. As a glorified “*Man,*” He stands as our representative before the Majesty in the heavens. He is there to keep us alive, even when the deadly venom of sin is found in us.

The deadly nature of sin is thus confirmed to our hearts. When men are tempted to take sin casually, presuming that God remains the same toward them even when they fall, this word comes through with great strength: “*We have an Advocate with the Father.*” God loves no man so strongly that He can overlook or wink at his sin, as though it did not occur. What is more, men sin grievously in imagining such is the case. Were it not for Jesus the Advocate, we would all have dropped into hell long ago. It does not take a large number of sins to separate us from God, as Adam and Eve can attest. It was a single transgression that introduced the need for a Savior. As it is written, “*For if by the one man's offense [not offenses] death reigned through the one . . . Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation . . . For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners*” (Rom 5:17-19. Who is the soul who dares to think their sin is minor, small, or inconsequential? Let them explain their view to Adam!

No matter what the sin may be, it absolutely requires an “*Advocate with the Father.*” The confession of sin, although essential, would be of no effect whatsoever if we did not have an “*Advocate with the Father.*”

A Means to Salvation

It is generally recognized that Christ's death and resurrection were necessary for us to be saved. As it is written, “*Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification*” (Rom 4:25). However, you will scarcely hear anyone declare His present intercession is also required for us to be saved. It is also written, “*Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost*

those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25). This is the Savior’s present ministry, or work. It is His High Priestly ministry, which is indispensable to our salvation.

The truth of the matter is that **God would not forgive our sins were it not for Jesus** –initially, or after our translation into the Kingdom of His dear Son.

Examples of Christ’s Intercession

If you wonder how Jesus pleads for us, the Spirit has given us glimpses of His intercession in the Gospels. The Savior once told Peter how He had interceded for him. *“Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But **I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail** ”* (Lk 22:31-32).

Another example is found in our Lord’s prayer on the eve of His betrayal. *“Holy Father, **keep through Your name those whom You have given Me . . . keep them from the evil one . . . Sanctify them by Your truth . . . I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word that they all may be one . . . I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am . . .** ”* (John 17:11,15,17,20-21,24).

What a marvelous revelation of the heart of the Savior! Who among us does not sense the need for that type of advocacy? And just as surely as God is, he has provided an Advocate with Himself—One who meets our need, and does so effectively.

The Righteous One

The One who represents us to the Father must Himself be righteous—righteous by nature, and not by imputation! Neither Moses, David, nor Paul can be our advocate. They need an Advocate themselves. We must be represented by someone with no flaw—One who is *“separate from sinners,”* yet earnestly desiring to represent them.

See how particular our Father is! If anyone speaks effectively for us, he must do so as one in whom not a trace of sin can be found. That is a requirement of the Divine nature. That prerequisite is answered in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. No one who requires salvation himself, whether in the earth or in the presence of the Lord, can effectively plead for us. A forgiven person cannot be our advocate. This circumstance puts forgiveness within the reach of all who believe, bringing hope to them. This understanding is essential for recovery from sin and the resistance of temptation. We must not allow Satan to lure us away from a consciousness of this necessity.

THE PROPITIATION FOR SIN

*“**2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.**”* If we are ever tempted to think we are beyond a need to again hear the Gospel, the Spirit declares it here with power. The Gospel remains the *“power of God unto salvation”* after we have been reconciled unto God. Over and over, the Spirit emphasizes this in the New Covenant writings. When the churches became deficient, the Spirit brought them back to the Gospel, powerfully bringing it to bear upon their conscience (Rom 1:16-17; 10:15-18; 16:25-26; 1 Cor 1:18; 15:1-3; 2 Cor 5:18-20; Gal 3:10-13; Phil 2:5-10; Col 2:10-14, etc.).

Those imagining that dealing with issues among God’s people has supplanted the proclamation of the Gospel do greatly err. The Gospel itself is the center of reasoning for the

people of God. When immorality was found among believers, they were told of the Gospel, and how their conduct contradicted the declared accomplishments of Christ's death and resurrection (1 Cor 6:18-20). If the church began retrogressing to the Law, they were told of the Gospel (Gal 3:10-14). When religious novelties tempted people to observe days and seasons, and even worship angels—or when they imagined rules and regulations were the means of becoming stable, they were told the Gospel (Col 2:10-23). When the saints were fatigued by oppression, and weakened by persecution, they were reminded of the Gospel (Heb 12:1-4). If elders were dilatory in their responsibilities, they were reminded of the Gospel (Acts 20:28). If a young evangelist was being admonished, he was again subjected to the Gospel (1 Tim 3:15-16).

And now that believers are being brought into full joy and a persuasion that they have eternal life, the Gospel is again set before them. When men allow other things to take the place of the Gospel, however important they may appear, they have brought great disadvantage to the saints.

The Propitiation

Here is a strong word, indeed: "*Propitiation.*" Other versions read "*expiation*" RSV, "*atonement sacrifice*" NRSV, NIV). John uses this word twice in this book. The other place is in the fourth chapter. "*Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*" (4:10). The word "*propitiation*" literally means "**a means of forgiveness, a way of reconciling**" Thayer . For those who are interested, this word comes from the Greek word **ἱλάσμοϋ** ((hil-as-mos), which emphasizes the **PLACE** where, or means through which, satisfactory atonement is made. It is a pivotal word and concept.

The Mercy Seat

There is a sort of Kingdom logic behind the use of the word "*Propitiation.*" The thought takes us back to the high priests of old. When they came into the presence of the Lord, a sacrifice and the blood of that sacrifice, was required. The Divine stipulation was that the high priest appear before God "*not without blood*" (Heb 9:7). While the blood was shed at the altar, in the outer court of the Tabernacle, it had to be presented within the veil--in the presence of the Lord (Lev 16:2-20).

The blood was sprinkled upon the "*mercy seat*" which covered the ark of the covenant (Lev 16:14-15). This was done while a cloud of sweet incense also covered the mercy seat (Lev 16:13). In this, there was an appeal to the mercy of God, teaching us there is no acceptance with God except through mercy. Here is a most vivid portrayal of the involvements of forgiveness.

- **A satisfactory sacrifice.**
- **The offering of blood.**
- **A pleasing presentation**
- **An appeal to Divine mercy**

The shedding of blood, while essential, was not the point at which satisfaction took place. It was the **PRESENTATION** of the blood that secured the atonement. When the blood of the innocent victim was sprinkled on the mercy seat, atonement was realized. That atonement was for "*the holy place,*" the high priest "*himself,*" the "*household*" of the high priest, and "*all the congregation of Israel*" (Lev 16:17). It portrayed a thorough cleansing that pleased the Lord.

Technical Definitions

Interestingly, the word used for “*mercy seat*” can be translated PROPITIATORY, and is so rendered in the Duoy Rheims and New American Bibles. The New Living translation reads “*atonement cover*” instead of “*mercy seat*.” The Hebrew word translated “*mercy seat*” is *tr,PoK;h;* (kapp o ret), and means “*the place of atonement.*” The LXX (Septuagint, or Greek, version of the Old Testament) uses precisely the same word for “*mercy seat*” (Lev 16:14), that is used in our text (*ĩ lasth,rio*).

All of this adds no weight to the text itself. I only provide it to confirm I am not presenting a private view of the text before us, but one that is linguistically as well as doctrinally precise.

An Appeal To Divine Mercy

Why must there be an appeal to the mercy of God? It is because sin offends God, summoning up His wrath and indignation. It is contrary to His character and abrasive to His Person. He cannot overlook sin, or simply turn away from it as though it did not exist. This is the meaning of the expressions, “*that will by no means clear the guilty*” (Ex 34:7; Num 14:18), and “*will not at all acquit the wicked*” (Nah 1:3). It is not that remission is impossible with God, but that simply wiping the slate clean without a just cause is not possible.

Any time we confront sin, or choose to talk about it, it is imperative that we remember God’s attitude toward it. It we are tempted to be tolerant of it, and excuse its presence in our own lives or the lives of others, we must recall that God cannot and will not excuse it.

In the forgiveness of sins, there must be a legal and pleasing appeal to Divine mercy, or grace. This is required now just as surely as it was under the Old Covenant, when the blood of an innocent victim was sprinkled on the “*mercy seat,*” or “*propitiatory.*” If this is not done, God cannot forgive, and will surely condemn the sinner.

The wonderful Proclamation

Now, full provision has been made for the justification of the ungodly. Jesus Christ is at once the Sacrifice, High Priest, and Mercy Seat. He, and He alone, is the means to the acceptance of sinners. He alone can obtain mercy for the fallen ones.

The imagery introduced under the Law is declared to be fulfilled in Christ. Notice the precision with which this is stated. “*Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption*” (Heb 9:12 NKJV). And again, “*Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate*” (Heb 13:12). The “*blood of His cross*” became effective for our salvation when it was presented in heaven.

Jesus is “*the Propitiation for our sins*” in heaven, not upon earth. He is our appeal to the mercy of God. To put it another way, God’s wrath against us is subdued because of the appeal of Christ’s sacrifice. Even now, He is appearing in God’s presence as “*a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain*” (Rev 5:6 NIV). The meaning is that Jesus is appearing before the Father as a Lamb newly slain. The freshness of His atoning death still remains, opening the fountain of grace to fallen

humanity.

Any time we confront sin, or choose to talk about it, it is imperative that we remember God's attitude toward it. If we are tempted to be tolerant of it, and excuse its presence in our own lives or the lives of others, we must recall that God cannot and will not excuse it. His wrath against the sinner is only subdued by *"the Propitiation for our sins."* Further, He is in heaven, in the presence of God, where an appeal to Divine mercy must be made.

For the Whole World

Lest we be tempted to think Jesus is the *"mercy seat"* only for our sins, the Spirit reminds us He is the place of atonement for *"the sins of the whole world."* Let there be no mistake about this. The death of Christ effectively dealt with the *"sins of the whole world."* The remedy for sin reached as far as sin itself reached. It is no wonder Jesus prayed so fervently, *"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"* (John 17:21).

Jesus took upon Himself the whole of sin— *"the sins of the whole world."* For this reason, the sacrifice of Christ is frequently said to be for *"SIN"* (singular)—that is, sin in its entirety. John the Baptist described Him as *"the Lamb of God Who takes away the SIN of the world"* (John 1:29 NKJV). Again, it is written, *"For He hath made Him to be SIN for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him"* (2 Cor 5:21). And again, *"once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away SIN by the sacrifice of Himself"* (Heb 9:26).

The Reasoning

The point the Spirit is making is that there is no excuse for sin. A thorough atonement has been made for it, and that atonement is available to all men. It can never be justified because of its nature. Further, victory over it and remission of it is found in Christ alone.

If this atonement does not effect the salvation of men, it is because it has been rejected. For this reason Jesus said, *"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 reprov'd"* (John 3:19).

That You Sin Not

It is no wonder the Spirit moved John to write that we *"SIN NOT."* What possible explanation can be offered for involvement in transgression? An atonement has been made for sin, and a Propitiation is presently found in Christ Jesus, who pleases the Father.

The very presence of these verses confirm that believers DO struggle with sin. They can still be drawn away by their own lusts, and enticed (James 1:14). The knowledge of access to Divine mercy, however, together with the effectiveness of it in the believer, will enable certain victory over sin. Therefore, the Spirit labors to convince us of the ministry of Jesus. How blessed to know these things, and more blessed still to embrace them. Let your heart take hold of the advocacy of Jesus, as well as His propitiation. He brings the mercy of God within your reach, and your faith is fully capable of appropriating it.

WHAT ABOUT HIS COMMANDMENTS?

" 3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. "

The Spirit will now assist believers in obtaining confidence they do, in fact, know the Lord. Since “*this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*” (John 17:3 NKJV), it is vitally important that we **know** that we **know** Him!

Knowing that We Know Him

At first, this may appear to be mere oratory— **knowing that we know** . But it is not. He is speaking of the “*full assurance of understanding,*” “*hope,*” and “*faith*” (Col 2:2; Heb 6:11; 10:22). This is another way of saying confidence, certitude, or being “*fully persuaded*” (Rom 4:21).

The Spirit will not settle for believers living on the surface, never really probing into their own identity with the Lord. He will not permit us to take faith for granted, or assume that we know the Lord. Much religion of our time does, in fact, encourage such an attitude. Fearful of what they may find, many professed followers of Christ never really examine themselves, to see if they are in the faith (2 Cor 13:5). They know more about the theological positions of their church than they do of their personal association with the Living God.

Knowing that we know Him is perceiving that we know Him, and have constant and effective recourse to Him. **The Amplified Bible** emphasizes the continual nature of this perception. “*And this is how we may discern [daily by experience] that we are coming to know Him—to perceive, recognize, and become better acquainted with Him.*” This is a heart-knowledge, a spiritual certitude of our reconciliation to God. It is a knowledge that includes, but passes beyond, the intellect. It genders a confidence that moves Moses to lift his rod over the Red Sea, David to face Goliath, and Elijah to confront 450 prophets of Baal. It is the kind of knowledge that is required to triumph over the devil and appropriate the things God has prepared for those who love Him. As one has well said, “It is not the trained and vigorous intellect that sees God, but the pure in heart” W. Jones, Pulpit Commentary . This is a knowledge that rises out of faith, which is associated with the heart. It yields a boldness that cannot grow out of mere intellectual apprehension.

This knowledge of God is particular. It is knowing God in His redemptive capacity: “*the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Eph 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3). It is knowing Him as the Father with Whom Christ is our “*Advocate.*”

His Commandments

The Spirit will not settle for believers living on the surface, never really probing into their own identity with the Lord. He will not permit us to take faith for granted, or assume that we know the Lord.

Spiritual life is exceedingly practical. It moves men beyond the realm of philosophy and mere speculation. Seven times in this Epistle, the Spirit will refer to “*His commandments*” (2:3,4; 3:22,24; 5:2,3). Here is an integral part of our relation to God— “*His commandments.*” In this world, salvation never brings us so close to God that “*His commandments*” are no longer toward us. Here is a premier test of our love for God and Christ: Will we “*keep His commandments?*” That will tell the real story of our association with Him! Jesus said, “*He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me*” (John 14:21). The person who does not do what the Lord says, regardless of profession, does not love Him—and loving the Lord is the “*first and great*

commandment” (Matt 22:37-38).

Just what is a “*commandment?*” Linguistically, it is defined as a precept, ordinance, edict, decree, or order. In Scripture, the commandments of the Lord assume His Lordship and our servitude. They also postulate human weakness and a need for Divine direction. The commandments are the point at which our discipleship and profession are put to the test. Since we are being led by Jesus to glory (John 10:3), the commandments confirm whether or not we CAN be led, for there is no other acceptable way of being brought “*to glory*” (Heb 2:10).

The summation of the commandments of God in Christ is this: “*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). Yet another summation of the commandments is given in Second John. It narrows the matter down to a single commandment. “*This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it*” (Verse 6) . When love exudes from the heart, the commandments will be kept.

In these directives the nature of all of the commandments can be seen. If we view “*His commandments*” as direction concerning domestic and social relationships, we have missed the point. “*His commandments*” have immediately to do with our relationship to God and His people through Jesus Christ. All of the detailed commandments, whether concerning personal, domestic, or even church life, relate directly to those matters.

Keeping “*His commandments*” has to do with these broader and more concise commandments. If these are kept, we will have no difficulty with the more detailed commandments. It is necessary for the Spirit to speak in this manner in order to develop strong confidence in the saints. The certainty of your life with God will never be established by viewing life on the lowest level: i.e., marriage, neighborliness, morality, etc. Let no soul imagine this provides for the smallest degree of neglect or disobedience at these levels. The Lord makes no such allowances.

Keeping “*His commandments*” is more an attitude than an act. That attitude, to be sure, compels the most detailed obedience. Keeping is the root from which obedience springs. Keeping “*His commandments*” involves *paying attention to, keeping in custody, and holding with preference and zeal*. It is hiding the Word in our hearts, that we might not sin against Him (Psa 119:11). This is a condition where the Word is found “*abiding*” in us—a distinguishing mark of the elect of God (John 5:38; Col 3:16). It is when the Word is “*engrafted*” in us, becoming a part of our persons (James 1:21). This marvelous circumstance commenced when we were born again.

The New Covenant, you will recall, involves God putting His laws into our mind and writing them upon our heart (Heb 8:10). Keeping “*His commandments*” is nurturing and enlarging upon that glorious reality.

Thus, those who have a hearty love for, and affinity with, “*His commandments*” carry within themselves the proof that they know God. This is an experiential knowledge that yields boldness, confidence, and assurance to its possessor. It is the type of knowledge depicted in a person who knows he can swim, as compared with one grasping the theory of swimming. The former can stay on top of the water, while the latter will sink. Thus it is in spiritual life, confidence is what enables the believer to stay on top of life, and not be overwhelmed by it.

The Liar

“***4 He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.***” The Spirit goes straight to the heart of the matter. Even in the first century, many had placed too much emphasis on mere profession. It is one thing to SAY you know the Lord. It is entirely

another thing to actually know, or have intimate acquaintance with, Him.

The person who affirms the knowledge of God, yet does not keep and delight in the commandments of the Lord, has simply not told the truth. He is “*a liar*,” and a most serious one at that. Keep in mind that God will ultimately destroy all those who do NOT know Him. This is not a theological conclusion, but a Divine affirmation. “*The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to **those who do not know God** and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power*” (2 Thess 1:7-9).

God will not allow people to maintain fellowship with Him while rejecting His Leadership. We see, therefore, that “His commandments” are the point at which the validity of profession is tested.

Here the Holy Spirit violently dashes false theology to the ground. Satan has seduced some into thinking people are saved with no possibility of revocation. They imagine the Lord will bring them to glory with them kicking all of the way, resisting Him, and refusing the Word entrance into their hearts (Psa 119:130). But this will not happen! Those who profess identity with the Lord, and access to Him, yet who do not retain His commandments, have not told the truth. They have lied, and thus are liars, in every sense of the word.

God will not allow people to maintain fellowship with Him while rejecting His Leadership. We see, therefore, that “*His commandments*” are the point at which the validity of profession is tested.

Perfected Love

“**5a But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him.**” Notice what appears to be a transition in thought. The Spirit does not say “whoever keeps His commandments,” but “*whoever keeps His WORD* .” Whereas He spoke before in summary, now the Spirit takes us to the detailed level– “*the Word*.” Thus He is showing us that the summary makes no provision for the rejection of anything God has said. If there is any Word from God that chaffs against the human spirit, and which cannot be joyfully retained, the love of the individual is, at best, in an imperfect state. The person is spiritually immature and childish that balks at any Word of God.

Confirming the complexity of this verse, the Amplified Bible reads, “*But he who keeps [treasures] His Word—who bears in mind His precepts, who observes His message in its entirety—truly in him has the love of and for God been perfected (completed and reached maturity)*. The “*love of God*,” in this case, includes both God’s love for us, and our love for God. The reason for this is that our love for God springs out of our perception of His love for us. As it is written, “*We love him, because he first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). When that love—His love for us—fills our hearts, they respond with a fervent love for Him. It is further the unique ministry of the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with God’s love for us—that is, to make us more fully aware of the greatness of His love toward us. It is a love filled with glorious provision and preference. A wonderful statement of this is found in Romans 5:5. “*Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been **poured out** (‘shed abroad’ KJV) **in our hearts by the Holy Spirit** who was given to us*” (NKJV) . Once poured into our hearts, that love begins to work, molding our affection, appetite, and anticipation. That work comes to maturity when we find great joy in appropriating and retaining in our hearts every Word of God. A preference for what the Lord has said powerfully supersedes the quest for all merely human expressions.

While it is not unlawful to become familiar with what godly men have said, that must never

become disproportionate to our desire to appropriate the word of our God. When and if that condition ever occurs, it belies our profession of knowing God.

When the love of God is perfected in us, fellowship with God is sought and preferred above all other associations. Acquaintance with His Word becomes a compelling drive that makes the acquisition of all other forms of knowledge secondary, at the very best. O, that this were more readily apparent among professed believers.

Knowing We Are In Him

“5b By this we know that we are in Him.” Here again, the Spirit moves to another perspective—still speaking about the same thing. Now we read of being **“in Him.”** He has thus far equated these six things (Verses 3-5).

- **Knowing Him.**
- **Keeping His commandments.**
- **The truth being in us.**
- **Keeping His Word.**
- **The love of God perfected in us.**
- **Being in Him.**

Salvation, or our relationship to the Lord, is thus seen as a multifaceted jewel. It is not a simplistic association, but involves many different sides. We should expect that a costly redemption would not yield simplistic results. It is a tragedy beyond description that Satan has deluded many into viewing salvation from the standpoint of simplism—ignoring the complicating factors that are addressed and satisfied in it. These childish views allow for wrong conclusions and a false confidence. Those embracing these views will be tempted to think their conduct has nothing whatsoever to do with their profession of faith. Too, they will be provoked to consider themselves acceptable to God, while possessing little or no evidence of such acceptance.

The Spirit is showing us that the vehicle of delusion is entirely unsuitable to bring us to glory. Knowing that we are **“IN HIM”** is not simply a luxury for a select few. It is spiritual understanding required to avail ourselves of the *“treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* that are hidden in Christ (Col 2:3). To run the race set before us, and fight the good fight of faith *“uncertainly,”* is to waste our time. Elsewhere the Spirit calls it *“beating the air”* (1 Cor 9:26). Knowing we are **“in Him”** is the opposite of running uncertainly and flaying the air with harmless punches. If you personally do not know you are **“in Him,”** you must make it your business to know, doing so without delay.

And how do we know we are **“in Him?”** When we keep His word, allowing it to dwell richly within us, then we know **“that we are in Him.”** That means keeping, or retaining a hold upon His Word cannot be accomplished outside of Christ. That is why it is proof that the love of God has been matured within us by the Holy Spirit, and our lives are *“hid with Christ in God.”*

It should be apparent to you that maintaining a grasp on the Word of God does not rank high on the institutional agenda. It is by no means a mark of distinction among those enamored with religious appearance. It does, however, blend perfectly with the Divine agenda, and thus yields a degree of confidence and assurance to the believer that is not otherwise attainable. What a rich treasure we have in this *“great salvation!”* Full provision has been made for us to

progress to heaven with all joy and confidence.

ABIDING AND WALKING

“6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.” Because abiding in Christ is a requisite to “*eternal salvation*,” it is imperative that we have an understanding of its involvements. Jesus spoke of abiding in Him. “**Abide** in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it **abide** in the vine; no more can ye, except ye **abide** in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that **abideth** in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit . . . If ye **abide** in me, and my words **abide** in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you . . . If ye keep my commandments, ye shall **abide** in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and **abide** in his love” (John 15:4-10). It is apparent abiding in him is not an option for the believer.

The word “*abide*” means to continue, dwell, or remain. It is based upon preceding Divine activity. It is God Himself Who put us into Christ. As it is written, “*But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption*” (1 Cor 1:30 NASNB). He is the One who raised us when we were buried by baptism into Christ’s death (Rom 6:4). From another perspective, God is the One who quickened, or made us alive (Eph 2:1). As it is written, “*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*” (Eph 2:4-6 NKJV).

Abiding in Him is remaining where God has put us, by his grace. It is maintaining the position afforded to us when we were taken out of the world for Christ (Acts 15:14). God gave us to Christ (John 6:37,39; 17:9,11,24), and “*hid*” our lives in Him (Col 3:4). Abiding in Him is maintaining that vital and essential association. It will require all of your effort, yet will be undergirded by God Himself.

Let it be clear that abiding in Him is our responsibility. It is not to be taken for granted, nor are we to approach life as though remaining in the Son required no effort on our part. God is “*able to keep us from falling*,” to be sure (Jude 24-25). However, anyone imagining this will be accomplished independently of hearty and sustained personal effort is simply deceived. God will NOT maintain the position of those who insist on walking contrary to Him. There is no question about this. Adam and Eve lost their Divinely appointed position when they sinned. Israel was expelled from the very land God gave them because they sinned. Judas lost the Apostleship to which he was appointed by Jesus, when he sinned. Holy angels were expelled from the very heaven to which they had been appointed. In all of these cases, the individuals involved did NOT abide. The habitation to which they had been appointed was forfeited when other interests constrained them to sin.

Thus the Spirit comes to the matter of abiding in Him. He will make no allowances for those who fail to remain in the Son. Those who are captured by a desire for other things—things that do not require Jesus—will lose their identity with Christ. It makes no difference whatsoever what seemingly logical doctrines are presented to the contrary.

Profession and Walking

In order to fix this truth in our hearts and minds, the

Spirit reminds us we are under a moral obligation to live in harmony with Jesus.

Our text is clear, leaving no question or room for any doubt. *“The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked”* NASB . There is a direct correlation between the manner in which we live and our relationship to Jesus Christ. **Let it be clear, it is NOT possible to be in fellowship with Christ and live in contradiction of that fellowship.** For this reason, the person claiming to know Christ, who is not keeping His commandments, has lied, and the truth is not in him (Verse 4). Also, the one who says he is in fellowship with Christ, yet walks in darkness, is lying and not doing the truth (1:6). This is not a matter open for discussion or theorizing.

The spirit has already told us that fellowship with one another and being cleansed from all sin are contingent upon walking *“in the light as He is in the light”* (1 John 1:7).

The word *“ought”* means **is under obligation to** . That is, this is the nature of life in Christ. If the life of Christ is not lived through us, it is only because we have refused to abide in Him. It is only reasonable for us to walk like Christ if we have been placed in Him. How is it possible to be *“in Christ”* yet NOT partake of His nature? As it is written, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”* (2 Cor 5:17 NIV). There simply is no way for this to be contradicted. If a person is *“in Christ,”* he IS a new creation. Old manners have passed, and new ones have come. Just as a walk in the light, or living as Christ lived, confirms we are abiding in Him, so a failure to do so verifies we are NOT abiding in Him—profession notwithstanding.

In order to fix this truth in our hearts and minds, the Spirit reminds us we are under a moral obligation to live in harmony with Jesus. It is understood that we will not do this in our own strength. Elsewhere, we are exhorted to enter into the godly life with zeal, knowing we are supported in our efforts. *“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure”* (Phil 2:12-13 NASB).

While the church is to be forbearing of one another in love, tenderhearted and forgiving (Eph 4:2-3; Col 3:13-14), there is to be no toleration whatsoever of individuals who profess identity with Jesus, yet refuse to live in accord with that profession. Where there is no hunger and thirst for righteousness, there will be no filling. Where men are not engaged in a quest to know Christ, they will not come to know Him. It is the solemn obligation of all spiritual leaders to acquaint people with *“how”* we are to *“conduct”* ourselves *“in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth”* (3 Tim 3:15).

How Did Jesus Walk?

If we are to walk as Jesus walked, just how did He walk? How did He live His life? What was His manner of conduct? It is said of our Lord, that during His formative years He *“increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men”* (Lk 2:52), and was *“about”* His *“Father’s business”* (Lk 2:49). His eye was set toward heaven, and He lived with an acute awareness of His Father and His Father’s desires. He even *“learned obedience by the things that He suffered”* (Heb 5:7). In times of deep need, He poured out His heart to the Father with *“strong crying and tears”* (Heb 5:7).

In His life, our Lord spoke and acted within the framework of His perception of the Father. He never acted on His own, or with His own interests being dominant (John 5:19,30; 8:28; 9:4; 12:49; 14:10). The standard, or norm, for spiritual life was established in the Lord Jesus Christ. He lived in total reliance upon the Father, and with His Father's objectives in mind.

The requirement for living in this manner is not to be understood within the framework of legalism. We have already been apprized that none of us can claim exemption from sin, or the lack of need for a Savior and forgiveness. Yet, we can live as Jesus did in the matter of focus and preference. The Apostle Paul stated it well. *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me"* (Gal 2:20 NASB).

We should exercise care not to expect too much from our brethren. They still need a Savior, forgiveness, and access to the throne of grace. Too, we must equally be careful not to expect too little of them—nor, indeed, or ourselves. At no time should we teach or live in such a manner as to make any professed believer comfortable in spiritual darkness. As great as salvation is, there is no provision in it for living in contradiction of the life of Jesus Christ. There is nothing about redemption that encourages such a wayward life, and we must be sure we do not either. The Spirit always leads us away from sin.

AN OLD COMMANDMENT

"7 Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning." The Spirit now confirms the perfect harmony of what is required of believers with previous revelation. The *"commandment"* to which He refers is loving God and keeping His commandments (Verse 5). The requirement to love God and keep His commandments is not a new idea. Such was required under the Law. As it is written, *"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength . . . Therefore you shall love the LORD your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always"* (Deut 6:5; 11:1).

Holy men and women have always understood these requirements, and sought earnestly to fulfill them. Yet, before Christ, no satisfactory advance was made in these areas. The reason for this condition is stated in Romans 8:3. *"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh."* Because man was unregenerate, he could not love God nor keep His commandments as required. The Law, though holy and good, could not be fulfilled in the flesh—it was *"weak through the flesh."* Although its demands were true and necessary, the law provided no strength for the individual, nor grace to deal with personal infirmities.

From the Beginning

"The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning." God has not changed His requirements. The necessity for loving God and keeping His commandments has not been removed. The grace of God does not remove obligations. Rather, it empowers us to fulfill them.

Here is a vitally important aspect of truth. There is a perfect harmony between the basic requirements of the Law and the life that is lived in Christ Jesus. This harmony is to be seen, lest we be tempted to imagine we are at liberty to live in the flesh. In a poignant statement of the case, the Spirit takes up this matter with great power. *"For what the law **could not do** , in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for*

*sin, condemned sin in the flesh: **That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us** , who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:3-4).*

In the strictest sense of the word, the Gospel of Christ does not present a new set of guidelines for life. Rather, it announcements that a means has been provided whereby men may live toward God, and in fellowship with Him—something the Lord has always sought. Those requirements were found in the Garden of Eden, when Noah built the ark, and at the giving of the Law. They were also announced at the beginning of the Gospel. Every person that has been born again started the newness of life loving God and desirous to keep His commandments.

Thus, in every sense of the word, loving God and keeping His commandments have been required from the beginning. They were mandatory in Eden and at Sinai—and they are still necessary. The Lord Jesus has done nothing that removes the necessity of these things. Rather, He has inducted a means whereby they can be fulfilled in us.

A NEW COMMANDMENT

“ 8 Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.” Let it be clear that the commandment to love God and keep His commandments is not a new idea or notion. It is, however, made new to us regularly—or renewed in our hearts and minds. Under the Law, the commandment became old and burdensome to the people, because they had no heart for it. Seeing this condition, the Lord heard their resolve to do all that He had commanded. His response was, *“Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!”* (Deut 5:29). With determination they had resolved, *“All that the LORD hath spoken we will do”* (Ex 19:8; 24:7). Yet, they soon forgot their determination, not having the nature required to keep it. AFTER they had twice declared they would do everything God said, they demanded Aaron fashion them a golden calf. They rose up early the next day, offering burnt offerings and peace offerings to that idol. They sat down to eat and drink in excess, and rose up to play or revel. They danced about the calf, provoking God and angering Moses (Ex 32:3-8).

And why did such a circumstance exist. To be sure, it was because they were *“a stiffnecked people”* (Ex 32:9). It was also because *“the flesh profiteth nothing”* (John 6:63). Whatever you may think about human abilities, they are wholly inadequate to empower men to love God and keep His commandments. Unless a man is born again, he can neither see nor enter *“the kingdom of God”* (John 3:3-5).

The commandment is *“new”* in the sense of perspective and power. It is seen in a larger sense, and with more appreciation. Both the Object of the commandment (God), and the intent of it (expression) are seen more fully and with greater desire. This is also experienced on an ongoing basis. It is part of the *“renewing of the Holy Spirit”* that occurs in salvation (Tit 3:5). It is as though the commandment is always fresh and precious, never diminishing with age. In all of our doing, the Spirit urges us to become more proficient in loving God and keeping His commandments. He will work with us to accomplish this as we live by faith.

True In Him AND In You

“ . . . which thing is true in Him and in you . . . ” This is a most marvelous and intriguing expression! To conceive of something being true in Jesus AND in us is most refreshing. The commandment to love God and keep His commandments was found in Christ—i.e., in His thinking and in His heart.

Because we have been made “*partakers of Christ*” and of the “*Divine nature*” (Heb 3:14; 2 Pet 1:4), it is also found in us. By saying it is “*true*,” the Spirit means it is real, or is actually a part of us. To assure our hearts, the text says the truth is realized in Christ Jesus AND in us—a most marvelous consideration. What could not be fulfilled under the Law is fulfilled in Christ. What is more, it is also fulfilled in those who are in Him.

Notice one further thing. The text does NOT say “which thing CAN be true in Him and in you,” or “which thing MUST be true in Him and in you.” Rather, it affirms, “*which thing IS true in Him and in you.*” Thus, the marvelous unity between Jesus and His brethren is confirmed, making a way for the realization of Divine fellowship, the fulness of joy, and the confidence that we have eternal life. These are things that can be experienced in growing measures.

The Darkness Is Passing

While the fulness of light is not yet realized, it has already begun to shine in our hearts, illuminating the Person and purpose of our Father which is in heaven.

The KJV reads, “*the darkness is past*,” emphasizing that God has decreed such to happen in Christ Jesus. Other versions use the active voice—“the darkness is PASSING, placing the accent on the experiential aspect of it. Both views are correct. The former is a foundation for faith, while the later is a basis for confidence.

In this text, “*darkness*” equates to an ignorance of God—a lack of familiarity with the Divine nature. The immediate result of spiritual light is the dissipation of an ignorance of God. As it is written, “*For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone 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 NKJV). Salvation, from this viewpoint, is being made capable of knowing and understanding the Almighty God (John 17:3; 1 John 5:20). What a marvelous change!

A remnant of darkness, or spiritual ignorance, does remain with us. That is, the fulness of God is not known. To put it another way, “*we see through a glass darkly*” (1 Cor 13:12). Yet there is sufficient acquaintance with the Lord to draw near and find grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16). Darkness no longer dominates us, but is passing away.

As we abide in Christ, there is a continual reduction of our ignorance of God. “*The darkness is passing.*” He is becoming more precious, and the world is correspondingly becoming more repulsive.

This is the same language used to describe the displacement of the Old Covenant with the New one. “*Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away*” (Heb 8:13). It is a real confidence-builder to know there is a continual diminishment of spiritual darkness.

The Light Is Already Shining

While the fulness of light is not yet realized, it has already begun to shine in our hearts, illuminating the Person and purpose of our Father which is in heaven. As we behold the Gospel message, pondering and meditating upon it, the light shines more brightly. That is, our understanding of God and salvation increases. The Spirit states it this way. “*We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts*” (2 Pet 1:19).

Thus, when we come into Christ, the light begins to shine as the rising of the sun on a new day. As we walk in the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, our path grows “*brighter and brighter unto the perfect day*” (Prov 4:18). What God has revealed becomes clearer and clearer, and the path to glory less obscure.

It is necessary for the people of God to know the darkness is passing, and the light is shining. In Christ, they have come into the realm of insight and advantage. But if they do not know this, Satan will gain an advantage of them. This is a sphere of ever-broadening knowledge—spiritual knowledge. It yields the rich harvest of assurance, confidence, and strong faith and hope to all who avail themselves of it.

LIGHT AND LOVE

“*9 He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. 10 He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.*” Identity with Christ is depicted in three different ways in this passage. This is the third such depiction. This is the manner in which the Spirit describes what men refer to as being saved, being a Christian, being a member of the church, etc.

- **KNOWING HIM**– Personal fellowship and intimacy with Christ.
- **ABIDING IN HIM**– Remaining in Christ, not allowing an interruption of the “*newness of life.*”
- **IN THE LIGHT**– Living in the awareness and favor of Christ, with spiritual insight dominating the life.

In each of the instances, the Spirit makes no allowance for living in contradiction of the profession. The individual claiming to KNOW Him, yet failing to retain His commandments, has lied, and the truth is not in him. The one who claims to be abiding in Christ is to live in this world as the Lord did. Now, the matter of walking in the light is addressed with the same certitude.

Remember, the Spirit earlier affirmed, “*if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*” (1:7). We will now see that He will not permit men to casually make this profession without evidencing the fruitage of it. There can be no discord between what we say and what we do.

In the Light

Being “*in the light*” involves living in an acute awareness of the Person and pleasure of the Lord. “*Light*” is the spiritual environment in which the Savior is the principal Objective of life. It involves both seeking and following the Lord, and maintaining a grasp of what He gives us to see. The scriptures are prominent in life, for God’s Word “*is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*” (Psa 119:105).

Notice, the text does not say, *He that says he WAS in the light*, or *WAS enlightened*. Rather, this refers to the profession of present experience. Rarely will the average churchman speak of salvation in this manner—the present state. Spiritually lifeless men love to speak of the past when referring to their salvation. However, if being saved and in Christ is not in place right now, the profession is only a delusion. I want to again emphasize this pivotal reality. There simply is no place in Christ Jesus for profession without possession, or identity without fellowship. **If the individual is NOT in the light,**

he is alienated from God. If life is not lived within the illumination of Christ Jesus and His Word, there is no life at all. The profession, in such a case, is a lie. The Spirit will now confirm this to our hearts.

Hating Our Brother

We will soon see that reconciliation to God involves reconciliation to His people as well. Those who have been joined to the Lord have also been added to His people. These are two sides of the same coin. **There is no such thing as union with God while being estranged from His people.** *“The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now.”*

He does not say the person is backslidden, or has lost ground. That is not strong enough. Rather, the one who *“hates”* his brother is living in darkness, and there is not a shred of hope for such an individual. One version reads, *“is in THE darkness STILL”* RSV . This strongly suggests nothing of significance has really occurred in the individual at all. I realize this will not be acceptable to those who try and justify a lack of love among brethren. Notwithstanding, that is what the text says, and we do well to believe and embrace it.

The person who disregards the saints of God is thus described as being in spiritual darkness. He is walking, or living out his life, in separation from God, and does not know where he is going. He has been blinded by the very darkness from which he was once delivered.

There is no such thing as connection with God while being disconnected from His people. It is not possible to have a preference for the Lord, yet be able to do without His people. If this seems too strong, then we must allow the word of the Spirit to penetrate our hearts. *“And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also”* (1 John 4:21).

What does it mean to *“hate”* ones spiritual brother? It is the opposite of being attracted to and caring for him. It is failing to consider him in our words and actions. The brethren are *“hated”* when they are ignored, or even detested. Those gripped by such hatred have no care for the people of God. They are closer to their own friends and earthly families, and think nothing of disregarding, and even harming, those in Christ Jesus.

Such deplorable conduct may take the form of drawing away from those who have an obvious preference for the things of God. It may show itself as a preacher who bludgeons, exploits, or entertains the sheep, without feeding and nourishing them. Hatred is sometimes revealed by professed leaders of a congregation siding against, and even persecuting, those who preach the Word of God. Diotrephes was of this class of haters (3 John 9-10).

The profession of all such people is disregarded by the Lord. Their lives have contradicted any claim they make to affiliation with the living God. They are abiding in darkness— *“still,”* or *“even until now.”* The REAL people of God do NOT despise, malign, persecute, or make sorrowful, the saints of the most high God.

Loving Our Brother

“The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him” NASB . Remaining in the illuminating presence of God is attended by certain evidence. Those in fellowship with the Lord are, in this way, predictable. Such have a love and preference for the people of God—those who are not of this world.

These days, there is a strong emphasis on family relationships—domestic life. From one standpoint, this is commendable. But it is not to be equated with the relationship of the people of God with one another. There is such a thing as spiritual life driving a wedge between earthly family members. Thus Jesus said, *“For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be those of his own household.”* (Matt 10:35-36 NKJV). This is not a state to be coveted, nor do these words justify the neglect of one's family. Notwithstanding, they do confirm the existence of relationships superior to that of our earthly families.

Jesus declared the identifying mark of His disciples. It was NOT the closeness of their earthly families. *“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:35). This is not a mere profession of love, but love itself. It is not a love for the world—not even a concern for the lost. It is a love, affection, and determination to do good to, the saints of the Most High God. The attitude one has toward the people of God is a revelation of being either a child of the devil or a child of God. As it is written, *“In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother”* (1 John 3:10). This, then, is undeniable evidence.

The person remaining *“in the light”* has a care and preference for the brethren of Jesus *“and there is no cause for stumbling in him.”* Such do not make life more difficult for the people of God, but bring spiritual advantages to them. It is true of them, even as it was with David. *“Those who fear You will be glad when they see me, Because I have hoped in Your word”* (Psa 119:74).

“Stumbling” is a vivid word covering an exceedingly broad spectrum. It speaks of creating an occasion that displeases, causes to offend, and encourages drawing back from the Lord. The person who *“stumbles”* is himself lured into darkness, and does not see the Lord as clearly as he once did. Those who cause their brethren to *“stumble”* have not considered them as Jesus did. They refuse to forfeit their own preferences in interest of their betterment and edification. Rather than pleasing *“his neighbor for his good, leading to edification”* (Rom 15:2), the one who does not love his brother chooses to please himself.

I am compelled to say a word about a very prominent stumbling factor in the church—discouragement. Many a godly soul has stooped beneath the weight of discouragement produced by professed brethren. I have known of proficient preachers and teachers of the Word who have given up declaring the Word because of discouragement. One can scarcely number men and women in such a state that live in this very vicinity. Such things are not taken lightly by the Lord, and they ought not to be taken casually by us.

Jesus has affirmed that inheriting the Kingdom depends upon our response to His people. *“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I*

say unto you, *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me*” (Matt 25:34-40). Thus, no occasion of stumbling was found in those loving the brethren.

The Powerful Impact of Darkness

“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.” This is an unusually strong statement, making absolutely no allowance whatsoever for a disdain of the people of God. The person who disregards the saints of God is thus described as being in spiritual darkness. He is walking, or living out his life, in separation from God, and does not know where he is going. He has been blinded by the very darkness from which he was once delivered.

There is no need to speculate about whether or not such a soul is saved. Such idle speculations are foolish to the extreme. If any person imagines that those who choose to remain and live in the darkness will dwell forever with the Lord, they have been deceived by the devil. You simply cannot go to heaven by way of spiritual ignorance and blindness. Such ignorance alienates the soul from God, severing the cord of life.

Jesus will NOT tolerate the abuse of His people! In one of His matchless words, He declared eternal life would hinge upon how His brethren were treated. *“Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungered, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in: naked, and ye clothed Me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not . . . Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal”* (Matt 25:40-46).

Our spiritual lives began with us being added to the church (Acts 2:47). We were placed *“in the body”* (1 Cor 12:18), and made members of the saints themselves (1 Cor 12:12; Eph 4:25). There was a joyful association with the saints, as we became of one heart and soul with them (Acts 4:32). Yet all of that is effectively negated when a person walks in darkness—when they live out their lives just as though there was no God. That is the *“power of darkness.”* It is the power that crucified the Son of God in utter disregard of His good words and works (Lk 22:53). It is also the power from which God delivered us when we came into Christ (Col 1:13).

Do not imagine for a moment that the darkness has lost its power. Should a person choose to return to that darkness, the latter state will be worse than it was in the beginning (2 Pet 2:20). For such a person, *“it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them”* (2 Pet 2:21). There is, in my judgment, a great need for this to be seen more clearly by the professed church. This awareness would resolve many problems.

YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN

“12 I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.” You sense the heart of the Apostle here, as well as His inspiration. He has a concern for the people of God, and lives out the very love he has just mentioned.

Little Children

In this verse, John uses the expression *“little children”* to denote believers of all ages. Later, in verses thirteen and fourteen, he will speak to different age groups. There, he will use a different word

for “*children*.” In this text, the word used is taken from **tekni,a**, which is a term of affection, not classification. Spiritually, it refers to those who are especially precious to the writer—probably some of his own converts.

The reason for this Epistle is again stated. Already several reasons for the writing have been adduced. All of them are weighty.

- That we might have fellowship with the Father, Son, and Apostles (1:3).
- That our joy might be full.
- Now he writes “because your sins are forgiven you for His sake” (2:12).
- Later, he will say it is in order that we might know we have eternal life (5:13).

Your Sins Are Forgiven

How important is it that we know our “*sins are forgiven for His name’s sake*” ? Note, he does not say our sins CAN BE forgiven, but that they “*ARE forgiven*.” It reminds me of the word of our Lord to the paralytic. “*Man, your sins are forgiven you*” (Lk 5:20). He said the same thing of the woman who anointed His head with oil and His feet with ointment: “*Her sins, which are many, are forgiven*” (Lk 7:47). The Scriptures also pronounce a blessing upon such an individual. “*Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered*” (Rom 4:7). The Spirit does not say our sins WERE forgiven, but that they “*ARE forgiven*.” Those in Christ Jesus are in a state of Divine acceptance. Their sins are not imputed to them, and the blood of Jesus Christ is cleansing them from all sin. It is vital that the saints realize this to the fullest extent possible.

Surely you have lived long enough to know Satan will dredge up your past, and haunt you with your past sins. How blessed to hear the words: “*Your sins are forgiven you!*” But lest we become complacent in our knowledge of this, the Spirit adds, “*for his name's sake*.” This refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. Elsewhere it is affirmed this way, “***God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you***” (Eph 4:32). Were it not for Jesus, God would not have forgiven us. It is just that simple. God loves and cares for you, but it is His love for His Son that moved Him to forgive you! Our identity with Christ has placed us within the range of forgiveness. That forgiveness, however, is because of Christ. No person is forgiven by God merely because they have met some of His conditions. The faithful Israelites met Divine conditions in offering sacrifices to God. Yet, they left the sacrifice with a goading consciousness of sin and guilt (Heb 10:3-4). **God will forgive no person because they deserve forgiveness, or have earned it by strict adherence to a Divinely authored code!**

The phrase “*for His name’s sake*” is frequently used in Scripture. It traces the cause described back to the Person of Deity—to God Himself and His Son. Thus, the Lord “*will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake*” (1 Sam 12:22). As a Shepherd, He leads His people “*in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake*” (Psa 23:3). David pled for forgiveness on this basis. “***For Your name's sake , O LORD, Pardon my iniquity, for it is great***” (Psa 25:11). The idea is that the name of Christ is at stake in our forgiveness. If God were to refuse to forgive those in His Son, Christ’s work would be for nothing, and both He and His Father would be reproached. If God is “*just*” in forgiving those with faith in Christ, He would be unjust in failing to do so.

For some, this is almost blasphemous. Yet, this is the solemn declaration of the Spirit, and we do well to heartily embrace it. “*To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be **just** , and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus*” (Rom 3:26). And again, “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and **just** to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9). The Father is glorified and the Son honored in the forgiveness of those in Christ. Let every soul needed forgiveness press toward the Throne and appropriate it!

See what privileges belong to those in Christ Jesus—whose sins “*are forgiven!*” This precious Epistle is vouchsafed to those who are forgiven. They are given the honor of having their fellowship with the Father and the Son enhanced, and their joy made full. They also will have confirmed to their hearts that they have eternal life. Wise, indeed, is the person availing himself of salvation! Great benefits come to them.

KNOWING HIM WHO IS FROM THE BEGINNING

“*13a I write to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning . . . “14a I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning.”* The Spirit now addresses different categories of believers. We must remember there are no fleshly distinctions in Christ. As it is written, “*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Gal 3:27-28). Therefore, because of the nature of the message, our text is not written to national groups, social classes, or men or women. Rather, there is a focus on spiritual maturity. While there are varying degrees of it, they are all recognized.

I Write – I Have Written

In verses thirteen and fourteen, the Apostle uses the expression “*I write*” three times. He also says “*I have written*” two times. This does not refer to separate writings. Rather, the first expression, “*I write,*” is from John’s perspective—what he is presently doing. The second, “*I have written,*” is from the readers’ perspective, after they have received the Epistle.

Fathers

“*Fathers,*” in this case, is not used in the domestic sense, as in Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21. There are two ways in which “*fathers*” is used here. First, of those who are older in years—we would say seniors. Second, and more importantly, of those who are spiritually mature. From the natural viewpoint, older believers can be tempted to excuse themselves from learning because they imagine themselves to be too old. From the spiritual viewpoint, seasoned saints are addressed as those who also need to extend their fellowship with God, enhance their joy, and be assured they have eternal life.

There is no separate message for the older brethren, or those who are more mature in Christ. The same message is written to all of the brethren. Too, they are not neglected as though they had no need. Without extended comment, this approach conflicts with many contemporary trends in teaching. The more teaching is divided, the less powerful it becomes.

You Have Known Him

The commendation of the older in Christ is not their age. Nor, indeed, is it their acquaintance with various aspects of Apostolic doctrine. He does not even commend them because of the diversity and extensiveness of their earthly experiences. Rather, their acquaintance with the Savior is the point: “*You have known Him that is from the beginning.*” This I understand to refer to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our only way to the Father. He is described at the beginning of this Epistle as “*That which was from the beginning . . . the Word of life . . . the Life . . . “that eternal life” and “His Son Jesus Christ”* (1:1-3). What marvelous descriptions of our Lord and savior!

That Jesus Christ is the object of a true quest for knowledge is confirmed in Philippians 3:7-

10. *“I count all things but loss for the excellency of **the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord** : for **whom** I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may **win Christ** . . . That I may **know him** , and the power of **his resurrection** , and the fellowship of **his sufferings** , being made conformable unto **his death** .”* This pursuit is to be common in the household of faith.

“*Fathers*” are thus described as having known the Lord—being acquainted with Him and His ways. Let every mature person, whether in earthly years or spiritual development, determine to be recognized as one who “*knows Him who is from the beginning.*” This goes beyond knowing the historical information about Jesus and being acquainted with His teachings. It is a familiarity with His Person that is founded upon Scripture, yet yields a greater understanding of both the Scriptures and life. That is how they are to be known, and wherein they will be of the greatest benefit to the household of faith. All other distinctions of the mature are secondary to this characteristic. Their intimacy with the Savior, knowing Him as coming from eternity, qualifies them to receive this Epistle. This word is for them—a word that is needed and will refresh them.

OVERCOMING THE WICKED ONE

“*13b I write to you, young men, Because you have overcome the wicked one.*” The various stages of spiritual life are characterized by certain attainments. Just as the “*fathers*” were noted for their perception of the One who was “*from the beginning.*” so the young men are also distinguished within the body of Christ. We are here viewing the Kingdom standard for these categories.

Young Men

The term “*young men*” refers to those in the flower, or vitality, of their age. In the world, this time of life is fraught with temptations to be immersed in this present evil world. Satan sorely tempts the “*young men*” to waste their energies, and squander their lives on things that jeopardize, and even destroy, their faith. If we view “*young men*” from a spiritual perspective, those capable of, and inclined to, energetic Kingdom enterprises are meant. How will the Spirit speak to such souls?

Overcoming the Wicked One

The “*young men*” are not commended for their evangelistic fervor, or their creative skills. There is certainly nothing wrong with these things. In fact, there is everything right about them. However, the spirit is not speaking of things that are merely good. He is focusing on spiritual traits that distinguish “*young men*” before God.

It is of interest to me that John does not exhort the “*young men*” to overcome the wicked one, but commends them because they have triumphed over him. He does not mean that all “*young men*” have done this. Rather, this is what can be expected when we are in the vigor of spiritual life. This very thought is strange to those who are casual in their lives toward God.

What does it mean to “*overcome the wicked one?*” The expression postulates an aggressive adversary. Satan is like a prowling lion, roaming to and fro to consume lethargic *Christians* . As it is written, “*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Pet 5:8). The devil does not ignore believers. He is not repulsed by their profession, nor intimidated by their persons. If he attacked the Lord Jesus Himself, you may be sure he will not draw back from assaulting His brethren!

Satan is called “*the wicked ONE*” because he is the source of all evil. Ultimately, his purpose is to involve the saints in wickedness. His intentions are described in the book of Revelation. “*So the*

serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood” (Rev 12:15). With unfathomable anger, he has declared war against those “who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 12:17).

This is the adversary that has been “overcome” by the “young men.” By this, the Spirit means the energies of the young have been given to Jesus. They have become involved with Him, refusing to become entangled in the affairs of this world. Satan has been frustrated in his attempts to lure them with “youthful lusts” (2 Tim 2:22).

Overcoming the wicked one postulates an acute awareness of his activity, as well as a profound preference for the things of God. Where these traits are not found in “young men,” they have failed to measure up to the Kingdom standard for them. Let all “young men” be noted for this singular achievement. They “have overcome the wicked one.” He has not been able to make inroads into their lives, but has been defeated by them.

YOU HAVE KNOWN THE FATHER

“13c I write to you, little children, Because you have known the Father.” In this verse, the term “little children” differs from the one mentioned in verses one and thirteen. In those verses, the expression denotes an affectionate relationship; i.e., “MY little children” (Verse 1). Here, however, a different word is used. The word from which “little children” is derived is **paidi,a**, and means *infant, or babe—immature or undeveloped*. It is the same word Jesus used when emphasizing the necessity of being born again—starting over. “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 18:3). It is also used to describe the little ones brought to Jesus for blessing (Matt 19:13-14).

In our text, “little children” refers to those who are in Christ, yet are immature. They are newly born, having “begun in the Spirit” (Gal 3:3). Because of their spiritual age, they are “children in understanding” (1 Cor 14:20). Their understanding is not like that of the Fathers, who know Him who is “from the beginning.” Notwithstanding, they are not without Kingdom qualities. No matter how young a person is in Christ, there is a level of knowledge in which they can find delight and spiritual sustenance.

Knowing the Father

Newborn babes receive this Epistle because they “have known the Father.” In the newness of life there is an awareness of Divine provision and care. A lack of comprehension concerning the extent of God’s Fatherhood does not exclude one from the persuasion and benefit of it. In Christ, things can be known, even though they are not fully known. From the very first, the indwelling Spirit cries out “Abba Father” from within the believer (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). Faith immediately shows us we are not orphans, but have recourse to the One who beget us through the Word of truth (James 1:18). A joyful sense of dependency grips the heart of the young in Christ Jesus. This is recognized by the Holy Spirit. He moves John to write to them in order that they also may have fellowship with the Father and Son, have their joy made full, and know they have eternal life.

STRENGTH, THE ABIDING WORD, AND OVERCOMING

“14b I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one.” Again, the “young men” are mentioned, as though to challenge them to spiritual excellence. What confidence it will produce in these “young men” to

identify the qualities heaven recognizes in them. Let it be the aim of every young and growing believer to have this said of them.

You Are Strong

Spiritual strength is a consistent objective held before believers. “*Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, **be strong** . . . **be strong** in the Lord . . . **be strong** in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*” (1 Cor 16:13; Eph 6:10; 2 Tim 2:1). Moses exhorted the Israelites, “*Be strong and of a good courage*” (Deut 31:6). The Lord urged Joshua, “*Be strong and of a good courage*” (Josh 1:6). David gave the same challenge to Solomon (1 Chron 28:20). When confronted with Sennacherib, Hezekiah was admonished, “*Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria*” (2 Chron 32:7).

Spiritual strength is not only an objective, it is a necessity. It is an aspect of faith that causes the individual to face adversity with confidence and boldness. Strength enables the soul to “*stand against the wiles of the devil,*” and remain faithful in the “*evil day*” (Eph 6:11,13).

Here is a trait that is to be found in our young people. Surely you are aware that an inordinate amount of moral and spiritual weakness characterizes the younger generation. Even within the church, there is a lamentable absence of spiritual strength among the younger men. However, this does not need to be the case. Youth can be characterized by spiritual strength. Great spiritual battles can be fought by young men, and the church should expect it to be done. **Miriam** cared for the infant Moses (Ex 2:4-7). **David** defeated Goliath (1 Sam 17). **Amaziah** became a productive king when he was sixteen, as well as his son **Uzziah** (2 Kgs 14:21-22; 2 Chron 26:1-2). At a young age, **Timothy** was identified as the only person naturally caring for the state of God’s people (Phil 2:19-20).

The strength of the young men was confirmed in their triumph over Satan. The kingdom of darkness suffered defeat because of them. May there be a resurgence of such strength among Christ’s “*young men*” today.

The Word of God Abides In You

What a marvelous thing to be said of young men! “*The Word of God abides in you.*” They did not have a casual acquaintance with God’s Word, but a working knowledge of it. They could move about in the Word of God with spiritual dexterity and profit. Like the Psalmist, they hid the Word in their hearts, that they might not sin against God (Psa 119:11). Not only had the laws of God been put into their minds and written upon their hearts, they had developed a profitable acquaintance with the Scriptures.

It is exceedingly rare in our time to find anyone with a good understanding of the Word of God. This is largely owing to the propagation of religious systems that do not require an understanding of Scripture, or the proper handling of it (2 Tim 2:15). Such systems are not from God, do not honor Him, and do not profit His people.

We are admonished to “*let the Word of Christ dwell*” in us “*richly,*” or in a manner that yields abundant and copious fruit (Col 3:16). Some may imagine this to be a state achieved only by the “*fathers,*” or more seasoned among us. However, our text shows this is a condition that can be—yea, must be—realized by “*young men.*”

Should we be tempted to think this is not possible or practical, the Spirit has provided a single incident in the life of youthful Jesus that confirms it to be true. It is a well known, but

little emulated, occasion. When Jesus was but twelve years of age, He had a preference for, and a good working knowledge, of the Scriptures. At that time, He went up with his parents to Jerusalem to observe “*the feast.*” It is written that when all others left, “*the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem.*” Three days later, when Joseph and Mary found Him, He was in the temple “*sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions.*” What is more, these experts in the Law, and teachers of the people, “*were astonished at His understanding and answers.*” Of the incident, Jesus told Mary He had been about His “*Father’s business*” (Lk 2:42-49). Such activity is still the “*Father’s business.*”

We may be tempted to think this was a miracle, and not intended to be the experience of others. But this is not the case at all. David, when but a young man, was acquainted with the Word of the Lord. Timothy is said to have “*known the Scriptures*” from his youth (2 Tim 3:15). Young men CAN experience the Word of God ABIDING in them. It CAN be the center of their thinking, and the point of reference from which their decisions are made. There simply is no substitute for a love for and working knowledge of the Word of the living God.

It is our business to encourage “*young men*” to possess the qualities mentioned in this text. Youth is not an end of itself, but the soul can, at that time, become anchored in Christ. Spiritual strength can be developed, and God’s Word find a abiding place in them.

CONCLUSION

In a wise and profitable way, the Spirit has identified the real believers—the ones who are in Christ Jesus. His words are calculated to provoke self-examination, and will yield the harvest of Divine fellowship, joy, and confidence. Being in Christ Jesus is not a mere formality. It is not subscribing to a series of theological statements, or identifying with a specific religious group. From the very beginning, the people of God have confronted the temptation to view life in Christ in a lifeless manner. This is the result of Satan’s effort to move us away from the hope of the Gospel. How we need the message of this brief, but pungent, letter!

A brief summary of this section will suffice to confirm the nature of spiritual life. Real believers,

- Know God and keep His commandments (2:3).
- Keep His word, and the love of God is perfected in them (2:5).
- Abide in Him and walk as Jesus walked (2:6).
- Abide in the light and love the brethren (2:8-10).

Certain affirmations are made concerning those who LACK these qualities.

- They are liars, and the truth is not in them (2:4).
- They remain in darkness, do not know where they are going, and are blinded by the darkness (2:9-11).

It is apparent that a profession of faith is taken quite seriously in heaven. Salvation makes no provision for profession without possession.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Book of 1st John

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #3

PROVISION FOR PROTECTION

“ 15 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 And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever. 18 Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us. 20 But you have an anointing (unction, KJV) from the Holy One, and you all know. 21 I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. 22 Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. 23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. 24 As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. 25 And this is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life. 26 These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. 27 And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. 28 And now, little

children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. 29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.” (1 John 2:15-20, NASB)

INTRODUCTION

It is possible to imagine that the church was at its most ideal state in its beginning. In fact, there is an approach to theology that assumes this to be the case. This line of reasoning imagines that if we can get back to what occurred at the beginning, we will be more free from corruption. It all sounds plausible enough—at least on the surface. And, it is not to be denied that there is an element of truth to this view. When God created Adam and Eve, they were at their best state, to be sure. But that did not last for long. Sin entered almost immediately. Cain, although born first, was not the “*pattern*” son. The same was true of Ishmael and Esau. Too, when the Law was given, the people embraced corruption in an unprecedented manner at the very base of Sinai (Ex 32:1-7). The defiling effects of Achan’s sin occurred when the people were first entering Canaan (Josh 7:1-24). Israel’s first king, Saul, did not

OUTLINE

1. **The Believer and the World** (15-17).
2. **It Is the Last Hour** (18-19).
3. **The Uncction, or Anointing** (20-21).
4. **The Liar Is the Antichrist** (22-23).
5. **When What Is Heard Abides** (24).
6. **The Promise** (25).
7. **The Anointing that Teaches** (26-27).
8. **Confidence When He Comes** (28).
9. **Knowing and Practicing** (29).

prove to be their best one. The transgression of Ananias and Saphirra surfaced at the threshold of church history (Acts 5:1-10). Beginning periods, while significant, are not always characterized by purity.

During Paul’s Ministry

During the ministry of the Apostle Paul, he spoke of deplorable conditions that existed on a significant scale. “*For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's*” (Phil 2:20-21). Another time he wrote, “*At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me*” (1 Tim 4:16). Once he lamented to the churches of Galatia, “*O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth,*” and *I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain*” (Gal 3:1; 4:11). Things were not ideal then.

The Churches In Asia

Who can forget the conditions of most of the seven churches of Asia, to whom the glorified Christ spoke with revealing frankness. “ . . . *thou hast left thy first love . . . thou art fallen . . . thou*

hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam . . . thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate . . . thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols . . . that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead . . . I will spue thee out of my mouth” (Rev 2:4,14,20; 3:1,16). These conditions occurred in the first century, when one of the chief Apostles was yet alive. That reality makes our text highly relevant.

We Are In A Warfare

All of this confirms that salvation is being accomplished in an intensely competitive arena. This has been the condition from the very first. In First John, the Spirit addresses the matter of corruption, both on a personal and collective level. He warns us of the environment itself—*“the world”* (2:15-17). He also tells us of the aggression of the devil—*“the wicked one”* -- and the flood of *“false prophets”* he has sent into the world (2:13-14; 5:18-19; 4:1). With great sobriety we are reminded, *“the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one”* (5:19). At no point are we encouraged to think of spiritual beginnings as free from danger or corruption.

We will find that false doctrines must not be approached in the energy of human logic alone. There are powerful evil spiritual personalities behind false doctrines. Although, from the standpoint of appearance, men propagate them, they are actually *“doctrines of demons”* (1 Tim 4:1). For this reason, Divine assistance must be provided to us, for human abilities are not adequate for confronting *“the power of darkness.”* Should men doubt this to be the case, the Spirit will tell us emphatically that our protection against delusion is provided through Divine resources. He will also confirm that God alone can enable us to continue to abide in Christ Jesus. At no point are we left to live in our own strength.

THE BELIEVER AND THE WORLD

“ 15 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 And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.”

This is one of the strongest exhortations of Scripture, and has been a hallmark text among the godly throughout the centuries. The church was always been strengthened when it took hold of this word. It has always been weakened when it was ignored. A deteriorating church has never taken this text seriously, and a strong one has never ignored it. It is a text where, if embraced, we can adjust our focus. There is no ambiguity in the passage whatsoever.

The World

I believe it was John Newton who said, “You can tell how close a man is to God by how he shudders at the word **‘world’** .” Faith does bring sensitivity to the heart concerning this word. We will see it is not only a danger- zone, but an order that is dominated by the devil. It behooves every child of God to have a good understanding of *“the world.”*

By *“the world,”* the Spirit means everything belonging to the cursed order—everything that is temporal. From another perspective, it is everything disassociated from eternal life, to which we have been *“called”* (1 Tim 6:12). *“The world”* is like a bottomless pit, in which everything that corrupts resides. It, together with *“the things of the world,”* will not allow God or the things of God to be maintained while it remains preminent. In order to *“love”* the world, the heart must be turned away from God, and salvation must be neglected. That is how corrupt the world is. John Calvin once said

that when the love of the world possesses a person, it “so holds him entangled that he thinks not of the heavenly life, [but] he is possessed by a beastly stupidity.”

This is why the Spirit refers to “*this present evil world,*” affirming that Jesus gave Himself for our sins in order to “*deliver us*” from it (Gal 1:4). Its cares “*choke*” the Word of God (Matt 13:22), Satan is its “*prince*” (John 12:31), and Christ’s Kingdom is not of its order (John 18:36). The wisdom that comes from the world has been made “*foolish*” by God (1 Cor 1:20), and its “*princes*” brought to nothing (1 Cor 2:6).

In salvation, we “*escape the corruption that is in THE WORLD through lust*” (2 Pet 1:4). We are also said to have escaped “*the pollutions of THE WORLD through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Pet 2:20). This matter is so fundamental that it is written, “*friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*” (James 4:4).

It is no wonder, therefore, that we are admonished “*love not the world.*” As the “*sons of God,*” we have been delivered from the world, and are no longer of that order. To have an affection for the world and its “*things,*” the Spirit must be quenched, and our attention diverted from the Lord Jesus. Loving the world will conform us to its ways—something strictly forbidden by the command and nature of our Lord (Rom 12:1-2). The ways of the world must be kept away from our way of thinking, our preferences, and our manners. Let it not characterize our speaking, our music, or our fashions. While men may not legislate in this area, the Lord will, if heeded, make us more and more unlike the world. That is the secret to NOT loving it.

Anyone

The Spirit is utterly intolerant of any affinity with “*this present evil world.*” He makes no allowance for the smallest degree of harmony with it, nor does he permit one to profess allegiance to God while loving the world. “*If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*” It is not possible to have a preference for God and one for the world at the same time. In order to embrace one, the other must be forfeited.

Mind you, believers are being addressed in this text. They are warned that God will not recognize them if they continue to look longingly toward the world like Lot’s wife did toward Sodom—profession notwithstanding.

The love of God cannot remain in a heart that is attracted to the world. As soon as the individual loves the world, the love of God, once shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit, leaves him. Our text will now confirm to us the reason for this circumstance. The world, and everything in it, is at variance—**sharp variance**—with God.

The Basics

Desires are what knit us to the world. The Spirit will now categorize these for us. These are basic classifications of unlawful desires, or lusts. All other sinful desires spring from these basic ones. Further, these are the areas in which Satan is active, and the means through which he allures dull souls into the condemned realm.

The ways of the world must be kept away from our way of thinking, our preferences, and our manners. Let it not

characterize our speaking, our music, or our fashions. While men may not legislate in this area, the Lord will, if heeded, make us more and more unlike the world. That is the secret to NOT loving it.

“The lust of the flesh” is the desire to satisfy the condemned part of us—the natural part of our persons. This is the part in which dwells *“no good thing”* (Rom 7:18). Jesus said of it, *“the flesh profits nothing”* (John 6:63), and *“is weak”* (Matt 26:41). Without any variation whatsoever, the flesh *“serves the law of sin”* (Rom 7:25). It is so utterly corrupt that those who walk in the flesh *“cannot please God”* (Rom 8:8). If anyone lives *“after the flesh,”* or according to its desires, they will *“die,”* being severed from Divine life (Rom 8:12,13). The Spirit, therefore, works with the people of God to mortify, or put to death, the inclinations springing from the flesh (Rom 8:13b).

Eve and Jesus

This is the lust that captivated Eve when she *“saw that the tree was good for food”* (Gen 3:6). It is also the lust with which Satan tempted Jesus when he said, *“If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread”* (Matt 4:3). Eve confirms to us what happens when we entertain such lusts. Jesus confirms the victory related with refusing their entrance into the heart.

The Flesh

Even though we have been delivered from the world and its lusts, *“the flesh”* remains with us. It is appropriately called *“MY flesh”* (Rom 7:25). While not confined to our bodies, it is primarily associated with that part of our persons. The flesh does have a *“mind”* of its own, and we must contend with it. Ephesians 2:3 refers to *“the desires of the flesh and of the mind”* (Eph 2:3).

To us, the flesh is like the wayward Israelites who longed for the fleshpots of Egypt AFTER they had been delivered from that *“iron furnace”* (Ex 16:3; Num 11:5; Deut 4:20). The *“lust of the flesh”* is the desire to return to the cursed realm. It is the strong craving to make the satisfaction of our temporal part the primary quest. Satan knows that he cannot lure us into sin without making us WANT to do so. Thus he uses the desires of our fallen nature to appeal to us. He knows that to satisfy our flesh, we must forget our God.

The *“lusts of the flesh”* are the prelude to the *“works of the flesh”* mentioned in the fifth chapter of Galatians. You may remember that dreadful catalog of transgressions. *“Adultery (marital infidelity) , fornication (all forms of sexual impurity) , uncleanness (impurity) , lasciviousness (unrestrained sensuality or lewdness) , idolatry, witchcraft (sorcery) , hatred, variance, emulations (jealousies) , wrath (outbursts of anger) , strife (selfish ambitions) , seditions (dissensions, quarreling) , heresies (party spirit, factions) , envyings (ill-will) , murders, drunkenness (intoxication in any form) , revellings (carousing, rioting, unrestrained madness) ”* (Gal 5:19-20).

Simply put, the *“lust of the flesh”* is the desire to participate in such things. It should be apparent that every child of God will have struggles with such desires. That is what it means to be tempted. However, when such assaults are hurled at us by the wicked one, we are to refuse to entertain them, knowing they are of the world. That is the meaning of the exhortation, *“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul”* (1 Pet 2:9).

I cannot leave this section without mentioning the danger of false religion in this regard. There are approaches to religion that allow for immortality and the indulgence of the flesh. These are chiefly manifested in the cults, and those religions that are more obviously sinful. However, there is an approach to *Christianity* that also is laden with lusts. These lusts do not appear as sinful as gross immorality, but are nevertheless classed with such sins. “*Works of the flesh*” that address this matter are “*contentions,*” “*dissensions,*” and “*party spirit.*” When ones religion produces results like this, the lust of the flesh has become dominant. We are to “*abstain*” from these.

“*The lust of the eyes.*” This is a particularly seductive desire. It places an emphasis upon appearance, concentrating on “*the things which are seen*” (2 Cor 4:18). This appetite causes one to “*glory in appearance, and not in heart*” (2 Cor 5:12).

The More Obvious

There are two categories of “*appearance.*” One provokes licentiousness, or the total lack of moral restraint. Such appearances move one to indulge in iniquity, as occurred when David saw Uriah’s wife washing herself (2 Sam 11:2). There are appearances, whether immodest clothing, pictures, or various forms of entertainment, that arouse such desires. The patriarch Job knew of this type of lust, and dealt with it in his heart. Here is what he said in a sort of self-exhortation. “*I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman?*” (Job 31:1). This is the sin to which Jesus referred when he said, “*But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart*” (Matt 5:28).

The Less Obvious

There is another category of appearance, however, that is more subtle, and is especially leveled at those identified with Christ. It is religious appearance, a sort of external show that is attractive, yet lures the heart away from Christ. That is the sin to which the Paul referred when he wrote of those who “*those who take pride in appearance, and not in heart*” (2 Cor 5:12 NASB). The Galatians were also warned of this tool of Satan. “*As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world*” (Gal 6:12-14).

There is another category of appearance, however, that is more subtle, and is especially leveled at those identified with Christ. It is religious appearance, a sort of external show that is attractive, yet lures the heart away from Christ.

This latter list is far more seductive than the former one. It is the desire upon which a staggering percentage of contemporary religion is built. While it is painful to acknowledge the existence of such a condition, nearly all modern religion has little more to offer than appearance. From the pomp and splendor of the Romish ceremonies, to the impressions of a contemporary praise gathering, there are religious “*lusts of the eye*” that offer nothing whatsoever to the heart. They are actually worldly presentations, orchestrated to impress the outward man, but having nothing to offer to the inward man.

As a matter of observation, those who claim the “eye-gate” is the primary way of real learning, and that “seeing a sermon is better than hearing one,” have unwittingly entered into the arena of “*the lust of the eye.*” If that postulate were true, which it emphatically is NOT, then the manifestation of God in the flesh should have sufficed to provoke true faith. However, it did not. Jesus had to leave the realm of sight before the world could believe.

Eve and Jesus

This is the lust that entered Eve’s heart when she “*saw that the tree . . . was pleasant to the eyes*” (Gen 3:6). It is also the lust with which Satan tempted Jesus when he “*showed unto Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto Him, All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If Thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be Thine*” (Luke 4:5-7). Again, Eve confirms to us what happens when we entertain such lusts. Jesus confirms the victory related with refusing their entrance into the heart.

“***The pride of life.***” This is a sin that strongly urges the individual to boast in himself, rather than in the Lord. The word “*pride*” means “*vain-glory of life.*” It includes the idea of gaining prestige and distinction that really does not belong to us. In this sin there is a powerful desire to be better than the other person, and to draw undue attention to self.

Eve and Jesus

This is the lust to which Eve yielded when she viewed the forbidden tree “*a tree to be desired to make one wise*” (Gen 3:6). The desire for such wisdom was nothing less than a display of pride, something strictly forbidden by God. This was also the sin Satan tempted Jesus to commit when he said, “*If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone’*” (Matt 4:6). Again, Eve confirms to us what happens when we entertain such lusts. Jesus confirms the victory related with refusing their entrance into the heart.

All That Is in the World

All that the world has to offer is wrapped in these three things: (1) The lust of the flesh, (2) The lust of the eyes, and (3) The pride of life. These are the three wells from which all temptations are drawn. They are the repositories from which Satan draws his “*fiery darts,*” or “*flaming arrows.*” Eve succumbed to Satan’s wiles in all three, and Jesus overcame him in all three.

All three of these are described as “*NOT of the Father.*” That is, at no time does God provoke people to indulge these appetites. When we are tempted to satisfy the flesh, we may be sure, it did not come from God. When what we see provokes the flesh to awaken and dominate us, the inclination did not come from God. If we are tempted to think more of ourselves than we ought to think, or to appropriate for ourselves things that do not belong to us, we are not being influenced by God. In all three cases, the “*prince of this world*” is courting our favor, and luring us away from the Savior.

It is Passing Away

Whatever we may think of the world, it “*is passing away, and the lust of it*” NKJV . Elsewhere, the Spirit affirms, “*the fashion (or present form) of this world passeth away*” (1 Cor 7:31). There is nothing in this world that is not fading and momentary. Therefore, to develop an appetite for what it has to offer shuts one up to frustration and sorrow, not to mention condemnation in the end.

Because we have been given “*eternal life*,” and are coming into an “*eternal inheritance*,” it is wrong to become attached to temporal things. What is more, faith cannot flourish when our attention is placed on the passing order. That is why the command to NOT love the world or the things in it is fortified by the affirmation that it is passing away. The perception of that fact makes its lusts unreasonable.

And the Lust of It

When the Spirit says not only the world, but “*the lusts of it*” are passing away, He is speaking of the object of lust, and not the desire itself. From the standpoint of language, this is called a metonym. Frequently the Spirit uses words in this manner.

For example, the word “*hope*” is used in this way. In one usage, it describes our personal anticipation of glory and being forever with the Lord (Rom 4:18; 5:2; 8:24; 1 Cor 15:19; 1 Pet 1:3). On other occasions, the Lord Jesus Himself, in Whom our hope resides, is referred to as the hope. “*Christ in you, THE HOPE OF GLORY . . . the Lord Jesus Christ, which is OUR HOPE*” (Col 1:27; 1 Tim 1:1).

The point of contrast is this: when we yield to the allurements of this world, we will ultimately have what we desire taken from us. However, when we “*do the will of God*,” we will not only keep our desires, but the things for which they long.

Thus, in this text, the “*lusts*” of the world are the very things for which men long. The meaning is that the best the world has to offer is but a fleeting fancy, and will not endure. When the world passes away, everything that it has offered will also be removed. Everything for which the flesh longs will be removed when the world passes away. Because they are part of the world, they can no longer remain when the heavens and earth pass away.

The desire for those things, however, will remain with those who are condemned. While believers will receive all for which they have longed, unbelievers will forever be deprived of that for which they have longed. This is a staggering consideration, and should provoke within us strong longings for the things that are eternal.

Abiding Forever

Notice that a contrast is made between the THINGS for which the unbeliever longs and the believers themselves. While everything Satan offers to us will “*pass away*,” those who “*do the will of God*” will themselves abide forever. That is another way of saying they will be forever blessed. The point of contrast is this: when we yield to the allurements of this world, we will ultimately have what we desire taken from us. However, when we “*do the will of God*,” we will not only keep our desires, but the things for which they long.

In this case, **doing the will of God** has primarily to do with fervently desiring what the Lord provides in Christ Jesus. All obedience springs from spiritual desire, just as surely as all sin springs from corrupt and illicit cravings. You will recall Jesus addressed this matter in the sermon on the Mount. “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven*” (Matt 7:21). If you know what the Lord desires, then you had best be about desiring and doing it. There is no possible way for this word of our Lord to fail of fulfillment. Eternal life, in this case, is united with doing God’s will. Those who

imagine they can be personally uninvolved with God, and yet be saved, have been deceived. In the strictest sense, eternal life does not exclude doing, but causes doing.

IT IS THE LAST HOUR

“18 Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.” Here is a text that unveils life in Jesus is not all pleasant.

As we enter into a consideration of this passage, we must labor to free ourselves from the grip of religious tradition. Too, we must vigorously avoid any temptation to ignore the passage because it is not popular, or conflicts with certain theological views. Words like “*antichrist*,” “*antichrists*,” and “*last hour*” are to be allowed entrance into our thoughts and meditations. The very spirit of this text cries out of importance. We dare not ignore it.

The Last Hour

Twice in the eighteenth verse the Spirit affirms, “*it is the last hour*,” or “*last time*” (KJV). The word “*last*” comes from the Greek word **evsca,th** (es-cha-tos), from which the word “*eschatology*” is derived. Theologically speaking, **eschatology** is the study of “*last things*.” The word literally means *the end, the farthest point, and the last state* Thayers . This is the final period of time.

By this expression, the Spirit means to awaken us to the realization that time is running out. We do not have time to become involved with the world. This is the time to “*to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed*” (Rom 13:11). He will show us that the very things that cause some to fear should cause us to awake.

Crucify the temptation to view “*last hour*,” or “*last time*” as a mere description of the time from Jesus’ ascension until the end of the world. That is far too simplistic, and brings no honor to God. It has done more to justify the lethargy of professed believers than to awaken sensitivity in the elect. It is generally understood that this expression, “*last days*” views the closing period of time in which the saints of God are assaulted with unparalleled Satanic energy. I concur with this view.

This is language addressed to faith, and shows us the utter unreasonableness of culturing an appetite for the passing things of this world. He has just told us that the world and its lusts are passing away. Now He reminds us that we are even in the last stage of that demise. Remember, these words came from John, but, strictly speaking, they were not his words. These are the words of the Holy Spirit, Who moved John to write them. They are spoken to the heart, not the intellect. They teach us that the next significant thing is the coming of the Lord and the passing of this world and its lusts. We are to adjust our hearts and minds to this fact, remembering we have received “*a kingdom that cannot be shaken*” (Heb 12:27).

When we keep in mind that we have come into the realm of eternal things, the fact that centuries have passed since these words were written will be of little consequence to us. The passing of time must not erode the power of these words. The saints of God are to conduct their lives as though today were their last day on the earth. To live any other way puts one into jeopardy.

Antichrist

By this expression, the Spirit means to awaken us to the realization that time is running out. We do not have time to become involved with the world. This is the time to *“to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed”*

This word is found only in First John—and it is found there no less than five times (2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7). It is not difficult to identify the meaning of the word. It means against Christ, an opponent of Christ. In particular, it means *one who opposes Christ in the guise of Christ* Vincent’s Word Studies . In this sense, the word differs from the expression *“false Christs”* (Matt 24:24; Mark 13:22). *“False Christs”* emphasizes those in question are primarily pretenders or deceivers. The word *“antichrist”* highlights their **opposition** to Christ.

You have Heard

From the very beginning, the saints of God were told of a coming apostasy, and of aggression against the saints that would come in the very name of Christ. If one were to view the current state of things, it would appear as though not a word had been said about this matter. That condition itself reveals the fulfillment of these very words. Those who would be faithful to their Lord must warn His people of coming evil as well as blessing.

Men have taken upon themselves to build an enormous body of teaching around the word *“antichrist.”* But they cannot find their teachings in First John, which is the ONLY place the word is used. Remember, this is the same Apostle who wrote the book of the Revelation. Whether you take the position that First John was written before or after the book of Revelation, you are faced with a certain dilemma. If First John was written first, why did not John mention this *“antichrist”* when speaking of the beast and the false prophet. If it was written after Revelation, why did not the Apostle refer us back to the beast and false prophet? I will deal more particularly with this term when we come to the twenty-second verse.

But all of this is no problem at all if we take hold of what the Spirit is saying, ceasing to try and fit it into a preconceived theology. In this text, the Spirit does not say this is a specific individual. In fact, later He speaks of a *“spirit”* that does not confess Jesus (1 John 4:3). And, in this text, the Spirit says that *“many antichrists have come.”* I gather from this that *“antichrist”* speaks more of a spirit than of a person, although we are not to imagine that this spirit cannot be embodied in a particular person.

More than warning us of a specific individual, this text is alerting us to a tactic of the wicked one. He uses those who say they are aligned with Jesus to oppose and deceive those who are really joined to Him. This particular passage probably includes two perspectives. First, the *“spirit of antichrist”* is already among us. Second, *“many antichrists”* are paving the way for a champion of delusion and opposition. In my opinion, the former is the thrust of this passage, and does not necessarily exclude the latter. However you view this text, it is one of great sobriety, calling us away from every form of spiritual casualness and slumber.

They Went Out from Us

John will now tell us of a most tragic circumstance. It is true that every child of God desires to be always separate from every deceiver and pretender. Yet, this has never been the lot of the faithful. Abel had to contend with Cain, Isaac with Ishmael, and Jacob with Esau. Moses had to deal with Korah and his motley bunch. Jesus was grieved by the presence of Judas.

Now John mentions some that left their company, yet were never really a part of it.

As long as we are in this world, a way must be provided for us to distinguish opponents of the Gospel from those who embrace and declare it. Heresies, or factions, are one way of accomplishing that objective.

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.” Who can measure the heartbreak woven into this statement? Here were “*antichrists*” who were in company with the very Apostles of Christ. He does not say these opponents of Jesus were once good and faithful, but fell away. He says they **never** were part of the faithful. This became evident when they “*went out*” from them.

I assume that some form of conflict existed while they were among the real messengers of Jesus. If this were not the case, they would have had no compunctions about remaining with them. These were like bad fish among good fish (Matt 13:48-49), chaff mingled with wheat on the threshing floor (Matt 3:12), and tares among wheat (Matt 13:25-40). In this instance, it was not necessary to wait until “*the end of this world*” (Matt 13:40). Unable to remain among the faithful proclaimers of the Gospel, “*they went out*” from them. They were misfits in that holy assemblage.

That They might Be Made Manifest

Notice the reasoning of the Apostle, as he was moved along by the Spirit of God. He does not say these “*antichrists*” left the faithful because they could no longer tolerate the truth. Nor, indeed, does he say they left because they were asked to do so. Either or both of these conditions may very well have existed, but a higher view of the matter is necessary. This was God’s way of making known to His children that these were really misfits in the body of Christ.

A similar statement is made by Paul concerning heresies, or departures from the truth, that arise within the church. *“Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine”* (1 Cor 11:19 NRSV). As long as we are in this world, a way must be provided for us to distinguish opponents of the Gospel from those who embrace and declare it. Heresies, or factions, are one way of accomplishing that objective. Those with corrupt hearts gravitate to corrupt teaching, while those with pure hearts are drawn to the truth of the Gospel. This is not easy to bear, but is necessary.

How glorious the announcement. *“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity”* (2 Tim 2:19). In this case, those engulfed in iniquity departed from the saints, thereby unveiling their true spiritual status. The unrighteous and righteous cannot perpetually dwell together. They are locked in conflict.

John makes no apology for these opponents of Jesus. “ . . .for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us.” A great deal, therefore, can be seen by who remains faithful to the Lord, talking hold on the truth and refusing to let it go. That would not sound loving enough to some people. Indeed, others would have launched an investigation to determine if the departure could have been averted by tender loving care. But all such speculations are a waste of time. They left because they did not belong. Their departure was a Divine confirmation of that fact. They left like Demas,

who “*loved this present world*” (2 Tim 4:10). Further, there appeared to be no effort to resolve the situation, or retrieve these pretenders.

For some, this is too difficult to receive. However, God has consistently dealt harshly with those who misrepresented Him, or claimed to be sent by Him when they were not. Moses, the Prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Apostles were consistent in their denunciation of such men. Their pretensions were never treated lightly, and they also provoked Divine judgment. As a matter of general observation, to my knowledge there is no example in Scripture of a recovery program for false prophets who come in the name of Christ Jesus. We are not to draw unwarranted conclusions from this. It should, however, provoke in us an utter hatred for corrupt doctrine. Departures from, and misrepresentations of, the Gospel are never taken lightly by the Lord.

THE UNCTION, OR ANOINTING

“*20 But you have an anointing (unction KJV) from the Holy One, and you all know (you know all things, KJV) . 21 I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth.*” Although a flood of false christs and antichrists have dispersed among men, a way has been provided for our protection. The saints of God are NOT at the mercy of Satan’s most crafty and seemingly effective teachers. Nor, indeed, have they been provided with a manual that enables them to detect wolves in sheep’s clothing. They have received an “*unction,*” or “*anointing.*” –something intensely personal and effective. This word is not addressed to the Apostles, most of whom had died at the time this Epistle was written. Nor do we have any indication that it was written to especially gifted believers who possessed peculiar benefits not given to all believers. Just as the danger of false teachers was not confined to the first century, so the provision for protection from their devices is not restricted to that time.

The “*unction,*” or “*anointing*” to which he refers is the Holy Spirit of God. The word used here is a significant one. It is the very word from which the word “*Christ*” (“*anointed One*”) comes. For those who are interested, it comes from the Greek word **cri/sma** (kris-ma). John uses this word three times in this Epistle: once in this verse, and twice in verse twenty-seven.

The same word is used one other time in Second Corinthians 1:21. There, it is in the verb form. “*Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God*” NKJV . That passage has a great deal of relevance in this discussion. There, the ones “*anointed*” include both the Apostles and those who believed on Christ through their word.

This is NOT the word used for the majority of references to anointing. When Jesus read from the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah, it was announced that He had been “*anointed*” to preach the Gospel to the poor, etc. (Lk 4:18). The word used there was a different one. It does come from the same root word, but there it means to dedicate or set apart. It is used in the same way in Acts 10:38 and Hebrews 1:9. These three texts pertain to the Lord Jesus Himself, speaking of His uniqueness as the Savior of men.

In our text “*anointing,*” or “*unction*” is a noun, and not a verb. It speaks of what we have been anointed with, as distinguished from the act of anointing itself. This is confirmed by the elaboration of the Spirit in Second Corinthians. “*Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has **anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee***” (2 Cor 1:21-22). Everywhere this particular form of “*anointing*” is used, it is an anointing accomplished by Deity, and does not refer to an external action (Lk 4:18; Acts 4:27; 10:38; 2 Cor 1:21; Heb 1:9).

Other uses of the English term “*anointing*” are taken from different words, and apply to outward activities. These include anointing the sick (Mark 6:13; James 5:14), the woman who anointed Jesus (Lk 7:38,46; John 11:6), and Jesus anointing the eyes of the blind man (John 9:6,11). In each of those cases, “*anointing*” was a physical action.

But this is not the case with our text, which is the same as the previous stated text (2 Cor 1:21-22). That rules out the idea that what is referenced occurred by the laying on of Apostolic hands. The anointing the believers received was the same one the Apostles received. It is something common to all believers, although it is given in differing measures. It is the Holy Spirit Himself.

Just as there are two different progenitors, so there are two differing progeny. Later, John will speak of the manifestation, or revelation, of “*the children of God*” and the “*children of the devil*.” Jesus spoke of “*the children of the Kingdom*,” and the “*children of the wicked one*.”

What Distinguishes God’s Children?

One might ask, “Just what is it that distinguishes the children of God from the children of the wicked one?” Just as there are two different progenitors, so there are two differing progeny. Later, John will speak of the manifestation, or revelation, of “*the children of God*” and the “*children of the devil*” (3:10). Jesus spoke of “*the children of the Kingdom*,” and the “*children of the wicked one*” (Matt 13:38). Obviously, there is something that distinguishes the two.

You might be surprised at the answers given to such a question. Some would affirm the distinction is found in the religious habits of the people, or the way they worship God, or their morality, or the creed to which they subscribe. While many such distinctions do have a place, it is not the primary place.

It is the possession of the Holy Spirit Himself that marks us as the children of God. He is the “*Seal*” that uniquely identifies us (Eph 1:13; 4:30). The Word of God is very strong on this point. “*Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His*” (Rom 8:9). Elsewhere it is written, “*And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’*” (Gal 4:6). The cry “*Abba, Father*,” is the cry of a begotten Son. It was sanctified in Jesus Himself, Who also cried out with these words (Mark 14:36). Romans 8:15 states the case with unusual clarity. “*For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*” (Rom 8:15-16).

The presence of the Holy Spirit is our proof that we belong to God. As it is written, “*And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us . . . By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit*” (1 John 3:24; 4:13). The Holy Spirit, therefore, is “*the anointing*” to which our text refers. That “*anointing*” is common to all believers, and is the appointed means of protecting us from the deluding influence of antichrists.

Not A Passive Spirit

The Holy Spirit does not dwell passively within the believer; i.e., His presence is not a mere formality. There is considerable teaching in Scripture on His activities. He strengthens us with

might (Eph 3:16), causes to “*abound in hope*” (Rom 15:13), and brings forth Divine fruit within us (Gal 5:22). In our text, however, a most personal aspect of His indwelling is addressed.

You Know All Things

Here different translations may seem to introduce confusion. The KJV, NKJV, ASV, Websters, Duoay-Rheims, Darby’s, and Young’s Literal Translation all read “*You know all things.*” The NASB, RSV, NIV, and BBE, read “*And you all know,*” or “*and you all have knowledge.*” The first emphasizes that the Spirit sheds light on every thing pertinent to the life of faith. The latter emphasizes that this knowledge is accessible to everyone who is in Christ Jesus. Both of them are true, and both underscore the Divine provision given to protect the people of God from being ravaged by false prophets. Here is a revelation of God’s great love.

Because this ministry of the Holy Spirit will be expounded more fully in verse twenty-seven, it will suffice to only introduce the provision here. The point being made is that extremely crafty teachers have penetrated the society of the elect, just as Paul warned they would (Acts 20:30). They would boast of association with the most elite in the body of Christ, and be able to prove they once walked with the Apostles themselves. Those who trust in the arm of the flesh will not be able to withstand these men. There must be a reliance upon *the “anointing”* which has been given to us, the Holy Spirit of God. God gives nothing to his children that is not required.

This is a most marvelous thing to consider. It is not designed to produce a lot of questions, or to be the occasion of division among the people of God. The fact that this has proved to be the case only emphasizes the dangerous subtlety of those who come in Christ’s name, yet are not really from Him.

THE LIAR IS THE ANTICHRIST

ENCYCLOPEDIC DEFINITION

Antichrist, opponent or antagonist of Christ; also, a false Christ. In the Bible, the word is used only in the Epistles of St. John, but the concept of an opponent of the Messiah appears in the Old Testament. Its earliest form is probably that of the warrior King Gog, in the Book of Ezekiel. The term Antichrist was variously applied by the early Christians to any opponent or enemy of Christ, whether a person or power, or to a false claimant of the characteristics and attributes of Christ. The “false Christs” were predicted by Jesus to precede the coming of the Son of man (see Matt. 24). Opposition to Christ's teaching on the part of the anti-Messiah was also prophesied (see 1 John 2:18). The development of this conception of active hostility is apparent in the Epistles of St. Paul, who bore the brunt of Jewish opposition (see 1 Thessalonians 2:15). The “man of sin,” as Paul saw him, was a Jew, because he would regard the temple at Jerusalem as the seat of God's worship (see 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4).

In the Book of Revelation, Antichrist is identified with paganism. Different interpreters have at various times identified the Antichrist with the Roman emperors Nero, Diocletian, Julian, and Caligula; with the Samaritan sorcerer Simon Magus (see Acts 8:9-24); and with Muhammad, the founder of Islam. At the time of the Reformation, Protestants quite generally held the pope to be the Antichrist, and Roman Catholics regarded Martin Luther similarly. In the controversy between the Roman church and the Greek church, the name was applied, by those who opposed them, to popes and Byzantine emperors.

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“ 22 Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one

who denies the Father and the Son. 23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.” We must never permit the doctrines of men, however plausible they may appear, to define Scriptural words and concepts for us. There are few texts that underscore this prohibition any more than the one before us. **THE ANTICHRIST!** The very expression conjures up all manner of thought and opinion.

Academic Definition

The teachings of men on the term “*antichrist*” have so impacted upon the English language, that even dictionaries and encyclopedias reflect them. The latest **Merriam-Webster Dictionary** defines “antichrist” as follows: “1. One who denies or opposes Christ; 2. specifically: a great antagonist expected to fill the world with wickedness but be conquered forever by Christ at his second coming.” **The American Heritage Dictionary** reads, “1. An enemy of Christ. 2. Antichrist. The epithet of the great antagonist who was expected by the early church to set himself up against Christ in the last days before the Second Coming.” The Oxford English Dictionary, the most extensive and definitive English Dictionary of all time, reads, “1. An enemy of opponent of Christ.” 2. The title of a great personal opponent of Christ and His kingdom, expected by the early church to appear before the end the world, and much referred to in the middle ages.”

In each academic definition, the first meaning is the obvious and most important one. Summarized, it is one who denies and opposes Christ. From the early centuries, devout men have pondered the term, used only by John, and only in First John. While their opinions are not to be despised, neither are they to be revered, as though carrying the same weight as Scripture. Nor, indeed, are they to be allowed a foundational place in our reasoning. It is true that men--godly men--have equated “*Antichrist*,” “*man of sin*” (2 Thess 2:3,) “*Gog*” (Ezek 38-39), and even “*the beast*” or “*false prophet*” of Revelation (Rev 13; 16:13; 19:20). But let it be clear, the Holy Spirit did not make these associations in Scripture. They are the result of human reasoning. However valid that reasoning may appear to be, it must be held as coming FROM man, and not TO men from God.

The Liar

The Spirit’s approach to this matter contrasts rather sharply with common religious views of “*the antichrist*.” Here, the greatest significance is placed on what is done, NOT who does it. That is, the person who “*denies that Jesus is the Christ*” becomes the focus of teaching. Thus, we are drawn to an activity instead of a historical person.

Jesus Is the Christ

The particular lie is most significant. Although denying that Jesus is the Son of God is also mentioned (verse 23), the first point of denial is that “*Jesus is the Christ*.” This is the first thing God revealed to Peter about Jesus--that he was “*the Christ*.” You may recall that marvelous occasion on the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, when Peter confessed, “***Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God***” (Matt 16:16). Jesus declared him to be especially blessed, because His Father which is in heaven made this known to Peter (Matt 16:17). The fact that Peter confessed was the appointed foundation upon which the very church of God would be built.

What does “*THE Christ*” mean? Linguistically, it means “*the Anointed One*,” or the one upon Whom the favor of God especially rests. He is the One of Whom the prophets prophesied--the One who would effectively address and resolve the human dilemma. He would not meet SOME of God’s requirements, but ALL of them. He would not deal PARTIALLY with the matter of man’s fall, but THOROUGHLY with it. The prophets referred to a single Individual upon Whom the hopes of the

world absolutely depended.

Jacob spoke of “*Shiloh*,” unto Whom the people would be gathered (Gen 49:10). Job saw the faint outline of a “*Redeemer*” that lived and would stand on the earth in the latter day (Job 19:25). Isaiah spoke of a budding “*Rod*” upon Whom the Spirit of God would rest (Isa 11:1-2). He also spoke of this Person as a “*Foundation Stone*,” and a “*sure Foundation*” (Isa 28:16). This Person would be God’s “*Servant*” (Isa 42:1), a “*Righteous Branch*” (Jer 23:5), and “*Messiah*” (Dan 9:26). Everything would be addressed in a single Individual—one solitary Man! How succinctly the Lord moved Isaiah to declare it. “*A man will be as a hiding place from the wind, And a cover from the tempest, As rivers of water in a dry place, As the shadow of a great rock in a weary land*” (Isa 32:2 NKJV).

Confessing that “*Jesus is the Christ*” is acknowledging that He, and He alone, is God’s answer to all sin has caused. There simply is no resolution anywhere else! God has made everything dependent upon His Son, giving “*all things*” into His hand (John 3:35). John reminds us that his Gospel was written “*that ye might believe that **JESUS IS THE CHRIST**, the Son of God*” (John 20:31). After Saul of Tarsus was brought to faith, this is the very point he developed in the synagogues, “*proving that this is **VERY CHRIST***” (Acts 9:22). When Paul came to Corinth he “*was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that **JESUS WAS CHRIST***” (Acts 18:5). It was said of eloquent Apollos, “*For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that **JESUS WAS CHRIST***” (Acts 18:28). Later in First John, the Spirit even says, “*Whosoever believeth that **JESUS IS THE CHRIST** is born of God*” (1 John 5:1).

If the blessing of God is sought, our attention must be drawn to God’s “Christ” –the solitary Person whom He has anointed to bring men to Himself. Our priorities cannot be turned from Him, else we will be lost.

The word “*Christ*,” as applied to the Lord Jesus, occurs no less than sixty (60) times in the Gospels. It is found four hundred and fifty three 453 times in Romans through Jude, and eleven (11) times in the book of Revelation. **Five Hundred and fifty-five times!** Included are the phrases “*Jesus Christ*,” “*Jesus the Christ*,” “*Lord Jesus Christ*,” “*Christ t the Lord*,” “*the Lord’s Christ*,” “*Christ the Savior*,” and “*Lord and Christ* .” By way of comparison, the word “*church*” appears seventy-seven (77) times “*Love*” is found one hundred and seventy nine (179) times. “*Commandments*” is found thirty-two times.

If the blessing of God is sought, our attention must be drawn to God’s “*Christ*” –the solitary Person whom He has anointed to bring men to Himself. Our priorities cannot be turned from Him, else we will be lost. Should we allow any person, institution, or thing to supercede Jesus, salvation will be forfeited, and we will find ourselves engaged in war against the Son of God. There is no salvation anywhere else! No help, protection, or strength can be obtained apart from “*the Lord’s Christ*.”

But now comes “*the liar*” who denies this is the case. He offers hope in something other than Christ. It may be in himself, his teaching, an institution, of even a discipline of life. But what is offered does not require the Lord Jesus Christ. In His relations with mankind, God Himself cannot do without Christ. Yet, “*the liar*” offers a way to God that has little or no room for God’s Anointed One. He does not see or present “*the Christ*” as the ONLY way to the Father. He denies Christ the place of prominence, which the Father has already given Him. He does not make things absolutely dependent upon Christ. More significance is placed upon a theological position, a particular activity, a belief system, or liturgical routine—but it is NOT placed upon “*the Christ*.”

To “*deny Jesus is the Christ*” is not simply to make a statement to that effect. It is to refuse Christ

the place of unbounded prominence. It is to hold out to men, in the name of the Lord, something that actually overshadows Christ, pushing Him into the background of human thought and purpose. O, the tragedy of such a thing! To offer resolutions to the sin problem that ignore Jesus is to deny He is *“the Christ.”* Surely, you must know there are impressive and dominating religious systems that do not have Christ at their center—if, indeed, they have made provision for Him at all.

What May Be Said of The Liar?

What is said of *“the liar”* –the one denying that *“Jesus is the Christ”* ?The strength of what is declared unveils the greatest of the transgression.

He is the antichrist

“He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.” I have scarcely heard or read a dialog on *“the antichrist”* that made this point. Such a person is against Christ. He has taken up arms against the Lord’s anointed, just as surely as Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel (Acts 4:26-27). When the One God has appointed is not afforded the honor due to Him, a war against Him is initiated.

A most significant thing can be seen here. While the KJV and NKJV do not use the article *“the”* (i.e., THE antichrist), that IS how the verse actually reads. The Greek reads ο` **avnti,cristoj** , or *“THE antichrist.”* Other versions do read *“This is the antichrist”* (ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, NIV, Darby’s, Young’s Literal, BBE). The omission of the article *“the”* by the older versions is not wrong. The reading still indicates the same thing. It is similar to saying *“he is Jonathan.”* That statement would not mean the person was simply A Jonathan, but that he was THE Jonathan being considered.

This constrains us to think quite differently about the term *“antichrist.”* Rather than associating it with a period of time, it is seen in direct relationship to our Savior Himself. Try as one may, he cannot rid the Bible of this statement. It is a clear definition of the word—an INSPIRED definition.

Also, we should learn from this not to limit the term to a single historical person. One might cite 1 John 2:18 to confirm that the coming of a single individual is also chronicled in this Epistle. *“Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come . . . ”* However, this text does not use the article *“the,”* either in the Greek or most standard English translations. The only exception to this rule are the NKJV, NIV and Young’s. All other versions omit the definite article *“the”* (ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, Websters, Darby’s, Phillips, NEB). The difference is that the word *“antichrist”* is more descriptive of an activity than of a person. It is a trait that characterized *“many,”* as is categorically stated in verse 18.

He Denies the Father and the Son

Whether we are speaking of the Gnostic heresy of the first century, or the

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falling-away heresies of our day, you cannot deny Christ without denying the Father also. You cannot refuse to give Jesus prominence without severing association with the Father! Those who do

not honor the Son do not honor the One who sent Him. As it is written, *“That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent Him”* (John 5:23). You simply cannot refuse the One God sent without refusing God Himself.

Has Not the Father

The Spirit presses the point. Denying that *“Jesus is the Christ”* also involves denying, or refusing *“the Son.”* Thus the text reads, *“Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either”* (NKJV). **Those, therefore, who refuse Jesus as the appointed Resolution have, in that very act, denied He is the Son of God.** This has alarming ramifications when one ponders the dominance of carnality and division within the professed body of Christ. Such things reveal a refusal of the Divine remedy, for you cannot embrace sin in any form without rejecting God’s Remedy for sin. The soul only has one hand and one eye. It can handle and see only one thing at a time.

What is more, God will have no affiliation with any Person who rejects His Son. Such an individual *“has not the Father.”* They do not have His blessing, His favor, His protection, or His promises. Jesus said such people are *“condemned already,”* and are living their lives with the very wrath of God abiding on them (John 3:18,36).

“The antichrist,” therefore, is a liar. He has denied, or rejected, the Lord’s Christ. He is against Christ, denies both the Father and the Son, and does not have the Father. Such is an imposter, a messenger from Satan, and one who brings the curse of God. Jesus Christ is not at the heart of his message. He offers other remedies to men than *“The Man Christ Jesus.”* His religion does not require nor exalt Deity. Wherever such a person is found, you have found *“the antichrist.”*

It thus appears clear that we are speaking more of a spirit than of a particular man. Thus, John later mentions *“the spirit of antichrist.”* It is not to be denied that such a spirit can find unusual expression in certain men, and during certain periods of history. Indeed, there are prophetic indications that such an individual will rise. We do read of *“that man of sin”* (2 Thess 2:3), *“a king of fierce countenance”* (Dan 8:23), and *“the false prophet”* (Rev 19:20). Yet, there is a vagueness in all of these descriptions that forbid the development of a highly structured theology around them. While there may be varying degrees of spiritual insight granted to godly men on this matter, we must let our faith rest upon the more clear statements concerning *“the antichrist.”* Far better to think of such an one as the opponent of Christ and the enemy of the saints. Such a spirit may be closer to us than many think. In fact, devout people will have a sense of alarm when they ponder these things.

WHEN WHAT IS HEARD ABIDES

“24 As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.” The expression *“As for you,”* contrasts the readers with the apostates that went out from John and company. It also identifies one of the marks of those possessing *“the unction,”* or *“anointing”* –the Holy Spirit. The word *“heard from the beginning”* is the consistent message given to all believers. It is encapsulated in the Gospel, and amplified in the Apostles’ doctrine—but it never changes. It’s core remains the same, and the direction in which it is pointed is fixed. Christ Jesus is always at its heart, and the presence of God is always its goal.

Jesus spoke of what is heard abiding, or remaining, in us. He defined it as a critical point, that will play a prominent role in the determination of our eternal destiny. The person who gains no profit whatsoever from the Gospel is described as one who *“hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown*

in his heart” (Matt 13:19). The condemned are described as those who “*do not have His word abiding*” in them (John 5:38).

The phrase “*keep my words*” refers to the same thing. Jesus said, “*If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him*” (John 14:23). Jesus promised our prayers would be answered if His Word abode in us. “*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you*” (John 15:7). When the Word of God, what we hear, remains in us, the work of God will be done within us also.

What Does It Mean?

What is involved in the Word abiding in us? Is there any hope for those in whom it does NOT abide, or remain? We will see from this passage that remaining in Christ is contingent upon what we hear remaining in us. This is a most critical matter.

When we begin our life in Christ, the laws of God are put into our hearts and written in our minds (Heb 10:16). We begin with a sensitivity to what God declares, and a capacity to retain it. Our very persons are made harmonious with the laws of God, so that we begin our new life in agreement with them. The new birth, or our identity with Christ, makes it possible for what God declares to have a place in our hearts and minds—the most prominent place.

What we have heard is remaining in us when we think about it, meditate upon it, and shape our lives around it. The godly person is thus described as one who meditates in God’s law “*night and day*” (Psa 1:2). This is the person who “*delights*” to DO God’s will, Whose law is “*found*” within his “*heart*” (Psa 40:8). The “*sweet Psalmist*” said it this way: “*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee*” (Psa 119:11). Faith moves us to speak this way, with our hearts as well as our minds.

All of this is involved in the Word of God, particularly the Gospel of Christ, being a “*seed*.” As it remains in us, being held by faith, it grows, producing fruit in the believer. The fruit does not come from our efforts alone, but from the powerful Word itself.

What is “*heard from the beginning*” can only “*abide*” in the person who regards God’s Word “*more than my necessary food*” (Job 23:12). This is the same as Christ’s word dwelling in us “*richly*,” or abundantly and copiously (Col 3:16).

The Word of God is “*living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*” (Heb 4:12). When it “*abides*” in us, it brings life to us: we become more sensitive to the Lord, more instant in our responses to Him, and more alert to our surroundings. It exercises its power within us, enabling us to overcome the world, and conforming us to our Lord’s image. With cutting precision, it enables us to distinguish between the soulish and the spiritual. All of this is involved in the Word of God, particularly the Gospel of Christ, being a “*seed*.” As it remains in us, being held by faith, it grows, producing fruit in the believer. The fruit does not come from our efforts alone, but from the powerful Word itself.

From the Beginning

What we have heard “*from the beginning*” is more the Gospel of Christ. When we first heard and believed the Gospel, its distinctiveness from all other messages was apparent. As it abides in us, it

maintains that distinctiveness, standing apart from all other messages. This is the ultimate “*good news*.” It dwarfs all other words especially those of “*antichrists*” who come in the name of Christ, but are not from Him.

The Gospel itself is the message we have heard “*from the beginning*.” It has “*power*” that is not afforded to any other word from God. This does not diminish any other Word of Scripture, but rather brings all of it into focus. The “*Gospel*” is mentioned over seventy times in the Epistles (Romans through Jude). It is always a point of focus, and is never tangential. This is what makes “*the Apostles’ doctrine*” distinctive. The core of their message was what God has accomplished in Christ Jesus— “*the Gospel*.” It was never human responsibility or conduct. While frequently mentioned, these were never the heart of the Apostolic message. That does not make responsibility inconsequential. It does mean that responsibility can be properly fulfilled only in the power of the Gospel.

Ye Will Also Abide

The greatness of the message is seen in the results it produces. “*If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father*” NKJV . The magnitude of this promise is staggering! Let your mind dwell upon it: “*you also will abide in the Son and in the Father .*” This is a required abiding.

The word “*abide*” or “*remain*” indicates we were put into the Son and the Father when we were saved, born again, reconciled to God, or baptized into Christ—all views of the same transaction. At that time, the Father put us into the Son (1 Cor 1:30). Later, the Spirit will confirm real life involves being “*in His Son Jesus Christ*” (1 John 5:20). During His ministry, Jesus affirmed He was “*in the Father*” (John 14:10-11). Those who are in Christ are, by virtue of their union with Him, also “*in the Father*.” Later, John will proclaim, “*Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God*” (1 John 3:24).

Lest we become complacent, however, we are reminded that REMAINING or ABIDING in the Son and in the Father is the point at issue. Further, we are apprized that this is not a process accomplished without our involvement. It is not automatic, so to speak. **Abiding in the Son and in the Father is conditional.** It can only be accomplished if what we heard “*from the beginning*” —the Gospel—remains in us. There is no place in the Son or the Father for anyone in whom the Gospel does not remain. If our understanding of that Gospel ever becomes distorted due to the influence of false teachers, our position in the Son and the Father is at once jeopardized.

The Galatian Departure

That is precisely the point developed to the Galatians, who were abandoning the Gospel in favor of a law-centered message. In great solemnity, they were told, “*I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ . . . I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain . . . Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace*” (Gal 1:6-7; 2:21; 5:4). They had allowed false teachers to remove the Gospel from their thinking. In so doing, they themselves were “*removed from*” Christ. This emphasizes the necessity of what we have heard from the beginning remaining in us.

Christ and the Gospel

At no point is Christ divorced from the Gospel, which is the sole means of affiliation with

Him. We are made “*partakers of His (God’s) promise in Christ BY THE GOSPEL*” (Gal 3:6). This is not limited to our initial entrance into Him, but remains true as we abide in Him. That Gospel contained a message of unparalleled hope. As it is written, “. . . *the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel*” (Col 1:5). If we allow ourselves to be “*moved away from the hope of the gospel which [we] heard*” (Col 1:23), there will be no further place for us in the Son and in the Father.

If both life and immortality have been “*brought to life through the Gospel*” (2 Tim 1:10), both of them move beyond our grasp if the Gospel is forgotten, or no longer abides in us. There is no point at which that Gospel ceases to be “*the power of God*” (Rom 1:16). The Lord has even given us a table where this memory is effectively stirred within us. As it is written, “*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes*” (1 Cor 11:26). Spiritual stability is realized in “*the Gospel,*” wherein we “*stand*” (1 Cor 15:3). It is the means by which we “*are saved,*” if we “*keep it in memory,*” otherwise, we “*have believed in vain*” (1 Cor 15:3NIV). No one can afford to lose a grip on the Gospel they heard in the “*beginning*” of their spiritual life. It remains God’s appointed power “*unto salvation.*” At no point can it be neglected with impunity. The very nature of salvation demands that we give it constant and focused attention.

THE PROMISE

“**25 And this is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.**” Here is the consummate promise— “*eternal life!*” It is the ultimate objective of all Divine commitment, the heart of “*eternal purpose,*” and the objective of faith. Everything prior to Jesus was preparatory for the conferment of eternal life. In spite of this, before Christ, there was precious little said directly about eternal life. The Law did not have a syllable about eternal life, either in the decalogue itself, or all of its ceremonial laws. Moses never said anything about “*eternal life.*” In all of his wisdom, Solomon never wrote a single word about it. Once, Daniel spoke of a coming resurrection when “*many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life*” (Dan 12:2). Once David spoke of God commanding the blessing, “*even life for evermore*” (Psa 133:3). If you want to know about “*eternal life,*” you will have to get beyond Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.

The Gospel and Jesus

We are expressly told that “*life and*

However, when people got close to Jesus, and heard His gracious words, they became acutely aware of “*eternal life.*”

immortality” have been brought to light, or illuminated, “*through the Gospel*” (2 Tim 1:10). The message of Christ shines like a heavenly beacon on the subject of “*eternal life.*” While precious few spoke of this subject before Jesus, when He came, men became intensely interested in it. A “*certain ruler*” once asked Jesus, “*Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*” (Lk 18:18). Earlier, a young lawyer asked Jesus the very same question (Lk 10:25). No one ever asked Moses that question! None of the Prophets were ever asked that question—at least there is no record of such an interrogation. Not even John the Baptist was asked such a question.

However, when people got close to Jesus, and heard His gracious words, they became acutely aware of “*eternal life.*” Once, after a vast number of Jesus’ followers had forsaken Him, being offended about His words on eternal life, He asked His disciples if they were going to leave also. Peter replied, “*Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life*” (John 6:54-68). It is not possible to listen to Jesus and not begin to think about “*eternal life!*”

Jesus declared that is why God sent Him into the world, that whoever believed in Him might “*have eternal life*” (John 3:14-16). He affirmed that He gives His sheep “*eternal life, and they shall never perish*” (John 10:28). To those who left all to follow Him, Jesus promised “*eternal life*” in “*the world to come*” (Mk 10:30). On the night of His betrayal, when He prayed to His Father, He confessed He had been given “*power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life*” to all God had “*given Him*” (John 17:2).

The Apostles

The Apostles continued this unmistakable emphasis. The Spirit moved them to declare “*eternal life*” would be given to those seeking for “*glory, and honor, and immortality*” (Rom 2:7). Those who believed the Gospel are said to have been “*ordained unto eternal life*” (Acts 13:48). The reign of the grace of God is said to be “*through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Rom 5:21). “*Eternal life*” is God’s ultimate gift to us (Rom 6:23). We are urged to fight the good fight of faith and “*lay hold on eternal life*” (1 Tim 6:12,19).

The objective of our hope, or confident expectation, is defined as “*eternal life*” (Tit 1:2; 3:7; Jude 21). When we were baptized into Jesus Christ and His death, we were made “*free from sin,*” and became “*servants to God.*” But that was not the end of the matter. The objective was “*eternal life,*” not mere liberation and servitude. Thus, the Spirit continues, “*ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life*” (Rom 6:22).

Its Centrality in the Kingdom

Because this is the consummate Divine promise, it is always central in God’s Kingdom. There is no point in spiritual life where eternal life becomes irrelevant, or is pushed into the background. Even as when Jesus “*dwelt among us,*” the more sensitive we are to Him, the more interest we have in “*eternal life.*” Lest we forget, “*eternal life*” is

Over nearly fifty years of conscious involvement with the church, I have become acutely aware of the near-total absence of any emphasis on “*eternal life.*”

not impersonal—something that can be possessed apart from the involvement of our persons. It was Jesus Himself who defined “*eternal life,*” and He did so in an intensely personal prayer to His Father. “*And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent*” (John 17:3 NASB). Experiential acquaintance with God and Christ is involved in Them dwelling in us, and us in Them. It should be obvious that this can never be relegated to a secondary position.

Over nearly fifty years of conscious involvement with the church, I have become acutely aware of the near-total absence of any emphasis on “*eternal life.*” I know by experience of frequent gatherings in which there is never a reference to this consummate promise— “*eternal life.*” In such gatherings, there is rarely, if ever, any question about “*eternal life,*” or how it may be obtained. Some years ago, I was asked to write a book on the subject of “*Eternal Life.*” After some dialog with the would-be publishers, I was informed there was no interest on that theme among their constituency. No such apathy existed in those who listened to Jesus—and it still cannot be found among true hearers.

This is THE Promise

By saying this is “*THE promise*,” the Spirit emphasizes there is nothing to compare with this. When our attention is drawn away from this promise to earthly considerations, we at once are standing on sinking sand. All of Christ’s present ministry is turned away from those who cease to engage in a quest to “*lay hold on eternal life*.” This is God’s ultimate objective, and He will not depart from it. As soon as we leave this emphasis, we leave God’s will.

The Focus of Antichrists

Regarding the teaching of this passage concerning antichrists, the Spirit is showing the error of their message by contrast. Those who are against Christ do not offer “*eternal life*” as defined by Jesus. Their focus is the world, and therefore that is what they talk about. Later the Spirit moves John to write, “*They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them*” (1 John 4:5). The phrase “*of the world*” is not limited to moral degeneracy. It includes any emphasis that is limited to this world. As Jesus pointed out, it can be one’s family (Matt 10:37), or the “*care of this world*” (Matt 13:22). Paul spoke of a quest for riches (1 Tim 6:9). The Galatians were warned about reverting to a system of law for justification (Gal 5:4). The Colossians were admonished about allowing men to corrupt them through philosophy and vain deceit (Col 2:8). In all of these cases, the PROMISE of “*eternal life*” was being pushed into the background. The **emphasis** was moved from what God pledged to what men do. That is a common mark of false prophets—those who are at war with Jesus, yet pretend to represent Him. They remove the emphasis from Christ. All such men are “*the antichrist*.”

THE ANOINTING THAT TEACHES

“26 These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. 27 And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.” Having declared the ultimate promise, the Spirit now returns to the matter of our protection against those who would detract us from it. The very people who “*went out from*” John and company were engaged in an energetic effort to “*deceive*” the people. John was moved to write about this because that is NOT how it appeared. By saying these men were “*trying to deceive you*,” the sufficiency of Divine provision is emphasized. Without that provision, “*the anointing*,” the false teachers could neither be detected nor resisted. No man’s intellectual abilities, however cultured and seemingly proficient, can protect the soul against the delusion of “*antichrists*.” This is because they are empowered by the devil himself, who has “*deceived the whole world*” (Rev 12:9). Indeed, “*the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one*” (1 John 5:19 NKJV). Our protection against the lie, therefore, cannot come from the earthly realm. We must have Divine provision! Praise God, that is precisely the circumstance of those in Christ Jesus. They “*have an unction from the Holy One*” –The Holy Spirit of God, given to them by God, because they are the sons of God (Gal 4:6). Among other things, this is His provision for protection.

The Abiding Anointing

“27 And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you.” The “*anointing*” is of little consequence if it does not remain! Samson could tell you that it is possible for the Spirit to depart from the very one He has endued (Judges 16:20). Therefore, the receiving of the anointing is not emphasized, but His abiding.

Because His ministry is realized only as He remains with us, we are admonished “*quench not the Spirit*,” and “*grieve not the Spirit*” (1 Thess 5:19; Eph 4:30). Those who make much of the free will of man do well to take heed to this matter. Just as God does not force His will for good upon us,

we cannot force the Spirit to act against His will. He is repulsed by unwilling hearts, and will not conduct His ministry for those who grieve Him. If, however, we remain tender in heart, and strong in faith, the Spirit will remain with us, imperfect though we may be. It is our willingness and tenderness that endear us to the Spirit of God.

The Anointing that Teaches

“ . . . you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie . . . ” At this point, we make a dramatic departure from all that the world has to offer. We also come into sharp conflict with much flawed doctrine. There is no question about what is actually stated. That is what makes it so arresting. Other translations also draw our attention to the statement itself. *“You do not need that anyone teach you”* NKJV,NIV,NRSV , *“you have no need for anyone to teach you”* NASB , *“you have no need that any one should teach you”* RSV . Remember, these are not Apostles, nor is there the slightest suggestion they were, as members of Christ’s body, endued with a power uncommon to all believers.

The teaching of reference is not ordinary teaching, like that which John himself is doing. There is no suggestion here that believers can exclude themselves from all teaching, navigating through life on their own. There is, however, a kind of teaching that can only be accomplished by God. In my understanding, this is what men refer to as *application* , or making the truth relevant.

Just as God does not force His will for good upon us, we cannot force the Spirit to act against His will. He is repulsed by unwilling hearts, and will not conduct His ministry for those who grieve Him.

We do NOT need HOW TO programs, something that has suddenly become a major thrust in Western world Christianity. This ought to be evident to us by the almost total absence of such instruction in the New Covenant writings. A few examples of this will suffice. In all of these things, we are given no procedures or routines, as carnal men so strongly desire.

- **Abstain from fleshly lusts–1 Pet 2:11**
- **Make no place for the devil–Eph 4:27**
- **Husbands, love your wives–Eph 5:25**
- **Seek the things that are above–Col 3:1**
- **Fight the good fight of faith–1 Tim 6:12**
- **Put on the whole armor of God–Eph 6:11**
- **Be strong–1 Cor 16:13**

These are representative of an endless number of exhortations. There is rarely, if ever, a routine provided through which these admonitions can be realized—at least not as men think. Of course, it should be evident from Israel that procedures do not impart wisdom, make people willing, or induct them into the presence of God.

In the matter of crafty false teachers, a sort of spiritual intuition is required. This is what makes faith practical. The *“anointing”* correlates the truth we know with the life we live. Thus believers who were having their goods plundered are described as taking such injustice joyfully,

“knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (Heb 10:34). That was a knowledge that was not gained by earthly teachers. It came from *“the anointing”* who clarified what was believed to the believer.

Elsewhere, this is called *“opening the eyes of our understanding,”* or hearts (Eph 1:15-18). This is included in the wisdom that *“is from above”* (James 3:17). It is the condition described by James who asked, *“Who is a wise man and **endued** with knowledge among you?”* (James 3:13). It is the *“wisdom and spiritual understanding”* Paul prayed the Colossians would receive (Col 1:9).

It is true that *“all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* and *“hidden”* in Christ Jesus. These are the treasures required to avoid delusion and appropriate the blessing. Unless they are given to us, we cannot possess them. They are simply inaccessible to the flesh and the natural man. Were it not for *“the anointing,”* we would be unable to effectively bring the truth to bear upon life’s circumstances. Simply stated, no man can effectively teach us HOW to use the truth. That is a work reserved for the Lord Himself, and is realized in our fellowship with the Son (1 Cor 1:9).

A classic example of this type of teaching is found in the love of the brethren. Frequently we are admonished to *“love one another”* (1 Pet 1:22; 1 John 3:11; 3:23). Yet, it is the Lord Himself who effectively teaches us to do so. This is expressly stated in the word of God. *“But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another”* (1 Thess 4:9). Thus the truth was effectively taught to the Thessalonians, not by precept, but by *“God Himself.”* The requirement to love is not the teaching described, but the effective means of accomplishing it.

The Nature of the Teaching

The *“anointing”* teaches us of things already revealed, yet which have not yet made a sufficient impact upon our spirits. In this case, what God has revealed is like a large and beautiful garden, filled with all manner of plants and fruits. Yet, at first we view it from a distance, unable to make out all of its intricate details. If, however, we are given a telescope, and focus it upon the distant garden, we will see more clearly what is there, and see how its plentiful vegetation can be used. The telescope did not add one thing to the garden, but only made it clearer.

So it is with the *“anointing,”* or Holy Spirit. When He teaches us, He does not show us things that have not been revealed already. Instead, He opens to our hearts what God has made known in such a way as to give it utility. We thus become able to handle the truth with spiritual expertise.

So it is with the *“anointing,”* or Holy Spirit. When He teaches us, He does not show us things that have not been revealed already. Instead, He opens to our hearts what God has made known in such a way as to give it utility. We thus become able to handle the truth with spiritual expertise.

In our text, this teaching enables us to decipher what is false. We can see its conflict with what has been revealed. Remember, these believers were confronting false prophets that boasted of impressive credentials. They would not be able to detect the falseness of their message with earthly, or natural, wisdom. There are, to be sure, some false teachers and doctrines that are so blatantly false they can be identified by a cursory comparison with Scripture. However, all error is not in this category.

The ability to see through these crafty teachers is primarily seen in the detection of their focus, rather than express blasphemous statements. Actually, that is what *application* means. It is seeing the *manner and direction* of the truth of the Gospel. That insight, coupled with the new nature, enables us to distinguish what is false, and to avoid it. On another note, it also equips us to live in the power of the truth. This is what Jesus referred to when He said, *“And you shall know the*

truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32 NKJV). This freedom involves liberation from Satan's devices.

The teaching of reference makes the believer dependent upon God, not men or human wisdom. This is not true of false teachers. Those who embrace delusion become dependent upon those who perpetrate the delusion.

The Scope of the Teaching

Notice the scope of the Spirit's teaching: "*the same anointing teaches you concerning all things.*" The phrase "*all things*" refers to the things of God, not various strata of human, or earthly, knowledge. Elsewhere it is said of the Spirit, "*For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God*" (1 Cor 2:10). The "*deep things of God*" deal with eternal purpose, the will of God, and the things God has prepared for those who love Him. These are the things He opens to our understanding, showing us their interrelationships, and how they bear upon our lives. So far as God is concerned, there really are no other "*things.*" If a person has no appetite for these realities, the Spirit has nothing more to unveil to our understanding, nothing more to give to us.

Contrary to the false prophets that Satan has sent out into the world, "*the anointing*" is "*real, and not counterfeit*" NIV . This is something you have received from God, and carry with you by faith. How appropriately the Spirit is called "*the Spirit of truth*" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). He Himself is real, and He testifies to what is real. He does not deal in the realm of philosophy or speculation, but in surety and Divine determination. Thus He stabilizes the soul, causing the believer to stand in the most aggressive attacks of the wicked one. His role is to anchor you "*within the veil,*" so that you are shaken by varied "*winds of doctrine.*"

The Effective Teaching

"*. . . just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.*" Here we come to the heart of the issue: **abiding in Him** . Let it be clear that remaining in Christ requires your effort, and yet is not accomplished by your effort. There is a perfect correlation with Philippians 2:12-13. "*So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*" This is but another way of saying we are taught effectively by God. He accomplishes this teaching through the Holy Spirit, "*the anointing,*" and the Spirit works with the truth of the Gospel in teaching us. In this manner, we work out our own salvation, yet God works within us as well, bringing glory to His great name.

The result of the Spirit's effectual teaching is simply, yet powerfully, stated. "*you will abide in Him.*" This is the way the Lord keeps us from falling (Jude 24-25). It is a primary way in which Jesus cares for His sheep leading them to glory (Heb 2:10). All of this postulates sensitivity of heart in "*the elect,*" as well as a hearty appetite for the truth, and a profound longing for the return of the Lord. Where these qualities do not exist, there will be no teaching. Where there is no teaching, there will be no abiding. Where there is no abiding, there is no hope.

Thus we again see there is no salvation that excludes Divine activity. While men haggle about whether or not God works in the saved, the "*anointing*" continues to teach those who do not quench Him. As He teaches them, a spiritual consistency is developed within them, and they remain in the Son. What a "*great salvation*" we have! It is no wonder that Satan extends himself to take it from us. He is crafty, and his power is far greater than that of mortals. Yet, because of "*the anointing,*" his most subtle ministers and deceiving schemes can be detected and rejected. When he comes, transforming himself into an "*angel of light*" (2 Cor 11:14), "*the anointing*" teaches us. When

his deadly ministers come “*transformed as ministers of righteousness,*” “*the anointing*” teaches us.

God be praised, the influence of the Spirit of our God is greater than the influence of Satan. To those who receive it, it penetrates deeper than Satan is able to reach, thereby stabilizing the soul and protecting our persons. **There is no valid reason for any believer being deceived!** Our Lord has made abundant provision for our protection. If we are deluded, it is only because we have quenched the Spirit.

CONFIDENCE WHEN HE COMES

“*28 And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.*” How clearly the nature of the heavenly Kingdom is seen in this passage! He has just finished saying “*just as it (the anointing) has taught you, you will abide in Him.*” Now John admonishes them to “*abide in Him,*” just as though it all depended upon them. Faith trusts in the Lord, but not with folded arms or in a state of spiritual stupor. The anointing teaches us to abide in Christ, but not while we remain in a state of idleness. Those who are not working out their salvation are not being “*taught by God.*” That is why they are indolent.

The Grand Conclusion

The grand conclusion of our lives is to be found acceptable “*when He appears.*” When we first turned to God, we did so to “*wait for His Son from heaven*” (1 Thess 1:9-10). Even in our participation at the Lord’s table, we “*show (proclaim) the Lord’s death till He come*” (1 Cor 11:26). There is absolutely no hope at all for those found unacceptable at that time!

The coming of the Lord is a central teaching in Christ Jesus. It is not a subject to be debated, or concerning which we are to take sides against one another. Here is the climactic event of all time, when Jesus will come “*in like manner*” as He left: with the clouds, attended by angels, bodily and visibly (Acts 1:9-11). He will bring His reward with Him at that time (Rev 22:12), and the heavens and earth will flee from before His place, with no place being found for them (Rev 20:11).

The ultimate purpose of the Holy Spirit is to prepare you for the return of Christ. It is then that the earth will be “*reaped*” (Rev 14:16), and the saved will be “*gathered together unto Him*” (2 Thess 2:1). Those who have remained in Him will then be “*glorified*” according to God’s eternal purpose (Rom 8:29-30). As it is written, “*When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory*” (Col 3:4). “*Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear*” (Matt 13:43).

The love of the world and false teachings will make us unfit for that appearing. It will so dull our hearts that we will not consider our Lord’s return, and thus will bury our talents and become conformed to the world.

The love of the world and false teachings will make us unfit for that appearing. It will so dull our hearts that we will not consider our Lord’s return, and thus will bury our talents and become conformed to the world. Abiding in Him involves keeping ourselves “*unspotted from the world*” (James 1:27), and purging ourselves from all false teachers—those who represent themselves as coming from Him, yet are not sent by Him (2 Tim 2:20-21).

This matter is so critical, that God has given us an “*unction*” in order that we might abide in Him. He has not left it to human ability, although it does require our response and sensitivity. I am persuaded that contemporary *Christianity* is robbing men of the tenderness of heart required to be taught by the Spirit, or the “*anointing*.” Jesus has already told us what results from NOT abiding in Him. “*If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned*” (John 15:6). It is not possible for those words to be effectively contradicted. Thus we must not view our text as a casual suggestion, but a solemn and urgent exhortation.

We May Have Confidence

If we do not see the sense of this verse, it will sound most peculiar. If we read it, “*YOU abide in Him . . . that WE may have confidence,*” you might imagine the readiness of the readers will bring boldness to John in the day Christ returns. That is not, however, the sense of the text.

Here John is identifying himself with the other believers. It is as though he said, *By the grace of God, I am abiding in Him. Now, you do the same so we all can have confidence before our Lord when He comes.* Right here we see the power of faith and the effectiveness of the Spirit’s teaching. For those who were once sinners, deceived by Satan, and dead in trespasses and sins, to be confident, assured, and unashamed when Jesus returns in all of His glory, is an exceedingly great accomplishment! You will find it difficult to find someone who even acknowledges the possibility of such a thing. But it is true!

Over the years, I have noticed the frailty of confidence that is created by a sectarian spirit. Some poor souls are forward and brash when they defend their doctrinal position, thinking nothing of denigrating those with whom they are at variance. But when the subject is turned to the coming of the Lord and the judgment of all men, their boldness withers and falls away. Nor, indeed, do religious routines and disciplines produce this kind of confidence. No motivational speech can make a person confident before the glorified Christ! I know from experience that the aggressive adoption of sectarian creeds has no favorable affect upon the heart when it reflects upon the return of Christ. That is because none of those things have anything to do with abiding in Christ.

Notice the glory of this text. Confidence in the day of the Lord does not depend upon our accomplishments, but on our abiding in Him. What is even more, while that abiding does require our effort, it is made possible by Divine tutelage. Such considerations awaken hope in our hearts.

Not Shrink from Him in Shame

When Adam and Eve sinned, transgressing the commandment of God, they “*hid themselves from the presence of the Lord*” when “*they heard the voice of the Lord walking in the garden in the cool of the day*” (Gen 3:8). That was only a very small token of the reaction of those failing to abide in Him when our Lord returns.

When those once placed into Christ fail to abide in Him, a chasm begins to form between them and the Lord. This is so because their union with Him is by faith, and is only as strong as that faith. However, not only does a chasm form between the person and the Lord, a certain hostility against, and fear before, the Lord also begins to develop.

When those once placed into Christ fail to abide in Him, a chasm begins to form between them and the Lord. This is so because their union with Him is by faith, and is only as strong as that faith. However, not only does a chasm form between the person and the Lord, a certain hostility against, and fear before, the Lord also begins to develop. But all of this remains unnoticeable to the withdrawing person, because sin has anaesthetized the heart and conscience. But when the Lord “*appears,*” that dulness will suddenly be shattered, and the neglecting soul will become acutely aware of the enmity that exists between him and the Lord. The word “*ashamed*” includes the idea of public disgrace, and an open acknowledgment of defeat. Language is not capable of conveying the measure of shame and disgrace that will be found in those who did not “*abide in Him,*” when Jesus “*appears.*” It will be something from which recovery will not be possible, for such will be consumed by Christ’s wrath. As it is written, “*when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed*” (2 Thess 1:7-10). All of the doctrines that taught men they could “*neglect so great salvation,*” and still be saved in the end, will go up like a puff of smoke. A stark realization of lostness will grip such souls as they confront the Lord they neglected.

Those who determine NOT to be ashamed in that day have done well. Those who do not make this determination have NOT done well—in anything. God has provided “*the anointing*” to see to it they rejoice at the appearing of their Lord rather than shrink from him in shame and disgrace. God is greatly to be praised for providing a daily way to “*keep us from falling.*” We carry about in us a well of living water that constantly refreshes and prepares us.

KNOWING AND PRACTICING

“*29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.*” One might respond, “Who does not know Christ is righteous?” This is not theoretical knowledge, or mere intellectual acquaintance with the facts. In fact, a unique word is used here. Coming from the Greek word **eivdh/te** (i-da-te), it means to recognize, be acquainted with, or know very well Friberg AGNT Lexicon . Simply put, it is something that has been effectively learned through the intervention of another.

A Technical Point

This word is used in this form six times in Scripture, and speaks more of a persuasive type of knowledge. It is the word used when Jesus raised paralytic man that was lowered through the ceiling to his feet. “*But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’; then He said to the paralytic, ‘Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house’*” (Matt 9:6 NKJV). It is also the word Paul used when he told the Ephesians he was sending Tychicus to them to inform them of his affairs. “*But that you also may know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you*” (Eph 6:21 KNJV). In addition to its use in this verse, John also uses it in chapter five of this book. “*These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God*” (5:13 NKIV). You see, then, that the knowledge of which he speaks is the result of a deliberate unveiling, or showing.

This is not the same word used in the second part of this verse; i.e., “*If you know . . . you know.*” The second “*know*” comes from **gnwri,sei** (gno-ri-sei), which means knowledge that has been revealed, or made known Barclay-Newman Greek Dictionary . It is as though the Spirit says, *If you are acquainted with the righteousness of the Savior, you have also been taught that the person*

practicing righteousness is born of Him.

The Result of the Anointing

The knowledge of which he speaks has come from “*the anointing.*” The Holy Spirit has shown the believer this aspect of Jesus: **He is righteous!** This perfectly correlates with our Lord’s affirmation of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. “*Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world . . . of righteousness , because I go to My Father . . .*” (John 16:7-11). Our Lord left heaven as “*the Word*” (John 1:14). He returned as “*the MAN Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim 2:5). The fact that He was received back into heaven as the glorified “*Man*” confirms He IS righteous—righteous in what He accomplished, and righteous in his Person. His righteousness is necessary for ours.

This verse forms a sort of bridge to the rest of the Epistle. It confirms to us that when Jesus comes again, He will come as the “*righteous Judge.*” Even now, He is our Advocate, “*Jesus Christ THE RIGHTEOUS*” (1 John 2:1). Knowing this is a matter of personal persuasion or conviction. There is no doubt about this. This knowledge constrains the believer to himself seek first “*the kingdom of God AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS*” (Matt 6:33). How effectively the “*anointing*” teaches those who have ears to hear!

True righteousness is the revelation of the life of God. It is not the result of mere human discipline. Further, our assessment of the person “*doing righteousness*” depends on our comprehension that “*He (Christ) is righteous.*” The more vague Christ’s character is to us, the less accessible righteousness becomes to us.

Those Doing Righteousness

The expression “*doeth righteousness,*” or “*practices righteousness*” NASB , speaks of the manner of life, and not occasional acts, i.e., doing something good. Righteousness can be lived out because it has been placed within those who are in Christ Jesus. To put it another way, imputed righteousness results in holiness of life. That holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord (Heb 12:14), is evidence that we have been “*made righteous*” (Rom 5:19). Just as surely as Christ Jesus was “*made sin for us,*” we have been “*made the righteousness of God in Him*” (2 Cor 5:21).

The one “*doing righteousness*” manifests he is a “*partaker of Christ*” and participates in the “*Divine nature*” (Heb 3:14; 2 Pet 1:4). True righteousness is the revelation of the life of God. It is not the result of mere human discipline. Further, our assessment of the person “*doing righteousness*” depends on our comprehension that “*He (Christ) is righteous.*” The more vague Christ’s character is to us, the less accessible righteousness becomes to us.

The Spirit leaves us with a marvelous fact—something that can be known: “*everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him*” NKJV . The reality of this cannot be altered. The only question is whether or not we “*know*” it. Later, John will confirm this by writing, “*Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous*” (3:7). Again, he will write, “*In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth **not** righteousness is **not** of God, neither he that loveth not his brother*” (1 John 3:10).

When those who “*were by nature children of wrath*” (Eph 2:3), begin to do righteousness, the work of God has been made known. Well did the prophet Jeremiah say, “*Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil*” (Jer 13:23). When, therefore, we know that He is righteous, we also know the one doing righteousness “*is born of Him.*” That individual was born, “*not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*” (John 1:13). God, by His own will, has begotten that person “*by the word of truth*” (James 1:18).

In First John, the EVIDENCE of being born of God is emphasized more than the fact of being born again. Equally true, the EVIDENCE of being righteous accented rather the necessity of being righteous. This by no means diminishes the necessity of the new birth and righteousness. However, it does teach us that there comes a time when our profession must be supported by our lives. Salvation does not provide for a lack of harmony between our essential persons and the God who delivered us through Christ.

CONCLUSION

Thus the Spirit has moved John to declare the marvelous nature of salvation, and the glorious character of the Gospel. He has shined eternal verities, and clarified the passing fancies of this present evil world. In all of this, He fine-tunes the spirits of those who have received the love of the truth.

Our Past

In Christ, God has effectively dealt with our past, removing our sins. He sent the Savior into the very arena of defeat, and commissioned Him to experience the conflict and defeat the enemy. Jesus is thus declared to be “*the Propitiation for our sins.*” No matter how sordid our past, Jesus has effectively dealt with it.

Our Condition

God has, through Christ, also effectively dealt with our natures, making us a new creation. He has caused us to be born again, becoming partakers of Christ. In that new birth, our preferences have been changed, and “*all things have become new.*” We now love God, His Word, and His people. Sin has become distasteful, and the Lord Himself is pleasant to us. He has even given us tests whereby we can determine our present condition, such as the love of the brethren, and doing righteousness.

Our Future

In Jesus, our future has also been secured, and hope now becomes dominant in our hearts. That hope provides us with a reason to be godly, resist the devil, and run energetically toward the goal. It makes sin unreasonable and distasteful to us. The future now has a brighter glow than the present, and we are attracted by “*the powers of the world to come*” (Heb 6:5).

The Present

As though this were not enough, salvation also equips us to face the jeopardies of life in this world. We have received an “*unction,*” or “*anointing*” that effectively teaches us. That teaching is of a spiritual nature, enabling us to distinguish between what is true and what is false. It even convinces us of the righteousness of Christ, and the nature of those who are born

of Him. Truly, we are complete in Christ (Col 2:10)! Nothing that we need has been omitted. In no area of life are we left deficient. Among other things, the knowledge of this will produce thanksgiving and consistency within us. Spiritual stability is within your reach!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Book of 1st John

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #4

THE IMPACT OF HOPE

“ 1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. 2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. 3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. 4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. 5 And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. 6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.”
(1 John 3:1-6, KJV)

INTRODUCTION

In Christ Jesus, hope plays a prominent role. It is the appointed means by which we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). As it is written, “*For we are saved by hope*” (Rom 8:24). Such “*hope*” is related to assurance, and the persuasion we will be advantaged by what is coming. In general, hope is the confident expectation of the future. Specifically, it is the joyful anticipation of the return of Jesus Christ, and the appointed changes that will occur at that time.

Faith in its Forward Posture

From still another view, hope is faith in its forward posture. Faith takes hold of the past, the present, and the future. It reaches back to the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, and appropriates reconciliation. It reaches up in the present, and appropriates grace to help in the time of need. Right now, faith equips us to live in this world, doing the will of God and resisting the devil. But faith also reaches forward, beyond the limits of time, and lays hold of the promised coming of Christ. It also moves us to prepare for our appointed confrontation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Constraining Factor

We will find that hope is a constraining factor in all of these aspects. It enables us to live in the power of Christ's atoning death. It compels us to live in the effectiveness of His present intercession. It also empowers us to live expectantly, dominated by a steadfast longing to forever be with the Lord.

Complete In Him

There is a marvelous sufficiency in Christ Jesus, and we do well to ponder it. The salvation wrought by Him, and appropriated by faith, is laden with "*all things pertaining to life and godliness*" (2 Pet 1:3). There is nothing about it that is inadequate or ineffective. We are "*complete*" in Christ (Col 2:10). No needed resources can be found anywhere else. Everything we really need, and all that we genuinely desire, are under the administration of Jesus Christ.

Throughout the Gospels, Acts, and especially the Epistles, the sufficiency of Christ is continually emphasized. It is seen in the merciful miracles of our Lord, as he "*went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil*" (Acts 10:38). The results realized through those mighty acts could not possibly have been experienced apart from Christ Jesus.

The real and rapid spread of the truth in the book of Acts was not the result of human strategies. Rather, it was evidence of a reigning Christ, working through the faith of His people.

The Epistles confirm Christ is the heart of the Kingdom. Our hearts must not be diverted from Him, for there is no salvation in any sense apart from Him. Thus, men were warned about trusting in their religious background (Rom 2:17), a system of Law (Gal 5:4), and religious disciplines of life (Col 2:20-23). If men draw back from the Lord, gravitating to some lifeless system, they move toward "*perdition*" (Heb 10:38-39). If they succumb to the delusions of the devil, lured away from fellowship with Christ, they will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15).

There is such a remarkable consistency in this line of reasoning that it seems almost impossible that anyone could miss it. Yet, and I speak from experience, it is possible to be so deceived by Satan's subtlety that one imagines Jesus is being embraced, when actually He has been rejected.

The Reason for the Epistle

I want to keep before you the reason for this brief Epistle. The Spirit moved John to tell us WHY this book is written. In fact, it is stated in a clear and edifying manner.

Fellowship with the Father and the Son

It is written that we might "*have fellowship*" with the all saints, and chiefly with the Father and the Son (1:3). The matters to which John exposes our minds, therefore, directly relate to our fellowship with the Father and the Son. Things against which we are warned jeopardize that fellowship, else we would not be warned about them. Realities we are told to appropriate enhance that fellowship, else we would not be told of them.

That Our Joy Might Be Full

This Epistle is also written to enhance our joy in the Lord, or that our joy might be “full” (1 John 1:4). The subjects John addresses, therefore, directly relate to our joy and state of joyfulness. Things against which we are warned diminish and endanger that joy, else we would not be warned about them. Realities we are told to appropriate cause that joy to abound, else we would not be told of them.

Knowing We Have Eternal Life

Finally, the Spirit moved John to write in order that we might “*know we have eternal life*” (1 John 5:13). The things John writes are immediately associated with our persuasion that we have eternal life. Things against which we are warned will thrust that knowledge from us, else we would not be warned about them. Realities we are told to appropriate will help to persuade us we do have eternal life, else we would not be told about them.

These Things Must Be Known

It is imperative that we keep these objectives in our minds as we consider what is written. Making it safely through this world requires these experiences. The various facets of salvation are calculated to enhance them. We do well to grasp that truth, not allowing our adversary the devil to move us to accept miserable substitutes. Without being redundant, allow me to state these objectives again.

- Fellowship with the Father, the Son, and those who also fellowship with Them.
- The fulness of joy.
- Knowing that you have eternal life.

We are to be cognizant that what is being said in this Epistle is related to our fellowship with God and His people, our joyfulness, and knowing we have eternal life. If we allow the Word to dwell richly within us, it will enhance our fellowship, increase our joy, and persuade us we have eternal life. It is difficult to conceive of anything having greater advantages than these things. The experience of them will strengthen us for both living and dying.

THE MANNER OF LOVE

“1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not.”

The due consideration of the nature and effectiveness of the love of God is essential to our progress in the faith. There is no possibility of fellowship with God or His people where a fundamental ignorance of His love exists. Divine love is the greatest love, and therefore sheds light on all other expressions of love. Thus it is written, “*We love Him, because He first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). In fact, His love is the definitive love: i.e., it is the love by which all other loves are measured. “*Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*” (1 John 4:10).

Also, the joy of the Lord is directly proportionate to our grasp of the love of God,

**True spiritual growth is owing more to the apprehension of
Divine commitment than of human responsibility.**

that has been poured out within us by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). Additionally, it is not possible to know we have eternal life if we have a shallow view of the love of God. Among other reasons, this is why the Holy Spirit sheds the love of God abroad in our hearts (Rom 5:5). It is not our love for God that permeates our whole being, but His love for us. Our love for Him is the result of perceiving His love for us.

True spiritual growth is owing more to the apprehension of Divine commitment than of human responsibility. Thus it is written, *“For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that One died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer”* NIV (2 Cor 5:14-16).

While there is a need for strong exhortation, warnings, and even rebuke, they all take their place behind the proclamation of the love of God as revealed in Christ. None of these things—i.e., exhortations, warnings, rebukes, etc.—are ends of themselves. They are the appointed means of bringing us within the perimeter of Divine influence, where the love of God can be seen more clearly. If we lose sight of this, our exhortations, warnings, and rebukes will become more harsh, and actually drive lethargic souls more deeply into the mire of spiritual death. Make no mistake about it, there is a time for sternness and the total absence of compromise. That need, however, is driven by the nature of the transgressor, not that of the Savior. Coming, as Paul would say, *“with a rod”* (2 Cor 4:21), is always in order to bring the people to a point where they can more clearly see God’s love.

Behold

The word *“BEHOLD”* is a summons to involve our thoughts in the good fight of faith. It is a strong word, meaning to *be aware, know, consider, perceive, and understand*. It is like saying, *Focus your attention here!* It is not a casual word, as though we are being asked to cast a fortuitous glance toward the Lord, or entertain a fleeting thought about His great love. I fear that much of what is represented as *Christian thought* is more on the periphery of life than at its center. The contemporary church has, to a large degree, allowed temporal matters to dominate its thinking. Our text calls for such people to turn their heads toward heaven, as it were, and focus on the marvelous expressions of Divine concern for us.

To *“behold”* is to look intently upon something, expecting to receive great benefit from it. Such consideration is pictured in the confrontation Peter and John had with *“a certain man lame from his mother's womb.”* Every day, this man was *“carried”* and placed at *“the gate of the temple, which is called Beautiful.”* Scripture tells us that when the poor man saw Peter and John entering into the Temple, he asked them for money. You will recall Peter challenged the man by saying, *“Look at us!”* It is written that the man *“gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them”* NKJV (Acts 5:1-5). The outcome is a commentary on the result of true beholding. His need was met as Peter said, *“Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk”* (Acts 3:1-8). That marvelous work was preceded by BEHOLDING, or focusing upon, the means through which the benefit was to be realized.

So it is with beholding the manner of God’s love. Here is where our hearts and minds are focused upon the Source of the needed benefit. The *beholder* is not seeking to merely add to his knowledge, or be introduced to some novel or intriguing area of thought. Rather, the *beholding* one seeks to be profited by what is beheld.

To *“behold”* is to pass beyond the surface of learning and into the citadel of holy contemplation.

When the Lord says “Behold!” , great benefit is to be expected from the object of attention. There is something to be learned that cannot be appropriated any other place, or by any other means. There are spiritual advantages to be gained by considering the love of God that cannot be realized in any other way.

The Manner of Love

The contemporary church has, to a large degree, allowed temporal matters to dominate its thinking. Our text calls for such people to turn their heads toward heaven, as it were, and focus on the marvelous expressions of Divine concern for us.

The love of God toward us is extraordinary. There is a “*manner*” evident in it that cannot be found in any other expression of love. Some versions translate the expression “*how great is the love*” (NIV), or “*how great a love*” (NASB). The idea is that of “*greatness*” in both quantity and quality. It differs, and excels, in both kind and measure from all others loves.

The word “*manner*” refers to the *quality, sort, or kind* of love to be pondered. It carries the idea of “*wonderful,*” or something to be admired, esteemed, and appreciated. The accent is thus placed on WHAT is being considered, and not the act of consideration itself. It is to be understood that what is beheld has a beauty and power of its own, whether seen or not. It is the beholding that will bring that beauty and power to us. We are actually changed by our vision of Him.

The Place of Beholding

The superiority of Divine love can be comprehended only as it is considered. Our thoughts must dwell upon it as we search out its various aspects. Among other things, that means this love is not mere emotion. It is an intelligent expression of God wherein Divine purpose and preference are conferred upon those of His choosing. This is also a selective love; i.e., it is not bestowed upon men indiscriminately. No person failing to behold this love will experience the full benefits of it.

A Bestowed Love

This is not a love that is earned or purchased by those being loved. God’s love is “*bestowed upon us,*” “*given us*” RSV , or “*lavished on us*” NIV . Some of the synonyms assigned to this word are *give, grant, minister, put, set, and show* STRONGS . A “*bestowed*” love is a preferred love placed upon particular individuals—those who are especially precious to the One giving the love.

Scriptural Expressions

There are some vivid expressions of such a love in Scripture. Hear the Lord speak to ancient 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 . . .*” (Deut 7:7-8). Zephaniah was also moved to give us an unusual expression of Divine love. “*The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love , He will rejoice over you with singing*” NKJV (Zeph 3:17).

Moses told the people of this kind of love—a love bestowed upon their fathers, Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob. “*Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them , and he chose their seed after them*” (Deut 10:15). This is the kind of love Joshua and Caleb referred to when they told the doubting Israelites, “*If the LORD delight in us , then He will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey*” (Num 14:8). It is the kind of love God had for Jacob. “*As it is written, Jacob have I loved , but Esau have I hated*” (Rom 9:13).

This is a discriminate and distinguishing love. It is not given because of the merit or moral achievement of the ones being loved. However, neither is it without a cause, for God affirms He does nothing “*without cause*” (Ezek 14:23). This short Epistle will not only affirm that Divine love has been placed upon us, it will avow that love is found in Christ, and Christ alone (3:16; 4:9,10). **It is unquestionably our association with Jesus that has constrained God to place His love upon us.** Apart from affiliation, there can be no placement, or bestowal, of God’s love upon us. **Our experience of, and profit from, the love of God, is directly proportionate to our fellowship with His Son** (1 Cor 1:9).

This is a vital distinction. Satan will tempt you to believe God’s love is directly relates to your moral achievement. By saying “moral achievement,” I mean your success in abstaining from evil and embracing the good. To be sure, both of these are an integral part of spiritual life, and are never to be minimized. However, the love of God is placed upon you because of your acceptance of, and preference for, His Son. Thus, you are “*accepted in the Beloved*” (Eph 1:6). You are “*acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet 2:5). In Jesus, and Jesus alone, we are “*made the righteousness of God*” (2 Cor 5:21). The redemption is “*in Christ Jesus*” (Rom 3:24). The status of “*no condemnation*” is for those who are “*in Christ Jesus*” (Rom 8:1). That truth must be seen!

We must lay hold of this truth. God has placed His love upon us because of our acceptance of, and delight in, His Son. Our safety from the devices of the devil depends upon our understanding of this. Thus it is written, “*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 8:38-39). The poor soul who does not see this will be jostled by temptation, and become disoriented in the day of trouble.

All of this is involved in “*the manner of love*” the Father has placed upon, or granted to, us. It cannot be perceived in a casual manner. Nor, indeed, will it ever burst upon the soul that is not devoted to the Lord. **The kind of love we experience in Christ Jesus is so grand it cannot be seen while concentrating on other things.**

In short, it was Christ’s atoning death that allowed God to

“*bestow,*” or put, His love upon us. In this arrangement, no one can point an accusing finger at God, saying He was unjust in placing His love upon us

Allow me to briefly elaborate on this “*manner of love.*” Among men, love must be earned—i.e., there must be a condition in the one loved that provokes that love to be placed upon him. For some, it is mere appearance. For others, it is because of the virtue of the one being loved . . . etc. But notice “*manner of love*” God has “*bestowed*” upon us. “*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners , Christ died for us . . . when we were enemies , we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son . . .*” (Rom 5:8). In this, the Spirit accentuates that God provided a just basis for the experience of His love. Even though we were wholly undeserving of His love, being “*sinners*” and His “*enemies,*” He did something about our condition. What is more, He did so without violating His own integrity or character.

In short, it was Christ's atoning death that allowed God to "bestow," or put, His love upon us. In this arrangement, no one can point an accusing finger at God, saying He was unjust in placing His love upon us (Rom 8:34). We will now see precisely HOW His love was "bestowed upon us." That is, we will see the primary evidence of that love.

What We Should be Called

" . . . that we should be called the sons of God." Who is able to measure the magnitude of this expression! Accentuating the clarity of the phrase, every major translation reads the same way: "**we should be called the sons of God**" KJV, NKJV, ASV, RSV, NASB, NRSV, NIV . The expression is unusually strong, as shown in the additional words provided in other translations: "*and such we are*" ASV , "*And that is what we are!*" NIV , "*and so we are*" RSV . The justification for such a bold affirmation will be found in the next verse, which states the case quite clearly.

By saying "*should be called,*" the **correctness** of our new identity is underscored. In this world, it is possible to be called by a name or title that is undeserving, or for which no real justification can be sited.

Thus, ruthless individuals can unjustly become kings, queens, and potentates apart from any righteous process. But this is not the case with the children of God!

It Is Right!

The "*manner of love*" God has lavished upon us makes it RIGHT for us to be called "*the sons of God.*" To put it another way, "*But as many as received Him, to them gave He power (the right) to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*" (John 1:12-13). Whatever you may think about our "rights," it is "**RIGHT**" for those in Christ Jesus to be called "*the sons of God.*"

The rightness of being "*called the sons of God*" is owing to at least three things. First, **God** calls us that, which makes it right. Second, it is founded upon our **acceptance** of His Son, and that makes it right. Third, we are REALLY the sons of God, being made "*partakers of Christ*" and of the "*Divine nature*" (Heb 3:14; 2 Pet 1:4).

The Spirit of Adoption

God has not only put a "*new heart*" and "*a new spirit*" within us, He has also "*given unto us His Holy Spirit*" (Ezek 36:26; 1 Thess 4:8). The presence of His Holy Spirit with us is what confirms we are "*the sons of God.*" It is a very real circumstance, and not a mere metaphor, or figure of speech. As it is written, "*For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'* The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom 8:15-16). The presence of the Spirit Himself confirms we are God's children (1 John 3:24; 4:13). Not only so, but the Spirit confirms our status by testifying "*with our spirit that we are the children of God.*"

That witness, or testimony, causes eruptions of dependence to come from our own persons: "*Abba, Father!*" It is only a son that can speak in this manner! Hear again the testimony of the Scriptures. "*And because ye are sons , God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son ; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ*" (Gal 4:6-7).

Men have found it in the hearts to haggle about what the people of God are to be "*called.*" Professed believers have even been known to divide over this issue. Some prefer "Christian," while

others prefer “disciples.” Still others choose “saints” (latter day), while others favor being known as simply “believers,” or members of Christ’s body. There are good things about all of these appellations, and none of them is to be despised. There is something, however, that none of them will yield. That is confidence, or assurance. All of them tend to relate us with other believers. I am quick to say this is not wrong, for that view is declared and encouraged by the Lord.

The Power of Knowing

However, when it comes to “*the full assurance of faith,*” and “*everlasting consolation and good hope*” (Heb 10:22; 2 Thess 2:16), the individual believer must be able to see his association with God through Christ. Thus, the Spirit affirms we are “*the sons of God.*” We have an immediate and effectual relation with the One begetting us!

We have a right to come to Him because of our acceptance of His “*only begotten Son.*” He is drawn to us, and has placed His love upon us, because of our connection with His Son. He knows us as “*sons,*” and is not ashamed to be called our “*God*” (Heb 11:16; 2 Cor 6:18). Christ knows us as His “*brethren,*” and is “*not ashamed*” of us, because we have been begotten of His Father (Heb 2:11).

As a general rule, those who condemn and refuse to accept other believers do so because of a lack of assurance in themselves.

Much, if not all, of the division among believers exists because of a failure to grasp this truth. As a general rule, those who condemn and refuse to accept other believers do so because of a lack of assurance in themselves. We are not left to conjecture on this. The Spirit speaks with pungency on this subject. “*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well*” (1 John 5:1). This particular text postulates that individuals born of God KNOW that is the case. They are aware they “*are the sons of God.*” Those, however, who live without this persuasion find it easy to reject other children of God. They do so because others do not measure up to their perceived criteria of acceptance. Such fail to see it is the “*MANNER OF LOVE*” bestowed upon us that brings about Divine acceptance. The awareness of that extraordinary love is what imparts the confidence and strength required to “*perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord*” (2 Cor 7:1). I personally consider this to be one of the greatest insights available to the saints of God. Salvation is calculated to bring this awareness to us. The Scriptures are given to clarify this reality to us.

The World’s Response to Our Status

“*Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him*” NKJV . Why does “*the world*” reject the children of God? It is NOT because their new birth has made them unreasonable, inconsiderate, or harmful. In fact, of all men, those in Christ Jesus are the most considerate, the most productive, and the most amenable. They alone are empowered to “*do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith*” (Gal 6:10). It is not a lack of trustworthiness or unreasonableness that moves the world against the saints. Although many of these traits are, indeed, found in professed believers, that is not the reason for the world’s rejection of them. They are also found in those who have not been delivered from “*this present evil world*” (Gal 1:4). Yet, the world loves its own, flawed or not. That is why Jesus said, “*If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you*” NIV (John 15:19).

How perfectly Christ's affirmation blends with our text! It is our association with God that has moved the world against us. That is why it cannot include us in their company. We should not expect the world to receive us. Jesus has chosen us "*out of the world,*" because that is the only way we can be "*joined to the Lord*" (1 Cor 6:17). It is not possible to have fellowship with the Lord and fellowship with the world at the same time. When God receives us, the world rejects us. Conversely, when we become a "*friend of the world,*" by that very affinity, we become "*the enemy of God*" (James 4:4).

Those who teach us to court the favor of the world are luring us into Satan's snare. Jesus does not draw people to Himself through mere friendliness and outward identity. This is not a matter of conjecture, but of revelation. Jesus said, "*But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself. He said this to show the kind of death He was going to die*" NIV (John 12:32-33). It is Divine consideration that draws men to Christ, not human politeness and favor.

If you doubt this is the case, consider all the multitudes who experienced the favor and profound thoughtfulness of Jesus. When He dwelt among us, He brought unparalleled kindness and thoughtfulness to the masses. He fed their hungry, healed their sick, and raised their dead. As the Spirit witnesses, He "*went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil*" (Acts 10:38). Yet, in the end, He was opposed by "*kings of the earth,*" "*the rulers*" of the chosen people, "*both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel*" (Acts 4:26-27). There is no record of them speaking out for Jesus when He was tried, nor do we see the vast multitudes blessed by Him gathered at the cross. As the disciples tarried in Jerusalem, awaiting the promised power, there were only "*about an hundred and twenty*" that were found together (Acts 1:15).

The world, even those in it who were blessed by Jesus, "*did not know Him*" in the sense of our text. This did not stop Jesus from "*doing good*" among the people, and it must not stop us either. But we must not imagine that such goodness will be met with the world's approbation. Nor, indeed, should we be surprised when those to whom we have "*done good*" revile and persecute us.

We are not of the world order. We have been chosen out of it, raised above it, made citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20). The world "*cannot receive*" the Spirit of truth, nor can it receive those in whom that Spirit dwells (John 14:17). Our text is precise on this point. The cause of the world not knowing or recognizing us is not found in our personal peculiarities. Rather, it is "*because it did not know Him*" NKJV . What is more, the world's hatred of those who are born of God is proof positive that it hates Jesus. Thus Jesus declared, "*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you*" (John 15:18). The hatred of the world thus confirms the enmity that exists between it and the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is our identity with Jesus that has caused the world to reject us. In becoming "*the sons of God,*" we were moved away from the world and its manners. Our natures were changed, and thus our preferences and manners were also changed. The world senses the change, and therefore senses we no longer belong to its order. It therefore rejects involvement with us. It is to be acknowledged that this is a burden to us, but not an unbearable one!

WE ARE THE SONS OF GOD

"*2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God . . .*" Even though we are not yet perfect (Phil 3:12), we are still "*sons of God.*" We admit, we see "*another law*" in our persons, "*warring against the law of our mind,*" but we are still "*sons of God*" (Rom 7:23). Every insightful believer will acknowledge, "*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present*

with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find” NKJV (Rom 7:18). Still, “ **now** we ARE the sons of God!”

And what believer is there whose heart does not leap with joy at this word? Here is something Satan cannot take from us, even though he challenges our sonship, even as he did Christ’s. Twice the devil said to Jesus, “*If thou be the Son of God*” (Matt 4:3,6). Even as our Lord hung upon the tree of cursing, the devil moved His enemies to chide, “*If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross . . . He trusted in God; let Him deliver him now, if He will have Him: for he said, I am the Son of God*” (Matt 27:40). The “*old serpent*” knew if he could get Jesus to doubt He was the Son of God, He would act foolishly. This is precisely how he lured naive Eve into disobedience—by causing her to forget her Creator, and think only of herself.

This was the focal point of Satan’s attack against Jesus. It will be no different with you. He will challenge your sonship. He will provoke you to think less of your status in Christ than is declared by God. He knows that when you are unsure of your acceptance in Christ, you will conduct your life in a spiritually slipshod manner, not availing yourself of the grace that belongs to you in Christ. If there was a single deficiency among believers that makes them most vulnerable, I suppose it would be this: **being ignorant of who they are in Christ Jesus** .

This was the focal point of Satan’s attack against Jesus. It will be no different with you. He will challenge your sonship. He will provoke you to think less of your status in Christ than is declared by God.

In our day, we rarely hear appeals to believers that are based upon their status in Christ Jesus. Such omissions are not the manner of the Kingdom. A few examples will assist us in grasping the power of this perspective.

The Corinthians

The Corinthian church was “*carnal*,” divided, unthoughtful, and tolerant of gross immorality (1 Cor 1:10; 3:1,3; 11:21; 5:1-2). They conducted themselves like spiritual babies (1 Cor 3:1-3), even abusing the gifts given to them (1 Cor 12-14).

In spite of these deplorable conditions, strong appeals were made to them upon the basis of their acceptance in Christ. “*To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints . . . God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord . . . But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God; and righteousness and sanctification and redemption*” (1 Cor 1:2,9,30).

The Galatians

The brethren at Galatia were in a most dangerous condition. They were “*removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel*,” and were ready to be classified as “*fallen from grace*” –a condition in which “*Christ will profit you nothing*” (Gal 1:6; 5:2,4).

Still, the Spirit appealed to them upon the basis of their acceptance in Christ, thereby striving to lift them from the quagmire of iniquity. “*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ . . . And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’*” (Gal

3:26-27; 4:6).

NOW! NOW! NOW!

“*NOW we are the sons of God.*” it is to be acknowledged that the bulk of our inheritance is ahead of us. Still, we do have part of it now, and it is sufficient to gender great confidence in our hearts. Whatever believers may **not** be, and whatever they may **not** have, they “*are the sons of God.*” They have not “apprehended” that for which they have been “*apprehended of Christ*” (Phil 3:12), but they “*are the sons of God!*” They are not “*already perfect*” (Phil 3:12), but they “*are the sons of God.*” They are to think of themselves as sons, approach the Throne as sons, and conduct their lives in this world as sons. They are not of this world!

“**NOW**” they are justified (Rom 5:11). “**NOW**” they are “*dead with Christ*” (Rom 6:8). “**NOW**” they are “*delivered from the Law*” (Rom 7:6). “**NOW**” there is “*no more condemnation*” (Rom 8:1). “**NOW**” we who were enemies “*are made nigh by the blood of Christ*” (Eph 2:13). It is true, we were “*sometimes darkness,*” but “**NOW**” we are “*light in the Lord*” (Eph 5:8). Although we were “*alienated and enemies in our minds by wicked works,*” “**NOW**” we are “*reconciled*” (Col 1:21). All of these are involved in being “*the sons of God*” “**NOW**.” Be sure of this, Satan will challenge your status.

While there are times when we must hear what we “*are not,*” and when our foolish ways must be exposed, it is also appropriate for us to know who we are. Let us declare it with more fervency and consistency. “***Beloved, now are we the sons of God.***” This is a very real status, and there are very real benefits related with it. The awareness of this standing brings both confidence and power. We do well to remind one another, “*NOW we are the sons of God.*” It is our business to avoid any religious thrust that makes it difficult to acknowledge this truth.

WHAT WE SHALL BE IS VEILED NOW

“*. . . and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.*” What we are “*now*” is great, but it is not the greatest. We must not allow our minds to settle on the truth of our present sonship. There is more to being “*the sons of God*” than what we currently perceive and enjoy. We do not yet possess all to which we have been appointed. Our race has not yet been finished, and we have not yet completed the course for which we have been designated. Salvation includes more than we presently possess. In our best and most luminous spiritual state, “*what we will be has not yet been made known*” NIV . It has not been made known intellectually or experientially. At the very best, we have only seen the outline of God’s great salvation.

By saying “*it doth not yet appear,*” the Spirit means our status as “*sons*” is not fully apparent. Just as the flesh veiled Jesus (Heb 10:20), so the tabernacle of clay conceals who we really are. Jesus did not look like THE Son of God when He was here, and we do not appear as “*the sons of God*” while we are here. For this reason, the world persecuted Jesus, and now persecutes those in whom He dwells. If they knew who we were, they would treat us differently. However, those who are of the world CANNOT perceive those who are of God. They have neither eyes nor heart for such perception.

The fulness of what we “*shall be,*” however, is also hidden from us. The world cannot see who we ARE. We cannot see who we SHALL BE. Presently, we are not suited for such wonderful knowledge.

By saying “*not yet,*” the Spirit is emphasizing that the “*appearance*” of the sons of God has been appointed, and will surely come to pass. As it is written, “*When Christ, Who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory*” (Col 3:4). As long, therefore, as the Lord Jesus is hidden from the world, so long will His disciples also be concealed.

The fulness of what we “*shall be,*” however, is also hidden from us. The world cannot see who we ARE. We cannot see who we SHALL BE. Presently, we are not suited for such wonderful knowledge. Even though “*the things God has prepared for them that love Him*” have been revealed (1 Cor 2:9-10), they have not been revealed in their fulness. What God has “*prepared*” is like a great temple, filled with inexplicable blessing. What we presently have is like “*Solomon’s porch*” (John 10:23). We are yet only on the border of the promised land! What we possess is greater than we imagine, and what we “*shall be*” is beyond all present comprehension, and abilities of comprehension.

It is no wonder that what we possess in Christ is termed “*so great a salvation*” NKJV (Heb 2:3). Lest we become complacent in our spiritual longings, we are reminded of “*the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory*” (2 Tim 2:10). What we ARE will yet be enlarged, enhanced, and perfected. What we HAVE will yet be expanded and intensified.

There is a marked tendency among men to grossly understate what is possessed in Christ Jesus. Over the years, I have observed the proneness to smallness among believers—myself included. It is something against which we much strive with all of our beings. **Minuscule thinking is the mother of religious boredom and dissatisfaction.** This is why believers allow things to enter their assemblies that contribute no edification. It is the reason for a demand for brevity and religious distraction.

Something of our future circumstance has been revealed. But it is still shrouded in mystery, and we sense the poverty of human speech and the impotence of human wisdom when we hear of these things. A few examples will suffice to confirm this is the case. “*Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One . . . Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth . . . Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? . . . Do you not know that we shall judge angels? . . . If we endure, We shall also reign with Him . . . And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations; He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels; as I also have received from My Father . . . He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God . . . To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne*” (Dan 7:27; Matt 5:5; 1 Cor 6:2-3; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 3:2:26; 12,21). Are these not staggering considerations, extending far beyond our fondest imaginations?

And who among us can fathom the blissfulness of a state where we “*go no more out,*” hunger and thirst “*no more,*” where the first heaven and earth are “*passed away?*” What earthly genius can unlock for us the fulness of what is involved in God wiping away “*all tears*” from our eyes? Or the former things not being “*remembered*” or coming “*into mind*” ? And what words can perfectly clarify what it means for there to be “*no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain*” (Rev 3:12; 7:16; 21:2,4; Isa 65:17; Rev 21:4).

Such things remain a challenge to consider. Yet, the pondering of them brings a sweetness to the soul that scarcely can be expressed. That is because they are absolutely true. When you are tempted to despair, consider what “*we shall be.*” More of it can be seen now, and all of it will be seen then. When you are not recognized now, remember that you will be then. His appearing will bring your’s also!

When He Shall Appear

The fulness of what we shall be will not be made known until *“He shall appear.”* When we pass from this life, we will experience increased joy and relief from the stresses of the *“good fight of faith.”* However, what we *“shall be”* will not be unveiled until *“He appears.”* Until that point, everything is introductory. As we advance in the faith here, more of it will be seen. When we are at last *“absent from the body,”* more of it will be realized. However, its fulness is reserved for the time when the Lord Jesus will *“appear.”*

However, what we *“shall be”* will not be unveiled until *“He appears.”*
Until that point, everything is introductory.

This is the meaning of Colossians 3:4. *“When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”* NKJV In a remarkable expression of this very truth, David wrote, *“As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness”* (Psa 17:15). Even in those spiritually primitive times, the *“sweet Psalmist”* knew his likeness to the Savior was contingent upon that Savior’s revelation. Jesus spoke of the *“appearing”* of the saints in this way. *“Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* (Matt 13:43). Lest we imagine this occurs when we come into Christ, or think of it as taking place in this *“day of salvation,”* Jesus identifies the time more precisely. *“The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth”* (Matt 13:41-42). It is *“THEN”* that *“the righteous”* will *“shine forth.”*

We Shall Be Like Him

The predetermined destiny of the children of God is not a mere moral transformation. That is the beginning of the process, but is by no means its culmination. God has *“predestinated”* His children will be *“conformed to the image of His Son”* (Rom 8:29). It is not that Jesus is the standard, and we all work diligently at being like Him. Surely, that is part of being in Christ, but it is not the fulness of salvation. We are BEING conformed to Christ’s image, as God Himself works *“all things together”* for our ultimate good (Rom 8:28).

As we live by faith, the Holy Spirit moves us from one stage of glory to another, shaping us into the image of God’s *“only begotten Son.”* Scripture states it this way, *“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord”* NKJV (2 Cor 3:18). Gradually, He is preparing us for the time when we will put on our *“house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens”* (2 Cor 5:1). That *“house”* is nothing less than our resurrection body, with which we will be ultimately *“clothed.”*

That this will occur when Jesus comes again is made clear in Philippians 3:20-21. *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body.”* Lest we despair at this announcement, thinking such a blessing is beyond us, it is added, *“according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”*

Thus, with surety and finality, it is affirmed, *“We shall be like Him!”* Then, the revealed purpose of God will be culminated as we begin our reign with Jesus *“for ever and ever”* (Rev 22:5). That destiny is as sure as the Word of God itself!

The Cause of the Change

The Spirit now declares the cause of the appointed “change.” “We shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is” NASB . When the Spirit says “see Him as He is,” He does not suggest that the vision of faith is not accurate, but that it is not complete. As powerful as faith is, it only introduces us to the glory of Christ. We will yet see Him in a new and indescribable way. God will yet show Him to us fully, withholding no part of His glory from us.

It is the sight itself that will change us! This should not surprise us, because we have

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already experienced an introduction to such transformation. The new birth itself is affected by exposure to the glory of God. Here is how it is stated in the fourth chapter of Second Corinthians. “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (4:6). The means by which the transformation takes place is “the face of Christ.” The One accomplishing it is “God.” The objective is to give us “the light of the glory of God,” or cause us to “participate in the Divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4).

The only effective understanding of God comes through Jesus Christ— “the face of Christ.” It is the Gospel that opens Christ Jesus to us. As we behold that glory, by faith, we “are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory” by the very “Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18). Just as the glory of God changed the face of Moses, so the glory of Jesus changes the character of the saints (2 Cor 3:7-9,18).

This same process will occur when Jesus comes again in all of His own glory, the glory of His Father, and the glory of the holy angels (Lk 9:26). Not only will the heavens and the earth flee from before His face (Rev 20:11), but all that has concealed the saints of God will be totally removed. Then their transformation will be complete, and they will fully “bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Cor 15:49). Until that time, however far we may have advanced, we are still in a state of transition—of being conformed.

As an addendum to this observation, **it is only to the degree that we see Christ NOW, that any effective change is wrought within us.** The kind of change God has determined cannot be accomplished by moral disciplines, however hallowed they may be. Souls who refuse to look to the Jesus (Heb 12:2) cannot be changed into His likeness. They have, by that refusal, shut themselves into a condemned state.

In view of this circumstance, we should make much of Jesus in our preaching. His atoning death, effective intercession, and return in glory must be in the forefront of all our preaching and teaching. How succinctly this is stated in the ninth chapter of Hebrews. Three appearings are mentioned, all of which are imperative for our salvation. “For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us . . . but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself . . . To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (Heb 9:24-28). His appearing to put away sin provided a righteous basis for our **initial change** – **the new birth** . His present appearing provides the means for our **continued change** “from glory unto glory” – **sanctification** . His “second” appearing will be the means of our **final transformation** , when we will “be like Him” – **Resurrection** . The consideration of these

things brings great grace to the soul.

THE PURIFYING IMPACT OF HOPE

“3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.” Throughout history believers have struggled with holiness. The struggle has not been in the area of desire, but in the fulfilling of the desire. Of old, David said, *“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me”* (Psa 51:10). With strong cryings he pleaded with God, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (Psa 139:23-24). Jesus pronounced an unequivocal blessing upon those who *“hunger and thirst for righteousness”* (Matt 5:6). He also demanded, *“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS”* (Matt 6:33). With great solemnity, the Holy Spirit admonishes us: *“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord”* (Heb 12:14). *“All filthiness and flesh and spirit”* is to be purged from our lives (2 Cor 7:1). Godly men and women have always known this. The challenge is seeing to it that holiness and purity are appropriated. It is good to underscore that these qualities **MUST** be appropriated. There is no place for sin in Christ’s kingdom—none at all! **Provision has been made for the remission of sin, but absolutely no provision has been made for the presence of sin.** This, I am convinced, is a reality that has not yet burst on many souls. Our text addresses this situation. The Lord knows we must have a powerful incentive *not* to sin, and to mortify the remnants of it that remain in us.

The Law

For some, the incentive is imagined to be law—moral demands placed upon the individual. However, that was not a sufficient motivation for Israel, and it will not be for you. As it is written, *“the law made nothing perfect”* (Heb 7:19). Even though the law is holy and just and good, it still cannot bring holiness to us. It is too demanding, and offers no resources for the accomplishment of its demands. It is *“weak through the flesh”* (Rom 8:3). **Human inability renders the Law incapable of pronouncing us righteous.**

Men cannot be commanded into heaven, nor can righteousness come by means of law—any law. Were that possible, *“Christ is dead in vain”* (Gal 2:21). The Spirit makes this unequivocal statement: *“For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law”* (Gal 3:21). A better way is required.

Fear of Death

For others, the threat of death is thought adequate for the task. But this did not work either, as confirmed under the Law. Such fear only induced slavery. Jesus was sent, among other things, to *“deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”* (Heb 2:15). Even threatening people with hell-fire is but a temporary incentive. Unless a more powerful stimulus is introduced, the potency of such a threat soon wears off, and men lapse back into their lethargic ways. The book of Judges provides a most excellent example of this principle, as well as the Israelites’ journey through the wilderness.

Bodily Disciplines

The church has been inundated with purveyors of human disciplines. These are secrets to subduing the flesh that rely completely upon the personal discipline of the individual. The Spirit informs us this approach is in sharp conflict with the very nature of the Kingdom. *“Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with*

the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh” (Col 2:20-23).

Although quite popular in religious circles, this approach contradicts the fact that we are “*dead with Christ.*” It also relies primarily upon the wisdom of men and the power of the human will. However, as rigorous as such disciplines may be, they cannot take away the desire to sin: “*they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence*” NIV . **Until the desire for sin is decidedly diminished, it will exercise power over us.**

A Better Way

Our text introduces the appointed way of accomplishing holiness—of purging ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit. It is the “*hope*” of being “*like Him*” —something that will be accomplished when He comes again. The impact of this hope is absolutely consistent in every one possessing it. It will not fail. “***And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.***” There are no exceptions to the rule. If an individual is not purifying himself, it is because he does not have the hope “*in him.*”

Keep in mind, this “*hope*” has been precisely stated. “*But we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is*” (3:2). Thus, the believer acquiesces with the determined purpose of God: to “*conform*” us to “*the image of His Son*” (Rom 8:29). That is what faith moves us to both desire and confidently anticipate.

Something that is Imperative

There is no value at all to a religion that does not have this hope. If the confident expectation of Christ’s appearing does not dominate us, our religion is pointless and vain. It is a mere exercise in futility.

There is no value at all to a religion that does not have this hope. If the confident expectation of Christ’s appearing does not dominate us, our religion is pointless and vain. It is a mere exercise in futility. I understand this has far reaching implications. Nevertheless, it is the truth, and is powerfully affirmed by both Christ and the Apostles.

This is the “*hope that is set before us,*” and is an “*anchor for the soul*” (Heb 6:18-19). The anticipation of the Lord’s return “*from heaven*” (1 Thess 4:16) keeps us from drifting so far from heaven we cannot hear Him who speaks from there (Heb 12:25). Drifting souls are unanchored souls, and unanchored souls are those who do not look earnestly for the return of their Lord.

This “*hope*” is integral to the life of faith. This is marvelously stated in First Thessalonians: “*you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven*” (1:9-10). It is ludicrous to imagine a person could prepare for eternity without turning from idols. It is equally foolish to think that one could expect to dwell forever with the Lord without serving the “*living and true God*” now. But it is also true that glory cannot be expected apart from waiting for God’s “*Son from heaven.*” Among the churches with whom I have been affiliated, this is virtually unknown. Rarely are sermons delivered on the subject, and it is even more uncommon to hear any conversations on the subject. **It is quite possible to visit many churches over an extended period of time, and not even hear that the Lord is going to come again.** This condition betrays a deplorable lack of faith, and is not to be excused.

Saved by Hope

The most strenuous activity is not related to getting into the Kingdom, but abiding in Christ. There is where the most hearty and extended endeavor is required. This by no means diminishes what is involved in entering the Kingdom. It DOES accentuate where our emphasis must be placed. Only those who “*endure to the end*” will be saved (Matt 10:22; 24:13). To put it another way, the promises of glory are only to those who “*overcome*” (Rev 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12; 21:7). The question is, how can one overcome? What will enable the believer to “*endure to the end*?” Is it enough to know that this is necessary? Honest souls know this is not the case. We need some help on this matter.

The Spirit affirms, “*For we are saved by hope*” (Rom 8:24). The particular “*hope*” to which He refers is “*the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body*” (Rom 8:23). That “*redemption*” will take place when our Lord returns. As it is written, “*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself*” NKJV (Phil 3:20-21). Our text also affirms this to be the case. “*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is*” NKJV (1 John 3:2). This is the “*hope*” that “*saves*” us.

But in what sense does “*hope*” save us? It is not in the sense of remitting our sins, or imparting righteousness to us. That is accomplished “*by grace through faith*” (Eph 2:8-10). He is not speaking of “*hope*” in the sense of justification. **Rather, it is in the import of sanctification.** The salvation of which he speaks is the same as mentioned in Philippians 2:12: “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*” This refers to cleansing “*ourselves of all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord*” (2 Cor 7:1). It is keeping ourselves “*unspotted from the world*” (James 1:27), refusing to be “*conformed to this world*” (Rom 12:2). From the standpoint of focus, it is placing our affection “*on things above, and not on things on the earth*” (Col 3:1-3). From the outlook of abstinence, it is refusing to “*love the world, or the things that are in the world*” (1 John 2:15-17). “*Saved,*” in this text, involves resisting the devil (James 4:7), fleeing sins of the flesh (1 Cor 6:18; 2 Tim 2:22), and not sinning (1 John 2:1).

From yet another view, “*saved*” includes laying “*hold on eternal life*” (1 Tim 6:12,19), finding “*grace to help in the time of need*” (Heb 4:16), and consistently “*looking unto Jesus*” (Heb 12:1-2). It also includes the addition of spiritual qualities to our faith (1 Pet 1:5-8), walking “*in the Spirit*” (Gal 5:16,25), and living “*by faith*” (Heb 10:38-39). Other Divinely appointed requirements include not making a place for the devil (Eph 4:27), not quenching the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19), and not refusing Him who is speaking from heaven (Heb 12:25).

How are all of these requirements to be realized? For some, these are so lofty they imagine they are only theoretical goals that are beyond our reach. First, there must be a settled persuasion that being “*saved*” requires all of our effort. The necessity of such involvement has not yet registered on many souls. However, those who are persuaded of the necessity of these things, are most interested in the means whereby they can be accomplished. Our text deals with this.

“In Him”

Here is a marvelous promise. “*And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself.*” There are no exceptions to the rule: “*everyone!*” When the text refers to “*hope in*

The “*hope*” of which the text speaks has no power unless it

dominates the heart. It cannot “save” us, enabling us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, if it remains in the background of our thinking.

Him,” the “*Him*” is Jesus, not the individual possessing the hope. The hope does reside in the believer, to be sure. The Spirit so strengthens us that we can “*abound in hope*” (Rom 15:13). However, lest we attach too much significance to the expectation itself, we must remember the emphasis is on the Object of our expectation, Jesus Christ. Thus it is written, “*Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father*” (1 Thess 1:3). Again, it is written, “*the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope*” (1 Tim 1:1).

The idea is that if Jesus does not come, we have no hope at all. However, if He is coming (and He **IS**), we “*rejoice in hope of the glory of God*” (Rom 5:2). That joyful anticipation compels us to purify ourselves, putting off the “*old man*,” and putting on the “*new man*” (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10). Take that hope away, and the required purity cannot be achieved. There is no human resource capable of producing such results.

“Even as He is Pure”

This purity is not defined by human wisdom. Even religious tradition, as hoary as it may be, cannot specify the purity in question. The kind of purity toward which believers strive is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the ultimate “*Man*,” and thus is the prototype for us all. It is said of Him, “*who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners . . . Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth . . . in Him is no sin*” (Heb 7:26; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5).

If we are going to be conformed to Christ in our bodies, it makes perfect sense to seek conformity to His character while we await that final change. Without any deviation whatsoever, Jesus said of His relationship to the Father, “*I do always those things that please Him*” (John 8:29). Of His words He said, “*I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father hath taught Me, I speak these things*” (John 8:28). Of His works He said, “*The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise*” (John 5:19).

All of these things reveal the extent of our Lord’s purity. He is the standard of pureness, and thus His purity is the goal for which we strive in the power of the Spirit— “*as He is pure.*”

We must not allow a manner of thinking to dominate us that puts Jesus’ purity beyond our reach. Salvation not only brings Jesus within our reach, it also brings purity within our grasp. This is involved in becoming “*partakers of Christ*” (Heb 3:14), and participating in the “*Divine nature*” (2 Pet 1:4). It is requisite to being “*conformed to the image*” of God’s “*Son.*”

We must settle it in our minds: **there is no place in heaven for anyone unlike Jesus!** As great as salvation is, it makes no provision for **un** Christ-like character. The grace of God is powerful and effective, but it will not allow us to remain in sin. The Lord has decreed this and will not repent, without holiness, “*no man shall see the Lord*” (Heb 13:12). Believers must be convinced of this.

Dominating Hope

The “*hope*” of which the text speaks has no power unless it dominates the heart. It cannot “save” us, enabling us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, if it remains in the background of our thinking. **Its effectiveness is found in its controlling presence.** Where hope is weak, spiritual effort is correspondingly weak. Where it is strong, men become more fervent in their

quest for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

This is what the Scriptures call “*abounding in hope*,” and it is accomplished “*through the power of the Holy Spirit*” (Rom 15:13). Our text affirms that such hope is found in every single person who has placed their hope in Christ and His appearing.

It goes without saying, that Christ’s return must be a point of emphasis among believers. It is “*the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*” (Tit 2:13). The lack of stress upon our Lord’s return has yielded miserable results among professed believers. It has also opened the door for a diversity of human doctrines, all of which are impotent to effect holiness in those embracing them.

This “*hope*” does not yield shame or frustration in any degree. As it is written, “*Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us*” NKJV (Rom 5:5). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the marvelous love of God and the hope of the believer have been joined together. The more we are convinced God loves us, the more we long for His Son “*from heaven.*” No believer will be disappointed or dissatisfied with this hope. When our Lord comes, we will receive even more than we have dared to imagine. There are no disadvantages to hope—none at all! Further, if we do not quench the Spirit, He will see to it that hope flourishes in our hearts. You must know that the Spirit is an effective and productive Worker. If He is not quenched, He will bring God’s work in you to its appointed culmination.

SIN IS THE TRANSGRESSION OF THE LAW

“*4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*” It might appear strange that defining sin follows a strong affirmation of hope. However, it must be remembered that purification has been introduced, and that has to do with a conscientious effort to eliminate sin from our lives. Viewed from this perspective, the whole matter of salvation has to do with extrication from sin. Because of the flesh, there is a temptation to lightly regard sin, imagining it can be indulged with impunity. Every believer must remember there is “*another law*” in them, “*warring against*” the law of their mind (Rom 7:23). We will not be rid of this law until we are fully conformed to the image of God’s Son, and that will occur when Jesus appears “*the second time*” (Phil 3:20-21; Heb 9:28). For this reason, we must be warned about the danger of sinning, and what is involved in transgression.

A Voluntary Action

Sin is something that is committed. It is not an involuntary action. The will is involved in sinning. A choice is made to sin—a deliberate choice. **While it is possible to sin, yet not realize you have sinned, it is not possible to sin without choosing to do so.** As simplistic as this might seem, the transgressor, apart from the conviction of the Holy Spirit, is not ready to admit sin was by choice. When Adam confronted God after he had sinned, he explained his transgression by

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saying, “*The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate*” (Gen 3:12

NKJV). When the Lord asked Eve, “*What is this you have done?*”, she replied, “*The serpent deceived me, and I ate*” (Gen 3:13 NKJV). These explanations, however, did not reduce the magnitude of the sin committed— one small jot or tittle.

Often men are alarmed when they hear of some friend or well known person “**falling into sin.**” When the Scriptures say “*but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression*” (1 Tim 2:14), the finality of the transgression is emphasized. The idea is that she toppled from her lofty position into the pit of transgression, where sin became the norm. But Eve sinned because she wanted to sin, and she wanted to sin because Satan deceived her. It is still that way. People sin because they **want** to sin. Satan deceives them into thinking there is an advantage to be had in sinning. In the wake of her delusion, Eve “*saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise*” (Gen 3:6). Her assessments could not possibly have been more wrong! The tree was NOT good for food! It was NOT pleasant to insightful eyes. It was NOT the way to become wise.

Thus, sin is always “*committed,*” or “*done,*” with the will, and by choice. Even when we are sorely tempted, if we do not COMMIT what we are tempted to do, it is not sin. That is why Paul could say of the invasion of wretched thoughts, “*Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me*” (Rom 7:17). Involuntary thoughts are fiery darts from the wicked one. If they are not “*committed,*” we have not sinned. It is one thing for the believer to be “*drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*” It is quite another matter for lust to “*conceive*” and bring forth sin (James 1:13-14). Our text is speaking about what enticement leads to, and not enticement itself.

Why bring Up Sin?

Why is sin brought up in this context? It seems as though we plummet from the lofty heights of anticipation to the dark halls of danger. There is a reason for what appears to be a diversion.

The very concept of “*hope*” presents the status of waiting on our part, and seeming “*delay*” on Christ’s part. Mind you, the Lord is not actually delaying His return, but it appears to unbelief as though that is the case. **When men begin to reason in this manner—that the Lord’s return is delayed—they are naturally attracted to sin.**

Jesus spoke of this tendency in a significant teaching about stewardship. “*Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath*” NKJV (Luke 12:42-44). Faith compels the servant of Christ to faithfully handle his stewardship until his Lord returns. Although that return may not come for a long time, yet when it occurs, the faithful servant will be found doing his Lord’s will.

However, if the steward begins to reason that he has time enough to be idle, he will leave his stewardship and indulge the appetites of the flesh. This Jesus continued, “*But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers*” NKJV (Luke 12:45-46).

The test of time is the reason for this word about sin. Were the sky blazing with the glory of the returning Savior, no one would have to be warned about sin. But that is not the case now, and the Spirit will not allow us to ignore the presence of sin and our vulnerability to it. **Our love for Christ must not diminish while we wait for Him!** If it does diminish, we will sin, and God has no tolerance for sin.

The Transgression of the Law

The Word of God does not speak kindly about sin or sinners. Although human nature is corrupt, the Spirit will not allow us to excuse sin because we are “human.” Sin is not seen as the unavoidable consequence of being human, but as “*the transgression of the law.*” It is not explained as a sort of sickness over which believers have no power, but as “*the transgression of the law.*” Sin is not the result of an unfortunate circumstance, or being treated unjustly, but is “*the transgression of the law.*”

The test of time is the reason for this word about sin. Were the sky blazing with the glory of the returning Savior, no one would have to be warned about sin. But that is not the case now, and the Spirit will not allow us to ignore the presence of sin and our vulnerability to it.

I am careful to point out again that the text is not speaking of the tendency to sin that is resident in the “*old man,*” or “*the flesh.*” Nor, indeed, is it referring to the presence of unwanted thoughts, hurled at us by the wicked one. I will even go so far as to say he is not speaking of those who love the Lord and abhor sin, yet must confess “*I have sinned.*” Such departures, though common, are not excused by God. They must, and can be, forgiven (1 John 1:9; 2:1). But this is not the matter addressed by this text. “*Sin,*” in this case, emphasizes the deliberateness of the deed. It is something “*committed.*”

“Transgression”

Just what is “*transgression?*” The word itself has the sound of harshness in it. This word comes from **avnomi,an** (a-nom-ian), and means wickedness, or lawlessness Barclay-Newman . It is often translated “*iniquity*” (Matt 7:23; 13:41; 24:12; Rom 6:19; Heb 1:9). It speaks more of a spirit than of a deed. For example, when Adam and Eve sinned, the appearance of their deed did not seem to be that serious—eating some fruit. However, in order to eat that fruit, they had to do the following, all of which were wicked.

- **Thrust the Word of God from their minds**
- **Listen to the devil**
- **Think upon what the devil had said**
- **Focus their attention on what God had forbidden**
- **Deliberately pluck the fruit from the tree**

In summary, our ancient parents had to consider themselves above their God in order to eat that fruit. That is the sum of “*iniquity*” or “*lawlessness*”—“*transgression.*” It is the usurpation of Divine authority and the exaltation of self. **You cannot sin without ignoring God and what He has said.** To transgress is to see a restraining barrier before what is forbidden, and leap over the barrier doing what is forbidden anyway.

Our Lord does “*forgive iniquity and transgression,*” but He cannot ignore it (Ex 34:7; Num 14:18). When sin is “*committed,*” the guilty party must acknowledge what has been done. No excuse must be presented to the Lord for such deeds.

“Sin is the transgression of the law.” More contemporary versions read, *“sin is lawlessness.”* That translation is linguistically correct but doctrinally weak. *“Lawlessness”* presumes principles that have been articulated, or clearly stated. In fact, the Scriptures clearly state, *“where there is no law there is no transgression”* (Rom 4:15). In this very expression, we find a token of Divine mercy. Not willing to leave men in total ignorance, God makes known what He approves and disapproves.

We must not conclude from this that the absence of, or ignorance of, law excuses the sinner. It is elsewhere written, *“For as many as have sinned without law **will also perish without law**, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law **written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness**, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)”* (Rom 2:12-15). Thus, even though God’s law may **not** be known in a written, or codified, manner, yet God has given man a conscious awareness of right and wrong. Although that consciousness is not as thorough as the written law, it becomes a basis for the judgment of the individual.

When, therefore, a person who is ignorant of the written law, goes against his conscience, given to him by God, he also transgresses the law. *“Sin is the transgression of the law,”* whether written on tables of stone or *“written in their hearts.”* To put it another way, sin is never excusable.

Correctly seen, *“the law”* is a reflection of the character of God. It places the Divine nature in a moral code, outlining what He does and does not do, imposing those characteristics upon men. The Ten Commandments are God’s moral law in summation. When giving the Law to Moses, the Lord said, *“Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and **a law**, and **commandments** which I have written; that thou mayest teach them”* (Ex 24:12).

“The Law” is affirmed to have defined sin, showing what is right and what is wrong. It was not given to justify men, but to show them they could not be justified apart from Divine intervention. Thus it is written, *“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for **by the law is the knowledge of sin**”* NKJV (Rom 3:20). Sin, therefore, is not defined by the church or some religious council. It is defined by the Law of God.

Writing of this very thing, Paul says, *“What shall we say then? is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, **I had not known sin, but by the law** : for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet”* (Rom 7:7).

Sin, therefore, *“is the transgression of the law.”* It is crossing over a clearly defined barrier, and doing so willingly. As great as salvation is, it makes no provision for transgressing God’s law. Even though we are left to struggle against an adversary and inward inclinations to evil, the Lord will not allow a place for sin. At some point, those who will dwell in the house of the Lord forever must come to grips with sin. They must appropriate the appointed remedy for sin. They must declare war upon sin. There must be in them a certain distaste for sin, and revulsion at the thought of it. No matter how long they wait for their Lord, they must strengthen their hearts against sin.

As great as salvation is, it makes no provision for transgressing God’s law. Even though we are left to struggle against an adversary and inward inclinations to evil, the Lord will not allow a place for sin.

The boundaries established by the Law have not been removed. **The Law itself remains wherever the lawless are found** . As it is written, “*Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers [general murderers] , for whoremongers [male prostitute, or sodomite] , for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers [one who enslaves another] , for liars, for perjured persons [giving false testimony] , and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine*” (1 Tim 1:9-10).

In Summation

In summation, the Spirit has alerted us to the jeopardy of time. We are in the stance of “*waiting*,” looking for the return of our Lord. The Lord has made no provision for us to sin during that period, taking our attention away from Christ’s coming and placing it upon the things of this world. It is imperative that we be pure when He finds us. Our faith must be strong, and our resistance of the devil consistent. Although this is a most ambitious assignment, the hope of Christ’s return, and our change into His likeness, provide the incentive to “*purify*” ourselves, “*even as He is pure.*”

Those who are mindful of their Lord’s return will find sin distasteful. They will be more alert to the devil’s devices, and more energetic in appropriating “*all things pertaining to life and godliness.*” However, should we choose to minimize Christ’s return, conducting our lives without an acute awareness of its imminence, we will be brought to the place where we will sin. **There is no soul strong enough to avoid sin without the dominance of “the blessed hope.”** Where, therefore, there is an absence of reduction of emphasize on the return of our Lord, a place has been made for Satan—and he will occupy that place! Part of our armor has thus been laid aside--the “*helmet, the hope of salvation*” (1 Thess 5:8). Make sure of this, you cannot survive Satan’s assault without your helmet.

MADE KNOWN TO TAKE AWAY OUR SINS

“*5 And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin.*” Once again, the glorious Gospel of Christ is placed before us for consideration. This is the consistent manner of the Spirit when He addresses believers. **It is important that we maintain a lively awareness of the centrality of the Gospel of Christ.** From time to time, men have thought the Gospel was only for alien sinners, those who were not reconciled to God. The Gospel, however, remains “*the power of God unto salvation*” as long as there is a salvation to be perfected. Believers are told they are being “*kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*” (1 Pet 1:5). Those in Christ are also reminded they are being succored, or helped, in “*the day of salvation*” (2 Cor 6:2). Certain who had sinned in the Corinthian church had repented, and were told “*godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation*” (2 Cor 7:10). All believers are to be involved in working out their “*own salvation with fear and trembling*” (Phil 2:12). You will recall Jude “*gave all diligence*” to write concerning the “*common salvation*” (Jude 1).

All of this confirms that being “*saved*” does not refer to a fixed state, but to a work in process. Thus, those in Christ are told they “*shall be saved from wrath through Him*” (Rom 5:9), and “*shall be saved by His life*” (Rom 5:10). They “*are being saved*” (1 Cor 1:18), and the “*day*” of their “*salvation is nearer than when [they] first believed*” (Rom 13:11). There should be no further need to substantiate this point.

Salvation, in all of its aspects, is inexorably connected with the Gospel of Christ. **At no point does salvation move beyond the Gospel, or render it unnecessary to the believer.** It is imperative that it be kept “*in memory*” if we are to be “*saved*” (1 Cor 15:1-3). Further, no word from Jesus or the Apostles suggests that such a retention of the Gospel is possible apart from its proclamation.

The Apostolic Manner

Because there has been a deluge of confusion on this matter, it is necessary to establish the necessity of the Gospel to our hearts. This is germane, for we are being told of the role of hope in our preparation for the Lord's return, and the purifying of ourselves from sin. The Gospel relates to this subject.

The death of Christ, for example, is referred to at least 95 times in the Epistles (Romans through Jude). Justification, redemption, and remission are associated with that death (Rom 3:24-25). The logic behind being saved by Christ's intercession is founded upon the accomplishments of His death (Rom 5:6-11). The validity of our baptism is confirmed by its association with the Gospel (Rom 6:3-10). The absurdity of committing fornication is unveiled by the powerful Gospel (1 Cor 6:19-20). An incentive for giving is found in the Gospel of Christ (2 Cor 8:9). The correction of the Galatians propensity to law was addressed by the Gospel (Gal 3:10-13; 4:4-5). The need and reasonableness of holiness is supported by the Gospel (Tit 2:14).

Time will not allow for a more thorough coverage of this subject. It is necessary that

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the people of God develop a hunger for the Gospel. It must be seen as a vast ocean with unplumbed depths. It always is associated with living by faith and walking in the Spirit. **The path of the godly never leads beyond the sound of the Gospel.** When the Gospel seems to have no relevance, the individual has wandered beyond the perimeter of Divine acceptance. Such a one stands in jeopardy of condemnation. God Himself cannot forget what His Son has done. The person who imagines he can do so, only betrays an abysmal level of ignorance.

Manifested to Take Away Our Sins

When the *"Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,"* He went about *"doing good, healing all that were oppressed of the devil"* (Acts 10:38). But that is not why He was manifested, or made known. He did not come to feed the multitudes, although He did on at least two occasions. Neither, indeed, did He come into the world to address its social injustices. There was a higher purpose that governed the degree of our Lord's involvement in all these things.

Here is something we *"KNOW."* That is, it is something that is common to all believers. The Gospel has brought this to our awareness. *"He was manifested to take away our sins."* Although His *"goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting"* (Micah 5:2), our sins were taken away by Him being *"manifested,"* made incarnate, or displayed visibly before the sons of men.

Our sins could not be taken away by a Divine fiat, or pronouncement. The worlds were summoned into existence by God's Word, but **redemption could not be accomplished by an utterance**. Sin could not be simply expelled from God's presence, as Satan was from heaven. It was imperative that *"a body"* be *"prepared"* for the Word, and He enter into the fallen realm (Heb 10:5-8).

In coming into the world as *"a babe,"* or *"seed of woman,"* our Lord assumed identity with the

ones God had determined to save. He did not come as an angel, *“For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham”* NRSV (Heb 2:6). The *“help”* He came to give was not of a temporary nature, i.e., healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and raising the dead. None of those marvelous displays of Divine mercy required Him to come into the world *“born of a woman, born under the law”* (Gal 4:4). He came into the world to *“take away our sins.”*

This is precisely what John the Baptist revealed about Jesus. *“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world !”* NKJV (John 1:29). Our text says He came to *“take away OUR sins.”* John said *“the sins of the world.”* What is the difference? Or is there any? John’s declaration was of Divine provision—a provision that reached as far as the curse: *“the world.”* Our text is confirming how unreasonable sin is for the believer.

“Take Away ”

The expression *“take away”* is rooted in the types and shadows established under the Old Covenant. It portrays bearing, or carrying, the sins away from the presence of the Lord. On the day of atonement, Aaron was to offer special sacrifices: a young bull for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering. The young bull was to be offered for himself and his house. He was also to take two goats from the children of Israel for a *“sin offering.”* These were to be presented before the Lord at *“the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.”* Lots were then cast for the two goats. One lot was *“for the Lord,”* and the other *“for the scapegoat.”* The goat on which the lot fell *“to be the scape goat”* was *“presented alive before the LORD, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness.”*

After killing the young bull, Aaron was to take its blood *“and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times.”* Then he was to kill the goat of the sin offering, and do precisely the same thing with its blood *“for the people.”* No other man was allowed in the tabernacle when this atonement was being performed.

If Jesus was revealed to *“take away our sins,”* what possible reason can be cited for taking them up again? What explanation can be offered for being *“overcome”* by the very sins that were *“taken away”* ?

After extensive ceremony for the atonement of the altar, the children of Israel, and the tabernacle itself, Aaron turned his attention to the remaining live goat. With deliberation, he was commanded to *“lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat.”* Then, choosing a suitable and strong man, Aaron was to *“send him (the goat) away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited : and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness”* (Lev 16:1-22).

In this ceremony, a vivid picture of the atoning sacrifice of Christ was depicted. The ritual was extensive because the atonement Jesus would accomplish would be extensive.

When the Spirit uses the phrase *“take away the sins of the world,”* He is referring to the imagery developed under the law. Jesus bore the sins of the world like that goat bore the sins of Israel. Just as the goat was released in a land that was not inhabited, so our sins were taken where God no longer remembered them.

Our sins were, in fact, removed from the face of the Lord God Himself. As long as they remained before Him, He could not bless us as He promised. However, once they were

righteously and effectively “*taken away*,” He could deal with us as sons. In this arrangement, the sufficient Savior is the High Priest, the young bull, the ram, the two goats, and the fit man—all in One! He thoroughly implements the extensive shadow, leaving no part of it unfulfilled.

The Logic of the Text

There is a spiritual logic to this text that is powerful. If Jesus was revealed to “*take away our sins*,” what possible reason can be cited for taking them up again? What explanation can be offered for being “*overcome*” by the very sins that were “*taken away*”? It simply is not possible for those in Christ to sin unless they are deceived and moved to disregard the reason for Christ being made known.

No person in Christ will boast that they have not sinned—at least they cannot say such a thing truthfully. But they will all acknowledge there is no satisfactory reason that can be given to God for such transgression. It is therefore to be “*confessed*” and forgiveness thereby appropriated.

In Him IS No Sin

There is much significance in the way in which this is stated. The text does not say “*in Him WAS not sin*,” but “*in Him IS no sin*.” In other places, the Scriptures affirm the sinlessness of Christ WHEN He was offered to God. “*For He [the Father] made Him [the Son] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*” (2 Cor 5:21). Again, it is written, “*Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth*” (1 Pet 2:21-22). In both of these verses, the sinlessness of Christ is in the past tense: “*knew no sin*,” and “*did no sin*.” Much of this is made elsewhere in Scripture. He “*offered Himself without spot to God*” (Heb 9:14, “*a Lamb without blemish and without spot*” (1 Pet 1:19), and “*was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin*” (Heb 4:15). All of this points to His worthiness as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

But our text is in the present tense, not the past: i.e., “*in Him there is no sin*.” Here the Spirit is not addressing the matter of Christ’s personal holiness. Rather, He is showing that “*IN Christ*,” that is, in our union with Him, there is no sin. **Our union with Jesus will yield no sin, for there is no sin in Him.** He did bear our sins “*in His body on the tree*” (1 Pet 2:24). But those sins were taken away, so to speak, into an uninhabitable place, where they could not be dredged up again. Believers are now “*in Christ*” (Rom 6:3; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 3:27). It is to be acknowledged by every believer that there is no room for sin “*in Christ*.” Even though men allow its entrance into their presence, be sure Jesus does NOT! He is not capable of living together with sin. When sin comes in, either it must leave, or Jesus will.

Sin never results from fellowship with Christ! There is “*no sin*” in Him! There is nothing—absolutely nothing—about Jesus that encourages or condones sin. Unanimity with Him will never draw a person into sin. “*In Him there IS no sin*.” Thus, the lines are clearly drawn for all believers. **God has made provision for the remission of sin, but not for remaining in sin.** Fellowship with Christ makes sin distasteful, and never palatable. What Jesus did not allow to enter into Himself when He was here, He will not condone entering into you while you are in fellowship with Him. Sin is always unreasonable, foolish, and the result of deception. There is no acceptable reason for or explanation for sin.

Sin and faith cannot cohabit. As soon as sin is entertained, faith begins to wane, and will finally be denied altogether unless sin is abhorred. Although this is apparent to us when we are living by faith, it becomes obscure when our attention is drawn to forbidden things. Satan’s design, of course,

is to intrigue us with evil. **He knows very well we will commit sin if we look at it long enough.** This Epistle is written to strengthen our grasp of the Gospel, thereby reducing the possibility of being attracted to sin.

A BOLD AFFIRMATION

“6 Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him.” This is one of the many challenging statements made in this short Epistle. I say “challenging” because such affirmations boldly confront stereotyped theology and neatly packaged belief-systems. These statements are unwavering in both tone and doctrine. Their acceptance requires strong faith and spiritual maturity. Permit me to cite a few of them before we deal with this particular verse.

- If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.–1:6
- 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.–1:7
- If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.–1:8
- If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.–1:9
- If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.–1:10
- He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.–2:4
- But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.–2:5
- He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.–2:9
- He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.–2:10
- 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.–2:11
- If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.–2:15
- Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.–2:22
- If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.–2:29
- Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.–3:2
- And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.–3:3

These statements are unwavering in both tone and doctrine. Their acceptance requires

strong faith and spiritual maturity.

Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.–3:6

- He that committeth sin is of the devil.–3:8
- Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.–3:9
- Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.–3:10
- Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer.–3:15
- And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.–3:22
- And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him.–3:24
- Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.–4:2
- We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us.–4:6
- Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.–4:7
- He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.–4:8
- If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.–4:12
- Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.–4:15
- If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.–4:20
- Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.–5:1a
- Every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.–5:1b
- For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.–5:4
- He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.–5:12
- And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.–5:15
- If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death.–5:16
- We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.–5:18

Strong faith and hope require unwavering statements. The “*full assurance of faith*” cannot be realized through human philosophy, or the sharing of religious opinions. While it is certainly not wrong to share our perceptions of the truth, faith itself “*comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*” NASB (Rom 10:17). That “*word*” is not primarily a directive outlining how we are to live, but is more a proclamation. While John does deal with our manner of life, he places a greater emphasis on kingdom realities—things as they are, not things as they should be. The statement before us is such an utterance.

Whosoever Abides in Him

John has already affirmed the necessity of continuing “*in the Son, and in the Father*” (2:24). **There is no salvation apart from involvement with the Son.** Further, this “*great salvation*” provides the means for abiding in Him. It is as the “*anointing*” which we have “*received from*” Him abides in and teaches us that we are promised, “*you will abide in Him*” (2:27). The abiding of reference, therefore, assumes we have neither grieved nor quenched the Holy Spirit, and are “*walking in the light.*”

This is the part of us that has been regenerated: the “*new man,*” or “*inner man.*” It is the redeemed “*I*” of the seventh chapter of Romans (verses 15-25), that finds delight in the Law of God, and hates every false way. It is essential that we see this because of the strength of this statement. There is a part of us that is NOT in Christ—namely our body, as well as the other parts encompassed in the larger word “*flesh.*” **In a sense, we carry the entirety of Calvary in our persons.** The Christ of the cross dwells within us. The penitent thief is represented by the “*new man.*” The hardened and impenitent thief is also represented by the “*old man,*” the remnant of our former self that will remain with us as long we are in the body. This form of reasoning is represented extensively in the sixth chapter of Romans, as well as the fourth chapter of Ephesians and the third chapter of Colossians. There is a part of us that is to be “*put off,*” as well as a part to be “*put on.*” There is a component to be nurtured and a part to be crucified.

When our text says “*Whoever abides in Him,*” it is specifically speaking about those who are “*in Christ Jesus,*” living by faith and walking in the Spirit. Such an one “*abides*” in Christ by maintaining the relationship into which he was translated by God Himself (Col 1:13). **He stays where God has placed Him** (1 Cor 1:30), receiving nourishment from the Head, and being conformed to the image of God’s Son. Abiding in Him is another way of saying ALIVE, for apart from being joined to Christ, there is only death.

Does Not Sin

And what may be said of the person abiding in Christ? “*Whoever abides in Him does not sin*” NKJV . Other versions read, “*No one who abides in Him sins*” NASB . “*No one who lives in him keeps on sinning*” NIV . “*Anyone who is in Him does no sin*” BBE .

Inconsistent with Abiding in Christ

However, sin is always out of harmony with life in Christ. It always has to do with death, not life.

The first thing to see is that **sin is altogether inconsistent with abiding in Christ.** Our text does not mean that it is impossible for a Christian to sin. Earlier we were told, “*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,*” and “*If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us*” (1:8,10). Further, we have been apprized that provision has been made for believers who do sin. “*If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*” (2:1). **However, sin is always out of harmony with life in Christ. It always has to do with death, not life.**

Habitual Sin?

Some have concluded that “*does not sin*” really means does not sin habitually. The verb is active indicative which means “*does not keep on sinning.*” However, that is quite different than saying *habitually sin* . If *keeps on sinning continually* is meant, it would have better been stated, “*Whoever abides in Him does not abide in sin.*” But that is not how the Spirit states the case. He compares

abiding in Christ with continuing to sin. He certainly does not mean abiding in Christ is a habit, or a way of life—something that is occasional, but not consistent. Where is such a view of life in Christ ever promulgated by the Spirit?

The idea is that sin finds its terminal point in Christ, and cannot continue *“in Him.”* As an environment (and we are *“in Christ”*), Jesus suffocates sin. It cannot exist in His presence, nor can the one abiding in Him continue sinning. This is the same line of reasoning used in the sixth chapter of Romans. *“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?”* (6:1-2).

This precise word (*a`marta,nei*) is used six times in Scripture. Three of them are in First John (3:6,8; 5:18). In First Corinthians 6:18, it refers to committing fornication, and may be committed in a single act. In First Corinthians 7:36, it refers to a man who married to avoid fornication, stating in marrying *“his virgin”* he was not sinning—a single deed. Titus 3:11 uses the word to describe a heretic (divisive person) who does not listen to admonition.

I conclude, therefore, that the use of the word, as well as the consistent doctrine of Scripture, does not justify saying *“does not sin”* means does not sin habitually. Rather, it confirms that sin and Christ cannot be joined. To the degree we are in Christ, we do not sin. To the degree we are not in Christ, we do sin. That there are, in fact, degrees of conformity to Christ is clearly proclaimed. We are being *“changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another”* by the Spirit of God (2 Cor 3:18). Christ is also being *“formed”* in us (Gal 4:19).

Later the Spirit will say *“Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God”* NKJV (1 John 3:9). The part of us that is in Christ can no more sin on the earth than it can in heaven. Jesus in you will not sin just as surely as He did not sin when He dwelt among us. Without laboring the point, and as I have already said, there is more to you, however, that what is *“in Christ.”* There is *“another law”* at work in OUR *“members,”* and it is relentless in its demands (Rom 7:23). That *“law,”* however, is powerless as we *“put on the new man.”* It is ever true, *“Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh”* (Gal 5:16).

Verses like this will develop a certain abhorrence for sin within us, if we will allow them to do so. They are not to be approached with a mind to work out theological differences between professed believers, or to buttress sectarian dogmas. **Rather, they confirm the absolute intolerance God has for sin, how there is no place for it in Jesus, and the new creation is not capable of living in contradiction of Christ.** The part of us that *does* sin is not in Christ. That is precisely why it is to be *“crucified.”* That is why we are to *“put to death your members which are on the earth”* —the part that is capable of sin and incapable of righteousness (Col 3:5).

This is precisely the point made in the eighth chapter of Romans. **In order to live after the flesh, one must live in disassociation from Jesus.** In order to *“set”* our minds on the flesh, we must remove them from *“the things of the Spirit”* (Rom 8:5). To be *“carnally minded”* (set the mind on the flesh, RSV) *“is death”* (Rom 8:6), and places one at war with God (Rom 8:7), and renders the person incapable of pleasing God (Rom 8:8). It should therefore be clear that the Divine nature that is in you is incapable of sin. Yet, that nature must be *“put on,”* else the remnants of our old nature that remain with us will soon gain control of us. *But “put on,”* he means live in its power.

There is a line of reasoning here that must not escape us. Just as beholding Christ transforms us into his likeness, so failing

to behold Him causes us to sin. That, of course, is the whole point the Spirit is making.

Whoever Sins

If we imagine that the first part of this verse is strong, the second is even stronger. The Spirit speaks with such pungency that it is not possible to ignore what is said. *“Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.”* Wherever there is no newness of life, there can only be sin! Too, wherever sin continues, there is no affinity with Jesus. Sin can only continue by reverting to the realm where it can be expressed—the world and the flesh. It has wisely been said, “Christ is never dormant where He reigns.” Just as the sun drives the darkness away, so the *“Sun of righteousness”* dispels the captivating darkness of sin. That is the reason for this statement.

The Spirit will now show us that sin springs from NOT seeing or knowing Christ. It is the result of a broken fellowship, for **neither the perception or fellowship of Jesus can foster sin .**

Has Not Seen Him

“Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.” He does not say the one who IS sinning IS not seeing Christ, but that He has not SEEN Him. Be clear about this. He does not mean that when we sin we cease to see Christ. Rather, He means we sin because we **have ceased** to see Him!

There is a line of reasoning here that must not escape us. Just as beholding Christ transforms us into his likeness, so failing to behold Him causes us to sin. That, of course, is the whole point the Spirit is making. Our conversion took place when the *“light of the glory of God”* was seen *“in the face of Christ Jesus.”* Our bodies will be *“changed”* when we see our Savior *“as He is”* (1 John 3:1-2). Both changes are effected by beholding. In the meantime, we are being *“changed from glory to glory”* by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, and that is also accomplished by *“beholding”* (2 Cor 3:18).

There is only one part of you that can keep on sinning—the *“flesh,” “old man,”* or *“natural man.”* That part has not and cannot see the Lord, and has no part of the Kingdom of God. As a son of God, you are required to reject its call for attention. If you refuse to do so, the flesh will soon dominate you again, and that state is a most dreadful one. Of that condition the Spirit says, *“For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning . For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them”* (2 Pet 2:20-21).

There is another aspect to this passage that should be noted. John has told us about false teachers that went of from them, but were not of them (2:19). Just so, there are those who bear the name of Jesus, yet really have no part of Him. They have, in every sense of the word, **never** seen the Lord. That is why they continue to live in the realm from which Jesus delivers us.

Has Not Known Him

“Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him .” To *“know”* God and Christ IS eternal life (John 17:3; 1 John 5:20). That knowledge, or acquaintance and experience with Deity, is what keeps us from sinning. Thus, when sin erupts, it is sure evidence that, at the very best, the knowledge of God has been imperfect. At the worst, it may never have existed at all.

Again, He does not say whoever is sinning does not know Him, but HAS NOT known Him.

The lack of the knowledge of God is the soil, in which sin grows and flourishes. To put it another way, the less aware and appreciative we are of the Lord, the more attractive sin is, and the more vulnerable we become to the devices of the devil. It is not possible to live at a distance from Christ and NOT sin. When we do not know Him experientially, walking in conscious fellowship with Him, we are shut up to transgression.

While this is thought jars upon the lethargic soul, it is imperative that its truth be grasped. The flesh, or the natural part of us, is wholly incapable of resisting the devil or laying hold on eternal life. That is what Jesus meant when He said it “*profits nothing*” (John 6:63). It can bring us no advantage in the matter of salvation—which is the whole of the matter.

Further, even the “*new creation*” can make no advance whatsoever apart from fellowship with Christ. At no point, or at any time, may the child of God dispense with Christ, as though He were no longer needed. At the very moment we cease to have a life-giving connection with the Head, we begin to die. A gravitation to the flesh begins, the glory of God starts to wane, and the devil becomes more powerful against us. Unless that process is aborted by running eagerly back to Christ, there is not a shred of hope. However, the moment our eye falls upon the Lord Jesus, renewal and recover begins, and the devil commences to lose his power.

In declaring such things, care must be taken to ensure the struggling believer that he does not waffle between the condemned and uncondemned state, standing in jeopardy every moment of his life. Many a trembling soul has been dominated by fear, supposing there is never a moment of safety in Christ Jesus. Such souls must be assured that God is “*able to keep us from falling, and present us faultless before His presence with exceeding joy*” (Jude 24-25). However, it is through our faith—our perception of and sensitivity to Him—that He keeps us.

Thus, our text has called upon us to stretch to look upward and forward. We have been assured our Lord is coming again, and that we will be like Him when we see Him as He is. In the meantime, while we eagerly wait, full provision has been made for us to be fully oriented for our final change. The Lord will continue to conform us to the image of His Son if we will look to Him. The more we perceive Him in truth, the more we become like Him.

To the extent we are unlike Christ, to that extent we have neither seen or known Him. To the measure we bear His likeness, to **that** degree we HAVE seen and known Him. As our hearts take these words seriously, they will assist us in overcoming the devil and appropriating the rich things that belong to us in Christ Jesus. As we examine ourselves, these texts will be seen as most valuable, and to be highly regarded. They set before us things indispensable to the perfecting of holiness and fellowship with Christ Jesus. I bid you to take hold of them, take them into your heart and mind, and live in the glorious power of them.

CONCLUSION

This text has been an especially provocative one, stimulating profitable thoughts. Some students of Scripture have pointed out the academic simplicity found in First John. An extensive vocabulary is not used, and thoughts are concise and to the point. Yet, there is profoundness to this book that is evident to all believers. The affirmations made in First John are laden with spiritual food. The mind must dwell upon them to derive their benefit. On the surface, some of them appear to be too general: i.e., “*every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God*” (1 John 4:7). Because of this, men attempt to explain what this does **not** mean, or that it does not mean what it says. When, however, human views are imposed upon the text, it loses its power, and becomes inaccessible to the heart.

Spiritual advance is accomplished through edification, and leads to increasing glory. The lack of edification aborts the process, pushing the body of Christ back into darkness and inevitable sin.

Through the Spirit, John is speaking from an elevated view—from the heavenly perspective. He is showing us that such things as loving God, knowing Him, and believing Jesus is the Christ, involve infinitely more than can be perceived by a casual glance. Each of these things, involves Divine activity as well as our own. As such, they are profound expressions with unimaginable potential. If we are to comprehend this book, we must come up higher, into the “*heavenly places*” where all of the blessings are found.

Feed the Flock of God

The text we have reviewed underscores the necessity of feeding the flock of God, as He appointed (John 21:15-17; 1 Pet 5:2). It is altogether too common for the Christ’s body to be given a meager diet of the things of God. When the attention of the church is turned to numerical expansion and community impression, it is done at the expense of God’s people. A highly organized institution that offers a variety of activities to the public may appear to be spiritually influential, but that may not be the case at all. **The Lord does not work through mechanisms in which He is not preeminent.** The Divine objective for the church is met by means of its immediate contact with Jesus Christ. Each member is to hold fast to “*the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God*” (Col 2:19). That process is accomplished through edification, and leads to increasing glory. **The lack of edification aborts the process, pushing the body of Christ back into darkness and inevitable sin.** It is becoming increasingly evident to me that this has not yet been seen by the masses in Christendom.

No Allowance for the Flesh

This text also confirms the nature of the Kingdom of God, which makes no allowance for the indulgence of the flesh. Regardless of its refinement and culture, there is no place for “*the flesh*” in the Kingdom of God. **The Lord has provided no door through which it can enter, and makes no allowance for its expression.** “*The flesh profits nothing,*” and those who operate in its domain “*cannot please God.*” Flesh belongs to the realm of darkness and alienation. It is to be crucified, denied, and refused expression. If heeded, it will rob the child of God of faith and hope, and finally cause him to be disqualified from the race and the obtaining of the prize.

Divine Intimacy

The Spirit also substantiates the essentiality of being close to, and perceptive of, the Lord Jesus Christ. This Epistle, you will remember, is written that we might have fellowship with both the Father and the Son. That is where spiritual life is realized and advanced. The joy that we require is found in the Lord’s presence. As it is written, “*in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore*” (Psa 16:11).

There can be no glory without transformation, and there can be no transformation without exposure to the glory of God “*in the face of Christ Jesus.*”

Where there is no fellowship with the Son, there can be no growth in Him. Nothing that God requires can be fulfilled without fellowship with His Son. In His dealings with us, God cannot do without Jesus, and neither can you.

The Prominence of Hope

Finally, the prominence of hope is declared with great power. The anticipation of our Lord's return, and of ourselves being "*like Him*" exercises a powerful influence upon us. In the energy of that hope, the child of God will extricate from his life everything that contaminates the soul and makes us unprepared for Christ's coming.

In order to do this, hope must be dominant. **Hope will not stand behind lesser things, or wait for the hour of crisis to do its work.** It must rule, or it will not stay.

Whatever minimizes, or even stifles, hope is an enemy to the soul. Such things jeopardize our salvation, and have the potential of alienating us from God. When, however, our anticipation of the glory to come is strengthened, we have gained unspeakable advantage. I challenge you to major things that promote the "*one hope.*"

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Book of 1st John

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #5

WORLDLY CONNECTION

“ 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. 8 He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 9 Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. 10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. 11 For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, 12 not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. 13 Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. 15 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” (1 John 3:7-15 NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

In the world, wisdom is often related to human philosophy. It frequently involves conjecture, opinion, theories, and assumptions. Because of this, worldly wisdom, however disciplined, cannot yield the “*full assurance*” of faith or hope in those embracing it. It is like a foundation of sand that shifts here and there, being unstable.

It is unfortunate that such wisdom has found its way into the professed church. An astounding amount of opinion and philosophy is being vaunted among believers. It is the

source of division and contention that has often reached epochal proportions. Historically, it has even occasioned the violent death of those holding opposing views. In fact, professed followers of Jesus have even called themselves after the names of the men whose thoughts they have embraced.

All of this accentuates the nature of the times in which we are living. They are truly “*perilous*,” because the truth itself is being given, at the best, secondary consideration. Whole denominations have been formed upon the flimsy foundation of purely human views. As if that were not transgression enough, these groups often condemn all who do not embrace their views, going so far as to consider themselves the solitary custodians of God’s truth. All of this is done in the name of the Lord, yet is founded upon the words of men. Coincidentally, the preponderance of current Christian literature is nothing more than a purveyance of human opinion on subjects having little or nothing to do with eternity. This is the current environment in which faith must be maintained.

While this may appear to have little to do with our text, it is not at all divorced from it. When a person takes the Word of God in hand, and begins to search it with an intent to see the truth, a stark realization will dawn upon the soul. The Scriptures stand apart from all other literature. They do not promote private views or opinions, nor are they the expression of ideas developed by certain theological experts. There is a firmness in Scripture that is most arresting. **Its power is in its affirmations—the pronouncements that it makes.** They are without equivocation, and free from all ambiguity. Such statements are to be believed unreservedly.

For example, the word “*verily*,” often translated “*truly*,” is used at least 140 times in the Word of God. It is the prelude to a statement that cannot be controverted, and upon which men are called to put their trust. In keeping with this line of thinking, the expression “*Thus saith the Lord*” occurs no less than 415 times in Genesis through Malachi. The phrases “*the Word of the Lord*,” “*mouth of the Lord*,” and similar expressions, also speak to our faith. They summon us to embrace the Word with certainty, suspending our very lives upon it. God’s word is free from any contamination, flaw, or element of falseness.

Once these things are recognized, the one relying upon the Word of God develops a certain distaste for religious theorizing and philosophizing. Such things are seen as distracting, while others see them as interesting, and even intriguing.

The text before us must be seen in this light. Certain statements will be made that will sound either too harsh or too lenient. They will appear on the surface to be stated in a general way. But that is not the case at all. People will be viewed as either of the world or of God, with nothing in between. People are either in Christ or not in Christ, of God or not of God, in light or in darkness, walking in love or not in love. They are either dominated by Christ or the devil, and there can be no neutral ground.

All of this is very apparent to faith, but it is totally obscured to the flesh. Frequently we will hear expressions like “carnal Christians,” “worldly Christians,” “sinning believers,” and the like. Such expressions are nowhere found in Scripture. They represent certain views of Scripture that allow for a person in affiliation with Christ to maintain a close association with the world at the same time. The Spirit will confirm to our hearts that this is not possible.

Once these things are recognized, the one relying upon the Word of God develops a certain distaste for religious theorizing and philosophizing. Such things are seen as distracting, while

others may see them as interesting, and even intriguing. Here, in my judgment, is an area where there is much room for improvement. There is altogether too much speculation among believers.

This very Epistle is written by the most seasoned believer, from the standpoint of time, the world has ever seen. He outlived all of the other Apostles, and is known as one especially close to the Lord— *“the disciple whom Jesus loved”* (John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7,20). He wrote this book nearly 30 years after Paul and Peter were martyred, and was in the inner circle of Christ’s followers several years before Paul was converted.

Notice how this aged saint writes, as moved along by the Holy Spirit. He does not involve himself in the affairs of that time. Nor, indeed, does he engage in political and social analyses of the day. He does not pull our thoughts into the area of opinion, or tantalize us with intellectual novelties. Instead, he makes powerful statements concerning the way things really are. He ushers us into a thoughtful area where faith can do its work within us.

You will find John, as moved by the Spirit, will give no quarter to the flesh. He will not allow it, as it were, to live. It must be crucified! He will also strongly affirm the direct relationship of righteousness to Christ. He will not permit it without Jesus. Neither will he allow Jesus without righteousness. He will also declare that Satan, and Satan alone, is the source of sin and iniquity.

THE PRACTICE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

“7 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. NKJV ” Here is a statement such as I have just described. See the total lack of any uncertainty or vagueness. First, the people are addressed as **insiders** , not outsiders— *“Little children .”* Second, they are appealed to as **dependent** , not independent— *“ Little children.”* They are in Christ, in Whom certain safety exists, no man being able to pluck them out of His hand (John 10:28-29). Lest, however, we be lulled into complacency, we are reminded we are in a place where there is deception. *“Let no man deceive you.”*

The Complexity of Spiritual Life

At once we see the complexity of spiritual life. Although we are in Christ, with sins forgiven and access to the throne of all grace, there is still the danger of deception. Even though we have access to all *“the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* (Col 2:3), there are cunning opponents capable of luring us away from safety. This should not surprise us, even though it contradicts no small amount of theology. If Adam and Eve were subject to deception when they were in a morally perfect state, with not so much as a shred of contamination, what would lead any naive soul to believe we are excluded from the dangers of deception?

AFTER Israel had been delivered from Egypt by the mighty hand of God, they were told, *“Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them”* (Deut 11:16). Similarly, Paul was concerned about some believers, *“lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ”* (1 Cor 11:3). He charged the Galatians with actually being *“betwitched”* and seduced into not obeying the truth (Gal 3:1). Thus, the admonition not to allow anyone to deceive us is a very real warning, not mere rhetoric.

Practices Righteousness

While the word “*practices*” is linguistically correct, it does not carry the strength of “*doeth*” or “*does*.” The word used here means to “keep on doing,” accomplish, and perform. **The idea is that of living out righteousness—producing in life what is contained in the doctrine.** Life that is not expressed is, at the very best, vastly inferior. Unless expression is realized, life cannot continue to exist, either in nature or in grace. “*Righteousness*,” in the sense of our text, is the expression, or manifestation, of spiritual life in thoughts, words, and deeds. It assumes consistency and continuity in life—a manner of life. One cannot “*do righteousness*” sporadically. That is why it is evidence that the person doing righteous is actually righteous—even as Jesus is righteous. The expressions of such a person are nothing less than the revelation of the life of Christ within the individual.

While righteousness is certainly imputed to us (Rom 4:22-24), it is not divorced from doing. It is true that we are legally righteous, without condemnation. But that is not to be construed as making allowance for living unrighteously. This is the reason for this statement. **The very faith that causes righteousness to be imputed to us compels us to live in a manner acceptable to God.** The grace of God which faith appropriates teaches us to “*live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world*” (Tit 2:11-12).

IS Righteous

The manner in which this is stated is crucial “*he that doeth righteousness is righteous.*” Such an individual is not righteous because he does what is right. Rather, he does what is right BECAUSE he IS righteous. Here we see a critical distinction between the Law and grace. Under the Law, righteousness was the **result** of human achievement. Such righteousness is called “*the righteousness of the Law.*” Now, rather than being achieved by us, as was required under the Law, it is “*fulfilled in us.*” As it is written, “*that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*” (Rom 8:4).

The person who “*doeth righteousness*” is walking in the power of the Spirit. He has been lifted above the flesh into heavenly realms, being freed from both the guilt and power of sin. The proof of their condition is seen in their walk, or manner of life.

If one affirms they know the Lord, yet live according to the flesh, they have not told the truth. If they preach a Gospel that allows people to claim identity with Jesus, yet live according to the flesh, do not believe them. They are deceivers, and are to be so regarded, party affiliation notwithstanding.

AS He IS Righteous

The Spirit further defines what He means by righteousness. It is not merely doing deeds that appear to be right. The truly righteous person is “*righteous just as He (Jesus) is righteous.*” The meaning is that such righteousness is of the same kind as that belonging to Jesus. It is a righteousness that proceeds from a pure heart and a genuine love for righteousness and hatred of evil.

Doing what is right is not merely living by a code of ethics. It is the result of a new sense of values, created by the new birth and sustained by the Spirit’s tutelage. It is said of Jesus, “*Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity*” (Heb 1:9). That very character is given to us when our sins are removed and we are reconciled to God. That is involved in the glorious affirmation, “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*” (2 Cor 5:17).

The person who “*doeth righteousness*” is walking in the power of the Spirit. He has been lifted above the flesh into heavenly realms, being freed from both the guilt and power of sin.

The proof of their condition is seen in their walk, or manner of life.

Thus we are reminded of three revelations of righteousness. **First**, Christ Himself is righteous. He is appropriately called "*Jesus Christ the righteous*" (1 John 2:1). By this, the Scripture means He is the embodiment, or personification, of righteousness. In Him true and flawless righteousness was made known to humanity.

Second, the righteousness of God is imputed to those in Christ. This imputation, or accounting of righteousness to them, is upon the basis of their faith. Thus it is written, "*And therefore it (faith) was imputed to him (Abraham) for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification*" (Rom 4:22-25). The righteousness conferred upon us is just as real as the faith through which it comes. It is the very righteousness of God. As it is written, "*even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe*" NASB (Rom 3:22).

Third, the person to whom righteousness is imputed **does** righteousness, living it out in the crucible of conflict. The conferment of God's righteousness upon the believer is effective, involving a transformation of character. God does not merely call the person righteous, but makes him righteous. As it is written, "*For He (God) hath made Him (Christ) to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (Christ)*" (2 Cor 5:21). The latter accomplishment ("*made the righteousness of God*") is just as real as the first ("*made Him to be sin*"). God made Jesus "*to be sin*" by placing our sin upon Him, causing Him to bear our sins in His body on the tree. He made us righteous by placing His own righteousness upon us. This, and this alone, is what enables the believer to DO righteousness.

We must settle it in our minds that no one belongs to Jesus except those who have been made righteous, and show that righteousness by their works. This is consistently taught in Scripture, and we must not balk at it. This is precisely the point James was making when he wrote, "*Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone . . . But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? . . . For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also*" (James 2:17,20,26). Such a view is no more popular in our day than it was when James wrote these words. Nevertheless, the people of God must heartily embrace them.

Thus we see the marvelous reasoning of this passage. When we know the Source of righteousness, we will also be persuaded that those ENACTING righteousness do so because they have, in reality, been made righteous. This is another reason the one born of God also loves those begotten of God. Such are recognized as God's "*workmanship*," and are thus loved greatly. They bring a certain refreshment to the soul that is both enjoyed and required. Thank God for His children!

THE PRACTICE OF SIN

"8a He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning." Just as righteousness has a Source, so does sin. Again, the Spirit will give no latitude in this matter. Those whose manner it is to sin are traced back to the devil himself, who "*has sinned from the beginning*." This is an awesome consideration, and must be approached with great sobriety. The Spirit will allow no excuse for sin, and, with remarkable consistency, will trace it back to the Tempter. Sinners are connected to him!

Professed Believers the Issue

At this point, our text is not commenting on those who have never embraced Jesus, but to those who bear His name, yet live in practical alienation from Him. The Spirit will arrest our attention by saying the person living in sin really has no association with the Lord Jesus Christ. His sin springs from his affiliation with, and obedience to, Satan.

Former Enslavement to Sin

The person “*who sins*” is the one living in sin—the individual enslaved to it. As it is written, “*Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin*” NKJV (John 8:34). Prior to being in Christ, we were in bondage to sin, and could do nothing but sin. Thus, our conversion is vividly described in this manner. “*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** ” (Rom 6:6). Well did Solomon say, “*the plowing of the wicked is sin*” (Prov 21:4). Showing the far-reaching effects of servitude to sin, the Spirit also says, “*but to those who are defiled and unbelieving **nothing is pure** ; but even their mind and conscience are defiled*” (Tit 1:15). When the heart is impure, it corrupts everything issuing from it.*

Every person “*baptized into Christ*” (Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27), begins in spiritual freedom. Sins are forgiven, and its shackles are removed from both mind and soul. There is neither obligation nor a will to sin in such a person. That is the way every person in Christ begins, and it is glorious.

The Holy Spirit will never lead a person to sin. The devil will never guide a person to do righteousness. There is not the slightest deviation from these rules at any time, or in any place.

However, as long as we are in the world, we are subjected to competing influences. Essentially, these may be summarized as the Holy Spirit and the adversary, the devil. **The Holy Spirit will never lead a person to sin. The devil will never guide a person to do righteousness.** There is not the slightest deviation from these rules at any time, or in any place. When sin is committed, it is always owing to the devil. That is a reality believers must fix in their minds.

When Judas betrayed Jesus, the dreadful deed occurred after “*Satan entered Judas*” (Lk 22:3). When Ananias and Sapphira conspired to lie about their gift, Peter said, “*Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 5:3). He that commits sin, is of the devil!

Outward Is Conduct the Point

It is important to note that outward conduct is the subject of this text—things that are observable. **The life of Christ and the righteousness of God cannot produce perverse and wicked acts.** Where such deeds are found, the devil is at work, and the individuals involved are, in those deeds, his subjects. Just as Christ is the Fountain of all righteousness (1 Cor 1:30), so Satan is the rootstock of all sin.

This truth is affirmed again and again in Scripture. After identifying the “*works of the flesh,*” the Spirit adds, “*they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God*” (Gal 5:21b). Again, before reminding the Corinthian believers of the pit from which they were dug, the Spirit solemnly stated, “*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?*” (1 Cor 6:9). Lest some be tempted to think expressions of sin can be lightly regarded, this very point is again affirmed with unquestionable clarity. “*Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. **Because of these things** the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience ” NKJV (Col 3:5-6). Again, it is written, “*For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for **because of these things** cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience*”*

NKJV (Eph 5:5-6).

Indeed, *“the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness”* NKJV (Rom 1:18). God is absolutely indiscriminate in His judgment against unrighteousness. **Either unrighteousness is forsaken, or His wrath will be experienced.** In my judgment it is particularly necessary to declare this in our time. There is a degree of tolerance for sin among those professing the name of Christ that jars upon the soul of the godly. Often we are asked to overlook serious transgression, and treat the offenders as though they were our friends. For this very reason, immortality is not uncommon in the professed church.

No Middle Ground

With great power, the Holy Spirit now confirms to our hearts that there is no middle ground in the matter of righteousness and sin, or of identity with Christ or Satan. A person is either in Christ, or under the dominion of Satan. It is not possible to be simultaneously governed by both. *“He that commits sin is of the devil!”*

The Spirit will not speak of “carnal Christians,” or “worldly believers,” for such is a contradiction of terms—like saying an godly demon, or a holy devil. He will squarely align those who commit sin with the devil, making no provision for such to be associated with *“Jesus Christ the righteous.”* Either the sin is abandoned, or their association with Christ is severed.

The Spirit will not speak of “carnal Christians,” or “worldly believers,” for such is a contradiction of terms—like saying an godly demon, or a holy devil.

From the Beginning

“ . . . for the devil has sinned from the beginning.” The nature of sin is defined by its perpetrator. The phrase, *“sinned from the beginning”* does not draw our attention to a point in time, but to the origin of sin. It is like considering the source of a river. In that case, time is not the point. So it is with this phrase, *“sinned from the beginning.”* It is as though He said, “The devil committed the first sin, and has never ceased to sin.”

The point is this: Since Satan was the first to sin, and has continued to sin from that time, those who sin are related to him. They are his offspring, just as surely as those who do righteousness are Christ’s offspring. With great pungency, Jesus charged His enemies with being Satan’s children. *“You are of **your father** the devil, and the desires of **your father** you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and **the father** of it”* (John 8:44). Their desire to oppose, and even kill, the Lord Jesus was the direct result of their union with and enslavement to the devil. Their diabolical deeds were the proof of that. Remember, they claimed to be of God, just as those to which John refers. But Satan’s children act like him, not Jesus.

It is Satan’s strategy to put his children among the people of God. We must take care not to adopt a view of either God or man that does not allow the embrace of this truth. Jesus pointedly taught this to be the case in His parable of *“the tares of the field.”* Our Lord explained both the *“enemy”* and the *“tares,”* that were to be plucked up and burned, in these words. *“The tares*

are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil" NKJV (Matt 13:38-39). These are the people to whom John is referring. It is the business of the "*children of the Kingdom*" (Matt 13:38a) to recognize such children, not allowing them to pull them into the vortex of iniquity. Just as Christ works through His children to bring others to Himself, so the devil works through his children to induce men to come under his influence.

The Nature of Sin

It is necessary for us to briefly consider the nature of sin, lest we be tempted to indulge in it. Satan will tempt us to think we can quickly exit from transgression at will. However, this is not the truth. Sin has a captivating nature about it. It will not allow men to dabble in it, but requires their whole heart and soul. Satan himself is the proof of this. He has neither the power nor the will to extricate himself from sin. He is altogether dominated by it, and has given himself wholly to it.

Should we imagine that we are, of ourselves, able to rise above this, we must ponder our condition prior to life in Christ. The Spirit vividly portrays us as "*dead in trespasses and sins,*" walking, or living, "*according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience*" (Eph 2:1-3). We were absolutely dominated by sin! Satan ruled over us, and we were his slaves. **It took a heavenly Liberator to free us from his grasp.** Jesus did precisely that, praise the Lord!

See, that is the nature of sin. That is what it does—enslaves those committing it. Were it not for an appointed Savior, we would never have been freed from sin—never! No amount of earthly wisdom could have released us, or even clearly identified our situation. That understanding is primary throughout Scripture. Had God not undertaken to save us, we could not possibly have been saved. No created personage was capable of making Satan release his hold upon us. This reality was sufficiently confirmed during 2,500 years without Law, and 1,500 year with Law—a Divinely revealed moral code. In that combined 4,000 years, there was not a single individual who did not sin and come short of the glory of God, except the Lord Jesus. Not one representative of the human race managed to free himself from the shackles of sin. We needed a Savior!

In spite of this rather obvious fact, men continue to haggle over the role of men and the role of God in salvation. That both have a role cannot be denied. Man's role, however is not an initiatory one. Rather, it is one of responding to Divine initiative. The very fact of faith assumes an existing Person and accomplishment, both of which must be accepted.

I mention all of this to point out the absolute unreasonableness of sin. It is the devil's work, and those who live in it are his children. They are not of God, but of the devil. Who can controvert it? "*He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning.*" When that persuasion settles in our souls, it will strengthen our essential nature. Then we become more alert to the devil's devices, and develop a protecting hatred of his ways. No person who does not deplore the devil's ways will be able to avoid ensnarement in them. It is only the one who has "*suffered in the flesh*" that has "*ceased from sin*" (1 Pet 4:1). When sin hurts us, we will draw back from it.

THE REASON FOR CHRIST'S MANIFESTATION

" 8b For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the

devil.” The Spirit will not let us go far without again confronting us with the glorious Gospel of Christ. He does not take for granted that we have a grasp on this truth. Because it is so divers from all other messages, the Gospel of Christ can easily be neglected. This is particularly true because of the distractions of the world, and the corrupt teaching that is spewed out in the name of the Lord. When our attention is turned to issues of this world, the Gospel appears to be less relevant, and men take for granted they have a grasp on it simply because they believed it sometime in the past. However, the power of the Gospel can only be realized while men **are** believing it, and relying upon the truth of its proclamation. It is the “*power of God unto salvation*” to everyone who **is** believing—not simply believing something, or some doctrine, but believing the Gospel itself. That is why the Spirit brings the Gospel to bear upon every circumstance with which He deals.

When it comes to fallen humanity, the revelation of the Son of God brought hope and restoration. For the kingdom of darkness, however, it brought decimation and devastation.

He Was Manifested

The purpose for Jesus being manifested is divers—multifaceted. The second verse of this Epistle affirms the “*the life was **manifested** ,*” that is, “*the Word of life*” (1:1-2). That Revelation is related to “*eternal life,*” which is the “*gift of God*” (1:2; Rom 6:23). Earlier it was also avowed, “*He was **manifested** to take away our sins*” (3:5). Later John will write, “*In this the love of God was **manifested** toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might **live through Him** ” (4:9).*

The manifestation, or display, of the incarnate Word is not to be viewed as a mere historical fact. While that appearance is certainly historically factual, its value is appropriated by faith. Both the reality and reason for Christ’s appearance must register upon the conscience. Faith must take hold on the REASON for Jesus coming into this world. Once this takes place, powerful incentives are created in the soul, enabling the individual to take hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12). In the strength of faith, the advances of the devil can also be resisted (1 Pet 5:8). All of this is immediately related to the Gospel of Christ—the good news about Who He is and what He has accomplished in our behalf. Now, again, the Spirit brings before us the purpose for which the Son of God was manifested.

To Destroy the Works of the Devil

“ ***For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.***” When it comes to fallen humanity, the revelation of the Son of God brought hope and restoration. For the kingdom of darkness, however, it brought decimation and devastation. It is written that Jesus partook of flesh and blood “*that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil*” (Heb 2:14). The wreckage wrought by the Son of God was remarkably thorough. At His weakest point, on the cross (2 Cor 14:4), He “*spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it*” (Col 2:14). He so completely disarmed Satan and his hosts that they could no longer retain their hold on a single soul who set out to come to Christ! Moral and spiritual prisons that held men within their grasp had their doors removed, and, through the Gospel, liberty is now proclaimed (Lk 4:18). The fact of the matter is this: there are no moral prisons with doors. Only delusion and unbelief can keep men from coming to Jesus!

Now the Spirit introduces another aspect of the ruination accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not only something He came to do, it is something that is realized through faith.

He was revealed “to **destroy** the works of the devil.” And what are these “works” ?They are nothing less than his accomplishments in men— **SIN** . Remember, sin is what Satan does— “from the beginning.” Wherever it is found, Satan is at work. Jesus came to destroy that work.

The word “destroy” is not synonymous with annihilation. The word actually means “To loosen.’ It comes from the Greek word **λυω**, which is defined as follows. “Loose, untie, release, set free, break, set aside, destroy, pull down, break up” Barclay-Newman Greek Dictionary . The idea is that the Son of God was made known to break the power of sin over men—i.e., to render it impotent, thereby enabling men to effectively resist the devil and live righteously.

Accomplished in Two Ways

The destruction of the devil’s works is accomplished in two essential ways. First, the guilt of sin is removed through just forgiveness. Thus the individual is justified, pronounced free from the defiling effects of sin. In this, the conscience is purged from guilt, which, when present, enslaves men to sin (Heb 9:4,9; 10:22). But this is not the whole of the matter.

The Spirit develops the extent of the destruction of reference in Romans and Colossians. In Romans, it is affirmed that the whole “*body of sin*” is “*destroyed*” when we are brought into Christ. The result is this: “*He that is dead is freed from sin*” (Rom 6:6-7). The expression “*body of sin*,” refers to the “*flesh*,” or the sinful nature—the whole of it. It is the propensity to sin that was birthed in Adam, and passed to all of his progeny. This is the part of our persons that is “*crucified with Christ*.” While it has not ceased to exist, it has no dominion over us as long as it remains crucified. Mind you, our new life in Christ begins with the crucifixion of the “*flesh*,” also called the “*old man*” (Col 3:9-10). That is something performed for us. It is our business to keep the flesh on the cross, not allowing it any degree of freedom.

In Colossians, this wonderful truth is expressed in yet another way. There it is called “*the circumcision of Christ*,” and is also associated with our baptism, as in the sixth chapter of Romans. The language is precise and strengthening. “*In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ*” NKJV (Col 2:11). The phrase “*the body of the sins of the flesh*” equates to “*the body of sin*” mentioned in Romans 6:6. It refers to the whole sinful nature which is cut away from our essential persons by Jesus. This act is also called “*the operation of God*” (Col 2:12). It is precisely at this point that our dual nature commences—the “*old man*” and the “*new man*.” The conflict of these opposing natures is the theme of Romans 7:15-25.

Satan has succeeded in so diverting people from God’s great salvation that they are not even aware of what Jesus has accomplished for and in them.

Being loosed from the dominion of sin through the circumcision Christ, “*we are debtors, not to the flesh , to live after the flesh*” (Rom 8:12). We are no longer obligated to sin because the sinful nature has been cut away from our essential persons. While it is present with us, it no longer belongs to us. That is why the righteous may say of its influence, “*But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me*” NKJV (Rom 7:17). That sinful principle found in the flesh, now severed from us, is “*another law*,” that “*wars against the law*” of our minds, or real self (Rom 7:23).

In another statement that clearly shows the glorious effects of Christ’s manifestation, the Spirit affirms, “*I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh*” (Gal 5:16). With great disappointment, I must confess I have scarcely been able to find a group of believers

that have a grasp of this truth. Satan has succeeded in so diverting people from God's great salvation that they are not even aware of what Jesus has accomplished for and in them.

Why Bring This Up?

Why is this line of reasoning introduced? It is to show us the utter unreasonableness of sin. It has no place in the Kingdom of God, and is never excusable. Not only has God "*forgiven*" us "*for Christ's sake*" (Eph 4:32), He has neutralized the power of the flesh by making it the inferior and subordinate part of us.

Thus, several things are revealed when sin is found in the person bearing Christ's name. (1) Satan has worked in the person. (2) The Gospel of Christ as been forgotten. (3) The Spirit has been quenched. (4) The flesh was let off of the cross. (5) A sense of forgiveness was thrust from the individual. (6) What was separated from the essential person was allowed to once again dominate.

It is no wonder the Spirit speaks with such firmness in this passage. The people of God must develop such a hatred for sin that they suffer when it comes near to them. They are to "*hate even the garment spotted by the flesh*" (Jude 23), and "*abstain from ALL appearance of evil*" (1 Thess 5:22). To do otherwise is to deny the Lord Jesus, do despite to the Spirit of grace, and count the sanctifying blood of the covenant an unholy thing (Heb 10:29). Sin is never innocent. It is always evidence of Satan's work. It always reproaches Christ, gives the advantage to the powers of darkness, and weakens the one committing it. O, how a profound sensitivity to sin is required in God's people!

BIRTH, SEED, AND SIN

"9 Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." Here is a most profound utterance. It is not to be stuffed into preconceived notions of either the purpose of God or the nature of the experience of the believer. The Spirit is quite capable of speaking "*expressly*." At the very beginning of our consideration of this text, it is imperative that we think in a spiritual manner. No part of Scripture is to be filtered through merely human thinking. This not only involves religious commentaries, but dictionaries, lexicons, and other fleshly means of determining the meaning of a text. While measured value can be found in all of these things, and they are not to be altogether despised, they are never to become the **basis** for "*spiritual understanding*." In the text before us, there are views that are based upon the tense of the word, rather than the teaching of the text.

A Brief Consideration

Those with a working knowledge of the Word of God are aware that weighty words are defined by doctrine, or teaching, and not by linguistic definition. Some very pivotal words that illustrate this are "*Lamb*," "*altar*," "*priest*," "*body*" (of Christ), "*flesh*," "*blood*," "*temple*," etc. Other words, common in English, but signifying foundational concepts, are "*faith*," "*love*," and "*hope*." The comprehension of such terms requires a spiritual understanding. The knowledge of language cannot produce this kind of understanding. Linguistic expertise can, at the best, be supportive of true understanding. It cannot, however, produce it. Two or three examples of this will suffice.

When Jesus said, "*Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life*" (John 6:54), He put the truth beyond the grasp of flesh. No student of language, however disciplined, will be able to understand this saying apart from the teaching of Christ. The words for "*flesh*" and "*blood*," from the standpoint of language, are no different that the words used for the flesh of men, beasts, fowls, or

fish (1 Cor 15:39; Heb 13:11). The meaning of Christ's "flesh" and "blood" are determined doctrinally, not etymologically. "*I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world*" (John 6:51). "*For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed*" (John 6:55).

The "*body of Christ*" is also an example of this principle. The word "*body*" is not unique in the original language, but it is in respect to "*the body of Christ.*" The word translated "body" is precisely the same one used to describe the fleshly human body, the resurrection body, and the "*body of sin*" (Matt 6:25; 1 Cor 15:44; Rom 6:6). Its meaning, in "*the body of Christ,*" is determined doctrinally. "*Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually*" (1 Cor 12:27). "*The church, which is his body . . .*" (Eph 1:22-23).

Does Not Sin

"*Whoever has been born of God does not sin.*" The strength of this statement cannot be denied. The Spirit states the case very concisely. He does not say a *Christian* does not sin, or those who have been baptized do not sin. Nor, indeed, does He say whoever is born of God does not "*continue in sin*" –a phrase used by the Spirit in Romans 6:1. There the phrase is not an announcement, but a point of reasoning. Those who are fond of saying "*does not sin*" means "*does not continue to sin*" must explain to us why that is not what the Spirit said. The text does not say whoever is born of God does not "remain in sin" or "abide in sin," but "*does not sin.*"

Not Completely Regenerated

Are the children of God **completely** regenerated, or "*born of God,*" at once? Is that the description of a single event? If it is, then our text is most difficult, indeed. But that is not the case, and the Scriptures emphatically affirm it is not. Those who are in Christ currently have, at the very best "*the firstfruits of the Spirit.*" The good work of God has "begun" in them, and has not yet been culminated. To be sure, faith is confident that "*He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ*" NKJV (Phil 1:6). We do not yet have the whole of salvation, but only the earnest, or down payment, of it (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14). The remnant of our old nature remains with us until the day we are "*absent from the body.*"

It is this condition that occasions the

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frequent warnings about sin, Satan's delusion, and falling into error. The determinist, who imagines those coming into Christ can never again revert to their former state overlook this truth, if, indeed, they know it at all. Considering the presence of the "*flesh,*" "*natural man,*" "*old man,*" and the contrary "*law within our members,*" it requires an unusual degree of spiritual stupidity to affirm no danger exists for the believer. Notwithstanding that circumstance, the child of God is not to live in fear and trepidation, or doubting he has been received by God. That is one reason for this strong affirmation—to gender hope within us.

In confirmation that I have precisely represented the situation, consider the depiction of our present status, as stated in Romans 8:22-23. "*For we know that the whole creation groans and*

labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, **eagerly waiting for the adoption**, the redemption of our body.” Mark this well, while we have already “received the Spirit of adoption” (Rom 8:15), yet we are “eagerly waiting for the adoption.” The Spirit then refers to the culmination of the work God has begun in us: “the redemption of our body.” It should be abundantly clear to every believer that their body is not yet saved. Our bodies are not yet reborn, or regenerated. But they will be. Until then, we are “being saved.”

There Is A Part that is Born of God

While we are not yet wholly regenerated, there is a part of us that is. That is the part of us to which the Holy Spirit testifies. As it is written, “*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*” (Rom 8:16). Our “spirit” is the essential part of our persons, and has been “born of God.” That is why the Holy Spirit can bear witness to it, confirming that we are the children of God. He does not bear witness with our body, for it is “vile.” Nor, indeed, does He bear witness with our soul, which must be possessed, or managed (Lk 21:19). He brings a confirming witness to the part of us that has been “born of God.”

In further confirmation of this, Galatians 4:6 states the same thing, referring to our essential component as the heart. “*And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’*” The Lord made known through the prophet Ezekiel that He was going to give His people a new heart and a new spirit. “*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you*” (Ezek 36:26). I understand this to be two views of the same thing. The “new heart” emphasizes the sensitivity of the new creation, while “new spirit” underscores its expressive capabilities.

This is the part of us that is “born of God.” The resurrection will bring no change to this part of our beings. Our bodies will be changed, but our spirits will be “holy still,” and “righteous still.”

Does Not Sin

“*Whoever is born of God does not sin.*” This is the revitalized part of us that “*is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him*” (Col 3:10). This is nothing less than “*Christ in you*” (Col 1:27), or “*Christ dwelling in your heart by faith*” (Eph 3:16-17). At this point, no other part of your person is “born of God.” But know this of a certainty, that part that is “born of God” **does not sin**. It has no inclination to sin, and cannot be lured into it.

This is precisely why we are admonished to “*put on the new man*” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). He does not sin. To sin, he must be ignored, and heed be given to “*the old man.*” God’s people must see this vital truth! This is the reason why we are told, “*I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh*” (Gal 5:16).

There remains a part of us that is not only capable of sin, but which can do nothing but sin. It is “the flesh,” which is totally rejected by God. It is so corrupt that it cannot inherit the kingdom of God

There is a certain dichotomy within the believer—two contradicting natures. The flesh profits nothing, is weak, and can do no righteousness. The Spirit profits everything, is strong, and can do no sin. Both are crying for our attention. As it is written, “*For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please*” NASB (Gal 5:17). James also refers to the strong desires of the

Spirit. “Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, ‘The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously?’” (James 4:5). This is another way of saying the Spirit longs for the fellowship and sensitivity of our spirit—our real person. He, and He alone, can fortify us for the battle, and give us the joy, peace, and hope of the Lord (Rom 5:5; 15:13; 14:17). You may rest assured, the Spirit has no yearning for our flesh, or for the “old man” within us. He is longing for that which is “born of God” within us. That is, He yearns for us to be dominated by the “new man” so He can work in and for us. He knows **that** nature cannot sin, and He wants us to know it also.

His Seed Remains in Him

Here is a New Covenant distinction, never before realized by the sons of men. There have been men upon whom the Holy Spirit came. They were holy men, and they possessed faith. However, they were not regenerate in the sense of the New Covenant. Those of them who believed, the Spirit affirms, “having obtained a good report through faith, **received not the promise** : God having provided some **better thing** for us, that they without us should not be made perfect” (Heb 11:39-40). That “better thing” is involved in the statement of our text. Prior to Jesus, some of the very people upon whom the Spirit came, also experienced His departure from them (1 Sam 16:14; Judges 16:20). But now the provision of redemption is announced.

“Whoever is born of God” is the object of consideration. It has already been affirmed that generation “does not sin.” It will also be affirmed it “cannot sin.” The reason: “His seed remains in him.”

There are at least two possible views of this affirmation. (1) His seed remains in HIM, “Him” (being God). In this view, whoever is born of God is the “seed,” in the sense of Galatians 3:29. (2) His SEED remains in him (whoever is born of God). In this view, the new life received from God remains in the one born of God, keeping him alive. In my judgment, both of these views are true, and are intended by the text. **The life that comes from God can only exist in association with God.** It dies in any other surroundings. Thus, whoever is born of God remains in God, deriving sustenance that can only be obtained there. Conversely, the life of God remains in whoever is born of God, for that is where it is meant to reside.

To the degree that this new life is nourished and heeded, sin will not occur. To the degree it is ignored and men walk in the flesh, it becomes impossible to avoid sin.

He Cannot Sin

Now the Spirit further fortifies His case. Not only does “whoever is born of God” NOT sin, he “CANNOT sin.” Those in Christ are made “partakers of the Divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4), and that nature is incapable of sin. Again, the text does not say the Christian cannot sin, or that the believer cannot sin. He has already announced provision for sin, should it be found in us (1 John 1:9; 2:1).

The phrase “cannot sin” is especially strong. The word “cannot” comes from the Greek word **du,natai**, which means *is unable or incapable of doing such a thing*. Barclay-Newman Greek Dictionary The part of you that is born of God cannot be seduced or drawn into sin. The idea is that sin is totally foreign to the life we receive from God. The Divine nature in you is repulsed by sin just as surely as it was in Jesus. That new creation simply cannot sin. The new heart cannot entertain a love for sin. The new spirit cannot indulge in iniquity. It is against that nature to do such things.

Taking this text, some have taught that while we are in the body, we reach a state where sin becomes impossible. Those who entertain this nonsense forget that we are not totally reborn. There remains a part of us that is not only capable of sin, but which can do nothing but sin. It is “the flesh,” which is totally rejected by God. It is so corrupt that it cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50).

While John holds out to us the reality of the new creation, Paul also confirms the presence of the remnants of sin within us. He solemnly warns us to see to it that we do not walk after the flesh. *“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God”* (Rom 8:5-8).

Were it not for the marvelous realities declared in our text, and other kindred passages, godliness would appear beyond our reach. You must remember, therefore, that you do have a part that is just as **incapable** of sin as the flesh is incapable of righteousness. See to it that you nourish the part that is *“born of God.”* It lives and gains strength in the presence of the Lord, and subsists on *“every Word of God.”* Put that *“new man”* on, allowing him the dominance in your life. Follow his inclinations, and be alert to the things offensive to the new nature. You will only have to endure the sinful nature until you leave the body. Until then, praise God for the purity of what is born of Him!

You have, by the grace of God, received a new heart and a new spirit. If you live in the energy of that newness, sin will not have dominion over you, and Satan will not seduce you. That type of life requires your fullest attention and commitment. That degree of devotion, however, will yield rich and satisfying results to you.

THE CHILDREN MADE KNOWN

“10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.” Having established the make-up of *“whoever is born of God,”* the Spirit now deals with the revelation of that nature. He will show us that just as the flesh cannot hide what it is, so whoever is born of God cannot hide what he is.

Two Generations

There are two generations of people in this world. Both of them are traced back to Adam from the standpoint of the flesh. But that is not their main association, only their natural one. Fundamentally, everyone is either born of God or born of the devil: children of God or children of the devil.

There are two generations of people in this world. Both of them are traced back to Adam from the standpoint of the flesh. But that is not their main association, only their natural one. Fundamentally, everyone is either born of God or born of the devil: children of God or children of the devil.

Those belonging to Christ are called *“the children of God”* (Matt 5:9; Rom 8:16; Gal 3:26) and *“the children of the Highest”* (Lk 6:35). Their illumination by God compels them to be called *“the children of light”* (John 12:36). Because they belong to another domain, they are called *“the children of the Kingdom”* (Matt 13:38). These are a *“chosen generation”* (1 Pet 2:9), *“begotten of God”* Himself (1 John 5:18), and in strict accordance with His will, and by the Word of truth (James 1:18). In every sense of the word, we are *“His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus”* (Eph 2:10). Our status as *“the children of God”* is not the result of our own doing, but is the work of God. The predominant

expression of this generation is righteousness (1 John 2:29; 3:7).

The Scriptures also speak of “*children of Belial*” (Deut 13:13; Judges 19:22), “*sons of Belial*” (2 Sam 23:6), and “*children of the wicked one*” (Matt 13:38). Paul referred to Elymas the sorcerer as the “*child of the devil*” (Acts 13:9). Judas is called “*the son of perdition*” (John 17:12). Jesus said to the corrupt leaders of His day, “*You are of **your father** the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do*” NKJV (John 8:44). The predominant expression of this generation is sin (1 John 3:8). Both generations are characterized by these expressions, and cannot depart from them.

These two generations are absolutely incompatible. Like Ishmael and Isaac, they cannot get along (Gal 4:28-31). They are locked in combat from the very beginning, as Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:22-23). The nature of each generation comes from a unique source. The “*children of God*” have the nature of God. “*The children of the devil*” have his nature.

Their Natures Will Show

Each generation has undeniable and perceptible traits. It is understood that neither the spirit of Satan nor the Spirit of God can remain hidden. Both will show themselves in expressions matching the character of their source.

Two specifics are mentioned, and they are preeminent characteristics. God will allow no compromise in these matters: “*whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.*” Again, notice the firmness with which this is stated. The person who does not do righteousness “*is not of God,*” profession notwithstanding. Further, the person who “*loves not his brother,*” by that very condition, confirms he is “*not of God.*”

The strength of this text can only be realized when it is taken at face value. If we attempt to neutralize it with fanciful explanations, it will soon have no meaning for us at all. The life of God simply cannot fail to do what is right. Nor, indeed, can it refuse to love those begotten of God. Only the LACK of spiritual life yields such failures. To put it another way, the new nature cannot do what is wrong, and the old nature cannot do what is right. Both are locked into their state of character. Both express themselves with perfect consistency. The old nature can no more do righteousness occasionally than the new nature can sometimes sin.

It now becomes a matter of which nature we will heed, for both of them are resident within us while we are in this world. The nature that dominates us is the one that will be reckoned to us. This is the point of the solemn admonition, “*Therefore, brethren, we are debtors; not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live*” (Rom 8:12-13).

Loving the Brethren

While the matter of loving “the brethren” will be developed more fully later, it is necessary to make a few observations about this now. The contemporary church is so structured that loving “the brethren” has little or no significance. Seemingly devout men have no difficulty at all rejecting professed followers of Christ upon the basis of purely human opinion. Often such bigots even condemn those with whom they cannot agree. What is more, the point upon which agreement is sought is not the Lord Jesus, or such central matters as justification and the hope set before us. Rather, they are areas in which Jesus nor His salvation are central.

It is a most tragic circumstance. But lest we brush it aside as though it is nothing, remember

what the Spirit says in our text. The person “*who does not love his brother,*” is “*not of God.*” That is the way it is, and it cannot be altered.

THE MESSAGE

“11 For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” In his commentary on Galatians, Jerome (1400's) said this of John the beloved. “When John became too infirm to preach, he used often to say no more than this, ‘Little children, love one another.’ His hearers at last wearied of it, and said, ‘Master, why dost thou always say this?’ ‘It is the Lord’s command,’ he replied; ‘and if this is done, it is enough.’” Jerome on Galatians 6:10

An Intriguing Thought

The point of reasoning here is most intriguing. We have just been told that the children of God and the children of the devil are made known, or revealed, in the doing or not doing of righteousness. Then, the concept of doing righteous is extended to the matter of loving “the brethren.” It is this latter extension of thought that now becomes the subject of reasoning. Lest we be diverted from the main line of reasoning, we are being shown how the children of God and the children of the wicked one are revealed.

In the first of this book, the Spirit affirmed “*the message*” to be “*God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all*” (1:5). Now He states the message is “*that we should love one another.*” On the surface, the two statements seem quite different. But that is not the case.

The Supreme Revelation

The supreme revelation of God, in Whom no darkness exists, is found in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Further, the supreme act of Jesus, through which God is made known, is found in His voluntary sacrifice. At precisely that point, the love of God was made known. “*Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us . . . Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins*” (3:16; 4:10). In each of the above references, the perception of Divine love is said to be evidenced in our love of one another. To put it another way, once we see more clearly the wonderful reality of God’s love for us, we will be drawn to those who also have experienced that love. Because this same subject is developed later in this book, I will wait to elaborate further on this line of reasoning.

The Commandment of Jesus

Salvation makes no provision for ignoring or neglecting the people of God. The “message” to love one another is found everywhere. At no point, for example, can any member of Christ’s body conclude there is no need for the other members.

The commandment to love one another was, indeed, an emphasis of our Lord. It is a word spoken to His disciples, and not the world in general. Hear His gracious words again, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*” NKJV (John 13:34-35). “*This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you*” NKJV (John 15:12). Here, however, John does not call the requirement for loving “the brethren” a commandment, but “*the message.*”

There Is a Message in the Commandment

By saying “*message*,” the spirit is showing us there is more in the commandment than a mere requirement, or condition. There is also a “*message*,” or signification, in it that can be grasped by the heart. While a commandment is something to be done, a message is something to be comprehended. There is a spirit in the commandment as well as a letter. As Jesus well said, “*The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life*” (John 6:63). Jesus did utter commands that carried such power they accomplished miraculous results. Mentioning a few of them will at once make this matter clear. “*Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house . . . Little girl, I say to you, arise . . . Lazarus, come forth!*” (Matt 9:6; Mark 5:41; John 11:43). In each case, the power to obey came with the command!

It is no different with the commandment to “*love one another*.” That is what makes this word a “*message*” as well as a “*commandment*.” Stated another way, “*Now **the purpose of the commandment** is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith*” NKJV (1 Tim 1:5). That “*purpose*” is realized only in “*the children of God*.” They have “*believed the report*” concerning Christ Jesus, and have cast themselves upon the Stone, gladly relinquishing carnal self interests. The proof of their perception and embrace of God’s love is seen in their preference for the children of God.

God Placed Us in Christ’s Body

When the Lord saved us, He placed us among His people. While salvation is personal, it is not **only** personal. Thus it is written, “*And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved*” (Acts 2:47). Again, it is written, “*Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually*” (1 Cor 12:27). It is not simply that individuals become a part of an impersonal mass of people. They have a particular role to play, and it can only be carried out within the context of God’s people. “*But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased*” (1 Cor 12:18).

Salvation makes no provision for ignoring or neglecting the people of God. The “*message*” to love one another is found everywhere. At no point, for example, can any member of Christ’s body conclude there is no need for the other members. “*And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary*” (1 Cor 12:21-22).

You will find that the closer you come to Christ, the closer you become to those who also are “*in Him*.” **That is the nature of the Kingdom.** It is not simply that obligation is laid upon every professing *Christian* to love “the brethren.” Those who have no heart for this need life from God, not another requirement.

The Message is Clear

Regardless of their profession, those lacking the love in reference are, to that degree, of the devil, and not of Christ. That is the clear teaching of our text. The love of “the brethren” is a point at which the children of God and the children of the devil are revealed. I do not know what kind of logic could be put forth to justify the conclusion that a person could hate the people of God and still be “*in Christ*.” In this very text, the Spirit is pulling down that stronghold of thought. There is no truth to such an imagination. A person who does not love his brother in Christ **IS** a child of the devil. Hear the affirmation again. “*In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother*” (3:10). Such a person simply has not believed “*the message*” heard from the very start, and thus has received no power to obey it. Faith always brings with it the power to obey, and to walk in the way it leads. Such is the heritage of God’s people.

THE TRAIT OF SATAN'S CHILDREN

“12 Not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.” The Spirit will now confirm to our hearts that a fundamental enmity exists between *“the children of God”* and *“the children of the devil.”* It is as real and consistent as the conflict between Jesus and Satan, light and darkness, good and evil. It is not possible for Satan to have a child that loves the people of God. Nor, indeed, it is possible for God to have a child that has a preference for the children of the devil. It makes little difference whether or not this meshes with our view of the Lord and His work. The Spirit will now confirm that there is a basic hatred for *“the children of God”* within the *“children of the devil.”*

CAIN

To confirm the basic nature of the conflict between the children of God and the children of the devil, we are taken back to the first man *“born of a woman”* –Cain. The very first thing said about Adam and Eve, after they were expelled from Eden, concerns the birth of Cain and Abel. *“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, ‘I have acquired a man from the LORD.’ Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground”* NKJV (Gen 4:1-2). Notice the difference between Eve’s assessment and that of our text. She said, *“I have acquired a man from the Lord.”* Our text says Cain was *“of the wicked one.”* Actually, both are true. The first is true in the sense of

The Spirit will now confirm to our hearts that a fundamental enmity exists between *“the children of God”* and *“the children of the devil.”* It is as real and consistent as the conflict between Jesus and Satan, light and darkness, good and evil.

the origin of life– *“from the Lord.”* The second is true in the sense of the acquisition of character–*“of the wicked one.”*

There are a few things we know about Cain. He was a *“tiller of the ground”* (Gen 4:2). He brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground (4:3). God did not receive his offering (4:5). Cain would have been accepted if he did well (4:7). Cain *“talked with Abel his brother,”* then killed him (4:8). God talked with, and cursed, Cain (4:9-11). Although a *“tiller of the ground,”* God caused the earth to refuse to fruit to him (4:12a). He was cursed to become a restless wanderer in the earth (4:12b).

The Lord placed a mark upon Cain that prohibited anyone from killing him (4:15). He lived in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden (4:16). He built the very first city, naming it after his firstborn son Enoch (4:17).

All of this points out that Cain was not recognized as *“of the wicked one”* in the normalities of life. He took residence in a country, married a wife, had children, and built a city. But none of these showed him to be a child of Satan. It was his conduct toward his brother Abel that revealed who he really was! Cain and Abel had the same parents, and lived in the same place, but Cain hated Abel. That hatred moved him commit the very first murder—and it was his own brother.

A Principle to be Seen

There is a spiritual principle to be seen here. **The one that is first hates the one who is second.** To put it another way, the person that is *“of the flesh”* (first) hates him who is *“of the Spirit”* (second). Confirming the sequence here revealed, the Scriptures say, *“However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual”* NKJV (1 Cor 15:46). This principle is also lived out in

Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael was first, being born “*of the flesh.*” Isaac was second, being born “*of the Spirit.*” The outcome—Ishmael “*persecuted*” Isaac (Gal 4:29-30).

Again, the principle is seen in Jacob and Esau. In this case, the boys were twins. Esau was born “*first,*” and “*after that*” Jacob (Gen 25:25). Yet “*Esau hated Jacob*” because he received the blessing of his father (Gen 27:41). God said of Esau, “*Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated*” (Rom 9:13). Malachi wrote, “*Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau*” (Mal 1:2-3). And why so? Because Esau was a “*profane person . . . who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright*” (Heb 12:16). Now, whenever the twins are mentioned by God, Jacob is first: i.e., “*Jacob and Esau*” —even though Esau was born first (Josh 24:4; Heb 11:20).

Not as Cain!

The consist message we have heard is “*that we should love one another.*” Then the Spirit adds, “*NOT as Cain, who was of the wicked one.*” We have no record of any conflict between Cain and Abel until it came to the matter of God. It was precisely at that point that the enmity surfaced. God respected Abel’s offering, but rejected Cain’s. Precisely how this was made known to the two, we do not know. But Cain knew it, and refused to acquiesce with the judgment of God. He was motivated by Satan, while Abel was constrained by faith (Heb 11:4).

The power of this text is staggering. “*And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.*” And what works of Cain “*were evil*” ? It was nothing less than an offering to God! His hatred for Abel was made known, so to speak, in the realm of religion. **Abel’s response to God elicited the hatred of his own brother, Cain.**

The Sectarian World

We are to make it our business for such a response NOT to be found in us. The hatred of the children of God is always evidence of the work of the devil. It can never be dignified or explained away. All of this is of particular relevance in the Christian world of our day. Sectarianism is a religious structure that allows for the hatred of God’s people who do not subscribe to a particular sectarian dogma. People are too often received and preferred upon the basis of their identity with the institution, with no regard for their affiliation with the Living God through Christ Jesus. Such a condition is not an innocent one.

There are people who are not yet born again, yet have a certain attraction to the people of God. They evidence a desire for God, even though they have not yet been reconciled to Him.

The divided *Christian* world has so obscured the truth that some can scarcely recognize “*the children of God.*” Because of this, professed believers are approved and received upon the basis of their embrace of views, as opposed to the Lord Jesus Himself. As though that were not bad enough, in that process, many of those who have been received by God are actually rejected as heretics. History is cluttered with such rejections, many of them leading to the martyrdom of believers by other professed believers. How serious a text is before us!

A Point of Consideration

Lest we be tempted to become judgmental in our view of men, there is another matter to

consider. There are people who are not yet born again, yet have a certain attraction to the people of God. They evidence a desire for God, even though they have not yet been reconciled to Him. Such people are not to be viewed as hopeless, or as our enemies. A few examples will suffice to confirm this point.

A Certain Centurion

On one occasion, a *“certain centurion”* with a sick servant, when he heard about Jesus, sent some Jewish representatives to Him, asking that He come and *“heal his servant.”* Although he was not technically qualified for such a benefit (for Jesus was sent *“to the lost sheep of Israel”* –Matt 15:24), yet a plea was made to Jesus upon the basis of this man’s interest in the chosen people. *“The one for whom He should do this was deserving, for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue.”* The result was that *“Jesus went with them.”* After an additional expression of faith, Jesus said of that man, *“I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!”* NKJV (Lk 7:2-6). That man was NOT of *“the world.”* Jesus recognized it, and he received the blessing.

Cornelius

Another classic example is found in Cornelius, described as *“a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.”* Although he was not in Christ Jesus, the Lord sent Peter to him. The reason for the gracious mission was declared by an angel to Cornelius. *“Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved”* (Acts 10:2; 11:14). As time would confirm, Cornelius was not *“of the world.”*

God’s People in Corinth

One further example of this perspective will suffice. When Paul came to Macedonia (Corinthian in particular), he encountered much opposition. As he testified to the Jews in that area, the opposition became so fierce that it is written, *“But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’”* Departing, they entered into a house next to the Synagogue, which belonged to *“a certain man named Justus.”* The outcome of the events that followed was that Crispus, ruler of the synagogue, his household, and many of the Corinthians, *“hearing, believed and were baptized.”*

Later, in a night vision, the Lord appeared to Paul saying, *“Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.”* Paul remained there for *“a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them”* (Acts 18:2-11). It did not appear as though there were *“many people”* belonging to God in that city. Yet, in the process of time, these people were revealed by being drawn to those declaring the Gospel.

The point to see that there are some people who are yet in the world that are attracted to the people of God, like those just mentioned. While they are still in the world, technically, they are (from heaven’s viewpoint) people belonging to God. As we *“let our light shine”* in their presence, and faithfully present the Gospel, these people will be drawn to us. That is how their real inclinations will be revealed. This is one of the factors of spiritual life that contribute to alertness and expectation. We are not to conclude from our present circumstances that we are surrounded by hopelessness, or that God has no people in our vicinity. Although it may appear that way, that may not be the case at all.

DO NOT MARVEL!

But in the matter of the world hating the children of God, marveling is out of order. It was unusual for the Centurion to have faith. It was completely unreasonable for those in Christ's home country to be dominated by unbelief. But it is neither out of order nor unreasonable for the world to hate those in Christ.

“13 Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.” Here is a reality that is not to befuddle, or confuse, us. When *“the world,”* or those who are not regenerate, despise you, you are not to be surprised, *“as though some strange thing happened unto you”* (1 Pet 4:12). Human nature has remained the same since the fall. All of the supposed advances in the sciences has not made a single change for good in the character of man. The truth of the matter is that *“the world”* cannot be made good. It is precisely for this reason that believers are taken *“out of the world,”* i.e., separated from the condemned order (John 15:19; 17:6; Gal 1:4). Its spot is not to be found upon us, which is a mark of *“pure and undefiled religion before God”* (James 1:27).

Confirmed by Jesus

Our Lord echoed the truth of these words during His last night with the disciples. He confirmed to them that oneness with Him placed them at enmity with the world. *“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you”* NKJV (John 15:18-19).

Just as the love of *“the children of God”* confirms we are aligned with Jesus, so the hatred of them confirms men are of the world. On one occasion, our Lord said to those rejecting Him, *“The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil”* (John 7:7). Among other things, this substantiates the wide disparity between the world and the Lord Jesus Christ. The two are so at variance with one another, that we must be delivered from *“this present evil world”* in order to be accepted by God (Gal 1:4). It is imperative that those joined to Christ continue His testimony of the world's evil works. We must not shrink back from this, even though it incurs the world's hatred against us.

With great power, John confirms how obvious this is to faith. *“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one”* NKJV (1 John 5:19). It is important to note that the righteousness of the children of God has not caused the world to be ungodly. **It has only brought that wickedness to the surface.** It is revealed in the hatred of the world against those who are born of God.

Do Not Marvel!

What does he mean by *“marvel?”*? To *“marvel”* is to be astonished, or surprised at something unusual. It is not that marveling itself is wrong. Jesus *“marveled”* at the faith of the centurion (Matt 8:10). That is because the Centurion's faith was most unusual. Jesus also *“marveled”* at the unbelief rampant in His own country (Mk 6:6). That too was extraordinary, particularly after they had seen so much incontrovertible evidence, and heard such gracious words.

But in the matter of the world hating the children of God, marveling is out of order. It was unusual for the Centurion to have faith. It was completely unreasonable for those in Christ's home country to be dominated by unbelief. But it is neither out of order nor unreasonable for the world to hate those in Christ. They have been removed from the world order, and now have citizenship in heaven. The world really has no alternative but to hate us, for we are a threat to

it.

Worldly people sense the conflict between our manner of life and theirs. The world has presence of mind enough to realize that if the children of God are right, then they are wrong. Rather than concede this to be the case, they hate the saints. We should not marvel at this, or be so taken back by it that we become discouraged or faint in the way. The world can really do nothing else. It must hate the children of God.

THE PROOF WE ARE ALIVE

“14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.” Remember, the reason for this Epistle is clearly stated. **(1)** To have fellowship with the Father, the Son, and those who also have fellowship with them (1:3). **(2)** That our joy may be full (1:4). **(3)** That we do not sin (2:1). **(4)** That we might know we have eternal life (5:13). With these objectives before us, this verse is particularly precious.

A Contrast with Nature

In nature, we pass from life into death. In grace, we pass from death into life. Just as in the flesh, there are two realms in the spiritual world: life and death. Also, just as with nature, only one of these realms can be occupied at a time.

We Know

The contrast between the world's view of the children of God and their own perception is found to be in sharp contrast. This chapter began with a statement concerning the world's view of us. *“Therefore the world does not know us”* (3:1). Candidly, they do not know what has happened to us. They simply know we do not belong in their realm anymore. It is because of *“the manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us.”* This love is of such magnitude and power that it has constituted us *“the children of God.”* Because the world is at enmity with God, and has no understanding of Him, they have no care for us either.

But those in Christ are not in the dark concerning their new status. They have immediate evidence that confirms what has happened to them. They *“know,”* or are perceptive, that they have *“passed out of death into life.”* RSV They have been *“delivered from the power of darkness,”* and *“translated into the kingdom”* of God's *“dear Son”* (Col 1:13). Once they were *“dead in trespasses and sins,”* but now they are *“alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Eph 2:1; Rom 6:11). Not only as this happened, *“the children of God”* KNOW that it has occurred.

Death and Life

Death and life are very real conditions. These are not theoretical circumstances or metaphorical states.

Death

The domain of death, from which we have passed, is one in which the individual is *“alienated from the life of God”* (Eph 4:18). Those in such a state are like a valley of dry bones before the Lord. This is a realm dominated by Satan. It is where *“the flesh,”* or the natural part of us, operates and feels comfortable. Death is marked by insensitivity to God. Blindness of heart and deafness of ears characterize those dwelling there. They are controlled by things that are seen, and have no regard for the things that are not seen, or the *“things in heaven, where Christ sits at the right hand of God”* (Col

1:1-3).

But those in Christ are not in the dark concerning their new status. They have immediate evidence that confirms what has happened to them.

By nature, everyone outside of Christ occupies this realm— “*death.*” Such are called “*dead in trespasses and sins,*” “*dead in sins,*” and “*dead in your sins*” (Eph 2:1,5; Col 2:13). There is a controlling law, or principle, operative in all who occupy this realm . It is “*the law of sin and death*” (Rom 8:2). Of ourselves, we were incapable of freeing ourselves from the dominion of this law. Prior to being in Christ, we ourselves are described as “*without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world*” (Eph 2:12). That was the “*death*” of which our text speaks.

Life

In Christ, life is not mere animation or excitement, although it involves both. “*Life*” is a condition in which response to, and preference for, the living God are prominent. It is a state in which we are given “*ears to hear,*” “*eyes to see,*” and a “*heart to perceive*” the “*things of the Spirit of God*” (Deut 29:4). This is a different kind of life than any other known to man. That is why those raised with Christ through baptism are said to “*walk in newness of life*” (Rom 6:4). Those occupying this realm are “*alive from the dead,*” and “*alive unto God*” (Rom 6:11,13). They have experienced a spiritual resurrection, and it is very real. Thus it is written, “*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*” (Eph 2:4-6).

How We Know

All who are in Christ Jesus have “*passed from death unto life.*” They have been delivered from the dominating “*law of sin and death.*” This is the freedom, or liberation, of which Jesus spoke. “*Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed*” (John 8:34-36). Further, those who are freed are to see to it that they remain free, resisting Satan’s efforts to lure them back into bondage. “*It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery*” NASB (Gal 5:1). The admonition to maintain the status of freedom confirms that it is a very real one. We are free just as surely as we were formerly bound. The “*Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*” (Rom 8:2), is just as effective in its rule as “*the law of sin and death*” that formerly dominated us.

The question now becomes that of confirming we are actually free and alive unto God. The Lord declares that we are alive, and have passed from death unto life. **However, it is our Lord’s manner to confirm the truth to us by two witnesses.** Confirming this characteristic of the Kingdom, Paul explained his repeated coming to Corinth in these words, “*This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established*” (2 Cor 13:1). Mind you, multiple witnesses are not required to establish the truth of God’s Word itself. It is “*forever settled in heaven*” (Psa 119:89). The confirming witness is for our confidence and assurance. The Lord knows that if we are not confident in our sonship and spiritual liberty, we will take little advantage of it. In such a case, Satan will more easily lure us back into sin. Thus, it is imperative that we “*know we have passed from death unto life.*”

Because We Love the Brethren

Our love of “the brethren” confirms we have passed from death unto life! Herein is a marvelous evidence. Note, the text does not say we love “*our brethren*,” as though only those of our group or persuasion are intended. Even though the NIV reads “*because we love our brothers*,” that is not a correct view. The phrase from which this expression is translated is **avgapw/men tou.j avdelfou.j**, meaning *and we are loving the brethren*. This may appear to be an incidental point, and of little consequence. But we must not allow ourselves to think in such a manner. The significance attached to loving “*the brethren*” demands that we have a proper understanding of it.

The corruption of the truth, so prevalent in our day, has robbed the saints of many things. Not the least of these matters is the identity of “*the brethren*.” Religious men, even devout religious men, are prone to speak of *our brotherhood*, a term and concept that is not honored by God. These are “*brethren in the Lord*” (Phil 1:14), not theological persuasion. They are “*brethren*” because of their identity with Jesus, not a movement. In fact, technically speaking, they are HIS brethren. As it is written, “*that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren*” (Rom 8:29). More precisely, they are related to Jesus because God is their spiritual Father. As it is written, “*For both He who sanctifies (Jesus) and those who are being sanctified (believers) are all of one (the Father), for which reason He (Jesus) is not ashamed to call them brethren*” (Heb 2:11).

Thus, “*the brethren*” refers to “*the household of faith*,” or all who are believing in Christ. All of them are **our** brothers, but they are **primarily** the brothers of Jesus. Those who restrict their religious affiliation to those of their particular assembly (a very common practice) are not doing well. Too, an approach to life in Christ that confines our attentiveness and appreciation to a particular movement, however noble that movement may be, diminishes the evidence of passing from death unto life. Jesus has not freed us to love some of His brethren, but all of them. Wherever they are found, the new creation is inclined to love and prefer them above all others.

A Small Consideration

To emphasize the nature of this text, it may be of profit to consider what it does NOT say. The Spirit does NOT say we know we have passed from death unto life because we are evangelistic, attend a good church, or have a successful church program. It is not because we have the right position, have mastered the text of His Word, or regularly do good works. All of these things are fine in their place. But they do not produce the evidence required for strong confidence, fellowship with God, and the joy of the Lord. You may experience all of those involvements and still not know you have eternal life!

The Role of the New Birth

The love of which our text speaks is not natural love, or fleshly preference. Such a love could carry no evidence of a Divine work within. This is a love that has resulted from being born again.

The love of which our text speaks is not natural love, or fleshly preference. Such a love could carry no evidence of a Divine work within. This is a love that has resulted from being born again. To further confirm the role of loving “the brethren”, we are told through Peter that the new birth was in order to an genuine and sincere love of “*the brethren*.” “*Seeing ye have purified your souls in*

obeying the truth through the Spirit UNTO unfeigned love of the brethren , see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet 1:22-23). The RSV reads, “FOR a sincere love of the brethren.”

The above passage speaks powerfully to our hearts. If the purification of our souls and obedience to the truth is in order to an unfeigned love for “*the brethren*,” who can justify their lack of such love? The purity and obedience Peter mentions is confirmed to be the result of “*being born again*.” The regenerate are recreated with a capacity to love the people of God—all of them. That is why they are admonished, “*love one another with a pure heart fervently*.”

By This We Know!

The love of “the brethren” is a preference for them. It involves a desire to do them good, and to benefit from what they have received from God. This love acknowledges the relationship to the children of God is of greater significance than that of flesh and blood. It transcends all other relationships.

As one might expect, the Lord Jesus Himself provides the supreme example of this love. On one occasion, when Jesus was teaching, the Spirit relates a most interesting situation. “*While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him.*” Noticing the situation, someone said to Jesus, “*Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You.*” How will Jesus respond to that? The relevance of His response to us is confirmed by its presence in the Word of God. “*But He answered and said to the one who told Him, ‘Who is My mother and who are My brothers?’ And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother’” (Matt 12:46-50).*

Here was One in Whom the “*fulness of the Godhead*” dwelt “*bodily*” (Col 2:9). He is confronted with a competitive situation. Those related to him in the flesh wanted to talk with Him while He was discoursing to those akin to Him in a higher sense. He acknowledged the higher relationship.

Let none imagine that Jesus was not mindful of His mother and brothers. He did provide for His mother while upon the cross. Incidentally, it is most interesting that Jesus did not leave His mother in the care of one of His brothers according to the flesh: James, Joses, Simon, and Judas (Matt 13:55). This is because, at that time, they “*did not believe in Him*” (John 7:5). Thus, He left His mother in the care of one more closely related to Him at that time.

Thus, the love of “the brethren” confirms our possession of the very Spirit of Christ. Therein we are assured that we have, indeed, “*passed from death unto life*.”

Evidence Versus Cause

There are fundamental differences between the economies of Law and grace. One of the primary ones regards the expression of godly attitudes and works. Under the Law, such expressions were what induced life. As it is written, “*Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD*” (Lev 18:5; Ezek 20:11; Lk 10:28; Rom 10:5; Gal 3:12). In that case, doing preceded, and was the cause of, life. However, during all of the administration of the Law, not a single person received that promise. Thus it was confirmed that spiritual life **cannot** be produced by doing.

Judge for yourself which has the greatest impact upon your soul: perceiving the love of “the brethren” as a mere responsibility, or as evidence that you **have** passed from death unto life.

How different it is in Christ Jesus. In Him, men are first made alive, then they DO. First they are “*raised up*” and made to “*sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*” (Eph 2:6). They are first created in Christ Jesus in order that they may be able to do good works. As it is written, “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*” NKJV (Eph 2:10). First we are reconciled, then we work (Col 1:21)! First we are given the Holy Spirit, then we work (Gal 4:6)! First we are put into Christ, then we work (1 Cor 1:30)!

In this arrangement, doing “*the works of God*” becomes an **evidence** of spiritual life, not the cause of it. The “*fruit of the Spirit*” is the result of His presence, not the cause of it (Gal 5:22-23).

Already John has introduced this principle. “*Now **by this we know** that we know Him, if we keep His commandments*” (2:3). “*But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. **By this we know** that we are in Him*” (2:5). Later, the Spirit will declare this principle again. “*My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And **by this we know** that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him*” (3:19). “*Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And **by this we know** that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us*” (3:24). “***By this we know** that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit*” (4:13). “***By this we know** that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments*” (5:2). God’s people are to look for evidence!

Judge for yourself which has the greatest impact upon your soul: perceiving the love of “the brethren” as a mere responsibility, or as evidence that you **have** passed from death unto life.

The One Who Does Not Love

The Spirit continues the thought because of its centrality in the Kingdom. “*He who does not love his brother abides in death.*” That is a most arresting consideration! Particularly when you ponder the hatred, suspicions, and rejection that sectarianism has created. **Notice, salvation makes no provision for rejecting the people of God!** It is not simply that failing to love the people of God will keep some good things from you. Those who do not love “the brethren” are not merely deprived of some of the grander things pertaining to life and godliness. Such are not afforded the privilege of staying alive, as it were. The one who does not love his brother, whoever it may be, “*abides,*” or remains, “*in death.*”

Is the Spirit saying such a person was never born again, or that they never were alive in Christ? I do not believe this is the intent of the verse, although that may very well be the case. The idea is that not loving “the brethren” is a condition brought on by death, not life. Whatever may have occurred in the individual before, at the time he is not loving “the brethren”, he is in the grip of death—the very death from which Jesus once delivered him.

Observe that failing to love “the brethren” is not a sign of ignorance, but of death. It is not the evidence of a lack of understanding, but of a lack of life. **The absence of love implies the atmosphere of death!** The life of Christ never fails to love “the brethren.” The Holy Spirit is incapable of ignoring or not loving the children of God. That condition characterizes the “*wicked one,*” and belongs to the domain of death.

I want to underscore this because of its obvious importance. This must be done without fostering disdain for people, or provoking us to be judgmental of others. Having said that, wherever lack of love for and consideration of the people of God is found, death exists. There, in that very place, the devil is at work, and influentially so. Hearts are thereby revealed to be alienated from God. There is a deadness to God wherever the love of “the brethren” is not found. Such individuals are, by their failure to love “the brethren”, rendered incapable of spiritual discernment. God does not share His secret and show his covenant to those abiding in death (Psa 25:14).

This must not be construed as harsh and unreasonable. It is the Holy Spirit who has made the assertion, and it is to be believed. *“He who does not love his brother abides in death.”* This is, indeed, a most sobering statement, and is to be embraced with zeal and resolve. The Lord will not permit any person wearing His name to fail to love His people. He loves them, and so do we.

NO MURDERER IS TRULY ALIVE

“15 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” As if the case has not been stated with sufficient strength, the Spirit further elaborates on the matter of loving “the brethren.” He will now show us there is no middle ground—no place of moral neutrality, where “the brethren” are neither loved nor hated. Those who do not “love the brethren,” by that very omission, confirm that they “hate” them.

Now the Spirit affirms that the one failing to love “the brethren” not only hates them, but is a murderer and eternal life does not abide in him. I cannot conceive of anything being stated more strongly. Should anyone entertain the thought that loving “the brethren” is inconsequential, this verse should certainly bring them to their senses.

The very word “murderer” brings feelings of disdain. Nowhere is any sympathy or encouragement for a murderer found in Scripture. Solemnly the Law said, *“the murderer shall surely be put to death”* (Num 36:16,17,18). Jesus said of Satan, *“He was a murderer from the beginning”* (John 8:44). One of the points on which the Jews were condemned in their rejection of Jesus is this: *“But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you”* (Acts 3:14). Revelation 21:8 declares that “murderers” will *“have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”* Let no one, therefore, doubt the gravity of the statement before us. In my judgment, he could not have described the disdain of God’s people in a more pungent manner. He does not say one hating “his brother” (any one of “the brethren”) could become a murderer, but that he already is one!

The Spirit has equated “not loving” with “hating.” Now, he equates “hating” with “murder.” By his very nature, a murderer is driven by hatred. He does not care for the life of another, but thinks nothing of expressing that hatred in the most emphatic way. Even though a person might not actually take the life of another, hating the individual confirms he has the spirit, or temperament, of a murderer. Thus, that is what he is called, for that is what he is in character.

Hatred

It will be of profit to briefly say something about hatred. The seriousness of this expression is confirmed by what is said of the one possessing it: he is a “murderer.” The meaning of the word “hatred” might appear to NOT justify such a conclusion. In the Greek, it means *despise, disregard, indifferent to*. Barclay-Newman Greek Dictionary It also includes the ideas of *loving less, preferring less, rejecting, and not choosing*. Thayers

In order to help us understand the gravity of such an attitude, Jesus spoke of the time when the sheep would be divided from the goats, the righteous from the unrighteous. In one particular teaching, He said the eternal destiny of men would be determined by how they treated His “brethren.” Those who neglected to minister to even “one of the least” of His brethren, will “go away into everlasting punishment” (Matt 25:31-46). And why so? Because they simply neglected the brethren of Jesus, thereby revealing their true attitude toward Him.

An Attitude, Not A Deed

It is quite true that some, in the name of Christ, have actually killed some of Christ’s brethren. Some of the great persecutions of history were instituted by professing Christians. Even at this very time, professed Christians in the Mexico are killing believers who refuse to be aligned with their institution. But John is not limiting hatred to that sort of conduct. He is speaking more of an attitude than of an action.

If what Jesus said, and what the Spirit through John said, is true (and it is), then neglecting, or even maligning, the children of God is serious beyond measure. It might surprise you how many of God’s people have suffered from the neglect, and even opposition, of the very ones with whom they have been associated. The Christian community is cluttered with the spiritual carcasses of precious souls that have been cast out by their brethren, like Joseph was by his brothers. There have been deep hurts given to some of God’s people, and that in the name of the Lord. None of these abuses have gone unnoticed by heaven.

Eternal life

“Eternal life” is the only life recognized and honored in heaven. It is not earned, but is “the gift of God” (Rom 6:23). However, it is not given nor maintained indiscriminately. Our text says, “no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” Remember, the “murderer,” in this case, is the one neglecting, and even rejecting the people of God.

Should we come upon an individual who wears the name of Jesus, yet has no respect for the people of God, we have happened upon a murderer. That individual, regardless of religious affiliation or personal profession, does not have eternal life abiding in him. He is governed by death, not life. Remember that eternal life is knowing God and Jesus Christ (John 17:3; 1 John 5:20). It is personal involvement with the Lord. However, God will NOT become involved with those rejecting His people.

Whether we choose to accept it or not, our receptivity to God and fellowship with His Son, are directly proportionate to our attitude toward “the brethren.” That attitude reveals the degree of our love for God and Christ. It is written, “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him” (1 John 5:1). In fact, our view of “the children of God” reveals the measure of our familiarity with the Lord.

It should be obvious to all that the abiding of eternal life in us is a requisite to glory. No one wearing the name of Jesus will be forever with the Lord who did not have eternal life abiding in him in this world.

CONCLUSION

The strength of the passage we have just considered is apparent. It all has to do with worldly connection. This present evil world and the realm of the Spirit cannot mingle. That is why Jesus came to deliver us from the world. It is also the reason for God raising us up to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. By the grace of God, we have been placed in Christ's body, a society of kindred spirits. The new heart and spirit which we have received is knit, not only to Jesus, but to all others who are in Him. The fact of that situation, however, and the awareness of it, are two different things. The intent of the Spirit, and consequently the purpose of the Apostle inspired by Him, is to make believers aware of who they are in Christ. They "*are the sons of God,*" and "*ought*" to be called precisely that. However, it is the awareness of that condition that brings the confidence and joy required to walk by faith.

Power In Perception

The power of the truth is realized in its perception—when it is seen more clearly. Our text confirms that the life of faith contains certain evidences that will strengthen our hearts and confirm what God has said of us. Without that confirming evidence, we will be weak and vacillating, unable to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Further, we are not left to our own resources to discover the appointed evidence. Rather, it is **declared** to us. Among other things that confirms the effects sin has had upon us. It also verifies the great love of God for us. He desires that we clearly see who we are in Christ, and rejoice in the confidence that knowledge genders.

A Matter of Concern

It is a matter of great concern to me that much of the religion with which I have been acquainted, actually fosters inconsideration of "the brethren." The faithful in Christ do overcome these things, yet they must contend with them. The gathering of the saints is an example at hand. What do you suppose is the source of promoting **infrequent** gatherings of believers? How about gatherings noted for their **brevity** ? Or, what about gatherings that **lack spiritual substance** , providing little, if any, nourishment for the soul? What of the current trend of replacing joint assemblies with **small groups** that meet in divers places? What spirit has driven these trends?

It should not surprise you that much of this is done in the name of consideration for "the brethren." While it is neither my purpose nor inclination to speak against those fostering such trends, I cannot believe the Spirit of God is behind them. In Christ, you cannot promote brotherly love by infrequent exposure to them. Nor, indeed, can "unfeigned" and "fervent love" for the "brethren" be properly advanced by focusing on only a few of them. Unless such fads are overcome, they will eventually lead to the hatred of the brethren. By that, I mean the people of God will eventually be neglected in favor of other relationships.

It is also in order to say a word about preachers and teachers who do not feed the flock. Such have revealed their disdain for the people of God, and thus of the Lord Himself. Once Jesus said, "*Go ye into all the world.*" Thrice He said "*Feed my sheep.*" Those who leave the people of God spiritually malnourished do not love them. It makes no difference what they say! When the saints come hungering and thirsting for righteousness, and are fed meager portions, and even inferior food, no real love for them has been shown.

By the grace of God, you can rise above all of these things. You have been created in Christ Jesus with a capacity for and propensity to the love of "*the brethren.*" As you life by faith, walk

in the Spirit, and fellowship with Christ, you WILL love “*the children of God.*” You will develop a joyful preference for them, and seek to do them good. In that very circumstance, your own affiliation with the Lord will be confirmed. By the very fact that you love “*the brethren,*” you will know you have “*passed from death unto life.*”

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Book of 1st John

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #6

APPROPRIATE RESPONSE

“ 16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. 19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. 20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. 21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. 22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. 23 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. 24 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 3:16-24, KJV)

INTRODUCTION

Spiritual Knowledge

Spiritual knowledge is fundamental in the matter of salvation. **By that I mean a personal acquaintance with the truth of the Gospel is imperative.** It is not enough to merely have our minds exposed to the truth, although that is imperative. The knowledge of the truth must be embraced by the heart. It is at that point the individual becomes capable of believing. It is, after all, *“with the heart”* that we believe (Rom 10:10). When the Ethiopian eunuch asked Philip what was hindering him from being baptized, he was told, *“If you believe **with all your heart** , you may”* (Acts 8:37). This type of knowledge is mentioned a number of times throughout Scripture. When it is lacking among professed believers, it is a point of *“shame”* (1 Cor 15:34). It is the knowledge that is appropriated in salvation (2 Cor 4:6). It is also the knowledge that is attacked by the temptations of the wicked one (1 Cor 10:5).

In its most precise sense, this is the *“knowledge of the Son of God,”* or a personal familiarity with Him (Eph 4:13). Because it is a life-long pursuit, all things competing with it must be abandoned, as affirmed in both the word and life of the Apostle Paul (Phil 3:8), a *“pattern”* for us (1 Tim 1:16). .

The *“knowledge of God”* is the means through which grace and peace are multiplied unto us (1 Pet 1:2). It is also the appointed agency through which the personal appropriation of *“all things pertaining to life and godliness”* is realized (2 Pet 1:3).

Extends Beyond Intellectual Learning

In the Kingdom of God, “*knowing*” extends beyond mere intellectual learning. Those who really “*know*” the truth actually experience it. It becomes a part of themselves, being woven, as it were, into the fabric of their being. The Scriptures call this “*tasting*,” or experiencing. It also involves a trust, or reliance, upon what is known. The Psalmist put it this way, “*Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!*” NKJV (Psa 34:8). In referring to his personal knowledge of God’s Word, the Psalmist wrote, “*How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth!*” NKJV (Psa 119:103). By this, he means he had actually experienced the life-giving properties of the Word of God. It had become a part of him. Jeremiah said it this way, “*Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts*” NKJV (Jer 15:16). There is no substitute for assimilating the Word, the means of maintaining life. (Matt 4:4)

The Involvements of the New Birth

The new birth involves the experience of the good things of God. In a telling text concerning falling away, the Spirit refers to new life in Christ in this manner. “*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come . . .*” NKJV (Heb 6:4-5). This is involved in “*knowing the truth*,” which thereby (by knowing it) makes us “*free*” (John 8:32).

Another view of this aspect of the Kingdom is seen in our Lord’s experience of death in its fullest sense. “*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone*” NKJV (Heb 2:9). Our Lord underwent death, “*tasting*” of it.

The Objective of this Epistle

All of this has a great deal to do with our study in First John. The word “*know*” is used at least twenty-seven times in this epistle. The Holy Spirit has moved John to write in order that we might have fellowship with the Father and the Son—a spiritual experience (1:3). He has also written in order that our joy might be full—a spiritual experience (1:4). His intention is also that we “*sin not*” —a spiritual experience (2:1). The objective is that we might “*know*” we have “*eternal life*” (5:13)—a spiritual experience.

Apart from this higher form of knowledge, it is not possible to live by faith. Those, for example, who lack this type of participation only “*believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.*” The person so characterized is described as one who “*has no root in himself*” (Matt 13:21; Lk 8:13). Such a one has not drawn water from the “*wells of salvation*” as faith demands (Isa 12:3).

An aspect of this knowledge that will be addressed in this text is PERCEIVING, which often, in Scripture, is an alternate word for “*know*.” While there are a number of different words from which “*perceive*” is translated, the one in our text is **evgnw,kamen** (from **ginw,sk w**), which means discerning knowledge, or understanding. Some have chosen to call it experiential knowledge. It speaks of discerning, distinguishing, able to identify, recognizing, and apprehending. It involves taking hold of the truth declared, and thereby profiting from it. Settle it in your soul, that no truth of God, particularly relating to Christ and salvation, can profit us unless we take hold of it by faith, see it, and perceive something of its nature.

It is certainly in order to give thanks to the Lord for not leaving us to our own surmising. Rather than simply affirming the Gospel, then leaving it to us to arrive at our own conclusions,

the Spirit reasons with us. He shows us what God has intended, opening the truth of the Gospel to us. He constrained holy Prophets to tell us what God was going to do in for men. He then gave the glorious Gospel to announce that those intentions are fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. But He did not stop there. He further expounds the Gospel to show us the extent to which the Lord is committed to bring us all the way to glory. This, among other things, is what He is doing in the Epistle of First John.

PERCEIVING AND RESPONDING

“16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” Having an intellectual acquaintance with *“the love of God,”* and perceiving it are two entirely different things. Perception requires intellectual acquaintance, but is not wed to it. A person may be mentally familiar with *“the love of God,”* yet wholly lacking in a perception of it.

The Lack of Perception

When Isaiah was sent to Israel, the Lord prohibited their perception of his message. *“And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not”* (Isa 6:9). Later, the Spirit affirmed the same condition in these words, *“For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered”* (Isa 29:10). Again it is written,

Perception requires intellectual acquaintance, but is not wed to it. A person may be mentally familiar with *“the love of God,”* yet wholly lacking in a perception of it.

“They have not known nor understood: for He hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand” (Isa 44:18).

Ezekiel’s Experience

When God sent Ezekiel to the children of Israel, He said they would not give heed to him. In explaining the situation, the Lord spoke of their inability to see, or perceive. *“Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house”* (Ezek 12:2).

Jesus Mentions

When Jesus ministered among the people, He often spoke in parables. While sophists imagine that He did so to simplify the truth, bringing it within the reach of the listeners, He affirmed this was not the case at all. Teaching in parables, He declared, fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy concerning **not** perceiving. *“Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive”* (Matt 13:13-14).

Paul Mentions

After Jesus returned to heaven, and the Gospel was preached, Paul encountered some who rejected the good news. One particular account explains the obtuseness of the people by siting

the words of Isaiah. *“And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and **not perceive**”* (Acts 26:24-26).

The love of God, while immense and effectual, is not readily apparent. It is as high above human love as the heavens are above the earth.

In his explanation of the current status of the Jews, Paul also referred to their lack of perception. He attributed it to Divine judgment. *“According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, **eyes that they should not see**, and ears that they should not hear;”) unto this day. And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompense unto them: Let their **eyes be darkened** that they may not see, and bow down their back alway”* (Rom 11:8-10).

Brief Observation on Spiritual Blindness

Spiritual blindness, or the lack of perception, is an infinitely serious matter. It reveals a deplorable situation that has been brought on by unbelief and hardness of heart. In Isaiah’s explanation of the *“deep sleep”* God poured out upon Israel, he said, *“Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid”* (Isa 29:13-14).

The Glorious Condition of the Saints

All of this emphasizes what a marvelous work has been wrought in the people of God. When the Scripture says *“Hereby perceive we,”* it at once separates us from all whose hearts are hard, and upon whom God has poured out a spirit of deep sleep.

Because of the accomplishments of Jesus Christ, God has given those who receive His Son a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 36:26). The presence of that newness gives believers the capacity to perceive and understand what is otherwise hidden to them. Now the Lord can open the *“eyes of our understanding”* (Eph 1:17-18) to behold His magnificent love.

Perceiving the Love of God

The love of God, while immense and effectual, is not readily apparent. It is as high above human love as the heavens are above the earth. The love of God is declared throughout Scripture. In this regard, He stands in stark contrast with the false gods of this world. His love is not only general, but is declared to be particular, being focused on special individuals. Perhaps a few examples will suffice.

*“And because **He loved thy fathers**, therefore He chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in His sight with His mighty power out of Egypt”* (Deut 4:37). *“But because **the LORD loved you**, and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh*

king of Egypt” (Deut 7:8). “And David comforted Bathsheba his wife . . . and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and **the LORD loved him**” (2 Sam 12:24). “The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, **I have loved thee** with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer 31:3). “When Israel was a child, then **I loved him**, and called my son out of Egypt” (Hos 11:1). “**I have loved you**, saith the LORD” (Mal 1:2).

Even though the Lord affirmed His love clearly and repeatedly, yet His people, with very few exceptions, did not perceive that love to any satisfactory degree. Their hearts were not changed, and thus they failed to perceive the love of God—even though, from our perspective, it had been abundantly confirmed in His dealings with them.

Perception is Necessary

The underlying point being developed in our text is that God’s love **MUST** be perceived in order for us to benefit from it. It is true, there are general mercies enjoyed by all men, whether they are saved or not. As it is written, “*He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust*” (Matt 5:45). Our text, however, is bringing us to a much higher level of spiritual awareness. The recognition of our Lord’s general mercies will not enable the perception God requires.

Here is a perception related to faith, which comes by hearing the word of Christ (Rom 1:16). Remember, this chapter began with a summons to “*Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us*” (3:1). This is a love that cannot be perceived with the eye, or any other human sense. The only way it may be known at all is through Divine proclamation. And that is precisely what the Gospel does—announce the great love of God toward humanity. Through it we gain an understanding of God’s profound love.

Hereby We Perceive

Because the Spirit is expounding the love of the brethren, He deals with the supreme example of love. This example is to serve as a definition of real love. “*By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us.*” NKJV He is referring to the Son of God specifically, and to God generally. While it was “*the Man Christ Jesus*” who laid down His life for us, it was the Divine nature that determined it should be done. This Acts 20:28 refers to “*the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*”

The determination to lay down His life was made **BEFORE** the Son of God came into the world. Thus, before He entered into the world, it is said of Him, “*Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure.’ Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come; In the volume of the book it is written of Me; To do Your will, O God’*” NKJV (Heb 10:5-7).

It is important to note the phraseology of this verse. He does not say we perceive, or know, love because Christ died for us. Rather, it is because He **LAID DOWN** His life for us—and there is a difference. The emphasis here is the voluntary nature of His death. Elsewhere, the necessity and legality of Christ’s death is the point (Rom 5:8; 1 Thess 5:10). But here, the personal regard for His brethren is the point. From a personal point of view Paul said it this way, “*the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me*” (Gal 2:20).

The precise point made here is also stated in Hebrews 2:14-15. “*Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear*

of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” NKJV

The death of Christ is a complex fact, with sweeping results. Through His death, sin was punished, or “*condemned in the (Christ’s) flesh*” (Rom 8:3). By means of this death, Satan was “*destroyed*” (Heb 2:14). The world was “*reconciled to God by the death of His Son*” (Rom 5:10). However, the death of Christ itself is not the point of this particular text. Rather, it is what led to that death: He “*laid down*” His life for us. We have the testimony of Jesus Himself on this matter. “*Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father*” NKJV (John 10:17-18). But this was no heartless obedience. When Jesus “*laid down His life for us,*” His heart was in the matter.

In another expression of this perception of the death of Christ, the Spirit drives the point home with unusual power. “*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich*” NKJV (2 Cor 8:9). It is not possible “*perceive*” this aspect of Christ’s death by mere intellectual assessment. Nor, indeed, were the multitudes that saw Jesus die aware that He had become “*poor,*” that we “*through His poverty might become rich.*”

**Just as all religious strife comes from the pursuit
of selfish interests, so true benefit is brought to
the saints by the abandonment of such interests.**

What kind of love would move the Lord of glory to divest Himself of Divine prerogatives, enter into this world, become a servant, and lay down His life? It is the only kind of love that is acceptable to God! **From our point of view, it is seeking the welfare of another at the expense of personal inconvenience and sacrifice.** That is how extensively God loved us. We “*perceive*” it in our Lord’s willingness, yea eagerness, to offer Himself to God in our behalf.

Nowhere is this love more evident than on the eve of our Lord’s betrayal. His heart was now acutely aware of the involvements and consequences of His imminent death. In agony he prayed, “*O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.*” Two more times He prayed, “*O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done*” (Matt 26:39-42). Right there is where He made the committal required to lay “*down His life for us.*” He “*offered Himself without spot to God,*” as a Lamb to be sacrificed for the sins of the world (Heb 9:14). Jesus left that garden in control of the situation, ready to make the sacrifice required to take away the sins of the world.

Notice the contrast between Cain and Jesus. Cain took his brother’s life to benefit himself. Jesus forfeited His life to benefit us. Therein is revealed the nature of the devil and that of Deity. As Jesus said, “*The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly*” NKJV (John 10:10).

We Ought to Lay Down Our Lives

In another place, Paul writes, “*Therefore be imitators of God as dear children*” NKJV (Eph 5:1). Paul also admonished, “*Be ye follower s of me, even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Cor 11:1). Now, the Spirit spells the matter out even more clearly.

Remember, the Spirit is opening up the matter of loving the brethren, an indisputable

evidence that we have passed from death unto life, and are born of God (1 John 3:14; 4:7; 5:1). Laying down our lives for “*the brethren*” is preferring them above ourselves. As it is written, “*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another*” (Rom 12:10). Again, it is written, “*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves*” (Phil 2:3). Just as all religious strife comes from the pursuit of selfish interests, so true benefit is brought to the saints by the abandonment of such interests. It is with great disappointment that we just acknowledge a serious lack of this type of love among those professing the name of Christ.

If we find it difficult to highly regard the interests of our brethren, let us ponder the high regard Jesus had for us in laying down His life for us. Such considerations confirm the reasonableness of pursuing the needs of our brethren.

The Teaching of Our Lord

During the last evening our Lord spent with His disciples, He buttressed this truth with a most remarkable action. The incident is the more extraordinary when you consider He was about to make “*His soul an offering for sin*” (Isa 53:13), enduring the curse of God (Gal 3:13). Earlier, He had told these very men, “*Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him*” (Mark 10:33-34).

Rather than dismissing His disciples, and spending the evening alone, He had told them, “*With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer*” (Mk 22:15). Now, seated with them at the Passover table, our Lord “*rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded*” (John 13:4-5). It was a tender occasion, indeed!

Following a personal word to Peter, who saw himself as unworthy of such personal attention, Jesus riveted the event in the memory of His disciples. “*Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For **I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you***” (John 13:12-15). Our lord lived out the love of the brethren in an apparent way, placing His own personal interests in the background. In doing this, He revealed the compelling nature of love; how it can triumph in the most excruciating trials and difficulties.

As if this was not enough, Jesus also told of a coming time, when He will again serve His brethren. It would not be a permanent arrangement—that is, He will not always serve us. However, it will set the tone for the ages to come. Here is what he said. “*Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them*” (Lk 12:37).

Suffer the Word of Exhortation

“*And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*” This is the manner of the Kingdom. It has been demonstrated in the life of Jesus. It has been shown in God sending Him to lay down His life for us—when we were enemies. How much more reasonable is it for us to forfeit our own interests in consideration of “*the brethren?*”

The phenomenal disregard of the saints that exists among professing believers is remarkable.

This is particularly true since so much has been said on the subject. It is even more true since our very salvation is an vivid portrayal of the profit that comes from such love. Let reach of us see to it that we “*love one another fervently with a pure heart,*” and with great consistency (1 Pet 1:22). Such love will yield enviable benefits in our brethren. It will also be the occasion of the experience of much grace by those loving the brethren. Any other posture is unreasonable. The Spirit gives us no other alternative. We are to love one another fervently.

SHUTTING UP THE FLOW

“*17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*” The Holy Spirit now begins to reason with us on the matter of brotherly love. From one point of view, this is a most remarkable fact—extended teaching on brotherly love. He has already declared the love of God will be “*perfected*” in the person keeping His Word (2:5). The one loving his brother is “*abiding in the light*” (2:10). The person who “*loveth not his brother*” confirms, by that very circumstance, that he is a child of the devil (3:10). He has affirmed the consistent message we have heard from the beginning is that “*we should love one another*” (3:11). The presence of such love confirms that we have “*passed from death unto life*” (3:14). If merely conveying the facts concerning the case was enough, we should be able to take the matter from here. But no such assumption is made by the Holy spirit.

The example of Christ confirms to us that real flow flows out from the one

There are two realms, or two worlds. One is heavenly, and the other is earthly. Both have commodities required to sustain life in those occupying them.

possessing it. That is its nature, or tendency. However, as we will find, that flow can be stopped by the obstinance and inconsideration of the individual. This is a very poignant view of quenching or grieving the Spirit of God.

Having This World's Good

Now the Spirit speaks of the one who has “*this world's good.*” While other versions use the word “goods,” the word is actually in the singular (**bi,on**). The literal meaning of the word is “this world's means of subsistence, property, goods, or ones living. Barclay-Newman Greek Dictionary There are two realms, or two worlds. One is heavenly, and the other is earthly. Both have commodities required to sustain life in those occupying them. The heavenly realm requires “*all spiritual blessings*” to sustain life (Eph 1:3). The earthly realm requires things to eat, drink, and clothing for the body (Matt 6:25; Lk 12:22, 29-30).

Not all people—even brethren, are blessed with these things, even though the Father knows we “*have need of them*” (Lk 12:30). For some, that is a contradiction of thought. But we must take time to consider Lazarus, a “*beggar full of sores,*” whose life was spent desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from a rich man's table. Upon his death, he is described as being carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom, and there being comforted (Lk 16:22-25). There were also saints of old who “*wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth*” (Heb 11:37-38). These very oppressed people “*obtained a good report through faith*” (Heb 11:37).

For that matter Jesus spoke of the day of when the sheep and goats would be separated—the ungodly from among the godly. He affirmed the eternal destiny of both the sheep and the goats would hinge upon their regard for His people. Because He was alive in His people, the Lord declared the actions toward even the least of them revealed how He Himself was regarded. In that discourse, He spoke of His people as being “*hungry,*” “*thirsty,*” “*a stranger,*” “*naked,*” “*sick,*” and “*in prison*” (Matt 25:34-40). It is obvious He knew nothing about the guaranteed health and prosperity that is ignorantly declared by many. Such teaching simply is not true.

The Good Samaritan

we can rise high enough, we will see that God has placed some people in our path who require our need. They are like a test of our faith and love.

An excellent example of the type of love declared in our text is found in the word of our Lord concerning the Good Samaritan. You will recall a “*certain man*” coming down from Jericho fell into the hand of robbers. The heartless thieves “*stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.*” Two religious men, a “*certain priest*” and a “*Levite,*” were first afforded the opportunity to minister to this man’s need. They both chose to “*pass by on the other side,*” leaving the man with his need.

Later, a “*certain Samaritan*” passed by that way. Jesus said “*when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.*” This man had “*this world’s good,*” and used it to relieve one less fortunate. Not content to let the matter rest there, and before he left the next day, he made further provision for the man’s care. Jesus said, “*On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you’*” (Lk 10:30-35). That is how love expresses itself. It brings benefit to another at ones own personal expense.

The Early Church

The early church, basking in the freshness of sins forgiven and the power of the Holy Spirit, experienced “*need*” among some of its members. Some, evidencing a genuine love for the brethren, “*sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need*” (Acts 2:45). Later, when the number of disciples began to swell, “*as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need*” (Acts 4:35). One of the significant ministries of that early church was superintended by men filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. It involved “*the daily distribution*” of necessities to widows (Acts 6:1). None of the cases involved the slightest hint that a deficiency of faith existed among those with “*need*” –need of “*this world’s good.*”

A Higher View

If we can rise high enough, we will see that God has placed some people in our path who require our need. They are like a test of our faith and love. In fact, the Word of God suggests we can even be visited by angels who appear as people in need. As it is written, “*Let BROTHERLY LOVE continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels*” (Heb 13:1-2).

The following words sound as though they were written in a modern newspaper. **They are a sort of alarm, sounded to the saints. “This office of humanity has also nearly ceased to be properly observed among men; for the ancient hospitality, celebrated in histories, is unknown to us, and Inns now supply the place of accommodations for strangers. But he speaks not so much of the practice of hospitality as observed then by the rich; but he rather commends the miserable and the needy to be entertained, as at that time many were fugitives who left their homes for the name of Christ.”** *Written in 1853 by John Calvin.*

This is, of course, a devastating view to those possessing a merely intellectual religion. Notwithstanding, this is what the Holy Spirit affirms, and it is on the part of wisdom to comport our lives with that in mind. Besides, Jesus said neglecting to minister to the needy was actually a neglect of Himself, suggesting it is not coincidence when we confront such circumstances.

Remember, whatever is born of God does not sin (3:9). There is in the new creation a compassion like to that of God Himself. An affinity with and preference for the people of God are resident in the new heart and new spirit. If, then, a person wearing the name of Jesus, who is in possession of *“this world’s good,”* is confronted with a brother that has *“need,”* and refuses to meet it, a deliberate activity has occurred. Such has *“shut up”* his *“bowels of compassion”* –the capacity and inclination to minister that came to him when he was born again. He has stifled Divine life, quenched the Spirit, and neglected Jesus!

There is a remarkable expression found in the sixteenth Psalm. Although there are a variety of translations of it, some of which tend to obscure the truth therein expressed, the KJV version does capture the precise meaning. *“O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to Thee; But to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight”* (Psa 16:2-3). The idea of the Psalm is that we do not personally do good to the Lord, but to His saints that are in the earth. They are the *“excellent”* ones who are our primary source of delight among the sons of men. A revealing verse, indeed.

The Love of God Is Not There

Unwilling to merely make an interesting observation, the Spirit presses the matter. *“How does the love of God abide in him?”* The question is a rhetorical one, as though He said, *“How can the love of God be in him?”* NIV Or, *“How is it possible for the love of God to be in him?”* BBE

The idea is this: It is not possible to entertain the love of God and at the same time neglect His people. When he says *“the love of God”* dwells in us, he means **our love for God**. That love has been prompted by His love for us—a selfless love that provoked the Lord Jesus to lay down His life for us. He did this willingly and with zeal, preferring our lives above His own.

Where there is a disregard for the people of God— *“the brethren”* –it is pointless to talk about loving God. **Our love for the Lord must be suppressed before we can neglect His saints**. The failure to minister to them when we are able, confirms that is exactly what has happened. A distance has formed between the individual and God, and thus God cannot be truly loved. Were a lively sense of this truth to grip the contemporary church, it would radically transform it.

VALID EXPRESSIONS OF LOVE

In the doing of good, the Spirit does not allow for a mechanical, or heartless, performance perceived obligations. Salvation makes no provision for heartless expression, either toward God or man.

“18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.” It is well to remember, *“For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power”* (1 Cor 4:20). In Jesus, we do not simply embrace a set of propositions. Life is not conferred upon us by means of a creedal statement. Therefore, the highest form of expression is not the statement of a persuasion, or the formation of a flawless position. Of course, almost all theological wrangling is over creedal statements.

In writing this powerful Epistle, the Spirit is not simply urging us to adopt a proper stand—one that can be sufficiently supported before our enemies. There is certainly nothing wrong with that, and such defenses are not to be despised (Phil 1:17). Notwithstanding, that is not the heart of the Kingdom, and it is certainly not the objective of this Epistle. Our words should not only strictly agree with the truth, but with what we exhibit in our lives.

Therefore, we are admonished as the children of God, *“let us **not** love in word or in tongue.”* He does not mean we are forbidden to say *“I love you,”* or to state this is our desire. The idea is that love is not to be **confined** to a statement or saying. It is not enough to affirm love with our tongue, if it is not beheld in our deeds.

And what is the difference between *“word”* and *“tongue?”* The term *“word”* emphasizes WHAT is said, while *“tongue”* underscores WHO said it. Both words, however, refer to mere verbal expressions that are not supported by deeds of kindness. The people of God are exhorted, *“As we have therefore opportunity, let us **do** good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith”* (Gal 6:10). Just as God’s love for us erupted in ministering what we needed, so our love for the brethren will break forth in ministering their needs. Of themselves, words are not sufficient.

It is fine to spend time proclaiming and defending the love of the brethren, affirming it to be necessary and evidential. Yet, if we do not actually live out that love, we have only condemned ourselves in our doctrine. It will be said unto such talkers, *“Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant”* (Lk 19:22). What comes from our mouths must be found in our conduct.

Deed and in Truth

In the doing of good, the Spirit does not allow for a mechanical, or heartless, performance of perceived obligations. Salvation makes no provision for heartless expression, either toward God or man. Loving in *“deed”* is confirming our love by doing something, just as our Lord confirmed His love by laying down His life for us. Loving in *“truth”* is loving in reality. That is, the deed done is an actual expression of the heart, both genuine and effective. Only a renewed nature can love in this manner. Thus, the admonition is not simply a goal set forth to us, but a challenge to walk in the Spirit, giving place to godly impulses, and subduing ungodly ones. **Thus, our hearts are made known.**

ASSURING OUR HEARTS BEFORE HIM

“19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.”

Remember, one of the primary objectives of this Epistle is that we might “*know*” we have “*eternal life*” (5:13). We will now see that a mere intellectual knowledge is not intended—like knowing George Washington was the first President of the United States of America. The intended knowledge yields confidence and assurance that permits the individual to traffic in the very presence of the Almighty.

Personal Involvement Required

This is the kind of knowledge that requires personal involvement and attentiveness. No disinterested person can obtain it. In the world, knowledge—even profitable knowledge—can be obtained by those with little personal interest in what is learned. Thus a person may become fairly adept at using mathematics without all of his person being involved. It is quite possible for a skilled person to perform meaningful tasks mechanically, while his mind is actually involved in other things.

But this is emphatically NOT the case in the Kingdom of God. No Kingdom benefit can be realized independently of the personal and deliberate involvement of the individual. God has “*called*” us “*into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord*” (1 Cor 1:9). That fellowship is satisfying to both the Lord and those joined to Him. If it is true that “*the secret of the Lord is with them who fear Him; and He will show them His covenant*” (Psa 25:14), the necessity of our awareness of Him should be apparent.

In all of this, confidence plays a most vital role. The closer we draw to the Lord, the more His “*secret*” is perceived, and the more His covenant is comprehended. The catch in all of this is that we cannot draw near if we are not confident. A lack of assurance makes coming to the Lord a fearful thing. That is why it is written, “*Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water*” (Heb 10:22).

Thus, the Holy Spirit now labors to bring a fuller measure of assurance to our hearts. We will not fight the good fight of faith well if we are not sure we belong to Christ and are welcome in the presence of the Lord.

Hereby

Here the Spirit again points us to the love of the brethren. When we are able to love Christ’s brethren “*in deed and in truth,*” we will gain a clearer understanding of our status in Christ. The love of the brethren, therefore, is infinitely more than an obligation, although it is surely that. At this point, where we **exhibit** an interest in, and preference for, the people of God, an indispensable confidence and assurance will be ministered to us. Not only is this confidence essential, it is both enjoyable and encouraging.

We Know That we Are of the Truth

This is a view of *evidences* that differs significantly from the approach normally taken in religious circles. The evidence under consideration relates to knowing we are “*of the truth,*” belonging to God, and with the life of God.

What does it mean to be “*of the truth.*” Some versions read “*we belong to the truth*” NIV, and “*we are from the truth*” NRSV. This is another way of saying we know we are “*born of God.*” Remember, God, “*chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created*” NIV (James 1:18). This is when the Word was “*engrafted*” within us (James 1:21). Through Peter, the Spirit said it this way, “*for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God*” (1 Pet

1:23).

A Superior Beginning

In the beginning God “*formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul*” (Gen 2:7). But the new creation is accomplished in a different manner. By means of “*the word of truth,*” specifically the Gospel of Christ, the new birth occurs. The very life of Christ, declared in the Gospel, is reproduced in the believer, making him “*of the truth.*” Thus we read of “*Christ in you,*” “*Christ dwelling in your heart by faith,*” and “*Christ liveth in me*” (Col 1:27; Eph 3:17; Gal 2:20). From this view, spiritual maturity is nothing less than Christ being “*formed*” in us (Gal 4:19). All of this is involved in being “*of the truth.*”

Thus, being “*of the truth*” means that we have been born again through the “*word of truth.*” That truth has liberated us from the guilt and power of sin, enabling us to take hold on eternal life.

Needful Knowledge

Knowing “*that we are of the truth*” is particularly needful. We are in a world that is filled with delusion, and in which powerful deceptive forces are at work. How can we know we are the product of the truth of God, and have embraced the truth? Is such knowledge to be obtained through scientific and logical proofs? Will we be persuaded we are of the truth through archaeological evidence and powerful apologetical arguments? Will convincing us of the historical accuracy of the Gospel produce this knowledge--knowing we are of the truth?

While these things are all lawful in their place, they are all powerless to influence the heart. Faith does not come by seeing, or by logical thought and convincing proofs. It comes “*by hearing*” –by exposure to the glorious Gospel of Christ of Christ (Rom 10:14-17).

The Real Evidence

This is a view of *evidences* that differs significantly from the approach normally taken in religious circles. The evidence under consideration relates to knowing we are “*of the truth,*” belonging to God, and with the life of God.

As simplistic as it may appear, that evidence is found in the love of “*the brethren.*” This is not a love in word or tongue, but in deed and truth. It is not a love confirmed by affirmation, but by demonstration. It involves a preference of the people of God above all others. As it is written, “*So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith*” NASB (Gal 6:10).

God’s View of People

Of all the people in the earth, the saints are the most favored of God. Is it not written, “*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people*” (1 Pet 2:9a). The NASB reads, “*But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION.*” This truth is taught with remarkable consistency throughout Scripture (Acts 20:28; Tit 2:14; 1 Pet 1:2; rev 1:5-6). That is why we read of “*the people of God*” (Heb 4:9), “*the household of God*” (Eph 2:19), “*My people*” (2 Cor 6:16), “*His people*” (Rom 15:10), “*His saints*” (Col 1:26), and “*the children of God*” (Gal 3:26).

The evidence that you belong to God is NOT your concern for the lost, although such concern is not to be despised. Our text says it is your love of “*the brethren.*” You cannot view people in a manner contradicting God’s view and expect to have confidence you are “*of the truth.*” God has made clear that He regards the saints—His children—more highly than any of the sons of men.

They alone receive eternal life, an eternal inheritance, and access to the throne of all grace. They are the subjects of angelic ministry, the intercession of Jesus, and the intercession of the Spirit—none of which are afforded to the unregenerate.

Best Friends

It is a matter of great concern when professed believers prefer the friendship of unregenerate people to that of the people of God. Many who wear the name of Jesus have “best friends” who are, by virtue of their unregenerate state, God’s enemies. How can such a practice be justified? Who is the naive soul that will attempt to vindicate a preference for the children of the wicked one over the children of the Kingdom?

Assuring Our Hearts

Here is a Kingdom reality that has escaped many a religious soul. **Assurance is more to be desired than information.** Too, our hearts are to be the focus more than our intellects. This by no means suggests that information and the intellect are of no value, or that they are to be despised. God forbid! **Rather, the heart is like the altar that sanctifies the processing of information.** If the heart is assured, God-given information becomes profitable as it pervades the mind, or intellect. However, when the heart is not “*assured*,” little profitable time will be spent thinking about what God has said. In fact, in such a case, there will be a marked tendency to ignore the Word of the Lord.

What Is An Assured Heart?

The phraseology of this verse is thought-provoking. It is “*WE*” that “*assure our hearts*,” based on the evidence of the love of the brethren. Other versions read, “*reassure our hearts*” RSV , “*set our hearts at rest*” NIV , “*persuade our hearts*” DARBY’S , “*give our heart comfort*” BBE , and “*convince us*” NJB .

The word “*assure*” carries unusual strength. In the English, it means to be satisfied, convinced, and persuaded. It is the antithesis of doubt, question, and uncertainty. In the Greek (**pei,somen**), the word means basically the same: be convinced or persuaded, to be certain of something.

An assured heart is what enabled David to face Goliath, Elijah the 450 prophets of Baal, and the three Hebrew children Nebuchadnezzar. This is why Peter and John could stand boldly before their enemies and affirm they would not refrain from speaking what they had “*seen and heard*.” Confidence (Eph 3:12; Heb 3:6), boldness (Eph 3:12; 1 Tim 3:13), steadfastness (1 Cor 15:58; Heb 3:14), and faithfulness (1 Cor 4:2; Rev 2:10), are all the result of an assured heart! They are blessings to be eagerly sought by every child of God.

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Too, our hearts are to be the focus more than our intellects.

The Opposite of a Troubled Heart

This is the opposite of having a troubled heart. Remember when Jesus said, “*Let not your heart be troubled*” (John 14:1). Again, “*Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*” (John 14:27). Whereas a troubled and fearful heart causes one to withdraw from God, an assured one compels the individual to draw close to the Lord.

Before Him

Here again, we see the real nature of the Kingdom of God. The whole intent of salvation is to “*bring us to God*” (1 Pet 3:18). Nothing else really counts if that is not accomplished. Jesus summarized the whole of His mission in these words, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*” NKJV (John 14:6). As simplistic as this may appear, it should not surprise you that countless numbers of professed believers are living their lives with little, if any, thought of coming into the presence of God.

Life Must Be Lived Before Him

The life of faith must be lived “*before Him*.” If we attempt to live without a due regard for our Father in heaven, we will fail. There is no chance that this will not happen. The Law rendered us guilty “*before God*” (Rom 3:19) and redemption enables us to have assured hearts “*before Him*.”

By living “*before God*,” I mean we conduct our lives in an acute awareness of His Person. As regards our text, that awareness is a confident one, producing a undoubting boldness. This is the heritage of every child of God, and must not be viewed as a sort of luxury for only a few. As it is written, “. . . *Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him*” NKJV (Eph 3:11-12).

Do you wonder about the necessity of this kind of confidence, boldness, or assurance? It is necessary if you are going to appropriate the grace you need. It is written, “*Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence , so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need*” NIV (Heb 4:16). Do not, therefore, regard an assured heart as something you can do without.

The Marvelous Simplicity

We must not allow our hearts to miss the marvelous *simplicity* of this truth. By simplicity, I do not mean unintelligent and uninvolved. Rather, I mean without undue complication, unpretentious, and well within our reach. An assured heart can be obtained by duly reflecting upon our love of “*the brethren*.” If we are at home in their presence, we can also be at home in the presence of the One who has begotten them! If we prefer them, God will also prefer us! If we do good to them, God will also do good to us! Our regard for the people of God confirms that we possess the nature of God.

All of this has to do with having a good conscience—something faith produces and requires. The Spirit will now show us that an “*evil conscience*,” or one that is polluted, will drive us from the presence of the Lord. It will not allow us to stand confidently before Him, or to expect mercy and grace from Him. When we stagger with fear before the Lord, we are not able to receive from Him. We sorely need assured hearts before our God.

IF OUR HEART CONDEMN US

“*20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.*” Here is a verse that has been greatly corrupted by many. It has actually been used to make people comfortable in their sin. Many consider this passage to be saying the following. *If we do something wrong, and our heart condemns us, we still have nothing to fear. God is greater than our heart and will not condemn us for such infractions.* Emphatically, this is NOT the truth! In fact, it is a serious contradiction of what is taught in this passage.

If there was no danger in a heart that condemns us, then there would be no need to “*assure*

our hearts before Him.” There would, in such a case, be no need for assurance. Thus, the whole reasoning of this passage becomes pointless, and an insult to the spiritual mind.

If Our Heart Condemn Us

Here is an unusually strong statement. A condemned heart is one that forbids us to come confidently into the presence of the Lord. This kind of heart compelled Adam and Eve to “*hide themselves from the presence of the Lord among the trees of the garden*” (Gen 3:8). It is the kind of heart that prompted Peter to say to Jesus, “*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!*” (Lk 5:8). A most precise explanation of this type of heart is found in the incident of the woman taken in the act of adultery being brought to Jesus. When our Lord challenged her accusers by saying, “*He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first,*” it is written, “*Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last*” (John 8:7-9). Their hearts condemned them!

Another phrase unveiling the meaning of a condemning heart is found in Titus 3:11. There, a heretic, or divisive man refusing correction, is said to be “*condemned of himself,*” or “*self condemned*” NKJV .

The New Heart

That is one of the advantages of receiving a “*new heart.*” The need of being sensitive of our own heart cannot be overemphasized. Satan tempts us to develop and nourish the longings of the flesh, or the unregenerate part of our persons. The Spirit, on the other hand, sheds abroad the love of God in our “*hearts*” (Rom 5:5). Among other things, this enables us to live with a greater consciousness of our heart than our flesh. After all, that is where God has sent the Holy Spirit—“*into our hearts*” (Gal 4:6; 2 Cor 1:22). That is where Jesus dwells (Eph 3:17).

If our heart sees our failings, what do you think God sees?
If our own heart refuses to commend our deeds, what do we
imagine the God of heaven will do?

When, therefore, “*our heart condemn us,*” it is nothing less than the new nature being repulsed and offended by our conduct.

The Matter of Loving the Brethren

In this particular text, the point of emphasis is loving the brethren. The presence of this love confirms we have, indeed, been born of God. But what if this love is NOT present in the professing *Christian* ? What if there is not due regard for the saints of God? What if they are not preferred, and their fellowship sought and enjoyed? What if the individual is not involved in doing good “*especially*” to them (Gal 6:10)?

Wherever this condition exists—a lack of the love of the brethren—the truth of God is so powerful it will, if believed, bring great conviction upon the individual. Their heart will, in such a case, condemn them. It will drive them from the presence of the Lord just as surely the sin of Adam and Eve drive them from the Divine presence.

There Is A Remedy

I am swift to say that a remedy for this condition is provided in Christ Jesus. “*If we confess*

our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” NKJV (1 John 1:9). “*And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*” NKJV (1 John 2:1). Yet, such confessions require a great deal of faith and fortitude, as your own conscience will confirm.

If the love of the brethren is a primary evidence of being born of God, then the absence of such love is a confirmation of the lack of Divine life. What is being revealed to us is that serious.

God Is Greater Than Our Heart

If our heart sees our failings, what do you think God sees? If our own heart refuses to commend our deeds, what do we imagine the God of heaven will do?

The ultimate judge is God, not the heart. Yet, the new heart does reflect God’s assessment of things. It is imperative that we be sensitive to its reactions.

Nothing Is Hidden From God

By saying “*God is greater than our hearts,*” the Spirit confirms we cannot hide anything from His view. As it is written, “*all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do*” (Heb 4:13). Living in an acute awareness of this will take the edge off of temptation, and weaken the influence of the flesh upon us. Your own experience in Christ will confirm this to be the case. You simply cannot sin while you are looking to Jesus, meditating upon the truth, or drawing near to God.

God Cannot Gloss Sin

We can not afford, therefore, to ignore the cries of our heart for spiritual sustenance. Neither, indeed, can we refuse to hear its condemning warning when “*straight paths*” are not being made for our feet

We also learn from this text that God cannot gloss sin—even in those who are in His Son. That is why he dealt so harshly with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) and the disrespectful Corinthians (1 Cor 11:30). It is the reason for chastisement, that we “*be no condemned with the world*” (1 Cor 11:32).

God Considers What Men Ignore

God takes account of things men tend to ignore. Many a soul is not even convicted by a disregard for the people of God. But for those who are, God’s view of their transgression is even greater than their own. He sees the fulness of such an attitude, knowing the reason for its presence and the extent of its defilement.

God Knows All things

The very fact that this is written confirms it can easily escape our attention. Think of it. We only know some things, and yet our heart can condemn us. What can be said of God Who “*knows all things*” ?

Peter’s Experience

The awareness of this fact prompted Peter's response to our Lord when he was asked about his love. "*Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You*" (John 21:17). Oh, for more of this frame of mind, that we might bare our hearts before the Lord, knowing He already sees them fully.

David's Experience

This is what moved the Psalmist to say, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*" (Psa 139:23-24). He knew God "*knows all things,*" and turned it into personal advantage.

Paul's Experience

It was this very truth that prompted Paul **not** to rely upon His own assessment of himself, even though he took account of such knowledge. "*For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God*" NKJV (1 Cor 4:4-5).

It is not often that any person can confess he knows nothing against himself—but Paul did. He was so dominated by faith, and lived so fully unto the Lord, that he was "*not conscious of any wrong*" in himself BBE . Yet, he made no boast in this, knowing that he only "*knew in part*" (1 Cor 13:9). He will wait for praise until "*the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.*" His faith would not rest in a personal assessment of himself. He would also wait to receive praise from God Himself.

Corruption Remains In Us

While we remain in the body, we will find "*another law in our members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members*" (Rom 7:23). By the grace of God, we are not given to see the fulness of the remnants of corruption within us. Methinks it would cause us to faint were we able to see it thoroughly.

We can not afford, therefore, to ignore the cries of our heart for spiritual sustenance. Neither, indeed, can we refuse to hear its condemning warning when "*straight paths*" are not being made for our feet (Heb 12:12).

All of this particularly has relevance in the matter of loving the brethren. If we ever find ourselves withdrawing from them, or not regarding and respecting them, we are in a danger zone of greatest magnitude. There is no acceptable excuse for refusing those God has received in Christ.

All Is Not Hopeless

As always, faith turns this knowledge into an advantage. Because God is "*greater than our heart,*" we must run quickly to Him—as soon as our heart cries out of offence! You just not allow your sin to keep you from God, but in faith come to Him for cleansing. He is "*faithful and just to forgive your sins, and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.*" When this occurs, your heart will condemn you no longer. The blessed of this provision is wonderful!

IF OUR HEART DOES NOT CONDEMN US

“ 21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.” Here the Spirit confirms the seriousness of our heart condemning us. He does not brush aside a condemning heart as though it was nothing. Now He speaks of a heart that does NOT condemn us, and of the consequence of having such a heart. He will confirm that lacking a heart that does NOT condemn us has a great deal to do with our approach to the Living God.

If Our Heart Condemn Is Not

First, we must rejoice that such a condition is not impossible. Here the spirit has confronted us with two “Ifs.” *“If our heart condemns us,”* and *“If our heart condemns us not.”* Here are two alternatives, and every believer must take one of them. The result of an uncondemning heart will confirm its value and indispensability.

What Is A Heart that Does Not Condemn?

Here we touch upon the conscience, and the necessity of it being “good.” There is a sort of spiritual intuition related to life in Christ Jesus. From one point of view, it is mystical. Yet, from another view, it is cognitive, involving things that can be, in measure, recognized and understood.

Faith brings with it a higher level of understanding. Through it, we are persuaded of realities than cannot be explained or confirmed on an earthly level. One of the premier examples of this is Abraham. When given a Divine promise that defied logical explanation, it is written that he *“contrary to hope, in hope believed”* NKJV (Rom 4:18). The text before us is dealing with that type of thing. Even though ALL of the facts are not before us, nor do we have the capacity of beholding them if they were, yet we are able to obtain a persuasion that God has received us.

A heart that *“does not condemn us,”* is one that does not prohibit us from coming into the presence of the Lord. It is a heart that is not burdened by the commandments of the Lord, nor does it faint when chastened by Him. The uncondemning heart can stand in the blazing glory of God without being harmed or repulsed by it.

A Good Conscience

Here is something much to be coveted— *“a good conscience.”* while such a conscience is not infallible, nor is it to be the object of trust, yet it yields indispensable benefits. Such a conscience provides some understanding of a heart that does not condemn us.

Paul’s Experience

There are many remarkable things about Paul stated in Scripture. Not the last of these is the confession concerning his conscience. *“I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day”* (Acts 23:1). Although, at one time, his conscience was imperfect, yet his refusal to violate it eventually led to his rescue from condemnation. After coming into Christ, he affirmed the maintenance of such a conscience. *“And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men”* (Acts 24:16). An enviable state, indeed!

The value of a good conscience, or a heart that does not condemn, is also expressed by Paul in Second Corinthians 1:12. *“For our rejoicing is this, **the testimony of our conscience**, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.”*

The Objective of the Commandment

Paul told Timothy he had been made an Apostle of Jesus Christ “*by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope.*” He then revealed the purpose of that marvelous “*commandment.*” It was not merely for his personal benefit, although that

was integral to it. The marvelous intention of the commandment is stated in this manner. “*Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith*” (1 Tim 1:1,5).

This is the precise focus of our text. The love of the brethren, John writes, becomes the evidence of our birth from above. Because of that, it can only be accomplished from a pure heart and a good conscience—that is, a heart that does not condemn us.

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Other expressions of a good conscience include “*a pure conscience*” (2 Tim 1:3), “*a conscience without offense*” (Acts 24:16), a “*purged*” conscience (Heb 9:14), and “*conscience toward God*” (1 Pet 2:19). All of them have to do with a heart that does not condemn us. Such a heart allows us in the presence of the Lord, where there is refreshment and fulness of joy. It is what brings delight and boldness to the believer.

Then we Have Confidence

It is important to note the revealed result of a heart that does not condemn us. Carefully, the Spirit does not ascribe to such a possession things beyond the will of God. He does **NOT** say, “*If our heart condemn us not, we have eternal life.*” Rather, He affirms that those so blessed “*have confidence toward God.*” By this He means we have “*access to God with confidence*” (Eph 3:12). We come into His presence by faith, knowing we have “*peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Rom 5:1). We are not His enemies, but His sons, and that by His grace.

The Difficulty

At once a difficulty looms in this text. Who is the individual that can say their heart has not troubled them, or that it has never condemned them? The Spirit has already told us, “*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*” (1:8). And again, “*If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us*” (1:10).

Our text confirms that faith makes us intensely sensitive. That sensitivity is spiritual, and is directed toward both God and His people. Even when deficiencies are found in our persons, yet we acknowledge they are against our will, and that they exist without our consent. Yet, even though they are present, we find ourselves loving those who have been begotten of God. While own advancement does not satisfy us, and we continue to press toward the mark, yet our preference for the saints of God emboldens us to come into the presence of the Lord.

There is yet another truth to be seen here. Our heart **not** condemning us, and possessing confidence before God, are not a perpetual and uninterrupted states. Your own experience will confirm this to be the case. However, when such confidence does dominate us, and we are expectantly rejoicing in the Lord, we may come without hesitation into His presence. The following verses will

confirm this to be the emphasis of the text.

Toward God

I cannot leave this section without noting the nature of this confidence. It is not self-confidence. Nor, indeed, is it the mere absence of fretting. It is confidence “*toward God.*” More contemporary translations read “*before God.*” That is, when we are conscious of His presence, THEN we are confident. Or, when we sense our need of the Lord and His blessing, THEN we are undoubting and assured we will obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need..

This represents the basic posture of the believer– “*toward God.*” The Lord Himself is our **basic** consideration. While we also, in a sense, live toward men, doing good to them, and seeking their welfare, yet our fundamental bent is “*toward God.*” That circumstance is what gives value to all good works. It is also what causes the “*love of the brethren*” to flourish among us. God will not accept the second position.

GUARANTEED ANSWERS

“ **22** *And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.*” Now we come to the practical value of having confidence “*toward God.*” This is a lofty teaching, yet well within the reach of faith. The Spirit will guarantee some things here that will intimidate the flesh. They will even contradict some theologies and doctrines of men. Some, because of unbelief, will imagine they are some form of Divine exaggeration, and are not to be taken, as men say, *literally* . It should be obvious to you that such views cannot be true. When what men observe diffuses the power of God’s Word, or neutralizes Divine utterance, it **cannot** be right, and **must** be wrong. It is difficult enough to take hold on the promises of God without some sophist filling our minds with theological nonsense.

I will approach this text knowing it is a precise statement of the case, and that God cannot lie. Any difficulties associated with receiving what it affirms are evidences of unbelief, and are to be overcome.

Further, I thoroughly repudiate any notion that the Spirit is here referring to some first century benefit that is no longer available to the sons of God. Such an approach to the Gospel is nowhere declared in Scripture, and is everywhere contradicted by Divine utterance. What is said here has to do with the revealed intentions of this Epistle. Allow me to state them again, for they are integral to the understanding of what is being affirmed.

- **That we might have fellowship with the Father, the Son, and those who represent them (1:3).**
- **That our joy might be full (1:4).**
- **That we might not sin (2:1).**
- **That we might know we have eternal life (5:13).**

Whatsoever We Ask

While it is to be acknowledged the Apostles possessed special measures of these things, the promises themselves were not exclusive to them.

This promise directly relates to having confidence before God. It is intended to elaborate on the marvelous results of possessing such confidence. We will find the Spirit's statement very weighty. Some versions connect verse twenty-two with verse twenty-one, making them a single sentence. This, in my judgment, does reflect the intent of the promise. “. . . *if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and **whatever we ask** we receive from Him*” NASB . “. . . *if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and we receive from Him **whatever we ask***” RSV “. . . *if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from Him **anything we ask***” NIV

We must not allow unbelief to rob us of this promise. Remember, we become “*partakers of the Divine nature*” through the “*exceeding great and precious promises of God*” (2 Pet 1:4)—and this is certainly such a promise! It must not, therefore, produce questions within us, but be perceived as something to be appropriated. If we do not approach the statement in this spirit, we are acknowledging we are convinced it has no relevance to us. Were that the case, of course, we have happened upon an unprofitable text of Scripture, which thought is the epitome of absurdity (2 Tim 3:16-17).

This is not the first place “*Whatsoever we ask*” is mentioned in Scripture. Later John will write, “*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we **ask anything** according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, **whatever we ask**, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him*” (5:15).

Jesus Speaks

Jesus said to His disciples, “*If you **ask anything** in My name, I will do it*” (John 14:14). Again He promised, “*And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, **whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you***” (John 16:23). The expression “*in My name*” is to be equated with “*according to His will.*” The idea is that the prayer is in harmony with the Lord's Person and purpose.

Not For the Apostles Alone

It may be that some will conclude these magnificent promises were given only to the Apostles—even though there is not the slightest hint that this is the case. It seems better me to reason that John, in writing our text, is fulfilling the mandate of Jesus. “*Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you*” (Matt 28:20).

While it is to be acknowledged the Apostles possessed special measures of these things, the promises themselves were not exclusive to them. Peter confirms this in his second Epistle. “*Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Pet 1:1).

A Divine Guarantee

Speaking of the tenacity of faith, Jesus promised, “*Ask, and it shall be given you . . . For every one that asketh receiveth*” (Matt 7:7-8). Again, Jesus promised, “*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will **ask what you desire**, and it shall be done for you*” (John 15:7).

Underlying all of this is the supposition that abiding in Christ, His word abiding in us, and a heart that does not condemn us, impacts upon our desires. The righteous are prone to want the right things when they are in the right place with God. Trivialities have no place in the presence of God or the heart that is pure. Given the existence of these conditions, we will be directed to ask for proper things, and not ask “*amiss*” (James 4:3).

It is comely for the saints of God to strive to live in the “*whatsoever we ask*” realm, not floundering around in the flesh, where it is impossible to please God. Just as surely as living in right spiritual domain brings answer to prayer, living in the wrong one shuts heaven to the sons of men.

We Receive of Him

To be sure, there are times when we ask and are denied. Elijah asked to die, and did not (1 Kgs 19:4-5). Paul asked for a thorn to be removed, and it was not (2 Cor 12:7-10). Our Lord Jesus Himself sought for the appointed bitter cup to be removed, and it was not (Matt 26:39-44). These, however, were all struggles with temptation. While such prayers are very real, they are not the subject of our text.

Here we read of answered prayer. The answer is not “*No!*” , or “*Wait!*,” which answer has been experienced by all saints. **This is an affirmative answer that finds the requester receiving what was requested.** “*Whatsoever we ask we receive from Him.*” Whatever you may think at first about this statement, you must acknowledge there is a pleasant ring to it. What soul is there that does not desire the fulfillment of such a promise? Of course, that is what gives the promise such power—the sensitive soul is attracted by it.

God has often promised such a reaction to the prayers of His people, so this commitment should not surprise us. “*Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me*” NKJV (Psa 50:15). “*He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him*” NKJV (Psa 91:15). “*Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know*” NKJV (Jer 33:3). It is no wonder the Spirit affirmed, “*The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*” (James 5:16).

Casualness in Prayer

The average assembly is characterized by an uncomely casualness in prayer. Too often this glorious benefit is approached while men are laden with the cares of this world. They do not come confidently before the Lord, and often even lack seriousness. It is time for the body of Christ to seek a strong confidence, and then to relate it to prayer.

Because We Keep His Commandments

The average assembly is characterized by an uncomely casualness in prayer. Too often this glorious benefit is approached while men are laden with the cares of this world. They do not come confidently before the Lord, and often even lack seriousness.

You will observe the care with which the Spirit approaches the promise of answered prayer, or receiving what we request. He will now confirm to our hearts that those living at variance with the revealed will of God are not to expect their prayers to be answered.

Not only does the Spirit relate receiving our petitions to the possession of confidence, He also associates it with the retention of “*His commandments.*” This is not synonymous with obedience, or the doing of the commandments, which is mentioned later.

The word “keep” is an interesting one, and can easily be overlooked. It literally means *to observe, pay attention to, and keep in custody*. Barclay-Newman Greek Dictionary It also carries that meaning in English: *to watch over, maintain, or cause to remain in a given place*. Merriam Webster

But we can get this meaning from the Word of God itself, which is the best procedure. Frequently the Law spoke of keeping the commandments AND doing them (Lev 22:31; 26:3; Deut 7:11; 13:8). David also spoke of keeping the commandments AND doing them (1 Chron 29:19). Nehemiah did as well (Neh 1:9). The very text we are considering also approaches the commandments in that manner. “*Because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.*”

This is a heart matter. It involves a preference for the commandments of God, and a great delight in them. Like David, the one keeping the commandments hides them in his heart, that he might not sin against the Lord (Psa 119:11). From the standpoint of the New Covenant, this is letting the Word of Christ “ *dwell*” in us “*richly*” (Col 3:16). This circumstance causes the commandments to no longer be grievous to us (1 John 5:3). It is no wonder the Spirit said, “*Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters*” NKJV (1 Cor 7:19).

There are areas of Divine good pleasure that require preference, longing, and participation. They all involve being guided with the Lord’s eye, as compared with a bit and a bridle, reserved for the recalcitrant

When the commandments of God are not welcome in our hearts, or do not occupy a prominent place in our thinking, our prayers become useless. David spoke of looking “*into all*” of God’s “*commandments*” (Psa 119:6). That is involved in keeping them: paying attention to them, pondering and meditating upon them.

Do Those Things Pleasing in His Sight

While this does involve obedience, it goes beyond simply doing what God commands. This by no means suggests that NOT doing what God commands is ever excused. God has pledged Himself to destroy all who “*obey not,*” and He will keep that word (2 Thess 1:8). There simply is no place for disobedience in the Kingdom of God! Those whose manner it is to disobey are called “*children of disobedience.*” Satan is said to work uninhibitedly in them, and the wrath of God will come upon them (Eph 2:2; 5:6; Col 3:6).

Our text, however, does not say we receive what we ask because we do not disobey. Neither, indeed, does it say our petitions are granted because we always do what we are told. Rather, the cause is “*we do those things that are pleasing in His sight.*”

Doing, But Not Pleasing

It is possible to do what God says, yet to displease Him in the doing of it. The feasts kept by the Jews are a case in point (Amos 5:21-23). The stilted approach of Ephesus to spiritual life is another example (Rev 2:1-5). Heartless religion is a ruination to the sons of men, for God will not receive it.

Therefore, the Spirit speaks of “*doing those things which are pleasing in His sight.*” Such doing

comes from the heart, and is an expression of faith. It is also the very life of Christ expressing itself through the faith of His brethren. Our Lord once used this very language in reference to His spotless life: *"I do always those things that please Him"* (John 8:29). He will do not less when He dwells in our hearts by faith.

If it is true that prayers can be "hindered" by a husband's inconsideration of his wife (1 Pet 3:7), how will they be obstructed by doing things that bring God displeasure? Do not suppose for a moment that God is not displeased with certain conduct. God killed Onan because what he did "displeased" Him (Gen 38:10). On another occasion, when the Israelites complained, it so *"displeased the Lord"* that He *"consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp"* (Num 11:1). When David sinned with Bathsheba, it is written, *"But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD"* (2 Sam 11:27). Indeed, there is no person capable of displeasing God with impunity.

But we must not allow our attention remain on the effects of displeasing God. Notice what occurs when we *"do those things pleasing in His sight."* ***"Whatever we ask we receive from Him!"***

Perfunctory Obedience

Lest we be tempted to imagine perfunctory obedience will bring this blessing, let us consider a saying of our blessed Lord. *"So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do'"* NKJV (Lk 17:10). You will search in vain for a single promise of good or Divine consideration for an *"unprofitable servant!"* They are always presented as unfavorable.

If you only express yourself toward God when you are told to do so, you are not doing what is well pleasing in His sight. There must come a time when you focus on those higher and more concise commands that cannot be fulfilled in a single deed. *"Be perfect"* (Matt 5:48), *"Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might"* (Eph 6:10), *"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness"* (Matt 6:33), *"Set your affection on things above"* (Col 3:1), etc. There are areas of Divine good pleasure that require preference, longing, and participation. They all involve being guided with the Lord's eye, as compared with a bit and a bridle, reserved for the recalcitrant (Psa 32:8-9).

If the time has not yet arrived, there will come a time when everything will hinge on the effectiveness of your prayer. It may be yourself sinking in the stormy deep like Peter. It may be time when you are pleading for your own little child like Jairus, or for your servant, like the Centurion. But when that time comes, keeping the Lord's commandments and doing those things that please Him will pay big dividends. You have a Divine commitment on this, and your faith can take hold of it. *"Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."*

Do not philosophize on this! This is a matter for faith, not philosophy. Take hold of the truth, and it will take hold of you. Believe this text in the fullest sense possible, firmly resisting the tendency to weaken its power. It is possible to please the Lord in what you do. Christ has provided all of the resources required for this, and man has provided none of them. Further, if you have a fervent desire to please the Lord, it will not be long until you will be doing precisely that. The largest part of pleasing God is a will to do so.

THE SUPREME COMMANDMENT

“23 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.” Again, the Spirit does not leave us to vain imagination concerning His commandments. When told of answered prayer being contingent upon keeping the commandments, the naive soul will wonder which commandments are intended. Were we left in the hand of the legalist and law-binder, the stipulation would destroy all hope of receiving what we ask. However, praise the Lord, the Spirit extends Himself to make the matter more clear to us. He desires that we take hold on the promise, and realize its fulfillment in us. This is more than a requirement for us. It is also a revelation of the heart of God, and His desire to bless us and give us what we desire. Thus, He will focus on the foundational commands in the New Covenant.

HIS Commandment

While the Spirit has mentioned *“His commandments,”* He will not speak of them as a single command. This is the same manner in which the Law was addressed. Moses wrote, *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might”* (Deut 6:4-5). Again he wrote, *“And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul”* (Deut 10:12). In this summation, the spirit of the law was captured.

Solomon also provided a summation of Divine requirements. *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man”* (Eccl 12:13). Here again, the nature of human responsibility was expressed.

Once, when asked *“Master, which is the great commandment of the Law?”*, Jesus answered, *“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 neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets”* (Matt 22:36-38). Again, our Lord stated the spirit of the Law.

But a summation of the law is not the highest expression of Divine commands. On the eve of our Lord’s betrayal, He spoke of His commandment—not commandments. Here is what he said. *“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you”* (John 15:12). Here, the commandments are expressed in an even more concise manner.

Now, John will declare *“His commandment”* with regard to the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Moses summarized the commandments from the standpoint of the Law. Solomon summarized the responsibility of man. Jesus summarized them from the standpoint of the consideration of His people. Now John will declare the impact of redemption upon the matter. The Law was summarized in both a primary thrust Godward and a secondary one manward. Now, as a result of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, the matter of keeping commandments will become even more focused. Both the Godward and the manward thrusts will be more definitive.

Believing on the Name of His Son

You may recall that the law did not require faith. It gave no commandment to believe. Solomon did not state a requirement for faith either, but rather of fearing the Lord. Now, however, much is made of the Son of God. It is no longer a matter of fulfilling obligations.

Now the issue is being born again, or becoming a child of God.

Thus it is written, *“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those **who believe in His name** : who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”* (John 1:11-13). In fact, believing in the name of the Son of God is very issue on which men are either saved or condemned. Jesus said, *“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has **not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God** ”* (John 3:18). So what does it mean to *“believe in”* or *“on the name of the son of God?”*

In fact, this very Epistle is written to *“unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God”* (5:13). This is, then, a most critical point, and we do well to comprehend it.

The Meaning of Believing On the Name

Right here, there is a phenomenal amount of nonsense being taught in the name of the Lord. For, some, this is a matter of pronouncing a mere formula—saying “in the name of Jesus.” For others, this is an affirmation of a single person Divine Person who has acted as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Those embracing this balderdash say that God is conducting business as under the name of Jesus today. Were it not for the tragic divisions these views have caused, we would simply dismiss them with the laugh of derision.

First, the spirit has spoken with Divine precision. He has declared, *“And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ.”* By “His,” the Spirit means God the Father, for Jesus Christ is *“His Son.”* The “name” of His Son is not the appellation Jesus, or Jesus Christ. That is not the sense in which this is written. It is true *“His name shall be called Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins”* (Matt 1:21). Text includes that, and more.

Throughout Scripture “name” stands for the person himself, and for the character of that person. When referred to Deity, “Name” is a synonym for Who God is and what He does. This is illustrated in God’s dealings with Moses. This great servant of God asked the Lord, *“Show me Thy glory.”* In response, the Lord said, *“I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But He said, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.”* Notice the interchangeable use of “name,” “glory,” “I,” and “Me.” They are all speaking about the Person of God. This is confirmed in the way in which God revealed Himself to Moses. *“Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed **the name of the LORD.** And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation’”* (Ex 33:18; 34:5-7). Thus, the “name of the Lord” referred to the revelation of His Person, of His character and manner of work toward the sons of men.

In the text before us, *“the name of His Son Jesus Christ”* refers to His Person as affirmed in the Gospel. Later, this will be called *“the record God has given of His Son”* (1 John 5:10, or how He has been made known through the Gospel).

Believing on the name of the Son of God is embracing Him as Savior, and as the exclusive means to God. It is trusting to His defeat of the devil and the work of reconciliation He has accomplished through His death. Believing on the name of the Son of God is not relying on Him to resolve personal problems. While we should bring such matters to the Lord, believing

on His name has to do with receiving the atonement He has accomplished. It has do with trusting what He has accomplished for us, and receiving what He has appropriated for us. If we are hesitant to do this, we are to remember it is “*His commandment*” to do so.

From the very beginning “*the name of His Son*” has been identified with salvation from sin. “*And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins*” (Matt 1:21). The Person of Jesus perfectly agrees with that “*name.*” Only those who have embraced Jesus as the remedy for sin have really believed on His name. That is the first and fundamental issue addressed by Him. Until sin is resolved, nothing else matters.

Loving One Another

He does not say love the world, but “*love one another.*” He does not say love our neighbor, “*but love one another!*” Every person, therefore, that does not love the brethren is living in disobedience, regardless of religious affiliation.

“*One another*” refers to all who are joined to the Lord, for they are all “*members of one another*” (Rom 12:5). I am emphatic in saying this does not refer to members of our denomination sect. God does not make us members of any denomination—even a major, fundamental, and doctrinally sound one. God has “*set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased*” (1 Cor 12:18). Being in that “*body*” is what makes the each individual “*one another.*” That is, they are as part of the whole.

KNOWING HE ABIDES IN US

“*24 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.*” The Spirit is now pressing the matter set before us, not allowing us to place it into the background of our thinking. Because the objective is to instill confidence in the believer, a sure indication of our real condition is given.

From one point of view, it is simplistic. From another, it is complicated enough to require extensive self-examination. You may rest assured, however, that a close inspection of our manner of life will bring great joy if we are, in fact, in the Lord. If the examination confirms the absence of the required qualities, provision is made in Christ for forgiveness and cleansing.

He that Keeps His Commandments

Loving one another. We must not take this further than that, else we will cause the saints to waver. For those in Christ Jesus, all other commandments come under these primary ones. It simply is not possible to keep these commandments and prove deficient in the other ones.

It is challenging to consider that we actually “*dwell*” in God.

Nevertheless, this is the affirmation of the Spirit, and we do well to embrace it with zeal.

Obedience here guarantees obedience in all other matters.

Neither, indeed, must we consider these words synonymous with “obey all of His commandments.” This does not allow for disobedience in any degree. It does, however, focus upon the heart, where the commandments are actually kept. This type of language

concentrates on the desire and preference of the believer, recognizing that we do come short of perfectly doing what we desire. As it is written, “*For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please*” (Gal 5:17). We do the saints no favor by bludgeoning them for coming short of their own spiritual desires. It is our business to encourage them to nurture those deep cravings, seeking grace to fulfill them. God has a controversy with those who harm His people by approaching them as though they were His enemies. Better to follow the example of this text, encouraging them to look within, and derive great comfort and benefit from their desire to believe on the Son and love the brethren.

Dwelling in Him

And what will be said of those who have “*fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before*” them, and “*love one another*”? They are dwelling in Him! The word “*dwell*” means abide, continue, and remain. They are staying where God placed them – “*in Christ Jesus*” (1 Cor 1:30). Be assured, this is no small accomplishment. It reveals hearty effort on the part of the believer, and powerful support on the part of God.

“*Dwelleth in Him*” is directly related to abiding in the vine (John 15:4). It is the practical view of “*eternal life*,” which is knowing God and Jesus Christ (John 17:3). When we are raised to walk in newness of life, we are “*joined to the Lord*” (1 Cor 6:17). He becomes our primary Residence. How succinctly David states it in 2 Samuel 22:3. “*The God of my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, My stronghold and my refuge . . .*” Again it is written, “*God is a refuge for us*” (Psa 62:8), “*You are my hiding place*” (Psa 32:7), “*You are my hiding place and my shield*” (Psa 119:114).

It is challenging to consider that we actually “*dwell*” in God. Nevertheless, this is the affirmation of the Spirit, and we do well to embrace it with zeal.

In the next chapter, the fact of us dwelling in God is again affirmed upon the basis of evidence. “*Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God*” (4:15). Again, “*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*” (4:16).

In a prophecy of this aspect of salvation, Isaiah declared how God would provide a hiding place in a “*man*,” even “*the Man Christ Jesus*.” “*A man will be as a hiding place from the wind*” (Isa 32:9; 1 Tim 2:5). Although the primary meaning of our text is that we dwell in God, the truth of being “*in Christ*” is also declared repeatedly. “*Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?*” (Rom 6:3). “*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ*” (Gal 3:27). “*But of Him (the Father) you are in Christ Jesus*” (1 Cor 1:30).

This is germane to our text, because we cannot consider the Father apart from the Son. To be effectually identified with One is to also be identified with the Other.

Indwelt by Him

As if we had not been challenged enough, the Spirit further declares the marvelous reality evidenced when we keep His commandments and love the brethren. “*Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He (God) in him (the one keeping the commandments and loving the brethren)* .”

This language emphasizes the oneness with Deity that is accomplished in salvation. Not only do the saved dwell in God, He also dwells, or makes His abode, with them. Jesus revealed this aspect of new life when He said, *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and **make Our home with him**”* (John 14:23). The promise is addressed to *“anyone”* meeting the requirements.

This is an aspect of the New Covenant that is to be declared to the saints. *“If we love one another, **God dwelleth in us**, and his love is perfected in us”* 1 John 4:12). *“Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, **God dwelleth in him** . . .”* (4:15). *“I will dwell in them And walk among them”* (2 Cor 6:16). Time spent meditating upon this reality will be time well spent, and will yield unspeakable benefits to the individual.

While it is apparent to faith, it should again be stated that union with God produces undeniable change in men. It does not change God. It simply is not possible to dwell in God, and God dwell in us, without a spiritual change being wrought. That is why our text is so firm in what it says.

By saying that God dwells in us, the Spirit has gone to the root of the matter. He does not do so independently of His Son or the Holy Spirit. Jesus has provided a just reason for God to dwell within us. The Holy Spirit is the appointed means of that indwelling. All of this is language addressed to faith. It cannot be deciphered with the human intellect, but it can be believed with the heart. The heart is the aim of the text.

How We Know He Abides In Us

By saying that God dwells in us, the Spirit has gone to the root of the matter. He does not do so independently of His Son or the Holy Spirit. Jesus has provided a just reason for God dwell within us. The Holy Spirit is the appointed means of that indwelling.

We must not content ourselves with taking a theological position concerning the indwelling God. We must look for solid evidence of it in order that confidence may rise in our hearts. Thus our text concludes, *“And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.”*

While the statement itself is simplistic, the weight of it is staggering. The Spirit does not seem to say enough about the confirmation of God dwelling within us—at least not for the flesh. Christendom is divided over the whole matter of the Holy Spirit. People take sides, choosing the opinions of men as their foundation, and argue about the presence of the Holy Spirit. These are greatly diverse, ranging from an outright denial that the Spirit is given to us at all, to the development of external proofs of that presence, imposed upon those who believe. With zeal, we must abandon such approaches to Scripture. They dishonor God, do despite to the Spirit of God, and rob us of things required for *“full assurance.”*

Something Evident

The proof that God dwells in us is stated as though it were abundantly evident: *“by the Spirit whom He has given unto us.”* He does not go into a list of things that proves the Spirit is in us, but simply states the case. Many a soul is wholly dissatisfied with this explanation.

Further, the text does not say that He WILL give us the Spirit, or that He CAN give us the Spirit. With the full spectrum of truth before Him, for He “*searches the deep things of God*” (1 Cor 2:10), the Spirit declares that God “*has given*” Him “*unto us.*” He does not speak of a possibility but a reality. His testimony is to be believed.

Divine Affirmation

Ponder how often this truth is expressed. “. . . *the Holy Spirit who was given to us . . . Now we have received , not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God . . . who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee . . . Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee . . . Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit . . . By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit . . . And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"* ” (Rom 5:5; 1 Cor 2:12; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; 1 Thess 4:8; 1 John 4:13; Gal 4:6).

The New Birth

The underlying supposition of this statement is that the new birth itself is effected by the Holy Spirit (John 3:6,8). Also, new life is the result of His

What God requires of His people cannot be accomplished through the energy of the flesh. It is ever true, “*the flesh profiteth nothing*” (John 6:63). That is, when it comes to doing the will of God, the natural part of us is impotent. Unless we are infused with life by the Spirit of God, we will not be able to do the will of God.

influence—as evidenced in the keeping of His commandments and the love of the brethren. What God requires of His people cannot be accomplished through the energy of the flesh. It is ever true, “*the flesh profiteth nothing*” (John 6:63). That is, when it comes to doing the will of God, the natural part of us is impotent. Unless we are infused with life by the Spirit of God, we will not be able to do the will of God.

That is why the Scriptures say, “*For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God , these are sons of God*” (Rom 8:13-14),. “*strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man*” (Eph 3:16), “*the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us*” (Rom 5:5). Believers are reminded they have “*obeyed the truth through the Spirit*” (1 Pet 1:22), “*through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith*” (Gal 5:5), and “*abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit*” (Rom 5:13).

While many choose to reject this basic postulate of Scripture, there is simply too much said about the subject to excuse such unbelief. It is God “*who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure*” (Phil 2:13) . Let every believer take delight in this arrangement and look for the confirming evidence of the Spirit within. His work in you loudly declares that God abides in you. What enlightened soul is there that does not rejoice in this glorious reality? God is, after all, “*able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us*” (Eph 3:20). But it is foolish to ponder what God is able to do apart from Him doing it in the saints. A lack of personal involvement removes the benefit.

That work is never more evident than when you maintain your grasp of the commandments

of God, and love the brethren. Admittedly, flesh will not be able to capitalize on those things, making them unique characteristics of a denomination. Many views of the Holy Spirit are nothing more than distinctive doctrines of a religious sect. Nevertheless, the retention of the commandments of God, and the love of the brethren will give you the confidence required to successfully make the journey from the cradle to the grave, or the day of the Lord, whichever comes first.

CONCLUSION

There are at least two approaches to gaining confidence, and assuring our hearts before God. One is by measuring our level of performance, seeing if we have done everything we have been commanded to do. There is certainly a place for this approach. It is involved in self examination, yet it is not the whole of it. It is written, *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”* (2 Cor 13:5). There is to be a hearty interest in confirming that Christ does, in fact, dwell within us. That is not something to be known only theoretically.

But what are we to look for? While we are not to avoid considering the absence of things required of us, that is not our primary focus. It is quite true that we pray with David, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (Psa 139:23-24). But we are not to end there, for that is not the highest form of inquiry. We do have something David did not have—something He desired, but which was withheld from him because of the time in which he lived. We have received benefits of a much higher order. They include the indwelling Christ, witness and intercession of the Holy Spirit, the multiplication of grace and peace, a new heart, and a new spirit.

We are primarily to look for *evidence* that we **do** possess new life from God. Herein is a significant difference between Law and grace, or faith and works. Under the law, the individual had received nothing more than a rule of conduct. It was a valid rule—one that effectively defined sin (Rom 3:20), and stopped every proud mouth from boasting of achievement before God (Rom 3:19). But the Law brought no resources, or power to do what it commanded. Further, it dealt more with the evidence of sin than with its root, and never with blessings received.

The New Covenant differs significantly. First, it makes demands that far exceed that of the Law: i.e., *“Be strong,” “Be perfect,” “Love one another as I have loved you,” “Lay hold on eternal life,” “Submit yourselves to God,” “Resist the devil,”* and *“Let the peace of God rule in your heart”* (Eph 6:10; Matt 5:48; John 13:34; 1 Tim 6:12; James 4:7; Col 3:15). If that is not enough for you, add *“Come boldly unto the throne of grace,” “Draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,” “Cast not away your confidence,”* and *“Keep yourselves in the love of God”* (Heb 4:16; 10:22; 10:35; Jude 21). These are matters of such magnitude that when they are done it confirms God is with us.

The Spirit often reminds us of the work of God within. *“Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, **working in you what is well pleasing in His sight**, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen”* (Heb 13:20-21). Your effort will be involved, to be sure. But when the commandments are kept, and you really do love the brethren as Christ loved you, a confession of the work of God will be made. In the process of beholding the confirming work of the Lord within you, you will become assured that you

have eternal life. You will capitalize on fellowship with God and His people. With joy you will draw water out of the wells of salvation (Isa 12:3). Sin will not only be more repulsive to you, there will be an experience of confidence and strength that will make you superior to all of the powers of darkness.

Blessed is the person who becomes convinced, by incontrovertible evidence, that God dwells in him, and he has passed from death unto life. That is an enviable position, indeed, and yet it is something that is available to every person who is in Christ. In fact, you will find it to be indispensable in obtaining victory over the world. Look for the evidence, and you will find consolation.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Book of 1st John

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #7

SATAN'S INTRUSION

“ 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. 4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are of the world. Therefore they speak *as* of the world, and the world hears them. 6 We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 John 4:1-8, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

In this Epistle, the Spirit places a great stress upon “*spiritual understanding*,” or discernment. It is essential that the saints of God be adept in navigating in spiritual realms—able to identify what is true and what is false, as well as their own status in the Kingdom of God. This is a relatively unknown emphasis in contemporary Christian circles.

No small number of professed believers appear to glory in what is mysterious, imagining that if the matter cannot be understood, it must be from God. This is a most subtle way of glorying in appearance, something strictly forbidden by the Lord (2 Cor 5:12; John 7:24; 2 Cor 10:7). Often, in Christ, what seems to be mysterious is only veiled to the flesh. It is on the part of wisdom to discern when this is the case. The Spirit is now opening to our hearts things that are, indeed, hidden to the flesh, but discernible to faith.

Faith Makes Associations

When we live in fellowship with the Father and the Son, we associate influences to which

we are submitted with the Spirit of God or the devil. It is not enough to merely judge religious matters according to a creed, or a denominational statement of perceived fundamentals. In Christ Jesus we come into a knowledge of the truth itself. That personal acquaintance with the truth protects us from deception.

Faith Has A Logic of Its Own

There is a discerning quality to faith. It has a logic, or rationale, of its own. Thus, when Abraham was promised a son in his old age, he reasoned on a higher basis. As it is written, *“Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith,*

Faith hears, takes hold of God’s word, and thinks upon it. In that very process, the heart becomes convinced of the surety of Divine commitment, moving the individual to trust implicitly in what God has said.

he *considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being **fully persuaded** that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform”* (Rom 4:18-21). Faith brought Abraham to reason upon the promise of God, bringing him to a conclusion and full persuasion—both aspects of rational knowledge. Again, when Abraham was told to offer up Isaac, faith led him into a higher form of reasoning. *“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son. Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: **Accounting that** God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure”* (Heb 11:19-20). Thus did our father Abraham set the manner in which we have fellowship with God. It is by embracing what He has said, depending implicitly upon it, and refusing to allow doubt to enter our hearts.

Faith’s Marvelous Quality

Faith hears, takes hold of God’s word, and thinks upon it. In that very process, the heart becomes convinced of the surety of Divine commitment, moving the individual to trust implicitly in what God has said. Our text will reason with us from this vantage point. If it is not possible for God to lie, it is not possible for those who rely upon Him to be disappointed in their expectation. Thus it is written, *“Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed”* (Rom 9:33).

Now the Spirit will confirm that we occupy an intensely active spiritual realm. Those who are familiar with the nature of spiritual life realize our foes are not flesh and blood. As it is written, *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”* NKJV (Eph 6:12). We must not allow ourselves to approach the faith-life as though our own ingenuity was sufficient to protect us—particularly in the matter of what is taught in the name of the Lord. We are to be neither overly suspicious, fearful of confrontation, nor naively gullible about messages said to be from God. Those who bring purported words from God are to be tested, examined, and evaluated. The claim to be from God is to be weighed and tested. At no point is it to be taken for granted. Too much is at stake for us to be naive.

BELIEVE NOT EVERY SPIRIT

“4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit.” To ensure we do not become hopeless skeptics, the Spirit does NOT say, “believe not ANY spirit.” Nor, indeed, is mindless naivete encouraged by saying, “Believe EVERY spirit.” Both extremes are altogether too common in professed Christendom. The children of God are not to assume those who bring a purported message are either right or wrong. Like the Bereans, they are to assume the posture of greater spiritual nobility. It is said of those from Berea, *“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so”* (Acts 17:11).

Eagerness for the Word Is A Requisite

These spiritually astute souls had an appetite for the things of God, *“for they received the word with great eagerness.”* NIV The testing, or trying, of the spirits does not assume doubt concerning the validity of the Word of God itself. Trying the spirits is not a way of determining whether the Word of God is true, but if the purported messenger has been sent from God.

Those who have no real interest in the Word of God are wasting their time examining the spirits or testing their message. This word is not for the disinterested or uncommitted. Those who do not possess a love for the truth are destined to be deceived, and God will see to it that they are. As it is written, *“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”* (2 Thess 2:9-12).

While false prophets, or those falsely purporting to have a word from God, are never excused in Scripture, neither are those who lack a real appetite for the truth of God. It is never innocent to misrepresent God, nor is it innocent to lack an interest in the truth of God. Both attitudes are deliberate, and can be neither inadvertent nor unintentional.

First and foremost, therefore, our text assumes a compelling interest in and love for the truth of God. Where that is lacking, there will be no benefit from the text.

An Exhortation Related to Revealed Objectives

We must ever keep before us the stated objective of this powerful Epistle. If we fail to do this, our view can degenerate into a mere academic pursuit, thus robbing the soul of Divine benefit.

NOT believing every spirit has to do with our fellowship with God (1:3). It is not possible to experience oneness with the Living God, while being lax and indifferent concerning messages purporting to come from God. Too, the admonition to NOT believe every spirit bears directly upon the fulness of joy that belongs to the saints (1:4). An indiscriminating ear robs the heart of spiritual joy, because it allows for the entrance of contamination.

Also, if we are to refrain from sin (2:1), our response to those coming in the name of the Lord is a critical point. We will not be able to refrain from sin if we allow corrupt teaching to enter our minds. Additionally, if we are to know we have eternal life (5:13), we are required to NOT believe every spirit.

We Occupy A Spiritual Realm

The Spirit does not say “Believe not every man,” but “*Believe not every SPIRIT.*” There is an animating spirit behind every teacher—particularly those who come in the name of the Lord. Just as we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, so we do not confront mere men when exposed to their teaching.

It is a matter of deep concern that the rise of religious education has diminished the presence and power of this truth. Men are prone to overestimate the power of the human mind, the worth of mortal logic, and the ability of men to decipher the truth. While we must guard ourselves from being drawn into a purely mystical approach to life in Christ, we must also guard against a purely humanistic, or carnal, view of our situation.

The Women With a Spirit of Divination

On one occasion, when Paul and his followers were in Philippi, they confronted a woman possessed of a “*spirit of divination.*” The NIV reads, “*a spirit by which she predicted the future*” (Acts 16:16). The message delivered by this spirit through the woman was remarkable accurate—from one point of view. “*These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation*” (16:17).

It is difficult to conceive of a set of words marked with greater intellectual preciseness. Yet, Paul “*tried the spirit,*” finding it coming short. After this possessed woman followed the holy entourage for “*many days,*” “*Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And he came out that very hour*” (16:18). Thus, it is possible for a message to pass the test of the intellect, but not of the heart or Spirit. All that comes from the kingdom of darkness is not obviously so identified. “*Believe not every spirit!*”

Jesus Confronts Demons

It is a matter of deep concern that the rise of religious education has diminished the presence and power of this truth. Men are prone to overestimate the power of the human mind, the worth of mortal logic, and the ability of men to decipher the truth.

God will allow no mimicry in His Kingdom. Foul spirits may not speak pure words. You may recall the confession of Christ’s identity by demons. On one occasion, a man with an unclean spirit was in a synagogue where Jesus was. The presence of the Lord so intimidated the unclean spirit that he cried out. “*Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are; the Holy One of God!*” Notice the magnitude of the confession. The demons knew they really had nothing in common with Jesus: “*What have we to do with You?*” They knew His earthly identity: “*Jesus of Nazareth.*” They knew He would bring an end to their influence: “*Did You come to destroy us?*” They also recognized His impeccable holiness: “*I know who You are; the Holy One of God.*”

In spite of this, Jesus did not allow the demons to speak. “*But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be quiet, and come out of him!’*” (Mk 1:24-25). While what they said was, from the earthly point of view, right, yet the Lord will not allow men to trust what demons say! They are an unlawful source

of knowledge, even if what they say comes to pass, or comports with reality. *“Believe not every spirit.”*

Compelling Messages

Both the Holy Spirit and the devil have compelling messages. By that I mean they are words that call for the trust of men. They never present neutral words, but speak so as to elicit the response and reliance of men. That is the point behind the admonition, *“Believe not every spirit.”*

Satan reasoned extensively with Eve to draw her into sin. *“Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’ . . . ‘You will not surely die. ‘For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’”* (Gen 3:2-5). Know that Satan and his hosts will press men to believe a lie—to launch out on their own, and against Divine counsel. He has persuasive powers, deceiving the only innocent adults that have ever lived, apart from Jesus Christ Himself. To Eve, his reasoning seemed flawless. It changed the way she saw the tree God had forbidden. He moved her to ignore what the Lord said, and imagine she could gain an advantage in so doing. *“Believe not every spirit.”*

The Spies of Israel

When Israel came to the border of the promised land, God commanded Moses to send out men from Israel to spy out the land, confirming its greatness and desirability. Solemnly, Moses charged them to report *“what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds; whether the land is rich or poor; and whether there are forests there or not. Be of good courage. And bring some of the fruit of the land”* (Num 13:18-20). The report was intended to confirm the glory of the promise given to them, and whet their appetite for the land.

But, alas, the majority of the spies (10 of 12), brought back an *“evil report.”* They reasoned, *“The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight”* (13:32-33). As a result of their word, *“they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, that they should not go into the land which the LORD had given them”* (32:9). They chose to believe a false report—one that conflicted sharply with the very promise of God. *“Believe not every spirit!”* At this very point, God judged the people unworthy of entering the promised land. All but two of those capable of judging correctly were appointed to die in the wilderness. And it all happened because of a message they believed! There is a spirit in every message, and we do well to perceive it.

Faith Can Be Overthrown

Paul warned Timothy about two particular teachers of the day. They brought a message that *“spread like gangrene”* among those who heard it. It was lethal in its effects. Hear the testimony of the Spirit. *“And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and **they overthrow the faith of some**”* (2 Tim 2:17-18).

Some are convinced this affect is not possible. They imagine that faith, of itself, is invincible, and that nothing can overthrow it. But faith cannot flourish when an erroneous message is embraced—particularly when it relates to the hope of the believer. Faith thrives on the Word of God—particularly His *“exceeding great and precious promises”* (2 Pet 1:4). When, however,

a person WITH faith chooses to accept a doctrine that is motivated by Satan, he will no longer be supported by God. *“Believe not every spirit.”*

Seducing Spirits and

Doctrines of Demons

When the Spirit says, *“Believe not every spirit,”* we are reminded of another word on this matter. Christ moved His Apostles to speak of a great *“falling away”* that would occur before the end of time (2 Thess 2:3). One aspect of that spiritual decline involved the influence of spirits. *“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons”* (1 Tim 4:1).

Those who imagine that demons are not longer active must contend with this prophecy, for it related to the “latter times,” and not the century in which the Apostles ministered.

Even though the spirits were the means of seduction, and doctrines found their origin with demons, yet it all came through the instrumentality of men. Just as the Holy Spirit moves those who affirm the truth, so seducing, or deceptive, spirits and demons motivate the propagation of lies. Observe that the Spirit speaks *“expressly,”* or pointedly, on this matter. Those who imagine that demons are not longer active must contend with this prophecy, for it related to the *“latter times,”* and not the century in which the Apostles ministered.

In the Revelation, John was given to see this very seductive enterprise. It was a sort of spiritual aggression, designed to marshal men for a battle with God. *“For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty”* NKJV (Rev 16:14). Praise the Lord, they gathered in vain, for the whole wicked host are simply overthrown by the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We gain some valuable insights in this Revelation text. Doctrines spawned by hell are not mere novelties, or harmless distractions. They have a design behind them, and fit into Satan’s diabolical strategy to overthrow Jesus and His people. It is a futile effort. Notwithstanding, those who embrace what demons propagate are, by that very fact, aligned against the Lord’s Christ. These doctrines are spread by men who speak *“lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron”* (1 Tim 4:2). They are desensitized Godward, no longer considering His will or good pleasure. Because they are insensitive to the Lord, they devote themselves to declaring “lies”—falsehoods and misrepresentations. They do so in hypocrisy or pretension.

An effectual relationship with Christ cannot be maintained by means of a lie. *“Believe not every spirit!”*

Some Examples of Their Doctrines

The Spirit provides some examples of demonic doctrines, perpetrated by *“seducing spirits.”* While men tend to ascribe such doctrines to human origin, the Spirit traces them back to the realm of spiritual darkness.

There is an unseen realm with which we have to do, and which we occupy. You will also note that, on the surface, the doctrines attributed to *“seducing spirits and doctrines of demons”*

do not appear critical.

Examples of doctrines taught by men who have been seduced by spirits include, “forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth” (1 Tim 4:3). It all may seem innocent, but it is not. Those who are seduced by wicked spirits into propagating doctrines created by demons, have become calloused toward God, and thus have been taken in by the devil. “Believe not every spirit.”

A Solemn Obligation

The exhortation of our text is involved in working out our own salvation with fear and trembling. In so doing, we are not to become the vassals of men, swallowing everything they say. Nor, indeed, are we to become indifferent to what men are saying, as though no words that are spoken have any spiritual value. We are to be alert to the spiritual forces about us, viewing doctrines, or teaching, as coming from a spiritual source, and not men alone.

Personal Views

Not believing every spirit also involves personal perspectives of the truth that come into our mind. We are not to assume new and challenging thoughts can only come from God. If we are prone to say, “the Lord told me,” or “the Lord showed me,” we must make it our business to be sure this is the case. The Holy Spirit is not the only spirit that has access to your thoughts, and it is on the part of wisdom to conduct your life with that in mind. We occupy an intensely active realm. Even though its activity is not visible, it is very real, with very real jeoaprdies as well as advantages. The Spirit is careful to remind of this circumstance. “Believe not every spirit!”

TEST THE SPIRITS

“**2a . . . but test the spirits, whether they are of God.**” The expression “test the spirits” refers to examining the **source** of the message; i.e., by what spirit has the teacher been actuated. It is to be understood that every teacher is impelled by some spirit, and it is our business to know which one it is. Notice the precision with which this exhortation is given. He does NOT say “Test the spirits to see what is false.” The aim of faith is to hear from God. It is not enough to simply identify what is from Satan, although that is necessary to know. Our primary objective is to determine what is “of God.” There is no value in determining what is not true if we have not laid hold on the “truth” itself as it is “in Jesus” (Eph 4:20).

The Lord Tries Us

The obligation to test the spirits is not unique to this day of grace. There is a remarkable text in Deuteronomy that emphasized the necessity of such testing. It unveiled the subtlety with which delusion is presented, as well as the Divine design behind it. “*If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, AND THE SIGN OR WONDER COMES TO PASS, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods'; which you have not known; 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for THE LORD YOUR GOD IS TESTING YOU TO KNOW WHETHER YOU LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL*” NKJV (Deut 13:1-3). A New Covenant view of this precise Divine manner is found in First Corinthians 11:19. “*For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized*

among you.” NKJV

The presence of false prophets is used

Believers are called into the arena of judgment and evaluation. In this regard, our role is not to pronounce eternal judgment on individuals.

of God to test the spiritual discernment of His people. This circumstance by no means excuses the false prophets. It does, however, call for unusual alertness on the part of the believer. Should the child of God choose to live in practical aloofness from God, relying on intellectual alertness to protect him from the delusive doctrines of false prophets, safety will not be realized. Our protection from the ravages of the lie can only be actualized through our involvement. Thus we are exhorted to “*try the spirits, whether they are of God.*”

Believers Are Judges

Believers are called into the arena of judgment and evaluation. In this regard, our role is not to pronounce eternal judgment on individuals. We must ever remember, “*There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?*” (James 4:12). We are required to determine whether the “*spirit*” motivating the doctrine is “*from God.*” To put it another way, “*Yes, and why, even of yourselves, do you not judge what is right*” (Lk 12:57).

In this judgment, we must not be governed by appearance, or things that are obvious to the flesh. As our Lord said, “*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment*” (John 7:24). This is also what Jesus called judging “*according to the flesh*” (John 8:15). Ranking high in this type of judgment is evaluating teachings in view of sectarian dogma, or teaching that distinguishes one religious sect from another. Many teachings are rejected simply because “*that is not what our church believes.*” The acid test of a valid message is NOT whether or not it agrees with favored denominational teaching. Truth is to be accepted “*for the truth’s sake*” (Psa 115:1; 2 John 2). Truth has a value of its own, standing apart from all religious creeds and systems of theology. It towers above all approaches to truth, however valid they may appear.

The final test of truth is not a movement or a position. In the last analysis, the truth clarifies God, Christ, and the great salvation wrought by the Son of God. It accentuates heaven and minimizes earth, making the individual more God-conscious. The truth of God leaves the individual acutely aware of a personal need for God, the jeopardy associated with being in the world, and the glory of the ages to come. Regardless who speaks the truth, it is to be accepted. Too, regardless who speaks the lie, it is to be rejected.

The Mysterious Prophet Balaam

An excellent example of these very things is found in the mysterious prophet Balaam. The Spirit makes clear to us that he is not a pattern to be followed. “*They (false teachers, 12-14) have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet*” (2 Pet 2:15-16). “*Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit*” (Jude 11). “*But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to*

commit sexual immorality” (Rev 2:14).

On the basis of these statements, some might conclude everything said by Balaam is to be rejected. But this is not so. This very prophet made some remarkable declarations. We are specifically told that God “*put a word*” in the “*mouth*” of Balaam (Num 23:16). “*God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? Behold, I have received a command to bless; He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it. He has not observed iniquity in Jacob, Nor has He seen wickedness in Israel. The LORD his God is with him, And the shout of a King is among them. God brings them out of Egypt; He has strength like a wild ox. For there is no sorcery against Jacob, Nor any divination against Israel. It now must be said of Jacob And of Israel, 'Oh, what God has done!'*” (Num 23:19-23). Who is the person bold enough to forbid the embrace of such glorious words, even though they were spoken by Balaam?

Yet, there are those who are unwilling to “*try the spirits.*” For them, it is enough simply to reject what they say because of the group with which they are identified. I have often been chided for quoting something said by Spurgeon, Calvin, or Luther: the sole reason being they were not officially recognized as part of a particular group. Those in Christ Jesus are not so easily relieved of the responsibility of trying the spirits. They must enter heartily into the activity for their own protection.

A Case Presented by Moses

The people of God have always been subjected to spurious prophets. Moses was inspired to give instructions for handling such occurrences. Through the Spirit, he pointed out the subtlety with which they often came. In the text previously introduced (Deut 13), the Lord continued, “*You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because **he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst.***” (Deut 13:1-5).

It is at once obvious that the presence of false prophets among the people is not to be viewed simplistically. This is actually an appointed means through which God tests His own people.

It is at once obvious that the presence of false prophets among the people is not to be viewed simplistically. This is actually an appointed means through which God tests His own people. As I pointed out before, this precise point is also made by the Spirit to the Corinthians. “*For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you*” (1 Cor 11:19).

If it is true that God uses the machinations of the devil to unveil those whom He approves, how necessary it becomes to “*try the spirits.*” The Lord does not simply announce those living within His favor, but reveals them, among other things, through their refusal to swallow everything presented to them by their peers. They know that every teaching is promoted by some spirit. Therefore, they engage their hearts and minds to make sure what they are hearing is the truth of God, motivated by the Spirit of God.

To the Word!

One of the sure ways of testing the spirits is the very Word of God. Well did Isaiah say, “*And when they say to you, ‘Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,’ should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*” (Isa 8:19-20). Both the character and content of God’s word will confirm a true message. A true message matches up with the righteousness of the Word as well as its focus. Those who come bearing a “new” message, purporting to unveil a new Divine direction, are not telling the truth. The “*more noble*” Bereans knew that God did not work in unannounced ways. That is why they “*searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so*” (Acts 17:11). What is more, the Spirit saw to it that a record of their deed was made, and Divine commendation given to them.

Scriptural Illiteracy

Wherever Scriptural illiteracy dominates, it is not possible to successfully “*try the spirits.*” All of this accentuates the perilous times in which we are living. This is particularly true of the Western world.

Here is another sense in which man lives “*by every Word of God*” (Lk 4:4). There is a certain protection in delighting in the Law of the Lord, and meditating in it night and day (Psa 1:2). As we give heed to the “*confirmed*” prophetic Word, the day will dawn, and the Day Star rise in our hearts (1 Pet 1:19). When the day dawns, and the “*Day Star*” rises in our heart, the sense of Scripture opens to our perception. We then discern what God is doing in Christ, and where Jesus is bringing us. False doctrine becomes apparent when it clashes with this overview of Scripture.

Some Examples

Hymenaeus and Philetus

An example of the apparency of error to the illuminated mind is found in the heretical teaching of “*Hymenaeus and Philetus,*” who taught that “*the resurrection is past already*” (2 Tim 2:17-18). Although they did “*overthrow the faith of some,*” they did not overthrow the faith of stable souls. Spiritual maturity introduces a condition describes as follows: “*no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting*” (Eph 4:14).

The absurdity of their doctrine is seen against the backdrop of hope, by which we are saved (Rom 8:24). All people in Christ have been called to seek for immortality (Rom 2:7), put off this vile body, and be clothed with a body like unto Christ’s “*glorious body*” (Phil 3:20-21; 2 Cor 5:1-5). Being called to an “*eternal inheritance*” (Heb 9:15), the discerning soul cannot imbibe a doctrine that affirms that for which the redeemed soul yearns has already come to pass. When “*the hope and resurrection of the dead*” is taken from people, life becomes futile (Acts 23:6; 1 Cor 15:19). This doctrine proved to have serious consequences.

It might interest you to know that this very doctrine is still being vigorously taught. Those espousing this bit of nonsense are called Preterists. A more familiar designation is “the A.D. 70 doctrine.”

The Health and Wealth Gospel

The sounding of the prosperity Gospel is gaining rapid momentum in our country. Those bearing this message appeal to promises of prosperity. A strong emphasis is placed upon

Solomon's word, "*the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just*" (Prov 13:22). As well, John's desire for Gaius is said to be God's plan for all saints. "*Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth*" (3 John 2). Some even parade the promises of the First Covenant before the saints, telling them God will prosper them everywhere they go, and in everything they do (Deut 28:1-13).

All of this simply does not mesh with being "*strangers and pilgrims*" in the earth (1 Pet 2:11; Heb 13:14), NOT being of the world (John 8:23; 15:19). It also clashes sharply with warnings about the snares associated with riches. "*But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*" (1 Tim 6:9-10).

Anything that draws our attention to our temporary status in this world cannot be a proper emphasis. God is taking us out of the world in order to inherit all things. It is simply out of order to move the saints to imagine their inheritance is here, and that the ultimate blessing is to be found here. Even the youngest believer knows this.

A DELUGE OF FALSE PROPHETS

" 1b . . . because many false prophets have gone out into the world." The multiplicity of false prophets is a staggering consideration. It emphasizes the militant posture each believer must assume. Jesus spoke to His disciples of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. In relation to those epochal events, He said, "*For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many*" (Matt 24:5). "*Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold*" (Matt 24:11). Earlier, John referred to "***many antichrists***" that were already in existence (1 John 2:18). Paul warned of "*savage wolves*" that would come in among the saints, "*not sparing the flock*" (Acts 20:29). Peter warned, "*But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed*" NKJV (2 Pet 2:1-2).

Into the World

The false prophets have flooded "*the*

The extraordinary amount of division and confusion among professed Christians is the direct result of "*many false prophets*" that are "*gone out into the world.*"

world." They have not invaded the heavenly realms into which we have been raised in Christ (Eph 2:6). Like the one who animates them, they are excluded from the domain now occupied by Jesus, and restricted to the lower realms—the world. It stands to reason, therefore, the closer we are to the world, the greater the danger of being deceived. Even though our faith overcomes the world, enabling us to detect and avoid messages originating with Satan, yet that faith cannot be sustained in friendship with the world.

It is no wonder the cry comes from heaven, "*Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time*" (Rev 12:12). There are unspeakable disadvantages to being in the realm flooded with false prophets.

It requires a greater degree of alertness. Too, much of our time is spent in a defensive and protective posture. There are distractions associated with the presence of false prophets. Many a child of God has grown faint-hearted because of the confusing morass of religious corruption around them.

We are subjected to the influence of contradicting spirits as long as we are in this world. Many, if not all, of them are Satan's ministers, "*transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ*" (2 Cor 11:13). The deception is so strong that Jesus solemnly warned His disciples in these words. "*For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not*" (Matt 24:24-26).

The extraordinary amount of division and confusion among professed Christians is the direct result of "*many false prophets*" that are "*gone out into the world.*" Rather than testing the spirits, immature and uncommitted *Christians* have responded to them in the energy of human wisdom—if they choose to address the matter at all. The results of that approach are painfully evident.

A REVEALING CONFESSION

“ 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.” Because Christ is the heart of redemption, in Whom the fulness of the Godhead is found, the test of false prophets centers around Him. Who Jesus is and what He has accomplished is the critical issue with God, and thus it must be with men also. At some point, those who are from the devil will reveal their contempt for the centrality of Christ Jesus. They will place duty, experience, or some form of religious activity above Jesus Christ. In this, their wicked natures are made known.

The Central Consideration

While men are tempted to ask teachers what they believe about this or that, the cardinal consideration is what they declare about Jesus. Jesus asked the central question when He interrogated His disciples, "*Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?*" (Matt 16:13). Again, He asked His critics, "*What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?*" (Matt 22:42).

It is not possible to overemphasize this point. The destiny of men hinges upon their perception of Jesus Christ. Through Peter, the Holy Spirit states the case with great power. "*Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the Head of the corner*" (1 Pet 2:6-7). This is not at all satisfactory to the sectarian. With them, the point at issue is not the Lord Jesus Christ. With some it is sacred tradition. With others it is the name by which we are called. Still others choose to make the issue the Holy Spirit, or the day on which we gather, or the state of the dead. Some make the pivotal point the rapture, or tribulation, or mark of the beast. Some even go so far as to make social issues the point at which true spiritual identity and preferences are revealed. **But Jesus is the issue with God.** If we are not right about Jesus, it makes no difference at all what else is believed.

While men are tempted to ask teachers what they believe about this or that, the cardinal

consideration is what they declare about Jesus.

This does not mean we are to be tolerant of erroneous views on the subjects mentioned, or treat them as though they were inconsequential. It does mean the key to understanding all things is a proper view of Christ. If we do not see and receive Him in the manner in which God presents Him, it makes no difference what we think of other matters—even Scriptural matters. The key and principle doctrine is “*the doctrine of Christ*” (Heb 6:1; 2 John 9).

Allow me to state it yet another way. If Christ is the proper object of our faith, then He is the primary consideration. The Spirit refers to “*faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*” and “*faith in Christ*” (Acts 20:21; 24:24; Rom 3:22; Gal 2:16,20; Col 1:4). We are an heir of God “*through Christ*” (Gal 4:7). God’s “*kindness*” comes to us “*through Christ Jesus*” (Eph 2:7). We have “*peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Rom 5:1). God gives us victory “*through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Cor 15:57). He, and He alone, has “*reconciled us to God*” (Col 1:21-22).

This manner of thought is a consistent pattern throughout Scripture. Of old time, Isaiah spoke of what we presently experience in Christ Jesus. He affirmed a “**MAN**” to be the central consideration in the rescue of humanity. “*A **man** will be as a hiding place from the wind, And a cover from the tempest, As rivers of water in a dry place, As the shadow of a great rock in a weary land*” (Isa 32:2). He alone can “*bring us to God*” (1 Pet 3:18). He alone destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14), plundered principalities and powers (Col 2:15), and brought grace and truth within our grasp (John 1:14,17).

A person may have a distorted view of our duty, the ordinances, and even morality, and still be saved. The Epistles deal extensively with believers who had a deficient understanding of serious matters. Permit me to name a few of them. Some in Corinth did not know there was one God (1 Cor 8:5-7). Some thought those who died would not be present when the Lord comes again (1 Thess 4:13-14). Others felt they could not eat meat (Rom 14:1-4), while some did not know they should not steal (Eph 4:28). The Spirit was not content to leave such ignorance unchecked—but those areas were not the determining ones. Through Christ, they were brought to a fuller understanding. However, lack of faith in Christ was not tolerated. Being incorrect about Him was never excused. He is the central consideration.

Corruptions Introduced Early

Two primary corruptions have occurred in Christendom, and continue to this day. These were actually Satanic initiatives against the saints—a “*flood*” spewed out to drown them (Rev 12:15-16).

Judaism Plus the Gospel

The first was the attempt to merge Judaism with Christianity, or law with grace (Acts 15:1; Gal 5:4; Heb 13:9). Throughout His Epistles, Paul dealt with this encroachment (Rom 3:20-28; Gal 2:16; 3:11).

Philosophy Plus the Gospel

The second was to incorporate Gentile philosophy with the Gospel (Col 2:8,18; 1 Cor 3:19; 1 Tim 6:20). The term Gnosticism is given to this corruption. It gives the weight of emphasis to human thought rather than Divine initiative, as revealed in Jesus.

Both approaches reduced, if not removed altogether, the significance of Christ Jesus. Yet, they both sought to fly under the banner of Christ.

Is Come

This refers to what has already taken place, yet cannot be confirmed by tangible evidence. It is something that can only be grasped by faith. By saying “*is come*,” the pre-incarnate existence of Christ is affirmed. He “*came into the world*” (1 Tim 1:15) voluntarily, and in obedience to the Father.

From Above

The fact that Jesus came “*from above*” is basic to this consideration. He was not of this world, and thus did not think like it nor hold to its values. Although a man, “*the Second Man is the Lord from heaven*” (1 Cor 15:47). Among other things, this confirms His Lordship. As He Himself said, “*He who comes from above is above all ; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all*” (John 3:31). Although in the world, He was separate from its order. Therefore He said, “*You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world*” (John 8:23). All of this is involved in confessing Jesus Christ “*is come*.”

On A Mission

The acknowledgment that Jesus Christ “*is come*” also admits to the existence of Divine purpose. There was a mission, or objective, that required His coming. Thus it is written, “*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief*” (1 Tim 1:15). Again it is written, “*And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins*” (Matt 1:21). Jesus Himself confessed, “*for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world*” (John 12:47).

At some point, all false doctrine minimizes or denies this point—the REASON for Christ coming into the world, or in the flesh. In a sense, all false prophets are teachers of novelties, never placing the accent on Jesus Christ. **If a teaching—any teaching—fails to find its relevancy in the Lord Jesus Christ, it cannot be true, and is to be rejected.** If Christ coming into the world sheds no light on the doctrine, thrust it from you as a spiritual poison.

In the Flesh

In saying He divested Himself of the prerogatives of Deity, I mean that while Jesus remained Divine, He laid aside the right to employ that Divine power. If He did not do this, He could not die.

Jesus was a real man, appearing “*in the likeness of sinful flesh*” (Rom 8:3). The word “*likeness*” does not mean Jesus was not a real man. Rather, it underscores that He was not a sinner, even though He was a man.

The redemption of humanity required that Jesus come “*in the flesh*.” A poignant statement of this requirement is made in the tenth chapter of Hebrews. This is an inspired exposition of the 40th Psalm. “*Therefore, when He came into the world , He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come ; In the volume of the book it is written of Me; To do*

*Your will, O God.’ Previously saying, ‘Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them’ (which are offered according to the law), then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through **the offering of the body** of Jesus Christ once for all” (10:5-10).*

The death of Christ had to be as real as the sin addressed by it. Further, for death to be real, a real body was required. The required death was not a mere formality, and therefore neither was the incarnation, or the Word becoming flesh (John 1:14).

A Real Man Was Really Tempted

A great deal of controversy has surrounded the temptation of Jesus. Some theologians have taught that it was impossible for Jesus to sin, and that is why He did not transgress. They reason that He was Divine, and Deity cannot sin. But their reasoning is not right, and denies the very fact of our text, namely that Jesus Christ is come “*in the flesh.*”

The Spirit informs us that coming into the world involved Jesus emptying Himself, divesting Himself of the prerogatives of Deity. “*Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*” NASB (Phil 2:6-8).

In saying He divested Himself of the prerogatives of Deity, I mean that while Jesus remained Divine, He laid aside the right to employ that Divine power. If He did not do this, He could not die. In taking upon Himself the form of a man, He assumed all of the liabilities of humanity. That is why He hungered (Matt 4:2; 21:18), thirsted (John 4:7; 19:28), and become tired and weary (John 4:6; Matt 8:24). These are certainly not traits of Deity! Jesus had laid aside those prerogatives when He came into the world.

The chief evidence of His humanity, however, (apart from His vicarious death) is found in His temptation. That confirmed His humanity! We are told that Jesus “*was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin*” (Heb 4:15). He endured temptation in all of the fundamental points: “*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*” (1 John 2:16). The Spirit even affirms Jesus “*Himself has suffered, being tempted,*” and thus “*He is able to aid those who are tempted*” (Heb 2:18).

The Lord Jesus withstood temptation in precisely the same manner we do. He did not resist the devil because He was God, but because He trusted in God. That is precisely why He is able to sustain us in our temptation. First, He knows the feeling of temptation, and is thus “*touched with the feeling*” of our infirmities (Heb 4:15). Second, He is able to bring to us the required resources because He Himself employed them while among us, and is therefore able to bring them to us.

Because Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, He is “*the Son of God*” (Lk 1:35). Because He is a Man, He is “*Seed of the woman*” (Gen 3:15), and is said to be “*made of a woman, made under the Law*” (Gal 4:4). This latter point is the consideration of our text: i.e., the humanity of Jesus. It is a central consideration—one that will determine whether a “*spirit*” is from God or from Satan.

The Good Confession

The truth emphasized in this text is also confirmed in what is called the “good confession.” Peter first made this confession to Jesus Himself. “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Matt 16:16). Jesus told him the Father had revealed this to him. The word “*Thou*” pointed to Christ’s humanity—the One whom Peter saw “*in the flesh.*” The words “*the Christ, the Son of the living God*” declared that He had “*come*” into the world and “*in the flesh.*” The Ethiopian eunuch also made this confession. “*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*” (Acts 8:37). Thus He also acknowledge Jesus to be a real man, but not merely a man. He had “*come in the flesh,*” and the eunuch saw and embraced that truth.

Once you know the manner in which God speaks
concerning Jesus, and where He places the emphasis
concerning Him, you will be able to distinguish the spirit
that comes from Him.

Not Mere Mental Assent

This confession is not the mere recitation of a point of doctrine. It is not something to which mere mental assent is given; i.e., “here is something else I believe.” A “*confession*” is the verbal acknowledgment of what the heart has grasped. **It is a matter on which agreement with God Himself is realized—an admission of unity with the Father.** You will recall God the Father confessed Christ. “*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*” (Matt 3:17).

Thus the person who confesses Jesus Christ “*is come in the flesh*” has the same view of Jesus as God does. He sees Him as the exclusive remedy for sin and way to the Father. Further, the one confessing this truth is well pleased with Jesus, just as the Father is. This is the PRIMARY thrust of sound doctrine! That is what makes it a “*confession.*” It will not do to intellectually acknowledge Jesus has come in the flesh, then go about to emphasize other things. Those who give Jesus a secondary place have, by that action, refused to confess He has come in the flesh! Unlike God, they have not placed the EMPHASIS upon Jesus.

Is of God

The “*spirit*” who confesses Jesus Christ “*is come in the flesh*” is “*of God,*” or “*from God*” NIV . Among other things, this means God will not present Jesus apart from His humanity, or identity with us. The objective of all extensive commentary about Jesus is His role in redemption. While He is set forth as the Creator of all things, the point is always brought back to what was accomplished when He came “*in the flesh*” (Eph 3:9-11; Col 1:16-18; Heb 1:2-3). That is what makes Jesus relevant to our situation.

Once you know the manner in which God speaks concerning Jesus, and where He places the emphasis concerning Him, you will be able to distinguish the spirit that comes from Him. God has, after all, sent ministers to every person—people through whom they believe. As it is written, “*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?*” (1 Cor 3:5). Those who place Jesus at the center of things, making the most of His redemptive role, have been sent from God. Such will agree with the Father, concerning Christ’s identity with men.

Every Spirit

By saying “every spirit that confesses,” the Lord is emphasizing the spiritual realm we now occupy.

We are not to approach teaching from a purely intellectual point of view. Nor, indeed, are we to imagine we are only dealing with men. We are in an intensely active spiritual realm, and do well to recognize it. The truth of the matter is that we are dealing more with spirits than we are with men.

WHAT NOT CONFESSING REVEALS

“2a . . . and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.” The emphasis placed upon this matter is arresting. To those immersed in the religion of the day, it has a strange sound to it. I suppose that is why some present this passage as dealing exclusively with first century circumstances, thereby reducing it to a state of irrelevancy. However, the Spirit does not occupy our minds with matters disassociated from us. Nor, indeed, do such terms as *“of God”* and *“not of God”* encourage that type of thinking. We are dealing with a Satanic strategy that spans all generations subjected to the Gospel.

A doctrine that presents Jesus, then emphasizes social relationships, economics, domestic ideals, or health and wealth, is NOT from God. No such EMPHASIS is ever presented in God’s Word. This is particularly true of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is such a marvelous consistency in the Spirit’s presentation of Jesus that one marvels it could ever be missed. Apart from redemption, Jesus actually has no relevancy to us. If He is not *“the Savior of the world”* (John 4:42), we have no need for Him at all. That is how He is invariably declared in Scripture, without a single deviation. His total ministry relates to the recovery of men from sin, and all that is related to that great and Divine enterprise.

The sternness with which the Spirit has spoken in this text is like a trumpet sound to spiritually lethargic or naive souls. We are in the midst of a fierce spiritual conflict in which influential spirits are at work.

Some have taken upon themselves to declare Jesus from a purely worldly point of view. They represent Him as primarily a healer or provider, even though He was not at all consistent in these ministries. All of His healings and miraculous provisions were selective. Too, some have suggested that because He was the perfect man, He had riches and was prosperous. They affirm that because He had a treasurer, He must have had excess funds (John 12:6; 13:29). They seem to forget who the treasurer was, and that throughout His ministry there were faithful women who *“ministered unto Him of their substance”* (Lk 8:3; Mk 15:41). That was certainly not an appropriate response to a rich man! These corrupted views of Jesus are the interpolations of men, superimposed upon the word of God. They are in sharp conflict with the manner in which God presents Jesus. They also prove the spirit so presenting Jesus is not of God.

“EVERY spirit that does not confess Jesus is come in the flesh” has, by that very failure, made known they are NOT from God. They have nothing from God to give us, for God offers nothing apart from Christ Jesus. Wherever something is exalted above Jesus, the devil is at work. It makes little difference whether it is the Law, temporal needs, man’s free will, the church, or even the Spirit of God—God simply has no messengers that do not ascribe the preeminent place to Jesus Christ, who is *“come in the flesh.”*

The word *“confess”* also accentuates the voluntary nature of the acknowledgment. It is not that the spirit acknowledges that Jesus is come in the flesh when interrogated by men. Teachers sent from God are not noted for their answers to questions, but for their message, or what they proclaim. Their *“confession”* is the thrust, or substance, of their message or doctrine. They may say some things that are true, wise, and morally good. But if their message does not cast the soul upon Jesus, it has not come from God! To put it another way, a message that makes temporal concerns primary, and eternal

ones secondary, has come from the bottomless pit.

The sternness with which the Spirit has spoken in this text is like a trumpet sound to spiritually lethargic or naive souls. We are in the midst of a fierce spiritual conflict in which influential spirits are at work. Some are from God, and some are not. It is our business to be able to distinguish them both.

THE SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST

“3 And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.” The term “*antichrist*” is used five times in Scripture, and only by John (1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7). It is not possible to develop a finely tuned doctrine upon the basis of these texts. Notwithstanding that situation, men have taken upon themselves to do precisely that. However, in so doing, they have missed the point being made by the Spirit.

The Spirit reveals the following about

“*Antichrist.*”

- The presence of antichrist is an indicator of the “*last time*” or “*hour*” (1 John 2:18a).
- There are “*many antichrists*” (1 John 2:18b).
- This is a spirit that denies Jesus is the Christ (1 John 2:22a).
- This spirit denies the Father and the Son (1 John 2:22b).
- The spirit of antichrist denies that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh (1 John 4:3a).
- Believers were told this spirit was coming (1 John 4:3b).
- The spirit of antichrist was already in the world at the time First John was written (1 John 2:22c).
- The spirit of antichrist does not confess Jesus Christ came in the flesh (2 John 7).

You will note there is no reference to political associations, economical strategies, or governmental power. Nor, indeed, is the antichrist clearly presented as a special foe of the Jews, a forger of political alliance, or the developer of social peace. Those are all associations developed by men. Those are simply the facts in the case. The revelation of God concerning “*antichrist*” is strictly confined to the opposition and denial of Jesus Christ. While there may very well be other associations, they are not revealed ones. Those choosing to approach the subject from another point of view, must take the total responsibility for their views. They are not developed in Scripture, which is the ONLY God-breathed writing.

The Spirit of Antichrist

With care, the Holy Spirit speaks on this matter. He does not draw our attention to a mere mortal, but to “*the SPIRIT of antichrist.*” He has drawn us into the consideration of spirits: i.e., “*Believe not every SPIRIT . . . try the SPIRITS . . . Every SPIRIT that confesses . . . every SPIRIT that confesses not . . .*” (4:1-3). Thus the Lord emphasizes that we are not to judge according to “*appearance,*” or evaluate men “*after the flesh*” (John 7:24; 2 Cor 5:16).

In this way, we are drawn away from provincial and historical considerations, which tend to put us to sleep. It is difficult to measure the adverse affects such approaches to Scripture have had upon believers. Concerning truth, we are brought back to the Spirit of truth (John 14:17;

15:26; 16:13). Concerning the lie, we are brought back to the “*father*” of lies (John 8:44), and “*the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience*” (Eph 2:2). It is quite true that throughout history certain individuals have been identified with the spirit of antichrist. However, such individuals do not fulfill the warnings about “*the spirit of antichrist.*”

That, of course, is the whole point of this text. There is a proliferation of false prophets. All of them are dangerous. All of them are fighting against Christ. All of them have a common origin. Some may appear more influential than others, but it is the animating spirit behind them that makes them so dangerous—not the time in which they are made known or exercise their influence. Many a simple soul has been taken in by “*the spirit of antichrist,*” disarmed by the notion that a spiritual tyrant was to come in the future, when they would not even be here.

You Have Heard

Early believers were told regularly of a move of Satan that would involve religious corruption.

The Lord Jesus

Jesus warned His disciples of a time when “*the love of man would wax cold*” because of abounding iniquity—a time when “*many false prophets will rise up and deceive many*” (Matt 24:2). Again He said, “*For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall show signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect*” (Mark 13:22).

Peter

Peter also wrote of a massive departure

It is quite true that throughout history certain individuals have been identified with the spirit of antichrist. However, such individuals do not fulfill the warnings about “*the spirit of antichrist.*”

from the faith, led by false prophets who would arise amidst the people of God. “*But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep*” (2 Pet 2:1-3).

Paul

Paul warned the elders from Ephesus that from among the very leaders of the church, corruption would arise defiling many. “*Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears*” (Acts 20:30-31). Timothy was told of “*perilous times*” in which a “*form of godliness*” would be maintained while the power of it was rejected (1 Tim 3:5).

In a most solemn warning, Paul also spoke of a falling away, or rebellion against the Lord that would occur within the church. Without providing many details, he mentioned it would

be marshaled under the influence of a person who was the very embodiment of sin. *“Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness (man of sin, KJV) is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved”* NASB (2 Thess 2:3-10).

Although it had not fully occurred in his day, this form of corruption was already at work—religious corruption. Christ’s opponent would identify himself with God, sitting in the temple of God, and displaying himself as God. This personage is identified by two salient terms: *“the man of sin,”* and *the “son of perdition”* KJV , or *“the man of lawlessness”* and *the “son of destruction”* NASB). By this, the Spirit means this is a promoter of sin and disobedience, and the offspring of the destroyer, Satan. He is to the devil what Jesus is to God.

The thing that makes this form of sin a *“mystery”* is that it comes in the name of the Lord, representing itself as coming from Christ. During the time Paul wrote, this mysterious working was already forming and active, though not dominant. It was restrained, but that restraining factor would be taken out of the way. It is my judgment that the restraining factor was not the Holy Spirit, or the church. Rather, it was the oppression of political power as embodied in the Roman empire. This power set itself against all forms of Christian influence, ascribing Deity to political power, and making no claim to any association with Jesus.

Upon the fall of Imperial Rome, corruption broke out in the church. It was particularly embodied in the Roman church, though not confined to it. A good case can be made for the office of Pope fulfilling the *“man of sin”* and *“son of perdition.”* Terms ascribed to the Pope include *“Lord God, the Pope,” “Holy Father,”* and *“Your Holiness,” “Vicar of Jesus Christ,” “Prince of the Apostles,”* and *“Supreme Pontiff.”*

In our time, we have become accustomed to powerless and lifeless Christianity. It is so common that few people think of it as a fulfillment of the prophecies of Jesus and the apostles. Fewer still see it as a Satanic initiative, designed to overthrow the faith of God’s people.

Without being unduly distracted from our text, this departure from the faith reveals the kind of conditions foretold by the apostles. While world religions such as Moslem, Hindu, and Buddhist are oppositions to Christ, they are nothing to compare with contaminated Christianity. Other opponents of the church include vain philosophy, the quest for pleasure, and the love of money. But they too are relatively insignificant when compared to rebellion that comes in the name of Christ. A form of religion that allows identity with Christ, yet permits its constituents to live in practical alienation from Him, is the most lethal form of spiritual corruption.

Jude

Jude reminded his readers of these words of the Apostles, alerting them to the necessity of earnestly contending for the faith. *“But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit”* (Jude 17-19).

Faithful Warning Confirms the Danger

The presence of these consistent warnings confirm the extreme danger they represent. In our time, we have become accustomed to powerless and lifeless Christianity. It is so common that few people think of it as a fulfillment of the prophecies of Jesus and the apostles. Fewer still see it as a Satanic initiative, designed to overthrow the faith of God’s people.

It is significant that the Holy Spirit moved inspired men to speak of this falling away, and did so with consistency. Faithfully believers were warned of the introduction of a lifeless religion of mere form. John has now referred to this as the evidence of *“the spirit of antichrist.”* It is a the outworking of a crafty plan, perpetrated by Satan and carried out by his ministers.

Now Already in the World

With care, the Spirit moves us away from merely looking into the future, imagining there is no danger at the present time. If the wicked influences of mention were *“already in the world”* in John’s day, what must be said of our day? No child of God can afford to be asleep or spiritually retarded on this.

Salvation in Christ Alone

Throughout the Apostles’ doctrine, Christ is presented as the exclusive Way to God and means to righteousness. Procedures are never exalted to the place of prominence reserved for Jesus, nor are theological patterns of thought or denominational affiliation. In the first century, men were already moving the emphasis from Christ Jesus and the love of the brethren to isolated and worldly interests. That tendency has continued to grow to this very day, and with remarkable rapidity and influence. It now so pervades the Christian world that scarcely a place can be found where it is not dominant. It is a most serious condition.

YOU HAVE OVERCOME THEM

“4a You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” There is no question about the formidableness of *“the spirit of antichrist’s”* influence. Were it not for the resources brought to us in salvation, it would not be possible to withstand this Satanic aggression. Now the Spirit addresses the people of God in order to assure their hearts. He does not present an extended commentary on the various corruptions of the *“many antichrists.”* Rather, He will now confirm that faith survives all of Satan’s onslaughts. Satan and his ministers are powerful, but not all- powerful. They are influential, but not the most influential.

You Are of God

Here is a marvelous affirmation! *“You are of God!”* How the people of God need to hear this. We have already been told that there are two categories of people: *“the children of God”* and *“the children of the devil”* (3:10). Jesus referred to them as *“the children of the Kingdom”* and *“the children of the wicked one”* (Matt 13:38). Paul once identified Elymas the sorcerer as the *“child*

of the devil” (Acts 13:10). Of His critics Jesus said, *“You are of your father the devil”* (John 8:44). But it is not enough to merely identify the devil’s children. Those who are *“born of God”* (3:9; 4:7; 5:14,18) need to be reminded of their royal birth also. Later, the importance of KNOWING we are of God will be affirmed. *“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one”* (5:19).

Notice, the spirit does not say we CAN be of God, or that we OUGHT to be of God, but that we ARE of God.

Our New Birth

Being *“of God”* refers to our new birth. We were regenerated, or born again, by God. As it is written, *“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become **the sons of God**, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God ”* (John 1:12-13).

We are also said to be *“born of the Spirit”* (John 3:6,8), Who presided over our spiritual birth as He did over Jesus’ birth of Mary (Lk 1:35).

This perspective of overcoming is critical. It is possible to conceive of overcoming as eliminating opposition and ushering in a tranquil and unmolested life. But this is only an imagination—at least as long as we are in the world. Overcoming has to do with standing against the wiles of the devil, and not being deceived by him.

It is God who, *“Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures”* (James 1:18). We are veritably the product of *“incorruptible”* seed, even the Word of God (1 Pet 1:23).

It is this birth, we will find, that has enabled us to overcome the wicked one.

His workmanship

Those who are in Christ Jesus are not the product of mere human effort. Rather, they are the result of God’s own work. As it is written, *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”* (Eph 2:10).

Of God in Christ

God Himself has placed us in Christ, thereby ensuring our victory over the wicked one and his ministers. *“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”* (1 Cor 1:30).

If you want to bring encouragement to the people of God, remind them who they are in Christ Jesus! Tell them they *“are of God,”* and are thus adequate to all the challenges of this *“present evil world.”*

Have Overcome Them

Many false prophets have gone out into the world. There are no individuals who, of themselves, are powerful enough to resist their influence. Yet, believers are told they *“have*

overcome them.”

By “*overcome them,*” the Spirit does not mean those in Christ have decimated the powers of darkness, or eliminated them from the world. Nor, indeed, have Satan’s ministers ceased to function because of the saints. “*Overcome*” means the efforts of false prophets to deceive those cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart have been frustrated. Satan, with all of his craftiness, has not been able to lure us away from Christ.

This perspective of overcoming is critical. It is possible to conceive of overcoming as eliminating opposition and ushering in a tranquil and unmolested life. But this is only an imagination—at least as long as we are in the world. Overcoming has to do with standing against the wiles of the devil, and not being deceived by him.

He Who Is In You

We are now reminded of the cause of our triumph over the “*devices*” of the devil (2 Cor 2:11). It is not because we studied his strategies, or were gifted with human logic. Nor, indeed, is our victory traced back to our own effort—even though we do expend effort. It is the One who is “*in*” us that “*causes us to triumph*” (2 Cor 2:14). From the standpoint of our birth, this is “*the Father*” who has taken up His abode in us (John 14:23). From the standpoint of our salvation itself, this is “*Christ*” who dwells in our hearts by faith (Eph 3:17). Considering it from the aspect of our spiritual life, it is the Holy Spirit who has been sent into our hearts (Gal 4:6).

It is ever true that we are strong “*in the Lord, and in the power of His might*” (Eph 6:10). Our strength is borrowed strength, and is not traceable to our Adamic nature. No amount of culture, mental disciplines, or moral strength can withstand the aggression of the devil. Satan has not been able to thrust us from the bosom of God because of the One who is “*in us!*” He is protecting us from within, not from without!

This clarifies the necessity of walking in fellowship with Christ and in the communion of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 1:9; 2 Cor 13:14). Living by faith brings us under the protecting hand of our Lord. Unbelief removes us from that sanctuary.

He Who Is in the World

Even though we have been reminded that “*many false prophets are gone out into the world,*” and that we have overcome “*them,*” yet there is really a single one whom we overcome: “*he who is in then world.*” All false prophets and powers of darkness are working for him as well as against us.

The World

The means of identifying Satan and his hosts are especially significant. “*He who is IN THE WORLD.*” This is the locus, or center, of Satan’s operation. He has come down to the earth having great wrath, because he knows “*the time is short*” (Rev 12:12). There is only safety in the “*heavenly places,*” to which we have been raised in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6). The world is a place of jeopardy.

The closer our affiliation is with “*the world,*” the more susceptible we are to Satan, and the less Christ will work in us. His kingdom is “*not of this world*” (John 18:36), and thus we must consciously withdraw our hearts from “*this present evil world.*”

We must ever remember that God has repudiated the entire world order. Everything that is in it, “*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, are NOT of the Father*” (1 John 2:16). Its wisdom is rejected, and is “*foolishness with God*” (1 Cor 3:19). Its concerns tend to choke

the Word of God (Matt 13:22).

This is the realm in which our adversary works, and the one to which he draws us. The more we are drawn to this world, the more active Satan is within us. The more prominent this world is in our thinking, the more vulnerable we are to Satan.

THEY SPEAK FROM THE WORLD'S POINT OF VIEW

“5 They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them.” Here is a remarkably concise statement that identifies all false prophets. They are of the world order, blending in with it. They speak of the world, with no regard to heavenly things. Those who are caught up in this world listen to what they say, giving heed to them. Who but the Lord could speak in such a condensed, yet powerful, manner?

They Are of the World

Satan's ministers—all of them—are *“of the world.”* They belong to the worldly order, being confined to the temporal realm. Their BASIC appetites have to do with this world. Their hearts are anchored to the seen. Their vision is limited to what is passing away. They are part of what God has rejected, and are glad to have it so.

Their wisdom is *“of the world,”* and is thus mere prattle. God is not at the center of their thought, but they reason and plan just as though there were no God at all. They are the exact opposite of Jesus, Who said *“I am NOT of this world”* (John 8:23).

The Speak of the World

People can be identified by the subject of their speech. Those whom we overcome, because of the One within, *“speak of the world.”* The subject of their communication is consistently *“earthly things”* (John 3:12). They speak this way because they *“mind earthly things”* (Phil 3:19). With them, the affairs of this life are not occasional considerations, but the dominating theme of their conversation.

Remember, we are speaking of those who come in the name of the Lord—people we must overcome in order to dwell forever in the house of the Lord. You will find these people in nearly every church. Wherever there is some degree of commitment to Christ, these people will surface, speaking *“of the world.”* They will draw our attention to the political situation, to economical concerns, and the popular events of the world. If they deign to speak of religious matters, it is always of human duty, or the preservation and extension of the institution. But it is always a worldly point of view.

If you have ever pondered the depth to which sin has brought all men, or wondered about the sinfulness of humanity, you must consider this text. The world and those who speak of it can only be overcome when Deity dwells within us.

None of this is innocent, and none of it is glossed by God. Remember, these are the people we *“overcome.”* There is a very real sense in which we must overcome religion and the contemporary

church to walk with the Lord. While it is not popular to say this, honest souls know it to be the truth.

To confirm the absolute seriousness of speaking of the world, the Spirit testifies to the following. *“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame; who set their mind on earthly things”* (Phil 3:18-19). These are enemies of the cross of Christ. Rather than crucifying the flesh, they feed upon it. Rather than dying to the world, they nurture their relationship to it. And what shall the end be for such people? Their appointed end is *“destruction.”* They have given the precedence to earthly appetites; i.e., *“whose god is their belly.”* What they glory, or boast, in is actually shameful and a disgrace. They speak of the world because they have *“set their mind on earthly things.”*

Men will seek to dignify such worldly-centered speaking by adding a little religious flavor to it. But that does not change the facts in the case. Such people speak of the world because they are of the world. The sobering truth is that it is not possible for such a person to enter into the Kingdom of God.

The World Hears Them

From one point of view, those who listen to these worldly self-professed experts have been deceived. The flamboyancy of these men has overwhelmed the faint-hearted. As it is written, *“For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple”* (Rom 16:18). Our text, however, goes even more to the root of the problem. Men are deceived because their hearts are anchored to this world. That is what makes them *“simple,”* or unable to distinguish Satan’s messengers from those sent by God. The closer one is to the world, or the more harmonious one is with the *“fashion of this world”* (1 Cor 7:31), the more susceptible they become to false prophets.

If you have ever pondered the depth to which sin has brought all men, or wondered about the sinfulness of humanity, you must consider this text. The world and those who speak of it can only be overcome when Deity dwells within us. It makes little difference how cultured flesh may become, or how disciplined the mind may become. Unless a person is delivered from the world, his ears are bent toward the lie, and his heart is closed to the truth.

You Can Tell by the Followers

One of the means of identifying false teachers is the people who follow them. Peter said of these teachers, *“Many shall follow their pernicious (destructive) ways”* (2 Pet 2:2). John tells us why, because they are *“of the world.”*

There are some staggering ramifications to this, but when a professed preacher or teacher heaps about him worldly minded people, it only confirms his falseness. Just as Jesus and His teaching are not attractive to the children of the devil, so Satan and his doctrines are repulsive to the children of God, and are thus rejected.

There are some of us who are deeply concerned about the presence of worldly-minded people in professed Christian environments. They certainly do not appear to be falling on their face, convicted by what they hear, and confessing *“God is in you of a truth”* (1 Cor 14:25). In fact, it appears they feel rather at home in churches where little consciousness of God exists.

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH AND THE SPIRIT OF ERROR

“ 6 We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” Here the Spirit speaks of the Apostles in particular, and of those who have believed on Christ through their word in general. When John says *“We are of God,”* he has particular reference to what he is writing—to the message that he is delivering. God not only sent His messengers, but gave them the words to say. He not only gave them the words to say, but enabled them to say them with power. All of this is involved in *“We are of God.”*

He Who Knows God Hears Us

Herein a most remarkable distinction is made. We have already been told that those who are of the world give heed to those speaking of the world. Not we are told that the individual who does, in fact, know God, hears His messengers. *“Hear,”* in this case, does not mean merely listening, or hearing the sound of their words. To *“hear”* is to understand, or comprehend. It also involves paying attention to, and being inclined toward, having a preference and love for the message.

When we are born again, we receive a capacity to *“hear”* with discernment and satisfaction. As Solomon said, *“The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them”* (Prov 20:12). That is true in both nature and grace. God gives *“ears to hear”* (Deut 29:4). He also exhorts us to use them (Matt 11:15; 13:9,43; Rev 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22; 13:9).

The renewed heart loves the Word of God. It lives *“by every word of God”* (Lk 4:4), and engages in a fervent quest to obtain and keep it.

He Who Does Not Know God Does Not Hear His Messengers

**If the person speaks of the world, they are not of God.
Those who listen to such a message do not know God.
Those who genuinely are sent by God speak His words, and
those who are born of God joyfully receive them.**

Those who do not *“know God,”* by virtue of that condition, do not give heed to His messengers. Their refusal to listen is not owing to immaturity, but to NOT being of God. Their ear is not bent toward God because they are unable to recognize Him, and have no appetite for His life-sustaining Word. They have not *“received the love of the truth, that they might be saved”* (2 Thess 2:10).

The Spirit does not move John to adapt to such people, reducing the truth, as it were, so that it is more appealing to them. Mark it well, the person who is a *“friend of the world”* is, by virtue of that circumstance, *“the enemy of God”* (James 4:4). Do not imagine for one moment that God will decrease or lessen His truth to accommodate to such people. I realize that much emphasis is placed on doing precisely this among those with a mega-church mentality. Such people will do nearly anything to appeal to those who are of the world and do not know God. But John offers no such suggestions. He simply acknowledges a condition over which he has no power. *“He who is not of God does not hear us.”*

I am sure that detail did not bring rejoicing to his heart. Nevertheless, he knew the truth declared elsewhere. *“For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?”* (2 Cor 2:15-16).

This Is How You Know

Here, then, is a twofold test of the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. WHAT IS THE MESSAGE, AND WHO LISTENS TO IT? If the person speaks of the world, they are not of God. Those who listen to such a message do not know God. Those who genuinely are sent by God speak His words, and those who are born of God joyfully receive them. On the surface, that may appear to be quite simplistic. Men often tend to develop more extensive tests to determine who is of the truth and who is not.

But this test is not as simple as it may appear. Behind it is a truth articulated by Jesus Himself. *“He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God”* (John 8:47). Again, He said to His enemies, *“Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word”* (John 8:43). And again, *“But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me”* (John 10:26-27).

God alone knows those who are His, even though they may not be apparent to us. As it is written, *“And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity”* (2 Tim 2:17-19).

Those who bear the message of God must speak with this persuasion: **those who are of God will hear His words.** Those who are born of God so identify themselves by their response to the Word of God. Those who are not of God identify themselves in the very same way. A person's reaction to the truth does not need to be explained by self-appointed philosophers. The Lord has already explained the situation.

These things are not written to make us hypercritical or divisive. A perception of them will have a significant impact on our assessment of the religious community. The real reason, however, for these words is to assure the children of God that they are precisely that—the children of God. Their response to the message of Christ confirms that to be the case, and they are to comfort their hearts in that awareness.

THE EVIDENCE OF AFFILIATION WITH GOD

“7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” Now the spirit returns to this cardinal point of love. How is it that a strong exhortation to *“love one another”* follows the consideration of *“the spirit of truth and the spirit of error?”* What has this to do with contemplating those who speak from God and those who speak of the world? There is a very vital association.

The love of reference is spiritual in nature, and rises above mere personalities. When the love of God is *“shed abroad in our hearts by he Holy Spirit”* (Rom 5:5), it produces a profound attraction to God Himself. It also results in a preference for the people of God, and a hearty appetite for the truth of God. Where God's people are not loved, a love for God is glaringly absent. Where the truth of God is not loved, God Himself is not loved.

More particularly, our love of the brethren involves receiving what God has given them for Christ's body, and giving to them what has been granted to us by His grace. Loving one another involves mutuality or spiritual exchange. In the case of John, loving him involves receiving what he was given from God.

In loving one another, we are not attracted by the human personality, or by fleshly similarities. It is the Divine likeness, or image of Christ, that draws us. That is the reason for these strong statements.

Love Is of God

The love of reference is spiritual in nature, and rises above mere personalities. When the love of God is “*shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit*” (Rom 5:5), it produces a profound attraction to God Himself. It also results in a preference for the people of God, and a hearty appetite for the truth of God.

The phrase “*love is of God*” means love is “*FROM*” God, and is so translated in the NIV, NASB, and NRSV versions. We possess it, but it came from the Lord. It was not developed by us, but granted to us. Thus it is written, “*Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, **from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ***” (Eph 6:23). And again, “*And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, **with faith and love** which are in Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim 1:14). Again, “*But the fruit **of the Spirit** is love . . .*” (Gal 5:22).

The Spirit spells this out with remarkable clarity in First Thessalonians 5:9. “*But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are **taught by God** to love one another.*” Again, Paul wrote to Timothy, “*For God has not **given us** a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind*” (2 Tim 1:7).

We are, then, custodians of that love, given to us by the grace of God. It is to be directed toward “*one another*” as well as God Himself and His word. To fail in this regard means the Spirit has been quenched, the power denied, and grace frustrated (1 Thess 5:19; 2 Tim 3:5; Gal 2:21).

Everyone Who Loves

There is no possibility that this is not absolutely true: “*everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*” Among other things, this confirms love is not shallow, nor is it based upon the flesh. It also declares that being born again and knowing God are a requisite to loving one another. This is a great consolation to those who do love the brethren. While they may lack many desired traits, they can find encouragement in their preference for the people of God. Such have been born again, and are in joyful fellowship with God. Else they could not love His people.

He Who Does Not Love

The specific point being made is that God, being Love, cannot beget children unlike Himself. When we are “*born again,*” we are not simply given a fresh start, we become “*partakers of the Divine nature.*” One of the primary evidences of this is our love for the brethren. Our desire to receive from them and minister to them confirms we are in the same “*family*” with them

Of course, the converse is also true. “*He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*” It makes no difference what profession of faith may be made, or what religious affiliation is entertained. The person who has no regard for the people of God does not know God. What is even more, God has revealed such people will be condemned in the day of Christ. “*You who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Thess 1:7-8). When you ponder the lack of love among professing Christians,

this is a most sobering thought. Nevertheless, it is the truth, and is to be received.

God Is Love

Twice this statement is found in Scripture, and both of them are in First John. “*He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love,*” and “*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*” (4:8,16). By this, the Spirit is not equating God and love. He does not say that “love is God,” but that “*God is love.*”

By saying “*God is love,*” the spirit is accounting for God’s action, both in creation and redemption. It was His regard for His offspring that compelled Him to determine to bless His people. Grace, mercy, compassion—these are all exhibitions of God’s nature. “*God is love.*” It should be apparent that we are handling a most profound truth in this text.

The specific point being made is that God, being Love, cannot beget children unlike Himself. When we are “*born again,*” we are not simply given a fresh start, we become “*partakers of the Divine nature.*” One of the primary evidences of this is our love for the brethren. Our desire to receive from them and minister to them confirms we are in the same “*family*” with them (Eph 3:15). How serious a matter, therefore, for us to consider. Right here, we may gain great confidence. Think upon these things.

CONCLUSION

The gravity of this passage is confirmed by the strength of the statements found in it. We all do well to remember them. Notice the strength with which they are stated.

- **“Many false prophets are gone out into the world.”**
- **“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.”**
- **“This is that spirit of antichrist.”**
- **“Ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”**
- **“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them.”**
- **“Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”**
- **“They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.”**
- **“We are of God.”**
- **“He that knoweth God heareth us.”**
- **“He that is not of God heareth not us.”**
- **“Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.”**
- **“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.”**

No ambiguity! Not the slightest hint of uncertainty! These are words addressed to faith, and will yield a glorious harvest when received. The Spirit has not called us into the arena of speculation, but ultimate reality. He has not spoken to us of mere possibilities, but of sobering verities.

Remember the revealed reasons for this marvelous Epistle.

- That we might have fellowship with the Father, the Son, and those in fellowship with Them.
- That our joy might be full.
- That we might not sin.
- That we might know we have eternal life.

Be sure, therefore, that these objectives cannot be accomplished without testing the spirits, to see whether they are from God. We cannot ignore the proliferation of false teachers and still obtain the stated benefits. All of these things will be realized in a militant environment, where opposing influences are brought to bear upon us.

Notwithstanding this situation, salvation makes us equal to it. He that is in us is, in every sense, greater than he that is in the world. The heavens still rule and Jesus is still the King of kings and Lord of lords. The devil is not greater than Jesus, nor are his children greater than the children of God. As we throw ourselves into the Divinely appointed work of testing the spirits, we will realize the blessing of the Lord. He never calls us to do something without providing the needed resources to accomplish it.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Book of 1st John

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #8

GOD IS LOVE

“ 9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide 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 the Son as Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. 19 We love Him because He first loved us. 20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.”

(1 John 4:9-21, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

Faith cannot be initiated or maintained by law, speculation, or philosophy. All of those are impotent to produce or nourish faith. We are categorically told *“the Law is not of faith”* (Gal 3:12). It has nothing whatsoever to do with faith. It does not require faith, but doing. Because both speculation and philosophy are of human origin, it ought to be apparent they are of no value in the area of faith. Speculation includes the idea of casualness and inconclusiveness Merriam-Webster . It has no real bearing upon life, and is driven by theory, not fact. Philosophy has more to do with the pursuit of knowledge than the acquisition of it. It sits upon the very border of vanity, and of itself cannot be a foundation.

The book of First John possesses neither speculation nor vain philosophy. You will find no evidence of groping for truth, or flaying the air in an attempt to get at something. There is Divine solidity to all of its affirmations, with not the slightest twinge of doubt found in them. Critical matters are said to be *“manifested”* (1:2; 2:19; 3:5,8,10; 4:9), *“revealed”* (3:2), and *“known”* (2:13,14; 3:6; 4:16). Evidences are provided with the marvelous introduction, *“By this we know”* (2:3,5; 3:16,19,24; 4:6,13; 5:2), and *“hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him”* (3:19), and *“Hereby we know”* (3:24). *“Assurance”* (3:19), *“confidence”* (2:28; 3:21; 5:14), and *“boldness”* (4:17) are also declared to be realities in the saints. Their presence, however, can be undetected by the novice, and therefore they are announced with gladness. The reality of these New Covenant provisions can also be washed away in with the tide of false religion, misplaced emphases, and distraction to lesser things.

There is a profound absence of all of these qualities in contemporary religion. Nearly all present-day representations of Christianity are driven by human philosophy and lifeless systems. In fact, that is what has created the many sharp divisions between believers. Human wisdom has been so elevated in the minds of religious people that it has become the touchstone for proof in Scriptural matters. Language, history, theological position, or some other form of human wisdom, are too often the very basis for supposedly Christian persuasion. This approach to life in Christ has all but eliminated the requirements of faith in Christ and love for the brethren. But both of these are powerfully declared in this book to be indispensable. There is no salvation apart from them. God will not recognize the person lacking these things.

This message is so clear in this short Epistle, that it can only be missed by failing to expose our hearts and minds to its truth. If our hearts are to be made confident, we must hear words of this sort. We cannot come into the presence of the Almighty upon the basis of our own achievements. Our hearts know this to be the case. A condemned heart will drive us from the presence of the Lord just as surely as it did in Adam and Eve.

Faith, however, takes hold of Divine provision and boldly comes into the presence of God to obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16). Thus the Spirit speaks to our faith, anchoring us in Divine utterance and heavenly realities. If we are to survive, we must know the truth, for it alone will free us.

GOD’S LOVE HAS BEEN MANIFESTED

“ 9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.” Notice how the Spirit does not take for granted that we know these things. While men may be familiar with them academically, laying hold of them spiritually is quite another matter. Great spiritual insights do not come through mere study, although they rarely come independently of study. They primarily come through the

same means as faith—by HEARING. I have already emphasized the many affirmations that are made in this book. Remember, they were written to believers who had already passed from death unto life. They had, from one point of view, already met the “What must I do to be saved” requirements. Yet, they had not yet finished the race, nor was the work of God completed in them.

This should put to rest the notion that reaching the lost is the premier work of the church—a myth that has been perpetrated in the name of Christ. Were this the case, most of the Apostolic writings would be addressed to the lost. But they are not, and the Apostles were given to the church, being placed as the foremost office in it (Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 12:28). The work of the Apostles is really a view of the fundamental work of Jesus and the primary work of the church. Jesus is presently interceding for the church, and has been made Head over the church to nourish it and prepare it to dwell forever with Him. The Apostles, together with all other gifts to the church, have been granted for the building up of the saints (Eph 4:12-16).

The Love of God

The love of God is obviously profound. It is “*shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit*” (Rom 5:5). The perception of it is the catalyst for our own love for God (1 John 4:19). It is a subject intended to engage both heart and mind.

One of Christ’s indictments against the Pharisees was that they passed over, or disregarded, “*the love of God*” (Lk 11:42). Among other things, this confirms “*the love of God*” is a vast repository of Divine goodness. It is a rich resource from which our need is supplied. If a person can get within the influence of Divine love, thorough satisfaction will be realized, and all requirements will be met. This is depicted in Zephaniah’s wonderful expression. “*The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy;*

He will rest in his love, He will joy over thee with singing” (Zeph 3:17). It is no wonder the Lord Jesus spoke of **abiding** in God’s love (John 15:10). Speaking of this fundamental aspect of spiritual life, Jude admonished us, “*Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*” (Jude 21).

Found Only in Christ

The love of God is an expression of His Person—an outreach of His character. With great care, the Spirit teaches us this love is realized in Christ Jesus alone. When we are found “*in Christ,*” we have come into the domain where Divine love is realized: i.e., “*the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom 8:39).

We cannot make too much of this. Satan has perpetrated a false religion that can function without immediate association with Jesus Christ. This pretension admits to Christ, but does not rely upon Him. It acknowledges the historicity of Christ, but does not flee to Him for refuge (Heb 6:18). It is described as “*Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof*” (2 Tim 3:5). All of its talk about the love of God is pointless and vain, because it does not rely upon the Son of God.

Without belaboring the point, this accounts for the lifelessness of much of the religion of our time. Where spiritual life is not made known, the love of God is NOT being experienced. And, where the love of God is not being experienced, there is not a reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ. It is really that simple, and there is no need to further complicate the matter. We

do want to be gracious toward people, but where God is not working, it is only because He is not welcome, loved, or trusted.

Manifested Toward Us

The love of God is not to be viewed academically, or studied as though it were a science, or body of knowledge to be classified. This is a love that is “*manifested*,” or displayed to us. While it does require our attentiveness and thought to perceive it, the point of our text is that God has made the initial move. Humanity, because of its fallen condition, is not able to conceive of a God that loves. That is evident in the multiplicity of gods conceived by idolaters. None of them are noted for love—i.e., a love that seeks to benefit those upon whom it is conferred. There have been gods created by men that are associated with love, but it is always sensual love. Such gods, or idols, have also been used to promote sensuality.

God has therefore made His love known. He has revealed both its reality and its manner, or nature. But this does not mean He merely has told us about His love, showing us certain aspects of it, and how He is capable of bringing good things to individuals, collectively and individually. He has not given us a manual of definition, but a book of affirmation. We will see that His love is chiefly declared in what He has done, not how He feels.

A Marvelous Expression

A most marvelous expression of this

Where spiritual life is not made known, the love of God is NOT being experienced. And, where the love of God is not being experienced, there is not a reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

truth is provided in Titus 3:3-7. *“For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and THE LOVE OF GOD our Savior toward man APPEARED, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but ACCORDING TO HIS MERCY He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been JUSTIFIED BY HIS GRACE we should become heirs according to the hope of ETERNAL LIFE.”*

A Focused Love

The love that is being made known is “*toward us*” – i.e., FOR those who are in Christ Jesus. This is even more focused than the love declared by Jesus: “*For God So loved THE WORLD that He . . .*” (John 3:16). There are at least three areas on which Divine love is focused.

The World

God’s love is focused toward the world, the church, and the individual. The world of humanity is distinguished from all other personalities in the love declared in John 3:16 (i.e., distinguished from angelic hosts). John 3:17 reaffirms this more general view of God’s love. “*For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved*” (John 3:17). This is a marvelous provision. It was a love that focused on those who “*were dead in sins*” (Eph 2:4). It constrained God to send His Son into the world to be “*the propitiation for*

our sins” (1 John 4:10). This is a love that appeals to all men everywhere.

The Church

In our text, those who are in Christ Jesus are distinguished from all other people. Israel is the initial example of Divine love being focused on a group of people (Mal 1:2). The church, or body of Christ, is the ultimate and greatest example. It is written, “*Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it*” (Eph 5:25).

Thus the triumph of the people of God is traced back to “*Him that loved us*” (Rom 8:37). The wonderful circumstance in which we now find ourselves is directly owing to the love of God. As it is written, “*Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work*” (2 Thess 2:16).

An Individual

The love of God can even be focused on a single individual. As it is written, “*Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord*” (Gen 6:8), and “*to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word*” (Isa 66:2). “*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). John, you will remember, was “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*” (John 21:20).

Realizing this aspect of Divine love, Paul cried out, “*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me*” (Gal 2:20).

An individual’s commitment to the Lord is directly proportionate to the discernment of these aspects of Divine love. In general, it is understood that God loved the world, thus emphasizing His commitment to delivering us from that dreadful environ (Gal 1:4). The understanding that God’s love is more specifically focused upon the church, compels the individual to be identified with those people, seek their welfare, and profit from their gifts and abilities. The awareness of the intensely personal love of God propels an individual into greater spiritual depths, more prolific understanding, and more prodigious labors. I know of no exceptions to these observations.

His Only Begotten Son Sent

Five times in Scripture, the Lord Jesus is called “*the ONLY begotten*” (John 1:14,18; 3:16,18; 1 John 4:9). Four of those times He is called “*the ONLY begotten Son,*” and once, “*the ONLY begotten of the Father*” (John 1:14). To the Son, the Father said, “*this day (when He came into the world) have I begotten thee*” (Psa 2:7; Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5). This refers to the humanity of Christ, and is not an affirmation that our Savior’s Person was created. His origin was “*from everlasting,*” as Micah declared (Mic 5:2).

How is it that Jesus is so identified when we read in this very book that those in Christ are also “*begotten of God*” (5:18). James declares God “*begat*” us “*with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures*” (James 1:18). Peter also affirms God has “*begotten us again unto a lively hope*” (1 Pet 1:3). When, then, does the Spirit mean by “*ONLY begotten Son?*”

The language is precise, and is to be taken as it is stated. The ONLY life really begotten by God is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We are begotten by virtue of our reception of the “*ONLY*

begotten Son.” God could beget no sons among sinners until He had begotten His “*ONLY*” Son. Technically speaking, Jesus is the only “*Man*” God recognizes and honors. Our recognition by God is strictly based upon our identity with Christ Jesus.

Illustrated in Abraham

This truth was marvelously illustrated in our father Abraham. When Isaac was around thirty years old, God required a most extraordinary thing of Abraham. “*Take now thy son THINE ONLY SON Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of*” (Gen 22:2). Of the occasion, the Spirit later said, “*By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON*” (Heb 11:17).

Where spiritual life is not made known, the love of God is NOT being experienced. And, where the love of God is not being experienced, there is not a reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

From one point of view, Abraham had also begotten Ishmael of Hagar when he was eighty-six years old (Gen 16:16). Ishmael is called “*Abraham’s son*” (Gen 25:12). Isaac, however, is called “*His ONLY begotten son*” (Heb 11:17). Why is this the case? Because no other son was born as Isaac was. His birth was a miracle wrought by God. Ishmael’s was a normal birth wrought in the energy of the flesh. Isaac, because of his BIRTH, was recognized by God, and thus became the heir of the promise (Gen 21:12; Rom 9:7; Heb 11:18). Ishmael, because of his BIRTH, was not recognized by God, and thus did not become an heir of the promise (Gen 21:10-12; Gal 4:30).

So it is with Jesus Christ, the “*ONLY begotten of the Father.*” No one was begotten as He was! No one came, or comes, into the world as He did! From one point of view, He was “*brought*” into the world (Heb 1:6). In this sense, He was, as it were, escorted into this world, protected from the diabolical purposes of the devil and the wicked intentions of men. From yet another view He “*came*” into the world (1 Tim 1:15). Here we see the choice of the Lord Jesus Himself, who graciously volunteered for the appointed mission, coming to do the will of the Father (Heb 10:7-9).

But our text declares our Lord’s entrance into the world from yet another point of view. Jesus was “*SENT*” by the Father into the world (4:9-10). He was sent to accomplish a purpose determined “*before the foundation of the world*” (Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:20). This mission, we are apprized, was an expression of “*the love of God.*” By this, the Spirit means God was not motivated by our need, or by a sense of deep sympathy for our deplorable condition. While those are surely involved in the reason behind Christ being sent into the world, they are not at the center of it. It was God’s profound desire to do us good, to bless us, and to bring us to Himself, that compelled Him to send the Son into the world.

A Costly Entrance

We must not take our Lord’s entrance into the world for granted, allowing only a consideration of our need. It is good, nay, imperative, to recall the unspeakable disadvantages Jesus experienced in coming into the world. He had to divest Himself of the prerogatives of Deity, laying them all aside (Phil 2:7). He entered into the world without omniscience, omnipotence, or omnipresence. He entered into a state where growth was required, dependency upon the Father necessitated, and temptation endured. He was required to be

“made sin for us” (2 Cor 5:21), be “made a curse” (Gal 3:13), and be “forsaken” by God (Mark 15:34). He

He was “tempted in all points like as we are” (Heb 4:15), “suffered being tempted” (Heb 2:18), and “learned obedience by the things that He suffered” (Heb 5:8). If you begin to imagine that you have been asked to endure difficult things, think of the cup Jesus was commanded to drink. It will alleviate your own sorrows, and open the door for rejoicing to enter into your heart.

And what does the entrance of the Son into the world confirm to us? What compelled such a thing to take place? It is the love of God that is revealed by His only begotten Son being sent into the world—and coming voluntarily and joyfully.

That We Might Live

Now the purpose for Christ’s entrance is more specifically defined. From a more general point of view, the Son came into the world in order that people might have eternal life and not be condemned. But John takes the matter even deeper, confirming this is no shallow love that we are being given to see. The purpose is brief but pungent: “**that we might LIVE through Him.**” When He was dwelling among us, Jesus said He came that we might “have life,” and “have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

Requires Death to the World

Any approach to religion that does not contribute to the development of spiritual life, is a delusion from the devil. It has nothing whatsoever to do with Divine intent or the Lord Jesus Christ, but is spurious and to be rejected as a poison to the soul.

Life in Christ presumes death to the world and its ways. As it is written, “*For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God*” (Col 3:3). When we were baptized into Christ, we were raised by the Father to “*walk in newness of life*” (Rom 6:4). Jesus was sent into the world in order that this life could be realized by us. It is a life that cannot join in alliance with this world, and involves a loss of affection for the things of this world.

Requires Death to the Law

Those participating in this life have become dead to the Law, having passed beyond its condemnation. As it is written, “*For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God*” (Gal 2:19). It is not possible to be alive and sensitive to God while remaining under the bludgeon of the Law. God did not send Jesus into the world so that we could be better governed, but so we could “*live unto,*” or for, Him.

A Dominating Life

This is a dominating life, as confirmed in the words, “*For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall **reign in life** by one, Jesus Christ*” (Rom 5:17). Spiritual life cannot be lived by fits and starts, or in cycles and seasons. **If it does not reign, it will wane.** If it does not dominate, it will dissipate. When the love of God is placed into the background of life, the love of the world comes to the forefront. Jesus came into the world in order that we might experience this type of life.

This is nothing less than “*eternal life.*” While it is presently only in the firstfruits sense, yet it is very real and very effectual. The person imbibing Christ has eternal life (John 6:54). This is God’s

gift to us “*through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Rom 6:23). It is what we are exhorted to lay hold of, being aware of its presence and power (1 Tim 6:12).

Any approach to religion that does not contribute to the development of spiritual life, is a delusion from the devil. It has nothing whatsoever to do with Divine intent or the Lord Jesus Christ, but is spurious and to be rejected as a poison to the soul. If God sent His Son into the world that we might “*live through Him,*” woe be to the person or procedure that stifles that life! If the soul becomes dull toward God, death is imminent. If a person’s religion causes such a condition, a most serious situation is present, and must be addressed immediately.

An absence of life indicates that, to some degree, Jesus has been refused. If God sent His only begotten on into the world that we might live through Him, the absence of such life can only mean the Son has not been embraced. If this were not the case, God would be proved a liar, and His purpose frustrated. Who is the person who would dare to affirm such a thing to be possible.

Let every soul embrace the Son, without reservation and with all zeal. When this takes place, the love of God will be confirmed to us. Then we will see more clearly that God’s abundant love has not only brought us forgiveness of sin, but abundant access to himself.

In a very real sense, we are presently being saved, or kept alive, by Jesus Christ. Is it not written, “*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*” (Rom 5:10). Not only, therefore, were we raised from death in trespasses and sins by Him, we are presently living by Him. Thus the Spirit testifies, “*Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them*” (Heb 7:25). The continual work of Christ in the behalf of the saints sets the tone for all Kingdom work.

Settle it in your heart, if Jesus continually makes intercession for us, it is because it is required. Only eternity will fully tell how low sin brought us, and how high grace is bringing us! Praise the Lord!

REAL LOVE IS DEFINED BY GOD’S LOVE

“ 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

A Spiritual Principle

When it comes to Scriptural definitions, we always begin with Deity, proceeding from there to things more obvious to men. God and Christ are defining Points, as our text will powerfully affirm. In this arrangement, you do not define God or the things of God by reasoning from temporal realities or relationships. The reasoning process must always be the other way—From God to temporal matters. Because this is not as clearly known as it should be a few words concerning this principle are in order. Heaven is never secondary—never!

Earthly relationships reflect heavenly ones, but do not define them. For example, the relationship of Christ and the church is reflected in the interrelation of husband and wife. However, marital involvements do not clarify heavenly ones, and are not intended to do so. Rather, heavenly relationships shed light on the earthly ones.

The types and shadows introduced under the Old Covenant do not define the great realities of salvation, but were designed to introduce them to men, preparing the way for the coming Savior. A shadow is never precise, and always more general than the substance. The marked similarities between the shadows of the Old Covenant and the substance of the New Covenant are best understood this side of Christ. The real profitability of those ancient ceremonies was never seen by those engaging in them. Now that the Light has come, we gain great insight, however, from them.

This very principle is declared in our text. Love—real love—is not defined by human response, but by Divine initiative.

Not That We Loved God

If we want to take hold of the greatness of love, and see it in its fulness, we must not look for its definition or primary exhibition among men. While there have been great men and women of God who loved Him, their love was a reflected love, and not the substance of love itself. “*In this is love,*” the Spirit affirms, “*NOT that we loved God.*”

Several things are revealed in this expression. First, God does not love us because we love Him. His tender love toward us is free, or gratuitous. Second, we are the ones that need to be constrained to love, not God. Our love must be awakened, as it were, and strong incentives given to take hold on God and His Son. But it is not so with God.

Notice also that he draws no comparison between man’s love for man and God’s love for man. Rather, the Spirit compares man’s love for God with God’s love for man. He straightly tells us that our love for God is not the greatest exhibit of love. We ought not to spend our time studying love from the human point of view, for the real profit will not be gained by such an approach. We may study how Peter, James, John, and Paul loved Christ, but that will not provide sufficient incentive for us to love Him. Our focus must be upon God’s love for us.

He Loved Us

As is seen in this Divine expression of love, love is costly, requiring an investment by the one giving it. How clearly this is seen in God’s love toward us!

From an earthly point of view, one might develop some reasons why men should love God. Such reasons might make a lot of sense to some. On a lower level, one could cite the many temporal benefits that come to men from God. On the higher level, the many aspects of His great salvation could be adduced as notable reasons to love Him. And all of those conclusions would be true. Yet, they would not give us an accurate picture of love, nor provide us with the impetus required to heartily love God.

But when we consider God’s love for us, we are seeing real love. He loved us, “*even when we were dead in sins*” (Eph 2:4). If, therefore, we imagine that we are above loving our enemies, as we are enjoined to do (Matt 5:44), let us ponder the love of God. When “*we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son*” (Rom 5:10). That is love! Everything contrary to that is really pretension, and is no love at all. This, as I understand it, is precisely the point the Spirit is making through John.

His Son sent to be a Propitiation

The Spirit will now affirm that the greatest revelation of the love of God is found in the reconciliation of men to Himself. He will not immerse us in the quagmire of human reasoning, or parade before us sundry examples of members of our race who have loved God. He will take us to the revelation of God's love through the atoning death of His Son. This, of course, is the Gospel once again. It is ever "*the power of God unto salvation*" (Rom 1:16), and is never replaced with another emphasis.

This is the second time we have read of "*propitiation*" in this book (2:2; 4:10). It is also used in Romans 3:25, where God is said to have set Jesus forth publically as a Propitiation (NASB). Jesus was the *votive* gift of God for the salvation of men. The word "*votive*" emphasizes the avowal, or commitment, of God to the salvation of men. In the sending of Christ to be the propitiation for sin, God was confirming His committal to our salvation. He was, as it were, making a statement that would stand the tests of time. Reaching down through the generations, the death of Christ remains the most powerful incentive to both faith and godliness. Once seen, it breaks down all resistance against God.

As is seen in this Divine expression of love, love is costly, requiring an investment by the one giving it. How clearly this is seen in God's love toward us!

By saying, "*Herein is love,*" the Spirit is saying we look in vain to find real love anywhere else. All valid love springs from God's love, finding its origin in the perception and reception of Divine love.

The reason for Christ's entrance into the world is herein specified: "*to be the propitiation for our sins.*" In so doing, He turned the wrath of God from us, absorbing the shock of that wrath. He "*tasted death for every man*" (Heb 2:9). The love of God was so strong that He vented His wrath upon the Son, that He might lavish His love upon us. That, and more, is involved in God sending His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

With remarkable consistency, the death of Christ is related to the sin of the world. He did not die because we were sick, but because we had sinned. The association of Christ with illness is consistently related to His suffering and His earthly ministry, not His death (Isa 53:4; Matt 8:16-17). His death, however, went deeper, touching the real issue that had separated men from God—sin. Sickness does not alienate men from God. It is sin that does that, and God sent His Son into the world to address that situation.

It is our business to ponder God sending His Son into the world, and to seek to grasp its significance more fully. It is not enough to develop some trite sayings about the mission of Jesus, and then forget it. When we behold the love of God in sending Jesus to be the propitiation for our sins, loving the brethren will make sense. Putting to death the deeds of the body will be seen as a necessity. Loving God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, will no longer be viewed as an impossible task. In the energy of Divine love, we will find our love for Him maturing and producing fruit within us. Serving God will be a delight, and His commandments will not be grievous.

THE LOGIC OF LOVING ONE ANOTHER

"11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." The reasoning of the Spirit is undeniably strong. If God "*so loved us*" that He sent His Son to be the Propitiation for our sins,

ought not we, the loved ones, reciprocate by loving one another? If not, we are choosing to disdain those God loves, thereby confirming we do not have His nature.

It is not possible to conduct ourselves in contradiction of the commands of God if we are living by faith. Spiritual life cannot be expressed unspiritually, or in violation of the Divine nature. Such expressions are always of the flesh, and never of the Spirit. It is not possible to conduct ourselves in contradiction of the commands of God if we are living by faith. Spiritual life cannot be expressed unspiritually, or in violation of the Divine nature. Such expressions are always of the flesh, and never of the Spirit.

Our obligation to love one another is twofold. **First**, as the “*offspring of God*,” we are in His “*image*.” We are therefore morally obligated to love one another. **Second**, we are a new creation in Christ Jesus, and are made “*partakers of the Divine nature*.” For this reason, we will find the greatest benefit and fullest expression of that nature in loving others also possessing that the Divine nature.

When we consider the “*manner*” (3:1) in which God “*loved us*,” what possible reason can be adduced for failing to love the brethren? God loved us when we were “*dead in sins*,” “*enemies*,” “*without hope*,” and “*carried away*” by our iniquities. His love was not a response to our kindness to Him.

Nothing has shed as much light on God’s view of man as the mission and work of His only begotten Son. The investment is so staggering we simply cannot take it all in. No matter how long and extensively we ponder God’s love for us, it seems we have only touched the hem of the garment. Our love for one another, while not in the same measure as that of our God, is to be of the same kind or manner. Thus we are admonished, “*Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma*” NKJV (Eph 5:1,2).

It is the manner of the Spirit to reason with us in this way. God and Christ are to be our considerations when thinking about loving one another. This is contrasted with the approach of Law, which simply imposes the matter of love upon men: i.e., “*Thou SHALT love . . .*” In Christ more powerful incentives are brought to bear upon the soul. When those incentives are taken seriously, it becomes totally UNreasonable to NOT love the brethren. Thus it is written, “*Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God*” (Rom 15:7).

The word “*ought*” must be considered from Mount Zion, not Mount Sinai. By that, I mean it must not be viewed as a mere obligation that goes against our nature, but is necessary anyway. That is the manner of Law, but grace reasons differently. While the word “*ought*” (coming from **ovfei,lomen**) does carry the idea of obligation or necessity, its emphasis is unique. The obligation is owing to the nature of life in Christ. In the New Covenant, it is utterly unreasonable to act contrary to what we “*ought*” to do. To put it another way, it is not possible to conduct ourselves in contradiction of the commands of God if we are living by faith. Spiritual life cannot be expressed unspiritually, or in violation of the Divine nature. Such expressions are always of the flesh, and never of the Spirit.

By saying “*we ought to love one another*,” the Spirit is saying there really is no room for any other response. God Himself has shown us the manner of Divine love. What is more, He has given us His

own nature (Col 3:10), which cannot act in contradiction of God. This is nothing less than a summons to “*walk in the Spirit*” and live “*by faith*” (Gal 6:16,25; Rom 1:17). Spiritual life cannot be sustained in any other way.

One Another

It will be profitable to briefly consider the significance of loving “*one another*.” This is a family term, applying to members of the “*household of faith*” (Gal 6:10). The admonition to “*love one another*” is never addressed to those outside of Christ. Also, it is never used to admonish unbelievers concerning their relationship with unbelievers. During Christ’s discourse with His disciples on the evening of His betrayal, He thrice mentioned their love for one another. He declared this was a “*new commandment*,” in that they were to “*love another*” as He had loved them (John 13:34). Twice, He commanded them to “*love one another*” (John 15:12,17).

The Epistles also strongly admonish believers to love one another, and to do so “*fervently*” (Rom 12:10; 13:8; 1 Pet 1:22). This is evidenced through “*all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love*” (Eph 4:2). It is also made exhibited in “*serving one another*” (Gal 5:13), “*preferring*” one another (Rom 15:10), and “*considering*” one another” (Heb 10:24).

Primary Associations

There is an underlying truth behind this exhortation—a major premise upon which it is built. **Our primary associations are those with our brethren in Christ.** Men should be able to perceive this by the very nature of their new life in Christ. Yet, this reality has apparently eluded many professed believers.

Jesus Sets the Tone

This is no strange doctrine. Jesus revealed this was His manner, which is the only acceptable manner. On one occasion, He was told that His mother and brothers were standing outside of the house in which He was ministering. His response is arresting, and worthy of the most serious

Is there any question about who God prefers? Whom he blesses? Those with whom He fellowships? Those to whom He gives exceeding great and precious promises? And if this is the manner in which God and Jesus conduct themselves, how is it that some professing identity with them think less of His people, and prefer those of the world?

deliberation. “*But He answered and said unto him that told him, Who is My mother? and who are My brethren? And He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples, and said, Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother*” (Matt 12:47-50). Jesus was certainly not unmindful of His mother, as seen in His care for her while upon the cross (John 19:26-27). His primary associations, however, were those who heard His word.

Another example of this is seen in our Lord’s activities on the evening of His betrayal. As He drew near to the time when He would make His “*soul an offering for sin*” (Isa 53:10), He preferred to be with His disciples. He had ministered to the multitudes, healed their sick, and even fed them. But now He withdrew from the multitudes, choosing to be with His primary associates. Do

you remember His words to them? “*With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer*” (Lk 22:15).

The Manner of God Himself

And what of God Himself—our heavenly Father? Whose company does He prefer, and with whom does He dwell? He will speak to us for Himself. “*For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones"* NKJV (Isa 57:15). And again, “*But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word*” (Isa 66:2). And again, “*The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, And He will show them His covenant*” (Psa 25:14).

Is there any question about who God prefers? Whom he blesses? Those with whom He fellowships? Those to whom He gives exceeding great and precious promises? And if this is the manner in which God and Jesus conduct themselves, how is it that some professing identity with them think less of His people, and prefer those of the world?

The Current Church Scene

With some exceptions, loving and preferring one another is a strange phenomenon in the average congregation. Camaraderie, if present at all, is generally in the flesh rather than the Spirit. The infrequency of meeting together in the name of the Lord confirms the people do not share a preference for the things of God.

I do not say these things to be critical, but to point out their total unacceptability before the Lord. A failure to love one another is nothing more than a confession that the Spirit has been quenched, the things of God are not desired, and the soul is aloof from God. There is no place for NOT loving and preferring one another. Salvation does not allow for such failure. The New Covenant makes no provision for such an omission. This is a key element of spiritual life.

LOVE IS NOT BASED UPON SIGHT

“12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.” Right here we strike at the heart of the matter. A person who does not live by faith must live according to sight. However, in Christ, this is not possible, for God has given us nothing to “*see*” with the natural eye. God Himself cannot be seen because He contrasts so sharply with the natural order: i.e., His glory is too great for men to bear. He has also withdrawn His Son from the earth. He has sent an invisible Spirit into the world, Whom the world “*cannot receive*” (John 14:17). Thus, men are confined to faith in their association with God. Fleshly vision provides no access, and gives no advantage. Now the Spirit will show us the evidence of God’s presence. It will not be found in vision or in any other natural sense. It will be evidenced by our love for His people— “*the brethren.*”

No One!

“*No one has seen God at any time.*” The statement certainly is not ambiguous. Even so, it is too difficult for some to receive. Some, unacquainted with the nature of Divine utterance, point to the experience of “*Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel.*” It is twice declared that they “*saw God.*” “*And **they saw the God** of Israel . . . also **they saw God***” (Ex 24:9-

11). Pointing to these texts, sophists declare there is a contradiction—that God has really been seen, as these texts affirm.

The sight reported in Exodus, however, did not involve the fulness of God. He was seen in a very veiled fashion. To put it another way, they saw the GLORY of God rather than God Himself—and even that glory was an accommodation to the frailties of their flesh.

When Moses requested that God show him His glory, the Lord replied, “*You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live*” (Ex 33:20). In view of this circumstance, God accommodated Himself to Moses, allowing him to behold the lingering glow, as it were, of His presence. Here is how it is stated. “*Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen*” NKJV (Ex 33:21-23).

Another verse which seems to contradict the affirmation of our text is found in Genesis. There, after wrestling with a heavenly messenger through the night, Jacob responded, “*For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved*” (Gen 32:30). Actually, the text says Jacob wrestled with “*a man*” (Gen 32:24). What Jacob had seen was a representation of God, and not God Himself. In his expression, Jacob was saying He had confronted God and survived. But he had not seen the fulness of God.

It is in this sense that our text reads, “*No one has seen God at any time.*” It was not that the privilege had simply been withheld. It is not possible for flesh to survive an immediate and full confrontation with God. So far as flesh is concerned, God is “*invisible*” (Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17; Heb 11:27). In his first letter to Timothy, the Spirit moved Paul to say this of the Lord: “*Who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see*” NKJV (1 Tim 6:16).

**Now the Spirit will affirm that God is only comprehended
through faith and love. Further, where faith and love are
found, God Himself is also found.**

John also wrote these precise words in his Gospel. “*No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him*” (John 1:18). Now the Spirit will affirm that God is only comprehended through faith and love. Further, where faith and love are found, God Himself is also found.

If We Love One Another

Remember, the point being made by the Spirit is not intended to create doubt, but to confirm we have eternal life. He knows we will not be able to face our adversary doubting whether or not we are accepted by God, or not knowing if we are reconciled to Him. He will therefore draw our attention to solid evidence of our sonship. It will be something of supreme worth, ranking high on the scale of spiritual values.

Note that the Spirit does not say, “If we are flawless in our perceptions,” or “If we have never sinned,” or “If we have no need to be chastised.” The test must be something at the foundation level—something that will enable us to make recovery where needed, and advance toward the “*the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 3:14).

“If we love one another . . .” This is no casual statement, and must not be viewed as though it is. Our acceptance of and attraction to the people of God are pivotal points. We know this is true because of the conclusions revealed in that love. Lest we underrate loving the brethren, we are told that God Himself teaches us to love them. *“Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another”* (1 Thess 4:9). How great the evidence, therefore, that loving the brethren yields.

Let it be clear that *“the brethren”* refers primarily to those related to Christ and God. They are Christ’s brothers because they have been begotten by God (Heb 2:11). Because they are *“sons of God”* (1 John 3:1-2), they are brethren to each others. As Jesus said to His disciples, *“one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren”* (Matt 23:8). We are not speaking here of denominational affiliation, the adoption of a creedal statement, or conformity to a perceived code or rule of conduct. This is NOT limited to people who attend the same fellowship as you do. It refers to the household of faith, wherever they are found, and under whatever circumstances they are revealed. Such relationships begin where we are, but they expand to all other places also.

God Abides in Him

“If we love one another, God dwelleth in us . . .” Is this not a remarkable statement? And are there not precious few bold enough to affirm it? Yet, it is the truth, and the people of God need to hear it. This is a glad sound to those who have a profound love for the people of God. Other versions read, *“God abides in us”* NKJV , and *“God lives in us”* NIV .

There is a tone of permanence in this language—God is identified with the one described in a unique way. Jesus spoke of the one in whom God would take up residence. *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him”* NASB (John 14:23). One of the precious promises of God relates to Him dwelling in His people. *“As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people”* (2 Cor 6:16). The indwelling is both individual (*“dwell in them”*) and collective (*“walk among them”*).

And what will be the evidence of this marvelous indwelling? It is the love of the brethren! God is at home in such an person, and the love of the brethren confirms that is the case. However, God does not abide in the person BECAUSE he loves the brethren. Rather, the love is the result of the abiding. It reveals that God resides in that person.

Among other things, we learn here that the presence of God is essential if His people are to be loved. Further, there is no option on this matter. No one can refuse to love the brethren, yet remain identified with God. Such only reveal they are of the wicked one, even as Cain (1 John 3:12).

His Love Perfected In Us

“If we love one another . . . His love is perfected in us.” The Spirit continues this powerful affirmation. Not only does God abide in the person loving the other *“sons of God,”* His love is perfected, or brought to maturity in that individual. This is a most arresting consideration! There is, to my understanding, no religious sect willing to unqualifiedly make this statement.

The word *“perfected”* can also be translated *“completed,”* or made mature. The idea is not that it is finished, but that it reaches it highest level. The reasoning is as follows. God’s love toward us is confirmed by His unspeakable beneficence to us through Christ. In bringing salvation through Jesus, god brought the ultimate good to us. If, then, we lavish that love upon those very people, we, by that

very work, confirm that He is abiding in us. God has already told us He is attracted to the humble and contrite, who tremble at His word. He has confirmed that He has received us in Christ, and will honor us because we serve His Son. Because it is not possible to conduct ourselves contrary to that manner and still be harmony with God, loving the brethren becomes the undeniable proof that God abides in us.

If a person is not able to receive that form of reasoning, then take hold on the Word itself, for that is what it says. *“If we love one another . . . His love is perfected in us.”* It is in the love of the people of God that the Divine nature is most precisely revealed. That love is most in harmony with the great salvation that is in Christ Jesus, and will be the point when sonship is made known.

KNOWING WE ARE IN GOD AND GOD IS IN US

“13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.” There is a reciprocation in salvation that is marvelous beyond all description. Now only does Deity dwell in us, we dwell in Deity. This indwelling is so real that it is confirmed by undeniable evidence. Only those whose lives are *“hid with Christ in God”* have the evidence or are able to perceive the evidence.

Here is a wonderful reality the Spirit does not want us to miss. God is not ashamed of us, and therefore is *“in us.”* Our strangership in this world, together with our longings for a *“better country”* have endeared us to God, and thus He is pleased to dwell within us.

Keep in mind the reason for this powerful Epistle.

- That we might have fellowship with the Father, the Son, and those in fellowship with them.
- That our joy might be full.
- That we might not sin.
- That we might know we have eternal life—life more abundant.

We are to understand that the words of this passage, like the rest of the book, are intended to produce these results. It should also be noted that the results cannot be achieved without this type of knowledge. This is not novel knowledge that can be ignored or removed from our consideration. Knowing these things is indispensable to consistent fellowship with God and Christ, and those who also fellowship with Them. It is essential for a dominating and strengthening joy. This knowledge dulls the knife of temptation, and empowers the individual to say *“NO!”* to ungodliness and worldly lusts. It also empowers us to have a confident grip on eternal life.

Knowing we Abide

“By this we know that we abide in Him.” The spirit chooses His words carefully. He does not say that are *“in Him,”* although we surely are (1 John 2:5; 5:20). But this is an even stronger statement: *“we abide in Him.”* Jesus spoke of the one abiding in Him as bringing *“forth much fruit”* (John 15:5). This very Epistle associates abiding in Him with walking, or living, like Him (2:6). It is also affirmed that *“Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not”* (3:6).

Here is the grandest of all locations: *“in Him.”* When we are delivered from this present evil

world, we are put into Christ Jesus (1 Cor 1:30). The one who “*abides in Him*” has not been lured into other things. Satan’s devices have been unsuccessful against such an one.

But our text does not merely say “*we abide in Him,*” but that there is evidence available to us that confirms this to be the case. We will find that the evidence is not coincidental, or a mere discovery by those astute of mind. Rather, it has been given to us by God Himself.

He Is In Us

Here is a wonderful reality the Spirit does not want us to miss. God is not ashamed of us, and therefore is “*in us.*” Our strangership in this world, together with our longings for a “*better country*” have endeared us to God, and thus He is pleased to dwell within us.

The knowledge of this confirms to our hearts that God is “*for us*” (Rom 8:31). Such knowledge moves the one possessing it to boldly say, “*The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me*” (Heb 13:6). Knowing He is “*in us*” produces boldness, confidence, and assurance. It ushers us into the courts of the Lord with peace and joy, and enables us to face the Goliaths, prophets of Baal, and Herod’s of our time.

He Has Given Us of His Spirit

And what is the evidence that we abide in Him, and He abides in us? It is not a knowledge of the Scriptures, as indispensable as that is. It is not the bearing of much fruit, prodigious labors, or the ability to catch men. None of those things are to be diminished or despised, for they are evidence of the blessing of the Lord. But they are in a different category than the confirmation given to us. They are all human expressions. Although they are the result of Divine empowerment, they are not to be the source of confidence, rejoicing, or the conclusion that we are in Him, and He is in us.

In confirmation of this, you may recall our Lord’s words to seventy of His disciples, sent on a special mission by Himself. He gave them power to do unprecedented things. Upon returning with joy from their mission, they shouted, “*Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.*” Immediately, the Lord identified the reason for their success, saying, “*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven,*” and “*Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.*” Notwithstanding, He would not allow them to base their joy or confidence on what they had done. With great power He said, “*Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven*” (Lk 10:17-20).

The knowledge of our identity with the Lord, and His with us, must be based upon what He has done, not what we have done. How marvelously this is confirmed in this text. “*By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.*”

The Spirit is not seeking to help us formulate a concise catechism of Biblical doctrine. He is bringing us to the indispensable knowledge that we possess eternal life.

The Nature of This Knowledge

Those who are unschooled in the heavenly Kingdom cannot be satisfied with this statement.

It seems too simplistic, and as though critical information is missing. The statement does not satisfy the scholar or the pragmatist. The surface commentator sees a need to apply extensive explanations to the text. The institutional man simply ignores the text. It is beyond him.

The Spirit is not seeking to help us formulate a concise catechism of Biblical doctrine. He is bringing us to the indispensable knowledge that we possess eternal life. Thus He speaks in family language of things that can only be known by the “*household of faith*.”

It is very true that the presence of the Holy Spirit can be, to some degree, determined by His fruit – but that is not the point of this particular text. The point is not the evidence of the Holy Spirit, but the confirmation that we are in God and God is in us. That reciprocal indwelling is profound, yet very real. Only those in the described condition are able to comprehend what the text is saying. It is not intended to be something debated, or a subject on which human opinions are tossed back and forth.

It is possible to live close enough to God to know things otherwise unknowable. It is also possible to be so sensitive to the Divine working, and so acquainted with the manner of the Kingdom, that we can trace, or recognize, the presence of Deity. Jacob knew He had confronted the Lord, but only after the fact. Our text is speaking of a more immediate knowledge.

Hear it again “*By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because **He has given** us of His Spirit.*” While men debate whether or not God gives of His Spirit to His children, our text affirms some KNOW this to be the case.

“Of His Spirit”

All major translations read the same way: “***OF** His Spirit.*” We have received the Spirit by measure, as distinguished from Jesus, Who possessed Him without measure (John 3:34). It is not possible for us to receive more than a portion of the Spirit. That is a condition reserved for Jesus alone. Were we able to receive the Spirit in all of His fulness, we would have no need of an Intercessor. This limitation is owing to our present condition: “*we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us*” (2 Cor 4:7).

The Spirit bears witness with our spirit, testifying “*that we are the children of God*” (Rom 8:16). Precisely how that witness is accomplished is not spelled out in Scripture—but those who have the witness can know it. The heart can be so tuned as to become aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit within. He is a gift from God, and makes us equal to the challenges of living by faith. How blessed, indeed, to possess such wonderful knowledge! Rejoice in it, and give thanks to God for it.

Let those who believe the Word of God seek for the knowledge of this situation: “*We know that we live in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.*” NIV There is no question about God giving His Holy Spirit to His children. This is repeatedly stated in His Word. “*Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts . . . Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit . . . God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit . . . And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father*” (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; 1 Thess 4:8; Gal 4:6). What a marvelous provision we have in the Holy Spirit! May we speak more often of it to each other.

Do not merely seek for a sign of His presence, but for the spiritual knowledge of it. The most powerful evidence of the presence of the Spirit is not to be found in the flesh, but in your spirit. That is the part of you to which the Spirit bears witness. That witness can be both

received and known. There is no point to a witness that cannot be perceived, or yields not benefits.

SEEING AND TESTIFYING

This is not a message emblazoned in the clouds of the sky, or written in stones of the holy land. While the message itself has come from God, it is testified by eye witnesses and participators in that love.

“14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.”

Again, the Spirit brings us into a consideration of the Gospel. Here, in the Gospel, is the most profound expression of the love of God. From one viewpoint, the Gospel is the announcement of Divine provision for us in the Person of Christ Jesus. From another view, it is the declaration of the love of God. If believers are ever tempted to doubt that God loves them, let them run to the Gospel, take it into the heart and mind and ponder its glorious message.

We Have Seen AND Testify

This is not a message emblazoned in the clouds of the sky, or written in stones of the holy land. While the message itself has come from God, it is testified by eye witnesses and participators in that love. This is not a message of empty and vain philosophy, or the propagation of human opinion. Well did Peter write, *“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 Pet 1:16). In the first of this Epistle, John confessed the same thing. *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you”* (1:1-3a).

This reveals another aspect of God’s character. His message is conveyed to men through men who have themselves walked with God– *“holy men.”* God does not send us philosophers, but those who have walked with Him. Even in prophesying of the coming Savior, *“holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Pet 1:21). He made His gracious intentions known *“unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit”* (Eph 3:5). God has always followed this procedure. Thus did He say through Isaiah, *“Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD”* (Isa 52:11).

They Saw It

When Jesus chose His disciples, He did so that they might *“be with Him,”* as well as work for Him. As it is written, *“And He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach”* (Mk 3:14). When the early saints were used to replace Judas, they knew of the requirement to be with Jesus and see the things that were to be testified. Therefore, Peter announced the criteria, *“Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us,*

one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection” (Acts 1:21-22).

The single exception to this was Paul the Apostle. Yet, Jesus made a special appearance to him because he was *“born out of due time”* (1 Cor 15:8). Jesus personally taught Paul apart from involvement with the other Apostles. Paul alludes to this in his letter to the Galatians, acknowledging that his instruction was so thorough, the remaining Apostles could not add to it. *“Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.”* Fourteen years later, it was revealed to Paul that he should again go up to Jerusalem and confer with the most reputable of God’s servants. Jesus had taught him so thoroughly, that he said of those early leaders, *“those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me”* (Gal 2:6).

Early in their ministry, when Peter and John were strictly commanded by a Jewish council *“not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus,”* they answered without hesitation. *“Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard”* (Acts 4:19-20).

Now John confesses he also was still a part of this Divine purpose. He was speaking of what he had *“seen”* – namely that the Father sent the Son. When but a young man, he followed Jesus when called to do so (Mk 1:19-20). He was among three elite men who were afforded extraordinary glimpses of Jesus and His work (Matt 17:1; Mk 5:37; 9:2; 13:3; 14:33). But now He recalls the significance of those times in the power of the Spirit.

This is not a mere technicality– testifying to what they have seen. The power of the message is confirmed in this circumstance. Do you not recall how those first hearing the apostles marveled at them. *“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus ”* (Acts 4:13). And how did they know these men *“had been with Jesus?”* Was it simply because they said so? It appears there was such power in the message these men declared, and such apparent confidence in their manner, that it could only be traced back to one thing. They had been with Jesus!

The Powerful Effect of Jesus

This situation confirms the powerful effect Jesus had upon those who walked with Him. They were never the same after they had willingly been with Jesus. Even as the glory of God altered the skin of Moses’ face, so the influence of Christ altered the manner of the blessed twelve whom He ordained to be *“with”* Him. That change, mingled with and sanctified by the glorious message, obtains a power than cannot be contradicted.

Chosen Messengers

Those charged with initially declaring the Gospel were not volunteers. Of these men Jesus said, *“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you”* (John 15:19). Thus Peter affirmed, *“Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead”* (Acts 10:41).

All of this is involved in the words, *“We have seen and do testify.”*

Sent the Son to be the Savior

This is now the third time in this chapter that John speaks of the Father sending the Son. “*God SENT His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him . . . God . . . SENT His Son to be the propitiation for our sins . . . the Father SENT the Son to be the Savior of the world*” (vs 9,10,14). Life! Propitiation! Salvation! Nothing is more important than these! All of them are sorely needed. The entire race was “*dead*.” Sin, like a thick cloud, covered humanity. Bondage to Satan and sin dominated all men. God “*sent the Son*” to correct that situation. That truth must remain dominant in our thinking.

Even as the glory of God altered the skin of Moses’ face, so the influence of Christ altered the manner of the blessed twelve whom He ordained to be “*with*” Him.

Divine Purposes Are Realized

Behind this declaration is the revealed fact that Divine purposes ARE realized. God has left no doubt about this matter. “*For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it*” NKJV (Isa 55:10-11). Again it is written, “*Who confirms the word of His servant, And performs the counsel of His messengers*” (Isa 44:26). “*Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it*” (Isa 46:10-11).

If this is true of God’s Word, what may be said of His Son? Once the purpose for God sending the Son is declared, faith can take hold of it, realizing its fulfillment. There is no way that this revelation can be embraced by faith, yet not fulfilled in the believer!

Recollection More Powerful

There is another aspect of the Kingdom that is here evident. Although the Apostles were chosen to be with Jesus, behold His workings, and directly hear His words, **the recollection of those things had more power than seeing and hearing them**. A word on this circumstance will be profitable.

When Jesus was bodily with His disciples, they were obtuse concerning His Person and purpose. This is made known in several of their responses. “*What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? . . . But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him . . . But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying . . . They understood not that he spake to them of the Father*” (Mk 4:41; 9:32; Lk 9:45; John 8:27). Even though he was with Jesus, saw what He did, and heard what He said, Peter once rebuked Jesus for saying He would be “*killed*” (Matt 16:22). Upon hearing that Jesus was going away and would return to receive them again, Thomas responded, “*Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?*” (John 14:5).

But this type of response was abruptly terminated following Christ’s ascension into heaven, exaltation to the right hand of God, and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Never again did they speak in such a manner. Jesus had told them, “*However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth . . . But the Helper (Comforter KJV) , the Holy Spirit, whom the*

Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 16:13; 14:26).

The recollection of the things “*Jesus began both to do and teach*” (Acts 1:1), under the powerful tutelage of the Holy Spirit, had greater power and yielded grander results, that seeing and hearing.

A Source of Comfort

This should be a source of great comfort to us. Such recollection is related to faith, which is “*common*” among every member of the body of Christ (Tit 1:4). This is precisely why Peter referred to the faith of later generations as “*a faith of equal standing with ours*” RSV (2 Pet 1:1). There is a fellowship in faith that is on a grand and glorious scale.

Believing the record of the Apostles will yield the same effect in us as believing what they saw and heard produced in the Apostles. It does not make us equal with them, but it does bring us into their fellowship (1:3). The extent of this is challenging to ponder.

CONFESSION IS EVIDENCE

“*15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.*” Again, this statement does not mesh with sectarian approaches to the Gospel. Neither will it support an institutional emphasis. We must remember that this is a precise statement, inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is not our business to reduce the power of this statement by trying to fit it into our perception. It is far better to labor to believe what it is said.

It should be obvious to us that confessing “*Jesus is the Son of God*” is more profound than at first appears. Too, that Jesus “*IS the Son of God*” is equally a concise and far-reaching statement. It is not to be viewed casually, or in a mere academic manner. We know this is the case because of what the confession evidences.

Confessing Jesus is the Son

Confession is more than making a statement. It is the acknowledgment of something believed and embraced. Commitment is inherent in confession, so that what is confessed reveals the focus of the individual.

The significance of confessing Jesus is further revealed in what He Himself said about it. “*Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven*” NKJV (Matt 10:32). The Spirit further says, “*If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, **you will be saved** . For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made **unto salvation** ” (Rom 10:9-10).*

Do not miss the gravity of these promises. They are absolutely unequivocal. “***I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven!**” “**You will be saved!**” “**Confession is made unto salvation!**” This cannot refer to a heartless statement, or mere intellectual assent to something considered of little consequence. Promises of this magnitude can only be related to an activity of great significance before God. If we are in doubt concerning the significance of a God-ordained duty, consider the promises attached to it.*

Confession is more than making a statement. It is the

acknowledgment of something believed and embraced.
Commitment is inherent in confession, so that what is
confessed reveals the focus of the individual.

When Peter confessed that Jesus was “*the Christ, the Son of the living God,*” Jesus informed him he was “*blessed.*” God had revealed to him what he had confessed (Matt 16:16-17). It is out of place for anyone truly making that confession to imagine it was not preceded a similar revelation.

Reciprocal Dwelling

The reciprocal indwelling is again brought to our attention. This emphasizes the remarkable unity that is accomplished in salvation. “*God abides in him, and he in God.*”

Jesus Prayed for This

This is the very unity for which Jesus prayed on the eve of His betrayal. “*I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You ; that they also may be one in Us , that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one : I in them, and You in Me ; that they may be made perfect in one , and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me ”* (John 17:20-23).

This is the focus of God’s great salvation—the bringing of individuals into fellowship and unity with Himself. contrary to some thoughts on this passage, Jesus is not praying for the organic unity of His people: i.e., of being united with one another. That is the natural outcome of the unity of reference, but is not the unity itself. The Father and the Son are united. Salvation brings the redeemed into THAT unity: i.e., “*one IN Us.*” Hear it again, “*I in them, and You in Me.*”

The person who confesses that Jesus IS the Son of God does so because God IS abiding in him, and he IS abiding in God. This is not, therefore, the initial confession that is made, because of which we are baptized into Christ (Acts 8:37). Nor, indeed, is that the confession of reference in the tenth chapter of Romans. This is an avowal that flows from fellowship with the Father and the Son, and it is precious!

It is the kind of confession Jesus Himself is said to make among the Gentiles. “*Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: ‘For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name’ ”* (Rom 15:8-9). Just as Jesus confessed to an existing relationship with the Father, so the one confessing that Jesus is the son of God is acknowledging an existing relationship with the Lord.

This reciprocal indwelling reveals that God is not ashamed of believers, and delights in them. It also confirms the Lord Jesus is not ashamed of them. Additionally, it also makes known that believers are not shamed of the Lord, and are satisfied with Him. God is thus at home in the believer, and the believer is at home in Him. That is a most delightful circumstance!

THE EVIDENCE OF CONSISTENCY

Abiding, or remaining, is a critical point in spiritual life. If it was, as some allege, impossible to fall away, the very idea of remaining would have no significance.

“16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.” The love God “has for us” has been revealed through the Son—in particular, through our faith in the Son. The point being made is that we can have no living association with Christ unless God dwells in us, and that God does not dwell in us except we believe in the Son.

Known and Believed

The phrase “we have known and believed” is the same as saying we have known by believing. Technically, the phrase reads, “we know and continue to believe.” Believing, therefore, is not terminated when we come to “know,” or begin to see the real nature of our redemption. It continues to be a wellspring of life while we are in the world. The word “known” emphasizes our experience, while “believe” underscores our persuasion. It is the manner of the Kingdom that experience always proceeds from persuasion. Thus Abraham fathered Isaac after he had believed the promise. Noah built the ark to the saving of his house after he had believed God’s word. Mary conceived Jesus after she had believed the angelic messenger.

And so it is with us. We will experience the result of God’s love for us when we believe that it is precisely what God has represented it to be.

The Love God Has for Us

Up to this point, God’s love has been mentioned in the past tense, hearkening us back to Christ’s entrance into the world, and His vicarious sacrifice (4:10,11). But now the love of God is in the present tense: “HAS for us.” When the love God HAD for us is received, it will be lavished upon us experientially! We ourselves will be loved, our need will be met, and our hearts will be abundantly satisfied. God will then take up residence within us, and show us His covenant (Psa 25:14).

The Threefold Abiding

“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.” Here is a most powerful line of reasoning. Because “God is love,” those who are characterized by love have, by that very fact, revealed their association with the Lord.

Here is a threefold abiding. (1) **The one in Christ abides in love.** (2) **The one abiding in love abides in God.** (3) **God abides in the one abiding in love.** It is not to be assumed that a person automatically abides in love. That is something that requires faith. Nor, indeed, is it to be assumed that one automatically abides in God. That is determined by whether or not the individual abides in love. Finally, it is not to be assumed that God automatically abides in the individual. That also is determined by whether or not the person abides in love. Salvation forges a unity between God and man. It also will, if not resisted, maintain that unity through

the power of the Holy Spirit. At no point does salvation cease to require the activity of the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit.

God will not remain in the person whose nature is fundamentally unlike His own. For him to do so would be a contradiction of His own character. A person who has no regard for those in fellowship with God and Christ has, by that disregard, forfeited the presence of God Himself. It makes little difference what the profession of such a person may be. If the one abiding in love is abiding in God, the one NOT abiding in love is NOT abiding in God.

Abiding, or remaining, is a critical point in spiritual life. If it was, as some allege, impossible to fall away, the very idea of remaining would have no significance. The word “*remain*” postulates the danger of NOT remaining. That is why such great promises are attached to it. If remaining in Christ is not an issue, these marvelous promises are instantly diffused, ceasing to bring solace and encouragement to those who are fighting the good fight of faith. Every believer is to give attention to the matter of abiding, or remaining, in Him. It is evident that this is not generally known in the Christian world, where departures from Christ have become commonplace. But no person who ceases to remain in Christ is recognized by God.

The purpose of this text is not to produce suspicions in us concerning others. Rather, it is to confirm to those in Christ that they have eternal life. It is axiomatic that those remaining in Christ are themselves aware of that fact, and draw great consolation from it. Our religion must, therefore, make us more sensitive of our status in Christ Jesus, drawing attention to our faith in, and commitment to, the Lord Jesus Christ.

PERFECTED LOVE AND BOLDNESS

“17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.” There is an objective realized when the love of God is in us—a purpose that it fulfills. This text will affirm that purpose to be far reaching, indeed.

The perfection of love refers to the fruitage it is intended to yield. Like a fruit tree has served its purpose when it bears fruit, so love serves its purpose when it yields the results declared in this text.

Love Perfected In Us

The perfection of love refers to the fruitage it is intended to yield. Like a fruit tree has served its purpose when it bears fruit, so love serves its purpose when it yields the results declared in this text.

No believer can content himself with a mere sampling of love, or occasional manifestations of it. Love must be brought to maturity, else its purpose will not be realized. Remember, the perfection of love is directly related to our consideration of the people of God. They are the revealed focus of God’s attention. There is no room in His Kingdom for the individual who, in his manner of life, is at variance with that fact.

Boldness In the Day of Judgment

These words fly over the head of the flesh. Those who are not living by faith cannot conceive

of having “*boldness in the day of judgment.*” “*Boldness,*” in this case, refers to unwavering “*confidence,*” and is so translated in later versions (RSV, NASB, NIV). Confidence, or assurance, is an aspect of faith, and will yield glorious results when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of ourselves (Rom 14:10).

The word translated “*boldness*” is a large one indeed, invested with much meaning by the Holy Spirit. It involves an attitude of unhesitating openness that stems from a lack of fear. It takes place publically, and is not a private matter. Thus the picture is of one standing before God Almighty in a state of absolute confidence, joy, and openness—nothing hidden. Such a condition is mentioned by Jude, who traces it back to Divine enablement. “*Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory WITH EXCEEDING JOY*” (Jude 24).

This sort of boldness is depicted in the parable of the talents. When the faithful stewards faced their master, they responded with boldness and confidence. “*So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them . . . He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them'*” (Matt 25:20,22). Notice how Jesus stated this. The master did not ask them what they did with his possessions. Rather, they “*came and brought*” their talents, and “*came and said.*” On the day of accountability, they were bold and forward to give an account! That is the sort of thing our text is declaring.

As He Is, So Are We

And what is the basis of this boldness or confidence? Again, the Spirit speaks quite differently than many who bear the name of Jesus. “*Because as He is, so are we in this world.*” Notice, it does not say “*As He WAS,*” but “*As He IS.*” The point is not that we are living in the world like Jesus lived when He was in the world—although there is certainly an element of truth in that. The point is that we are so intimately involved with the Lord Jesus that His present life is being expressed through us while we are in the world. Is that not a marvelous consideration?

And what can be said of Jesus now? What is He doing, and what are His interests. The Word of God is abundantly clear on this. He is “*ever living*” to make intercession for the saints (Heb 7:25). He is the “*Great Shepherd of the sheep*” (Heb 13:20), and is touched with the “*feeling of their infirmities*” (Heb 4:15-16). He is giving them rest (Matt 11:28), and is nourishing and cherishing them (Eph 5:29). He is committed to their interests, marshals angelic hosts for their assistance, and governs the world with them in mind. There is not a single moment when Jesus is not attentive to those destined to be His bride.

How is it that such a life can be found in us? How can we be “*as He is*” in the world? The resounding message of this book is that this is revealed in our attitude toward His people. In this text, loving the brethren is the focus of “*as He is.*” I understand that being holy as He is holy is essential. The hatred of sin and the love of righteousness is also a requisite. No part of spiritual life is to be avoided. But all of this is concentrated in the love of the brethren. Right there the real nature of Christ is made known, and it will yield benefits on the day of judgment itself.

THE POWER OF PERFECT LOVE

“*18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.*” He now elaborates on our boldness in the day

of judgment. He will show us that love, particularly the love of the brethren, works certain effects in us. There is a spiritual culturing that is taking place in the person who loves, and it is marvelous to consider.

No Fear in Love

Fear, in this case, has to do with the prospect of being punished. Attempts to obey or do good are done in an effort to avoid the punishment of God. To the natural man, this makes a lot of sense. It is not uncommon for men to induce respect and obedience by threats. And, indeed, when men are *“in the flesh,”* this is certainly in order.

Here the Spirit is contrasting true spiritual life with the administration of Law. Under the law, the people were themselves at variance with God. They did not think like God, and thus could not act in harmony with Him. Law assisted them in addressing the manner of their conduct by threatening them with death, should they choose to disobey God. Thus fear rose in the hearts of the people. Of this situation the Spirit says Jesus came to *“release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”* (Heb 2:15). In summation, the Law shouted, *“The soul who sins shall die”* (Ezek 18:4,20). In fact, the very first commandment given to man was of this order: *“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”* (Gen 2:17). It has always been true, *“The wages of sin is death”* (Rom 6:23).

Now the spirit affirms *“there is no fear in love.”* The individual who loves is not motivated by fear. He is neither serving nor obeying God to avoid condemnation, but because he has a preference to do so. He worships and serves the Lord because he wants to, or *“in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:23-24). The more completely a person loves the Lord, the less fear will dominate him. Fear and love, in this sense, cannot mix.

Fear Involves Torment

What a statement is this! *“Fear hath torment!”* Other versions cast additional light on this remarkable statement. *“Fear involves torment”* NKJV . *“Fear involves punishment”* NASB . *“Fear has to do with punishment”* NRSV,NIV .

Fear, in this case, has to do with the prospect of being punished. Attempts to obey or do good are done in an effort to avoid the punishment of God. To the natural man, this makes a lot of sense. It is not uncommon for men to induce respect and obedience by threats. And, indeed, when men are *“in the flesh,”* this is certainly in order. But, as the Spirit says, you are *“not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you”* (Rom 8:9).

If you have ever been dominated by a fear of facing God, being judged by God, or being consigned to hell, you know the effect that has upon the soul. Were it not for God sending Jesus into the world, we would be confined to such a state. Those before Christ who served God out of love did so because they believed the promise of a coming Savior. Throughout all history, those who were ignorant of God’s provision of redemption have been dominated by fear.

The One Who Feels

The person who fears, at this point, is not condemned. The Spirit now makes a strong appeal to our hearts. *“But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”* NKJV The words *“has not been made perfect,”* or *“IS not made perfect”* awaken hope within our hearts. They mean the fearing soul is not yet shut up to fear. Love can yet yield a bountiful harvest in the one presently dominated by fear.

But such an one must acknowledge the truth. It must be admitted that a deficiency in love exists, and effort expended to correct that situation. No person lacking love is spiritually mature. However, that does not mean they cannot be mature. There is grace in Christ to effectively meet and conquer this situation.

WHY WE LOVE GOD

“19 We love Him because He first loved us.” What can a soul do that is ruled by fear, and in whom the love of God has not been perfected? Here the Spirit gives us a most sweet elixir of hope. He does not shout at us to work more energetically to love. Nor, indeed, does He set before us Divine rejection, making us to fear the more. Rather, He gives us the secret to loving God and loving His people. Such love is an effect, not a cause. The well from which this love is drawn is God’s love for us. *“We love Him BECAUSE He first loved us.”*

It is the perception, or belief, of God’s love for us that produces our love for Him. What, then, ought to be the focus of true religion? Should the emphasis be placed upon us loving God, or upon God loving us? Right here we come into sharp conflict with a lot of professed Christianity.

The Law

Under the Law, the primary thing was the duty of man. Thus the first and great commandment was to *“love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength”* (Deut 6:5). The whole Law was, in a sense, an exposition of that commandment. Nine times in the book of Deuteronomy, the people were reminded of their obligation to love God (6:5; 11:1,13,22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6,16,20). The thrust of the Law, therefore, was an obligation placed upon men to love God.

Too often, those representing Christ speak as though this was a proper message for the church. They speak to believers as though they did NOT love God, seeking to constrain them to love Him out of a sense of obligation. This is altogether out of order.

The Gospel

The Spirit will not let go of this matter. He will not allow us to imagine that we love God if we do not prefer and care for His people. We cannot conduct ourselves toward the saints in a way conflicting with the manner of Jesus, and affirm that we love God. **It is not possible to love God and despise His people at the same time!**

Our text affirms that *“we love Him because He FIRST loved us.”* Because of this reality, the Gospel **accentuates** God’s love for us. It is a declaration of an existing love, not the imposition of a

required one. Over and over we are apprized of Divine love toward us. *“God so loved the world . . . the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me . . . But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us . . . Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us . . . God, even our Father, which hath loved us . . . Unto him that loved us”* (John 3:16; Gal 2:20; Eph 2:4; 5:2; 2 Thess 2:16; Rev 1:5).

As that Gospel is preached in power, and when it is believed, it causes us to love God. When the Gospel is believed, we WILL love Him because He first loved us. That is why the Gospel must never be shelved by the church in the interest of other things. No other message must be allowed to gain the prominence afforded to the Gospel alone. Should that ever take place, our love for God will wane. In fact, that is exactly what happened to the church at Ephesus.

The Ephesian Church

The Ephesians had a noble beginning, receiving the Gospel of their salvation joyfully, and being sealed with the Holy spirit of promise (Eph 1:13-14). But before too many years passed, Jesus Himself said to them, *“Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love”* (Rev 2:4).

They had carefully tested the false apostles and found them to be liars. They had also labored indefatigably for Christ. Yet, they abandoned their *“first love.”* And why so? It could only be that their attention had been turned from the Gospel to other matters. Perhaps they had become more focused on identifying false prophets than on perceiving the Savior.

Not Irrelevant

If it is true that *“we love Him BECAUSE He first loved us,”* then a waning of our love can ONLY come when His love for us is diminished in our thinking. A failure to love God cannot exist unless its CAUSE is neglected. When love is waxing cold, the Lord Jesus is being forgotten. Our message, like that of the Apostles, must emphasize the love God has shown toward us in Christ Jesus. That is the melody of all true preaching.

SAYING IT DOES NOT MAKE IT SO!

“ 20 If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” The Spirit will not let go of this matter. He will not allow us to imagine that we love God if we do not prefer and care for His people. We cannot conduct ourselves toward the saints in a way conflicting with the manner of Jesus, and affirm that we love God. **It is not possible to love God and despise His people at the same time!** The very hour Saul of Tarsus confronted and believed on the living Christ, he forever ceased to persecute His people. From that moment on, and with unwavering consistency, he sought the betterment of believers everywhere. That is the calculated effect that loving God has upon a person.

Jesus’ Word to Peter

Before the betrayal of our Lord, He confided in Peter that Satan had asked to sift him. *“Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.”* The awfulness of that sifting required Christ’s intervention. He continued, *“But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail.”* Knowing that His prayer would be effective, and that Peter would recover himself from the dreadful evening when he would thrice deny the Lord, Jesus directed Peter concerning his future activities. *“And when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren”* (Lk 22:31-32). He did not tell him to testify to the world, but to strengthen the brethren! You can effectively proceed from loving

the brethren to preaching the Gospel to every creature. But there are precious few, if any, that are able to successfully move from reaching sinners to edifying saints.

Following His resurrection, Jesus confronted Simeon Peter. Under the sifting of Satan, Peter had denied Christ three times—and had wept bitterly that he did. Early in the morning, Jesus came to His disciples, preparing them some food, and providing a miraculous catch of fish for them. After they had eaten, Jesus addressed Himself to Peter. He did not ask, “Will you obey Me?” Nor, indeed, did He ask, “Will you die for Me?” Instead, he asked three times, “Do you love me?” And after three affirmative responses, Jesus replied, “Feed My lambs,” “Feed My sheep,” and “Feed My sheep.” That emphasis remains the same to this very day.

If Someone or Any Man

Here is a statement that knows of no exceptions. Wherever a person can be found fitting this description, one who does not love God has been identified. “*If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar.*”

The word “*hate*,” as you must know, means to love less, disregard, or have no real interest in. It speaks more of neglect than of harming or violence. It has more to do with not providing for, than taking from. It does covers everything from the person simply being indifferent to the brethren, to doing evil against them. The people of God are simply not viewed as His people.

Is it possible for a person to affirm a love for God, and yet be indifferent to, and even harm, the people related to God? Indeed it is! That is why the Spirit compelled John to write this down.

Throughout history, from Abel until this very day, the greatest source of sorrow to the people of God has been those who profess to know God. Whether you consider Moses, the holy Prophets, the Lord Jesus, the holy Apostles, or Stephen the martyr, they have confronted the hatred of professed brethren. For myself, my greatest hurt and sorrow has come from professed Christians. In fact, such experiences are so common, we tend to overlook them. But the Spirit does not overlook them!

Our text goes straight to the point. Those who hate the brethren, yet profess to love God, have lied. They do not love God, and have no affiliation with Him. The argument is strong and incontrovertible. It is stated with this truth in mind, that “*the brethren*” are partakers of Christ (Heb 3:14), and of the “*Divine nature*” (2 Pet 1:4). God is in them, and they are in God (4:16). Therefore the Spirit reasons, “*for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?*”

The Spirit is not asking for an answer, for there is no acceptable answer to this question. The only tangible evidence we have of God is His people – those in whom He resides. If a man does not love them, it is because he does not love God. His lack of attraction to, and appetite for, God has produced an aversion to the people of God. The people of God and God Himself are joined together in Christ, and are always so viewed. It is not possible to make the matter more plain than that.

THE COMMANDMENT REITERATED

“*21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.*” Now the Spirit nails the matter down. As the prophet would say, “*It is ready for the soldering:*”

and he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved” (Isa 41:7). He affirms that God has made no provision whatsoever for any other manner of conduct. This is the nature of the Kingdom, and no other response will be received. “*And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.*” NIV There is a tone of absolute sobriety in this text that cannot be denied.

Failing to love the brethren, then, is not a matter of weakness, but of disobedience. It is a waxing fat and kicking like Jeshurun of old (Deut 32:15).

It is not possible to walk in the favor of God, experience His blessing, or taste of His goodness without loving the brethren. No believer CAN live in isolation from the people of God, or with a disregard for them. If God is interested in His people, and His eye is always upon them, and His ear is always open to their cry, what can be said of the person who ignores, or even despises them. If the Lord Jesus “*ever lives to make intercession for them,*” what can be said of the one who has no interest in them. If the Holy Spirit makes intercession for them, strengthens them, and fills them, what of the one who ignores them? If the holy angels have been charged with the responsibility of ministering to those who are the heirs of salvation, what will be the destiny of those who do not love them, or even bring pain and sorrow to them? These are matters for serious contemplation.

CONCLUSION

Texts of this magnitude are to be believed and pondered. They leave no room for doubt, clearly defining the parameters of life in the Spirit. If embraced by faith, the Lord Jesus will express Himself to His people through us. The Holy Spirit will minister to them through us. If we are laborers together with God in the succor of His people, we will surely be blessed abundantly by Him in the last day.

Now, set your mind to not only love God, but those who have been born of God. Seek their welfare. Minister to their needs. Lift them up when they are fallen. Tell them of the homeland, and of the soon coming of their Lord.

Count the people of God as your closest friends, for they are that, indeed. Their names are, with yours, written in the Lamb’s book of life, and your destiny is to dwell with them in the house of the Lord forever. May you be an advantage to the people of God!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Book of 1st John

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #9

EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY

5:1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world; our faith. 5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 6 This is He who came by water and blood; Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. 7 For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. 8 And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one. 9 If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. 10 He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. 11 And this is the testimony: that 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. (1 John 5:1-12, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The book of First John deals with the very heart of human responsibility. It takes us higher than Sinai, and closer to the heart of God. There is no room for sectarian interests in this marvelous Epistle, nor does it make any allowance for varied views of key matters. With great clarity, the Spirit sets forth the chief responsibility of men heavenward and earthward. Toward heaven, our duty is summed up as believing “*on the name of His Son Jesus Christ.*” As regards our life in this world, it is loving “*one another,*” or “*the brethren.*” From our obedience to these two commands proceeds every other aspect of spiritual life.

These two matters are so integrally related they are referred to as a single “*commandment*” (3:23). Our eternal destiny hinges on the fulfillment of these responsibilities, with no allowance whatsoever for failure in them. Neither of these expressions can be institutionalized or exploited to the advantage of the flesh. Both of them require a vital association with Deity, and can only be effectively sustained in disassociation from this present evil world, and anticipation of the world to come. The love of the world erodes them both, and the flesh can fulfill neither one. The Holy Spirit will not allow either of them to become insignificant, but consistently holds them before us for due consideration, retention, and heart-filled obedience.

Those who are acquainted with institutionalized, or lifeless, religion will recognize a glaring absence of these requirements in the professed church. A strong faith in Christ and a fervent love for the brethren are not at all common these days.

Our text will show us strong evidence of affiliation with God and Christ. It will affirm there is triumph over the world through faith, and a powerful inner witness that attests we are the sons of God.

Throughout history, the devil has worked aggressively to destroy these expressions by diverting the attention of professed believers to the “*fashion of this world,*” which is passing away (1 Cor 7:31). This is done in a variety of ways, but they all narrow down to a religion that has a “*form of godliness that denies the power thereof*” (2 Tim 3:5). The Lord Jesus Christ is not essential for such an approach to *religion*, and the Holy Spirit is not required. The individual can thus sustain affinity with the cursed world, all the while imagining he is acceptable with God. Such a conclusion is only a vain imagination, designed to subvert the soul.

I want to again bring to your attention the tone of these words. There is no vagueness about them or room for varied interpretations. The strength of the affirmations is borne out by the conclusions to which they lead. Ponder a few of these conclusions, or spiritual deductions.

- Fellowship with the Father and the Son –*the reason for the Epistle* – 1:3
- We have fellowship with one another – *if we walk in the light* – 1:7
- The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin – *if we walk in the light* – 1:7.
- The truth is not in us – *if we say we have no sin* – 1:8
- God is faithful and just to forgive our sins – *if we confess them* – 1:9
- God is faithful to cleanse us from all unrighteousness – *if we confess our sins* – 1:9
- His word is not in us – *if we say we have not sinned* – 1:10
- He is a liar and the truth is not in him – *if we say we know Him, yet keep not His*

commandments –2:4

- The love of God is in us – *if we keep His word –2:5*
- We know we are in Him – *if we keep His word –2:5*
- He is in darkness until now – *if he says he loves God, yet hates his brother –2:9*
- He is abiding in the light – *if he loves his brother –2:10*
- There is no occasion of stumbling in him – *if he loves his brother –2:10*
- He is in darkness, does not know where he is going, and is blinded by the darkness – *if he hates his brother –2:11*
- The love of the Father is not in him – *if he loves the world –2:15*
- We know it is the last time – *because many antichrists are in the world –2:18*
- He is a liar and antichrist – *that denies Jesus is the Christ –2:22*
- You will abide in Him – *if the anointing abides in you and teaches you –2:27*
- Every man purifies himself even as He is pure – *if he possesses the hope –3:3*
- He is a murderer and does not have eternal life – *if he hates his brother –3:15*
- He is of God – *if he confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh –4:2*
- He is not of God – *if he does not confess Jesus Christ is come in the flesh –4:3*
- Everyone is born of God and knows God – *everyone who loves –4:7*
- He does not know God – *if he does not love –4:8*
- God dwells in us, and His love is perfected in us – *if we love one another –4:12*
- God dwells in him, and he dwells in God – *if he confesses Jesus is the Son of God –4:15*
- He dwells in God, and God dwells in him – *if he dwells in love –4:16*
- He is not made perfect in love – *if he fears –4:18*
- He is a liar – *if he says he loves God, yet loves not his brother –4:20*
- He is born of God – *if we believe Jesus is the Son of God –5:1*
- One overcomes the world – *if he believes Jesus is the son of God –5:5*
- Does not sin – *whatsoever is born of God –5:18*

There is a certainty in these affirmations that fortifies the heart. They have a strong appeal to faith, but produce confusion to the one who does not believe. This is the manner in which the Spirit speaks when He is seeking to produce assurance in us. If believers are to know they have eternal life, they must hear words like this. Law in any form cannot produce such marvelous results.

Our text will show us strong evidence of affiliation with God and Christ. It will affirm there is triumph over the world through faith, and a powerful inner witness that attests we are the sons of God.

BORN OF GOD

“5:1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.” Here is a statement religious flesh cannot make. Some, in fact, would be

afraid to take these words into their mouths, lest they be misunderstood by their hearers. But there is no such intimidation found in John! He has no concern for how they will be misunderstood, or if they do not blend in with certain theological views. He is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and thus is using heavenly precision. God is not loose in His expressions, nor does He move men to write in broad generalities that have no relevancy to men. God is precise in nature, unequivocal in Law, and even more explicit in grace. He has exalted His Word above all His name. As it is written, “*For You have magnified Your word above all Your name*” (Psa 138:2). So far as Scripture is concerned, the Word of God is unquestionably coupled with His Person. It must be taken at face value, pondered, and believed. No other response is acceptable.

Whoever Believes

These words are not to be reduced by attempting to fit them into theological patterns created by men. The phrase “*whoever believes,*” or “*whosoever believeth*” KJV , are common in Scripture, and are always associated with blessing and Divine benefit. There is never a question about the status of such a person. The promises made to the individual believing in Christ are staggering. (1) All things are possible to the one believing. (2) Should not perish, but have everlasting life. (3) Will never thirst. (4) Has everlasting life. (5) Out of his belly will flow rivers of living water. (6) Will never die. (7) Will not abide in darkness. (8) Will do greater works. (9) Will receive remission of sins. (10) Is justified from all things. (11) To such the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. (12) Will not be ashamed or disappointed. (13) To such, Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness. (14) Will not be confounded. (Mk 9:23; John 3:15,16; 6:35,47; 7:38; 11:25; 12:46; 14:12; Acts 10:43; 13:39; Rom 1:16; 9:33; 10:4,11; 1 Pet 2:6).

The Nature of Faith is Thus Seen

Divine commitments of this magnitude tell us something about faith. It cannot be the result of mere human activity, although our exertion is surely involved. Believing is associated with the grace of God, else such commitments could not be made. It is written that we have “*believed through grace*” (Acts 18:27). The grace of God is abundant with “*faith and love*” (1 Tim 1:14), and can only be grasped by faith (Eph 2:8). **The presence of faith, therefore, or believing that Jesus is the Son of God, is itself evidence of Divine favor** . It was so with Peter (Matt 16:16-17), and it is so with you.

Faith and Love United

In this text, the Spirit unites faith and brotherly love, showing that they cannot be separated. One of Satan’s effective ploys is to convince men they can have faith in God without having a love for His people. But this is not possible in the Spirit.

Flesh and Spirit

Not believing that, however minuscule it may appear, is on the flesh side. Loving the one born of God is on the Spirit side. Not loving such an one is on the flesh side. It is to be acknowledged by everyone professing faith in God, that the flesh, together with all that comes from it, is unacceptable to God.

In Christ, we become “*partakers of the Divine nature*” and “*of Christ*” (2 Pet 1:4; Heb 3:14). Experientially, we are removed from Satan’s grasp, “*delivered from the power of darkness*” and “*translated into the kingdom of His dear Son*” (Col 1:13). All of this is realized by faith, through which we become the children of God (Gal 3:26). At this point the believer becomes a walking dichotomy. Within the child of God, “*the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would*” (Gal 5:17).

Believing that Jesus is the Christ is on the Spirit side. Not believing that, however minuscule it may appear, is on the flesh side. Loving the one born of God is on the Spirit side. Not loving such an one is on the flesh side. It is to be acknowledged by everyone professing faith in God, that the flesh, together with all that comes from it, is unacceptable to God. “*The flesh profits nothing*” (John 6:63). It cannot be trusted, and brings no advantage to the believer.

To make a profession, therefore, to believe in Christ, yet have no love for those who are born of God, is to attempt to join the flesh and the Spirit together. This cannot be done, and those who make such a foolish attempt have actually returned to the flesh—if, indeed, they ever left it.

Born of God

“*Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God . . .*” Here is a statement that demands our most serious consideration. It is a precise statement, conceived by God and revealed unto men through the Holy Spirit. It is not a general utterance to be blended with other Divine affirmations, although it is in perfect harmony with everything God has said and done.

At once it is evident that believing “*Jesus is the Christ*” is not the product of human reasoning. Such a declaration could not be made of something issuing from natural resources alone. Rather, it is the result of revelation (Matt 16:17). Prior to this, the Spirit spoke of confessing that “*Jesus is the Son of God*” (4:15). Later in this chapter, He will affirm that believing Jesus is the Son of God is the cause for overcoming the world (5:5). Additional declarations are made concerning believing Jesus is “*the Son of God*” (5:10, 12, 13, 20). They are always pivotal, and always commended by God.

The Christ

This text, however, states that the one believing “*Jesus is **the Christ is born of God***.” This is a concise statement, and is a precious gem of truth from every side. From the standpoint of WHO He is, Jesus is “*the SON of God*.” Regarding WHY He came into the world, He is the “*CHRIST of God*” (Lk 9:20). It is said of the demons, “*they knew that He was THE CHRIST*” (Lk 4:41). Both Paul and Apollos powerfully confuted the Jews, proving that “*Jesus is THE CHRIST*” (Acts 18:5, 28). Peter preached that “*THE CHRIST*” had been raised up to sit on David’s throne, and was appointed to suffer at the hands of men (Acts 2:31; 3:18). This was the thrust of New Testament preaching. What is the significance of “*the Christ*” ?

The Christ

The word “*Christ*” comes from **Cristo,j** , and means “*Anointed,*” or “*Messiah.*” However, everyone anointed is by no means Messiah! That is why Jesus is called “*THE Christ,*” i.e., THE anointed one. The New Testament refers to Jesus as “*Christ*” no more than 520 times. **He is the solitary Individual upon Whom God has suspended the hope of the world.** He bore ALL of the sins of the world, and made the ONLY acceptable atonement for sin. He ALONE is bringing many sons to glory, and there is no access to God apart from Him. He administers the New Covenant by Himself, and He ALONE sanctifies the people. In the matter of our salvation, Jesus is “*THE Man.*”

A Single Person Promised

He is the solitary Individual upon Whom God has suspended the hope of the world. He bore ALL of the sins of the world, and made the ONLY acceptable atonement for sin. He ALONE is bringing many sons to glory, and there is no access to God apart from Him. He administers the New Covenant by Himself, and He ALONE sanctifies the people.

He is the “Man” foretold by Isaiah. “*And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land*” (Isa 32:2). Jeremiah pointed to a single Person who would be called “*The Branch of righteousness*” (Jer 33:15). He is the “*Sun of Righteousness*” of whom Malachi spoke (Mal 4:2), and the “*Prophet*” of whom Moses prophesied (Deut 18:15). Haggai referred to Him as “*The Desire of all nations*” (2:7). Paul called Him the “*Seed*” promised to Abraham (Gal 3:16). He is the “*Nail*” of which Isaiah prophesied, who would bear the burden of man’s sin and the judgment of God against it (Isa 22:23-25).

At the pinnacle of His ministry, Isaiah declared the effectiveness of a single Person (Isa 53). He alone bore our griefs and sorrows, and was smitten of God and afflicted (v 4). “*But HE was wounded for our transgressions, HE was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon HIM ; and with HIS stripes we are healed*” (v 5). The Lord laid the iniquity of us all upon “HIM” (v 6). The Lord bruised “HIM,” putting “HIM” to grief, and it was “HIS soul” that was made an offering for sin (v10). Because “HE” bore the iniquities of many, “HE” will justify the many (v 11). “HE” alone divides the spoils of His victory with the strong, and “HE” is the appointed intercessor for the transgressors (v 12).

God has nothing to give that does not come through Christ. That is the resounding testimony of Scripture! Whether we are able to see it or not, the Scriptures unanimously “*testify*” of Christ (John 6:39).

Not Just the Answer to Man’s Perceived Problems

The person believing that “*Jesus is the Christ*” has seen the uniqueness of Jesus. That uniqueness is directly related to the Father’s appointment of Him. It goes far beyond the “*Jesus is the answer*” mentality that has pervaded the evangelical world. That is a view that starts with the problems as men see them, and then holds Jesus out as the means to their correction.

But that is not at all the point of Jesus being called “*the Christ*.” The Father has appointed Jesus to bring His “*eternal purpose*” to fruition (Eph 3:11). From the standpoint of atonement, that was taking away the sins of the world (John 1:29). From the standpoint of the our enemy, it was bruising the head of the serpent, or destroying the devil (Gen 3:15; Heb 2:14). From another view, it is bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10). From yet another, it distributing the spoils of His triumph to the strong (Isa 53:12). From yet another, it is to gather together into one all things in heaven and earth (Eph 1:10).

There is no valid religion apart from Christ Jesus. It is not possible to receive the blessing of the Lord independently of Him. There are no required resources that are not received from Him. He is “*the Christ*.” The person believing this has been blessed by God, just as surely was Peter. As with Peter, they have believed what God has revealed unto them (Matt 16:17).

Not Merely Academic

It should be abundantly apparent that this is not an academic faith—a mere intellectual acquiescence with the statement of Scripture. The person believing this has ceased to look

elsewhere for what is required. Such a one refuses to follow the world with its purveyors of methods and techniques.

If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, you are born of God. That is the express statement of the Spirit. It has been written to convince believers that they have eternal life. It is the evidence of God's own work, and thus this statement can be made: "*Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.*" No attempt to reduce the significance or power of this word can be justified. Rather, the hungry heart will seek to lay hold of its truth, seeing it with a clarity that only faith can bring. No person has any cause to doubt the absolute truth of this statement.

Loving the Child Born of God

" . . . and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of

It is taken for granted that the person believing Jesus is the Christ also loves God. It is not possible to trust in Jesus without loving God! Faith, which comes from God, produces in the believer a love for God, who has begotten the believing one. True faith and love cannot be separated.

Him." It is taken for granted that the person believing Jesus is the Christ also loves God. It is not possible to trust in Jesus without loving God! Faith, which comes from God, produces in the believer a love for God, who has begotten the believing one. True faith and love cannot be separated. Where it appears this has taken place—i.e., the person professes to love God, yet does not love others begotten of God—the profession is negated. For such a condition to be possible, God would be made a liar, for He has said "*everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.*"

This love, however, is also expressed toward others who are born of God. There are no exceptions to this rule. "*Everyone who loves him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.*" This is an expression of the **new creation: it is how the "new man" reacts. If a professed believer does not love the person begotten of God, it is not because he does not know the person is begotten of God, but because he is walking in the flesh, and not by faith.**

Some, unable to receive the truth of this text, have affirmed "*him who is begotten of Him*" is the Lord Jesus Himself. Thus, to them, it reads, "**He who loves the Father also loves the Son.**" Even noble Augustine, held to this meaning. This view, however, contradicts the reasoning of this passage. The next verse proceeds upon the basis of this one, speaking of loving "*the children of God.*" In fact, this is the entire thrust of this Epistle—that a relationship to God necessarily involves one to His people.

Also, we are not to conclude from this text that **ONLY** those begotten of God are to be loved by the one born of God. Elsewhere we are told "*love your enemies*" (Matt 5:44), "*bless*" our persecutors (Rom 12:14), and to go beyond simply loving those who love us (Matt 5:46). This text, however, emphasizes that our love is to begin with, and be especially devoted to, the children of God. As it is written elsewhere, "*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith*" (Gal 6:10).

Thus the Spirit has given us a means whereby we can measure our own progress in the faith. It is our duty to lay our lives next to this text, and draw a conclusion. Suffice it to say, a fervent love among the people of God will dissolve many difficulties that would otherwise remain among them. As it is written, "*love will cover a multitude of sins*" NKJV (1 Pet 4:8).

Fervent love for the brethren should not be considered unreasonable. The uniqueness of the people of God is strictly owing to the work of God, not their personal achievement. In loving them, we are, from one point of view, simply acknowledging the work of God in them. We do not love them primarily for what they do, but for whom they are: “*begotten of Him.*” God’s work in them is what endears them to us. Faith recognizes that and provokes us to love them.

HERE IS HOW WE KNOW

“*2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments.*” Again we see the nature of spiritual reasoning. It does not conform to this world’s thought patterns. To the flesh, this statement is totally unreasonable. This is because natural reasoning does not see the correlation between God and His children, or between obeying God and loving His children. This is why the enemies of God’s people are not afraid to speak evil of them, persecute them, and even kill them. Had Cain pondered the relationship of Abel to the Living God, he would not have killed him. If Ishmael had considered Isaac a child of Divine promise, he would not have mocked him. If Saul of Tarsus had seen the relationship between the saints and the God of heaven, he would not have vigorously opposed them. It is only when such relationships are NOT seen that men are forward to oppose, despise, or neglect the people of God.

Notice the simplicity, yet unusual power, of the Divine affirmation. “*This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.*” NIV The flesh would reason that knowing we love the children of God flows from how we treat them, or how we respond to them—but that is not the reasoning of the Holy Spirit. The root of the matter is our identity with God. Everything flows from that. Life flows from the Vine to the branches (John 15:5). Being begotten of God involves participating in the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). If we want our hearts to be assured that we love the brethren, we must first be assured that we love God and keep His commands. That takes the priority.

Our primary focus is God Himself. The “*first and greatest commandment*” of the Law was to love and serve the Lord. The second—and never the first—commandment was to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt 22:37-39). The Law did not, however, tell men that love for one another was a necessary consequence of loving the Lord. It remained for that to be made known in Christ Jesus. The reason: no one was “*born of God*” in the regenerative sense until God had exalted Jesus to His own right hand.

From an earthly point of view, we may be attracted to our brethren for spiritually inferior reasons. That may include their status in this world, their unique gifts and abilities, or their kindness toward us. They may be amiable and attractive, and even belong to the same assembly as ourselves. But that is not the “*love of the brethren*” of which the Spirit speaks. None of those, however acceptable they may be in the flesh, are acceptable in the Spirit. Our love for them cannot be confirmed on that level. It is also important to remember if we do NOT love them we are “*not of God,*” (3:10), abide “*in death*” (3:14), and “*know not God*” (4:8). We are not, therefore, speaking of some trite or sentimental human expression.

Our love for the people of God will be confirmed to our hearts in the persuasion that we love God and do what He says. Simply stated, that argues strongly that God will, if we love Him and keep His commandments, teach us to love His people, just as affirmed in First Thessalonians 4:9. If we will devote ourselves to Him, He will devote Himself to effectively teaching us in the matter of loving His people. **You cannot love God and retain His commandments without this happening!** That is the reason such a strong statement can be made. Believe it!

THIS IS THE LOVE OF GOD

The root of the matter is our identity with God. Everything flows from that. Life flows from the Vine to the branches (John 15:5). Being begotten of God involves participating in the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). If we want our hearts to be assured that we love the brethren, we must first be assured that we love God and keep His commands.

“3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.” See, the Spirit does not leave to conjecture what is involved in loving the Lord. Remember, the objective is to bring us into fellowship with the Father and the Son, make our joy full, keep us from sinning, and convince us we have eternal life (1:3,4; 2:1; 5:13). Such noble intentions cannot be accomplished by making a few doctrinal statements, or imposing Divine law upon us. The Spirit will tell us what it means to love God—i.e., he will unveil to us the result of loving God.

The *“love of God,”* of which He speaks, is OUR love for God, not His love for us—even though our love for Him flows from His love for us (1 John 4:19). The observable evidence of our love for God is this: *“we keep His commandments.”* That is, we retain, or remember, them. They are preferred utterances to us, and are the subject of our meditation and contemplation. We obey them because we do not let them leave our memory. As it is written, *“If thou shalt keep all these commandments to do them”* (Deut 19:9). This involves hiding them in our heart, that we might not sin against the Lord (Psa 119:11). The joyful involvements of keeping His commandments are reflected in

the confession of Jeremiah. *“Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts”* (Jer 15:16). Before the Law, Job possessed this same spirit. He said, *“I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food”* (Job 23:12). David also acknowledged, *“Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold”* (Psa 119:127). All of this, and more, is involved in keeping God’s commandments.

Even under the Law, the Lord required the love of Himself and walking according to His commands. *“And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?”* (Deut 10:12-13). However, they did not have a heart to do such things, proving that more than human effort is necessary to fulfill the requirement.

In Christ, praise God, we are not confined to human effort. Being *“born of God,”* we are endowed with the ability to keep the commandments of God, and to do so with consistency. Otherwise our text would have no real power, for it would speak of an impossible condition.

Loving God is not a mere emotion, although our emotion is brought into it. It is based upon faith, or spiritual perception. *“We love Him BECAUSE He first loved us.”* It is the result of comprehending His love for us. Such love pervades our *“heart,” “soul,” “mind,”* and *“strength”* (Mark 12:30).

Loving the Lord with ALL our heart involves the basic, or central, part of our persons. Such love is not on the surface, but comes from deep within.

Loving God with ALL our soul means with all of our expressive abilities. Such love flows out from us in expressions of praise, thanksgiving, obedience, and service.

Loving God with ALL our mind embraces our thoughts. It diffuses itself into our contemplations, purposes, and preferences.

Loving God with ALL our strength signifies all of our ability or aptitude. Everything about us that is capable of loving and preferring God is thus dominated by our attraction to, and preference of, the God of our salvation.

It is not possible for such love to ignore the commandments of God. Remember, in this Epistle, the Spirit has summarized those commandments under two great charges. *“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”* (3:23). **No person failing on these points loves God!** Where these are lacking, the profession of faith is empty, and is nothing more than a lie. The individual who is repulsed by the commandments of God has no love for Him! It is not possible to love God and despise or ignore what He has commanded. We **MUST** not allow ourselves to entertain the notion that loving God exists where His demands upon us are disdained.

His Commands Are Not Grievous

Here the New Covenant towers above the Old one, showing the glorious benefits that have resulted from Christ’s vicarious atonement. Here is a condition that exists in all who are *“born of God.”* This is not something that SHOULD exist, but a circumstance that DOES exist in the child of God. *“His commandments are not burdensome”* (grievous KJV). The word *“burdensome”* or *“grievous”* means heavy, difficult to bear, and contrary to the nature of the one to whom they are addressed. It is the condition that compels the offended party to ignore the commands of God. Such people refuse to retain God’s commands, think upon them, and obey them.

But this is NOT the case with the one *“born of God.”* The word of Christ is confirmed in the heart of the children of God: *“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”* (Matt 11:30). Regardless of the extent of the commandment, it does not chaff against the person who is born again. It is not contrary to his nature, nor offensive to his soul. Rather, it is a source of delight.

This was not the case with Israel at Mount Sinai. They were the best people in the world, and the only people within the favor of God. What is more, they received the best moral Law, or code, ever given—in fact, the ONLY one God ever gave. They were privy to a unique word from the Living God. What was their response? They said to Moses, *“You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die”* NKJV (Ex 20:19). The commandments of God were grievous to them. They conflicted sharply with their basic nature, and were contrary to their basic propensities. The Divine nature was abrasive to their human nature.

Responses of Faith

How different it is in Christ Jesus. When the Gospel was believed, people became eager to know the commandments of God. Who can forget the responses recorded for our learning. *“What shall we do?” “See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” “What wilt Thou have me to do?” “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”* (Acts 2:37; 8:36; 9:6; 16:30). Why did they respond in such a manner? This was certainly not the response of the Israelites!

These were responses of believing hearts. Every person who is *“created in Christ Jesus”* (Eph 2:10) begins this way. **No person begins in Christ with a heart offended by the commandments**

of God. Every heart begins tender and obedient.

The burden of the saints of God is not the commandments of God, but their own failings and weakness. Their cry is not “Oh, how wretched are His commandments,” but “*wretched man that I am*” (Rom 7:24). When we mourn, it is never because of the witness of God.

If We Love God

The condition that produces this reaction is the “*love of God.*” It simply is not possible to love God and, at the same time, be burdened by His commandments. Therefore, we can derive great comfort from our attitude toward His commandments. If they are not grievous to Him, it is because we love Him. And if we love Him, it is because we have been born of Him. And if we are born of Him, we do love those who also have been begotten by Him.

The burden of the saints of God is not the commandments of God, but their own failings and weakness. Their cry is not “Oh, how wretched are His commandments,” but “*wretched man that I am*” (Rom 7:24). When we mourn, it is never because of the witness of God. Thus, if you want confirmation that you really love the people of God, do not look to your own achievements. Rather, consider the effect of God’s commandments upon your heart. If you are tender to them and long for them, you love God.

FAITH OVERCOMES THE WORLD

“ 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith. 5 And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” In His objective to confirm to our hearts that we have eternal life, the Spirit now piles evidence upon evidence. He continues to enlarge upon the marks of a person “*born of God.*”

There is no possibility that these things are not true, else our confidence could not be based upon them. The burden of this emphasis is to establish to our hearts that we are, in fact, “*born of God.*” If we can be brought to that conclusion, confidence and joy will fill, our hearts, and we will overcome the world. How sorely we need this word.

Overcomes the World

The world **MUST** be overcome! When we are “*born of God,*” we are by no means locked into the state of triumph. True, God “*causeth us to triumph in Christ*” (2 Cor 2:14), but not independently of our involvement. God “*gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*” NKJV (1 Cor 15:57). Like everything God gives “*through our Lord Jesus Christ,*” that victory is to be received by faith.

Whatever is “*born of God*” does, in fact, overcome the world—but we must walk in the energy of that begotten life. Our new birth thrusts us into irreversible conflict with the world. Faith cannot avoid the conflict, or cause it to come to an end while we are “*in the body*” (2 Cor 5:6; Heb 13:3). The Lord summarily rejects the “*wisdom of the world*” and “*all that is in the world*” (1 Cor 1:20; 3:19; 1 John 2:1 John 2:16). Salvation, from this perspective, is deliverance from “*this present evil world*” (Gal 1:4). The world, together with its lusts, is “*passing away,*” while the saints are being “*renewed day by day*” (1 John 2:17; 2 Cor 4:16). No wonder we are in conflict with it! Satan is its god, and the Lord of hosts is our God (2 Cor 4:2-4). The “*fashion*” of this world is passing away, but “*the world to come*” has powers of which we currently are tasting (1 Cor 7:31; Heb 2:5; 6:5). These two worlds—

the present evil one, and the one to come—are locked in mortal combat. Faith joins us to the battle.

What Does It Mean?

What does it mean to “*overcome the world?*” Simple stated, it means the world does not draw us into its vortex. We do not become conformed to it (Rom 12:2), nor are we enamored of its manners and promises. The person who overcomes the world successfully avoids loving it, preferring it, and shaping their lives around it. When faith is confronted with the contradicting influences of this world, it chooses the Lord, and “*looks for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God*” (Heb 11:10). Faith refuses to be shaped by the world. It will not allow what is seen to dominate ones vision. It does not consider the applause and approbation of this world of any value, and is willing to count everything the world offers but “*dung,*” which it most assuredly is.

The person who is overcome by the world, being caught up in its values and manners, has, to that degree, ceased to “*walk in the Spirit*” and “*put on the new man.*” When we hear of a professing believer that has fallen into sin, we need not ask why such a tragedy has occurred. There is no need for a psychological analysis of the behavior of the fallen one. If whatever is born of God “*overcomes the world,*” then the one overcome by the world is either not born of God, or has reverted back to the flesh from whence grace delivered him.

The Victory

It is not simply *possible* for faith to overcome the world, it DOES overcome the world. If, therefore, a person is overcome by the world, they have ceased to walk by faith. It makes no difference what they profess.

Now the Spirit continues to speak with great pungency. He precisely defines the victory, lest we be tempted to imagine it is accomplished in the energy of the flesh. The victory is “*faith.*” “*And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith.* NRSV ” Notice, the text does not simply say faith, but “*OUR faith.*” It is not ours by origination, but by the grace of God, for that grace is “*exceeding abundant with faith,*” which is in Christ Jesus alone (1 Tim 1:14).

It is not simply *possible* for faith to overcome the world, it DOES overcome the world. If, therefore, a person is overcome by the world, they have ceased to walk by faith. It makes no difference what they profess. The faith must be “*kept*” to be effectual (2 Tim 4:7). If it is “*kept,*” the one keeping it will triumph over the world, for the world is inferior to faith, and is impotent against it.

If victory over the world depends upon “*our faith,*” then attention must be paid to it. We must “*continue in the faith*” (Acts 14:22), be “*established in the faith*” (Acts 16:5), and “*stand fast in the faith*” (1 Cor 16:13). It is necessary to build ourselves up on our most holy faith (Jude 20), be “*strong in faith*” (Rom 4:19), and “*abound*” in faith (2 Cor 8:7). **If we cannot believe God and trust in the Lord Jesus, the world will triumph over us.**

Do you see why such a great emphasis is placed on faith by Jesus and the Apostles? And do you not, by the same token, marvel that the contemporary church puts so little emphasis on faith. In fact, some religious sophists are aggressive to diminish the significance of faith. Those acting so foolishly are actually setting their hearers up to be conquered by the world.

The One Who Overcomes

There is even more precision declared, and that because of the centrality of the truth with

which we are dealing. The individual who overcomes the world is precisely defined: *“he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”* Does that seem too simplistic? It is not! This is the language of the Spirit. It is not to be adjusted to our perceptions. Rather, our perceptions are to be adjusted to the Word of the Lord!

At once you see that believing *“Jesus is the Son of God”* is not an elementary thing. Not only is believing Jesus is the Son of God associated with our entrance into Him (Acts 8:37), it relates to the triumphant life. By this we are to understand that our belief will be challenged by the devil, and assaulted by the powers of darkness.

Not A Creedal Faith

The believing of reference is active and dominating. It is not a creedal faith, if there be such a thing—i.e., simply affirming we believe that Jesus is the Son of God. This is something embraced with the heart—a faith that governs the whole man. If this were not the case, such a statement could not be made. Make no mistake about this, it is proper and necessary that we acknowledge the truth of Christ’s Sonship. The power of that reality, however, is unleashed when we depend upon it, casting the weight of our whole being upon Him.

We must learn to reason with these thoughts, making them the chief building blocks of our thinking. If the one who overcomes the world is the person believing Jesus Christ is the Son of God, then the person overcome by the world is the one NOT believing that Jesus is the Son of God. Flesh will argue with this conclusion, but it is wrong, and the Spirit is right. At the precise point an individual is overcome by the world—at that point he does not believe Jesus is the Son of God. If this were not the case, he would have overcome the world, rather than it overcoming him.

This is an elaboration of the promise given by the Prophets and confirmed by the Apostles. *“Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded”* (1 Pet 2:6; Isa 28:16). No shame will come to the one bold enough to trust in Jesus (Rom 9:33; 10:11). Such will triumph over all of their foes, and the world itself will be overcome by them! The only real jeopardy for the Christian is unbelief. From that root all danger spring. No blessing is ever given to unbelief.

THE WATER AND THE BLOOD

“6 This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood.” The Spirit now turns to the OBJECT of our faith, rather than lingering upon the faith itself. **It is the One in whom our faith rests that gives it power, enabling us to overcome the world.** Being moved by the Spirit, John now makes a statement that has long boggled the minds of the most prestigious thinkers in the post-Apostolic church. It appears to me, that lest men begin to imagine that the things of God are overly simplistic, occasional statements are made that call us into loftier realms of thought. All such statements have to do with the Person’s of the Father and the Son, and never the duty of men. The most productive thoughts relate to *“our Lord and His Christ”* (Rev 11:15; 12:10; Acts 4:26). The value of thought deteriorates in both value and effectiveness as it moves away from Christ Jesus and His great salvation.

The Spirit has already emphasized Christ coming into the world. He *“is come in the flesh”* (4:3). The Father *“sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him”* (4:9). He also *“sent”* Him to be *“the Savior of the world”* (4:14). These affirmations are intended, among other things, to confirm the relevancy of Jesus to our situation. Our interest in Him is not novel, like

that of the Athenians who “*spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing*” (Acts 17:21). When the Spirit speaks about Jesus, He is addressing our life, our immediate association with God, and our eternal destiny. For that reason, we must extend ourselves to comprehend what He is saying.

This Is the One

It is vital that our hearts be lifted from a merely intellectual view of the Lord Jesus. To put it another way, we are not to consider Him from a fleshly point of view.

Here the Spirit forbids any speculation concerning the Savior of the world. The One who was “*in the beginning,*” and is “*that Eternal Life*” (1:1-2) is the same Person who walked among men. It was “*the Word*” who “*became flesh and dwelt among us*” (John 1:14). His Person was concealed by His body, so much so that mere men saw in Him “*no form nor comeliness; and when*” they saw Him, they concluded “*there is no beauty that we should desire Him*” (Isa 53:2).

The point of this text is to confirm to our hearts that the One in Whom we are trusting is the fulfillment of all the types, shadows, and prophecies of a coming Deliverer. The Spirit is giving us evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He will not argue the point in accordance with worldly wisdom, but will produce spiritual arguments that can only be perceived by faith. He will soar high above the flesh.

It is vital that our hearts be lifted from a merely intellectual view of the Lord Jesus. To put it another way, we are not to consider Him from a fleshly point of view. As it is written, “*Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer*” NKJV (2 Cor 5:16). **The lower our view of Jesus, the less we receive from Him.**

“By Water and By Blood”

Here is a most arresting consideration, and thoroughly unlike any earthly reasoning. One has well said, “An ambassador might be said to come with credentials; a warrior might be said to come with the spoils of victory; a prince might be said to ‘come’ with the insignia of royalty; a prophet comes with signs and wonders; and the Lord Jesus might also be said to have come with power to raise the dead, and to heal disease, and to cast out devils; but John here fixes the attention on a fact so impressive and remarkable in his view as to be worthy of special remark, that He ‘came’ by water and blood.” BARNES

This text has long challenged the most distinguished thinkers in the Christian community—not because it is shrouded in mystery, but because it is so lofty. Remember, the Spirit is providing us with evidence that justifies fully trusting in the Lord Jesus, and not questioning His promises to us.

“Water and Blood Foreshadowed”

A principle of spiritual understanding is that **great declarations of the Person, accomplishments, and ministry of Jesus were invariably foreshadowed in the Law.** This circumstance illustrates the word of God to Amos. “*Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets*” NKJV (Amos 3:7). It is also confirmed by the words of Jesus concerning the Scriptures: “*these are they which testify of Me*” NKJV (John 5:39). This is

also corroborated by Peter. *“Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow”* (1 Pet 10:11). Paul also spoke of Jesus *“both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets”* (Acts 28:23).

Therefore, I will first look at the God-ordained ceremonies of the Law for some understanding of this declaration.

Under the Law, water and blood were of special significance in confirming the healing of a leper. The procedure is found in the fourteenth chapter of Leviticus. It involved two *“clean”* birds. One was to be *“killed in an earthen vessel over running water.”* The living bird was then dipped in the blood of the bird killed over running water, and the blood sprinkled seven times on the healed leper. After this, the living bird was released in an open field (v 5-8, 48-53). Thus an association was made between *“water”* and *“blood”* and cleansing.

Under the Law, both *“water”* and *“blood”* were integral to the Divine service. The brazen laver was filled with water. Both Aaron and his sons were to wash themselves at that laver. The criticality of this washing is seen in the following words. *“When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the LORD: So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they die not: and it shall be a statute for ever to them, even to him and to his seed throughout their generations”* (Ex 30:10-21). Here, *“water”* is associated with sanctification, which made the priests suitable to minister in the sanctuary and at the altar.

In offering the sacrifices upon the altar, the priests were directed to *“wash the inwards and the legs with water”* before laying is all upon the altar (Lev 1:9,40). All of the tabernacle procedures involving water are referred to as *“diverse washings”* in Hebrews 9:10, and were related to sanctification.

“Blood” was emphasized to an unusual degree under the law. It was associated with atonement (Ex 30:10; Lev 17:11), cleansing (Lev 14:52; 16:19), sanctification and reconciliation (Lev 8:15,30). The First Covenant was dedicated with blood, which was sprinkled on the altar, the book of the covenant, and the people (Ex 24:6-8).

In His life He grappled with the same temptations as those He came to save. He also lived out before men the Divine life, bringing the invisible God within range of their senses. He also wrought great signs and wonders, showing the superiority of God to all that is aligned against us.

Thus, from the Law, the **significance** of Jesus coming by water and by blood is signified. He *“came,”* or fulfilled the types and shadows of old, by inducting the era of true washing and sanctification. He came primarily to atone for sin, and to qualify us to stand before God in a state of acceptance. All of this was typified in the phenomenally detailed ceremonies of the Law. In fulfilling the types and shadows instituted under the Law, Jesus brought a conclusion to them. Once the *“Substance”* is in place, there is no further need for types and shadows (Col 2:17; Heb 8:5; 10:1).

There Is More

The Spirit indicates to us that even more is to be seen in this text. This is indicated by the elaboration, “ *not only by water, but by water and blood.*” In this regard, “*came*” indicates made known, revealed, or made apparent. This doubtless refers to Christ’s baptism and death. His baptism was the point at which His earthly ministry was inaugurated. His death was the point at which it was consummated. What is more, He was made known at both occasions.

When Jesus was baptized in water, it is written, “*When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’*” NKJV (Matt 3:16-17). Thus, Jesus “*came by water,*” publically owned as the Son of God, in whom He was well pleased.

But Jesus also “*came by blood.*” At His baptism, His earthly occupation concluded and His ministry began. At His death His earthly ministry concluded, and He prepared to enter into His heavenly ministry. Of His death it is written, “*And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God*” (Mk 15:37-39). Matthew provides some additional information. “*The earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many*” (Matt 27:51-52).

Thus Jesus came “*not by water only, but by water and blood.*” By water sin was acknowledged, by blood it was atoned. In both cases, effective ministry was the outcome of His Person being revealed. The first, a ministry in which He “*went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him*” (Acts 10:38). The second, a ministry in which “*He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them*” (Heb 7:25).

To put it yet another way, coming by water and blood refers to Christ’s life and death. Both of them were required for our justification. In His life He grappled with the same temptations as those He came to save. He also lived out before men the Divine life, bringing the invisible God within range of their senses. He also wrought great signs and wonders, showing the superiority of God to all that is aligned against us. In His death, His weakest point (2 Cor 13:4), He destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14), plundered principalities and powers (Col 2:15), blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us (Col 2:14), and reconciled the world to God (Rom 5:10). He came by “*water and blood!*”

A Physical Occurrence At Jesus’ Death

But there is even more in this text. Because the revelation of the Savior of the world is the point, the words describing that revelation are pregnant with meaning.

It is not by coincidence that John records this of Jesus’ death. “*Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that He was dead already, they brake not His legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out **blood and water** . And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe*” (John 19:32-35).

It is not without significance that this occurred AFTER Jesus was dead. In a prototypic way, it declared that cleansing and atonement would result from His death. In an external way, it confirmed that the Lord was, in fact, dead. That condition proved that the atonement had been

accomplished. It also confirmed this was a Man that died, and not the mere appearance of a man as some suppose.

Some have seen this as evidence that *“Jesus died of a broken heart so that His pericardium was full of blood and serum.”* Bible Knowledge Comentary Of this condition, Webster confirms this is a trait of the human anatomy. “The heart is surrounded by a membrane called the pericardium. This membrane contains a serous matter or liquor resembling water, which prevents the surface of the heart from becoming dry by its continual motion.” Webster The flowing of water and blood, however, are not here attributed to a broken heart, but to the thrust of the Roman spear. While the view in question is surely a sentimental one, it is not supported by the Word of God. Therefore, it must be held as an opinion.

Believers must not take the death of Christ for granted, treating it as though it were a mere tradition. It is to be the subject of preaching, exhortation, and contemplation.

Some have observed that blood and water coming from the Lord was a natural phenomenon that can be confirmed by science. I have already cited the scientific proof of that condition. In his record of this, however, John places a lot of emphasis upon this fact. *“And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe”* (John 19:35). Thus John confirms that Jesus DID die.

A Central Doctrine

This is a critical point upon which the great doctrines of Scripture are dependent. If Jesus did not, in fact, die, not only is the human condition unchanged, it CANNOT be changed. It is Christ’s death into which we are baptized, and from which we rise to walk in newness of, life (Rom 6:3-4). By His death we are reconciled to God (Rom 5:10). It is His death that is shown forth in partaking of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:24). This was the Father’s commission to the Son—to die, or lay down His life—and it was the objective of His obedience (John 10:17-18; Phil 2:8). It is through His death that Jesus will present us *“holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight”* (Col 1:22). It is *“by means”* of His *“death”* that we *“receive the promise of eternal inheritance”* (Heb 9:15). His death was also required for the initiation of the New Covenant (Heb 9:16).

The attestation of that death, therefore, is critical. By saying Jesus came *“by water and by blood,”* John is confirming that all of the benefits dependent upon Christ’s death are now available to men. They can be effectively obtained by faith.

Believers must not take the death of Christ for granted, treating it as though it were a mere tradition. It is to be the subject of preaching, exhortation, and contemplation. An ordinance has been instituted by Jesus Himself to assist us in reflecting upon this most marvelous accomplishment.

As a point of consideration, the proper subject of extended contemplation is not when we came into the Kingdom, but when Christ came *“by water and blood.”* The ministry of Jesus is superior to our own ministry, and thus is to be afforded the highest place in our thoughts. A great deal of harm is done when we focus on ourselves, and that is something that should be clear.

THE WITNESSES ARE IN AGREEMENT

“And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.” NKJV John does not suspend the proof of Christ’s effective death, however, on his own testimony. While he was an eye witness, eye witness accounts are not a sufficient foundation for faith. They must be combined with a higher witness to obtain power. He will thus attribute the confirming witness to three sources—and John is not one of them.

The Holy Spirit Bears Witness

John declares, *“And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.”* The Holy Spirit is the superintending witness of all other valid testimony. The validity of John’s testimony is directly owing to the work of the Holy Spirit. He is recalling the reality of Christ’s death around sixty years after it occurred. In that recollection, he recounts a detail that might easily be forgotten—*“water and blood.”* His memory of this event, however, has been under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the appointed Expositor of truth, and is therefore called *“the Spirit of truth”* (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). The Spirit, we are apprized, *“searches all things, yes, the deep things of God”* NKJV (1 Cor 2:10). The Scriptures state the case with remarkable pungency: *“no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God”* NKJV (1 Cor 2:11). That is why it is affirmed *“the Spirit IS truth.”* He does not say the Spirit **speaks** truth, but that He **IS** truth. The NASB correctly reads, *“the Spirit is THE truth”* (**h` avlh, qeia**). Coincidentally, this is the same thing Jesus said of Himself: *“I am . . . the truth”* (John 14:6). While the Lord Jesus is the Personification of truth, the Spirit is its Custodian, or Distributor. If, therefore, the Spirit does not put His testimony to a matter, it is not to taken as the truth of God.

Three That Bear Witness In Heaven

“For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit . . .” **Under** the Law, two witnesses sufficed to confirm a matter, and three were even better (Deut 17:6; 19:15). But when it comes to the matter of confirming the validity and ministry of the Lord Jesus, *“there are THREE that bear witness in heaven.”*

This verse reads quite differently in the various versions. I have given you the NKJV, which agrees with the KJV. The NRSV and the NIV read, *“There are three that testify.”* The NASB reads, *“And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth.”* The RSV reads, *“And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth.”* Webster’s Bible, The Douay-Rheims Bible, and Young’s Literal read the same as the KJV.

Men have disagreed about this verse from early times. Jerome (345-419 A.D.) was of the opinion these words are found by Divine design rather than mere human addition. Without belaboring their authenticity, I will share with you the observation of John Calvin, acknowledged by friend and foe as one of the greatest textual scholars of all time. *“But as even the Greek copies do not agree, I dare not assert anything on the subject. Since, however, the passage flows better when this clause is added, and as I see that it is found in the best and most approved copies, I am inclined to receive it as the true reading.”*

The Witnesses that are first identified are *“in heaven.”* This makes them the *“greater”* witnesses, as will be confirmed in verse nine. This observation alone should cause us to be hesitant about dismissing these words as though they were foreign to Scripture.

Again, I am careful to say this is not intended to influence us to trust in men. I only site these things to confirm we are not being foolish in taking the text as it stands. Nor, indeed, is anyone wise in assuming those who criticize this translation possess some form of superior knowledge. There is nothing in the text itself that contradicts any portion of Scripture. There is no cause for us to involve ourselves in existing controversies over the legitimacy of this text. It does not violate any point of Apostolic doctrine. It does not demean Jesus, reproach the Father, or do despite to the Spirit of grace. There is not a shred of conflict in it with Jesus, salvation, or the nature of spiritual life.

The Witnesses that are first identified are *“in heaven.”* This makes them the *“greater”* witnesses, as will be confirmed in verse nine. This observation alone should cause us to be hesitant about dismissing these words as though they were foreign to Scripture.

The Father

The witness of the Father is imperative. Jesus declared, *“All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father . Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him ”* NKJV (Matt 11:27). Make no mistake about this, *“Our Father”* who is *“in heaven”* still bears witness to the Son! He witnesses to Him by having delivered all things into His hand. When He gave Him *“all power in heaven and earth,”* He bore witness to the Son (Matt 28:18). When He placed Him at His own right hand, saying *“Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?”* (Heb 1:3), He witnessed of the Son. When He exalted His name above every name that is named, He witnessed to the Son (Phil 2:9). When He received us in Christ, He bore glorious witness to the His Son. Let us give heed to His witness. If the Father speaks so consistently of the Son, what ought to be the stance of those who bear His name?

The Word

This is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:1,14; 1 John 1:1). He bore witness to the validity of His mission when He said in heaven, *“Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God”* (Heb 10:7). He bears witness in heaven now by ever living to *“make intercession”* for the saints of God. (Heb 7:25). He bears witness by mediating the New Covenant (Heb 9:15; 12:24), bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10), and being touched with the feeling of our infirmities (Heb 4:15). The Word, Christ Jesus glorified, is bearing witness from heaven. We are admonished, *“See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven”* NASB (Heb 12:25).

The Spirit

This is the leading witness to the Person of Christ Jesus. He is the vicar of Christ, sent to take His place among men. As Jesus said, *“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you”* NKJV (John 16:7). In His appointed capacity, the Spirit bears witness of Jesus, as the Lord said He would. *“When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me ”* NIV (John 15:26).

The Gospel itself is evidence of the Holy Spirit from heaven bearing witness. As it is written, *“To them (the Prophets) it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven; things which angels desire to look into”* NASB (1 Pet 1:12).

Later, I will develop the witness of the Spirit more thoroughly, as it is addressed in verse

nine. Suffice it to say at this point, the Holy Spirit is able to convince the believer of the truth concerning Christ Jesus. He brings a certitude and confidence to the heart that cannot otherwise be obtained.

Perfect Agreement

All of these witnesses, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, are in perfect accord. They are not only one in their Nature, but one in their witness as well. So far as men are concerned, they all speak of the same thing, and with the same emphasis.

Three That Bear Witness On Earth

“And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.” Because salvation involves activity in both heaven and earth, sets of witnesses are found in both realms. Heaven needs a witness, and so does earth.

The Spirit

Why is the Spirit said to be a witness in heaven as well as upon earth? Simply

Jesus is the singular figure in History, and the King of glory as well. His life and death declare what He came. The Spirit gathers it all together and seals it with Divine consent.

When we are required to “look,” it is to Him!

because He is active in both realms. His work in heaven involves making intercession for the saints. As it is written, *“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God”* (Rom 8:26-27).

But His work is also upon earth, for He works within the saints as well as in their behalf. He also witnesses upon earth by convicting men of sin, righteous, and judgment (John 16:8-11). He witnesses by comforting the saints in Christ Jesus (Acts 9:31), and strengthening them with Divine might in order that Christ may *“dwell in their hearts by faith”* (Eph 3:16-17). He witnesses by shedding the love abroad in our hearts (Rom 5:5), bringing us joy (Rom 14:17), and causing us to abound in hope (Rom 15:13).

The Water

That Jesus is the promised Messiah – *“the Christ of God”* – is attested to by His baptism. There God spoke from heaven, affirming this was His beloved Son in whom He was well pleased (Matt 3:16-17). It was at that time that the Holy Spirit descended from heaven in the form of a dove, making Himself visible, coming, and remaining, upon Jesus (John 1:32-33).

The Blood

The Savior-hood of Christ was also confirmed through *“the blood of His cross”* (Col 1:20). At that time, the prophecies of the rejection and cruelty of men were fulfilled (Isa 53:3). All of the types depicted in the sacrifices made according to the Law were fulfilled. He was the *“innocent blood”* (Psa 94:21; Matt 27:4). As it is written, *“the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”*

(1 John 1:9). That reality witnesses to His Person and accomplishments.

Perfect Agreement

“ . . . and the three are in agreement (are one, KJV) .” NASB While there is some controversy about whether or not these words belong in the text, I will accept them as legitimate. The following versions include the words: KJV, ASV, NKJV, NRSV, NASB, RSV, The Webster Bible, Douay-Rhims, Darby’s, BBE, Young’s Literal, New Jerusalem Bible, New Living Translation, NIV(British). Of itself, this observation adds no weight to the text. I only draw attention to this to confirm that the acceptance of the text as it stands is harmonious with the majority of translation expertise.

This statement reflects the tenor of Scripture—that there is a perfect harmony throughout. All of God’s witnesses speak, as it were, with one voice. The water, the blood, and the Spirit all point to One Man, “*the Man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim 2:5). He is the singular figure in History, and the King of glory as well. His life and death declare what He came. The Spirit gathers it all together and seals it with Divine consent. When we are required to “*look,*” it is to Him!

When it comes to our redemption, God introduces no conflicting evidence or discordant witnesses. If there are contradictory witnesses in the Christian community, it is because of the flesh, not the Spirit. God offers no such witnesses.

Wherever you look in Scripture, the same message will be declared. It can be heard from Moses and the Prophets. It is seen in the testimony of the harbinger John the Baptist. The Lord Jesus bore witness with His life, His words, His deeds, and His death. The Apostles, compelled by the Holy Spirit, bore witness to the same.

The message of the Gospel is a solitary one. It does not adapt itself to men, but brings men into accord with itself. It does not change with the times, but challenges the times to conform to it. It is an “*everlasting Gospel*” (Rev 14:6), and cannot be changed by either time or eternity.

If men are not convinced of the truth of Christ, they have exposed their minds to the wrong thing. They have not looked at His life. They have not considered His death. They have not heard what the Spirit is saying. The real witnesses all agree! There are three in heaven that agree, and three in agreement upon earth as well. What possible reason can be offered for being ignorant of the Son, or not believing on His name?

THE GREATER WITNESS

“**9** *If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater . . .*” There are multiple valid witnesses, and they all agree. Yet there is a witness that is “*greater,*” and it is “*the witness of God.*” The immediate reference here is not to men who bear witness of the truth of Christ, such as John in this very Epistle. The Spirit is here adducing a principle—one which God Himself has inculcated upon men. While the principle itself is general, it seems to me that the Spirit has the role of witnesses under the Law in mind in this passage. When administering justice under the Law, the witness of men was required by God Himself. “*At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death . . . at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established* (for any iniquity, or any sin) ” (Deut 17:6; 19:15).

Now, if the determination of whether or not a man should live, or whether or not he was guilty of sin, was determined at the mouth of “*the witness of men,*” what shall we say of “*the*

witness of God?” In the world, even the most capricious of persons relies on the “*witness of men.*” In the normal course of acquiring knowledge, “*the witness of men*” is sought. In academic circles, higher degrees cannot be acquired without acquaintance with “*the witness of men*” on the facet of knowledge being pursued. Our courts of law depend upon “*the witness of men.*” Our acquaintance with the sciences, history, and other areas of lawful knowledge, relies upon “*the witness of men.*” Indeed, this is a point requiring no further substantiation.

The Witness Must Be Certain

The “*witness of God*” is greater because He gave it. It remains greater because He protects it. If God did not let any of Samuel’s words “*fall to the ground*” (1 Sam 3:19), He will surely not allow any of His own to do so.

A “*greater*” witness must be a sure one. It cannot be ambiguous, uncertain, or subject to varied interpretations. Those are characteristics of “*the witness of men.*” I cannot say too much about this matter. Since the convergence of, what is erroneously called, *higher criticism*, men have introduced doubts concerning the authenticity of Scripture. Presenting what they believe to be flawless arguments, they cast a shadow of doubt upon the text of Scripture itself. If we allow such sophists to corrupt our thinking, we will place a lesser value upon the “*greater*” testimony of God.

Emphatically we are told, “*Every word of God is pure*” (Prov 30:5), and man lives “*by every word of God*” (Lk 4:4). It will not do for that word to be uncertain or doubtful to any generation.

Some affirm that the witness of God is truly “*greater,*” but only in the original language. Somehow, that word can, it is imagined, become diluted as it is passed down through the generations. And, indeed, some rather impressive arguments are produced to buttress the position. But it has no support in Scripture, which dealt extensively with texts that were copied and translated. But there is no hint that Moses’ copy of the Law was more accurate than that of Ezra. Or, indeed, that the Greek Septuagint version was less precise than the original scroll of Isaiah.

If we are going to throw people upon a “*greater*” witness, the credibility of that witness must be apparent. Further, a “*greater*” witness cannot be corroborated by a lesser witness, which thought is the epitome of absurdity. The “*witness of God*” is greater because He gave it. It remains greater because He protects it. If God did not let any of Samuel’s words “*fall to the ground*” (1 Sam 3:19), He will surely not allow any of His own to do so.

The Witness Must Be Clear

A “*greater*” witness must also be a clear and discernible one. If the witness cannot be understood, or, more precisely, if it is not addressed to the understanding, its greatness is of no value to us.

This section of First John will confirm God’s witness is personal, and not general. It comprises two kinds of writing: the writing of Scripture, and writing within the heart. Both are witnesses, both are from God, and both agree. It is particularly the latter witness that brings such clarity to the message, confirming its truth to the heart.

God (and I speak as a man) deserves to be believed more than men. His witness is greater, and thus our embrace of it should also be greater. However strongly we embrace the witness of men, the witness of God should be more heartily embraced, with absolute superiority assigned to it.

I do not believe we can make too much of this. We live in a time when scholarship, statistics, and other forms of human knowledge, have been exalted too highly. Often they are actually given the same weight as the Word of God. When it comes to buttressing the faith of God's people, making their hope solid, and clarifying their inheritance, the "*greater witness*" is given.

THE WITNESS IN THE BELIEVER

This Is The Witness

The Spirit does not leave us in the dark concerning the subject of God's witness—which witness is "*greater*." He will tell us the core of the Divine witness. Everything God has said relates to this witness. In our pursuit of an understanding of what God has witnessed, we must get to the point stated in this text.

“9 . . . for the witness of God is this, that He has borne witness concerning His Son. “10 The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son.”

Now we come to the intensely personal nature of salvation. It is not enough to formulate a sound theological position about our Lord. The word from heaven is, "*O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him*" (Psa 34:8). That is why the Holy spirit moved Peter to write to believers, "*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious*" (1 Pet 2:2-3). A good taste of the Lord would resolve many a theological argument, and bring together whole bodies of people who are separated over human opinion.

There is a personal dimension to salvation. In fact, that is what makes it "*salvation*." An impersonal salvation is no salvation at all. There are some who, because of an over-emphasis of experience and feeling, speak disparagingly of them, as though they were of no value at all. While we must give diligence to avoid an undue exaltation of experience, or relying on feeling, we must not run from them as though they were our enemies. It is possible to say with Laban, "*I have learned by experience that the LORD hath blessed me for thy sake*" (Gen 30:27).

While God has something to say about us, He has more to say about the Son. Even though He testifies of our obligations, He speaks more of His Son's accomplishments.

He has "*borne witness concerning His Son*."

Salvation is primarily an experience, not a philosophy. Deliverance from sin, justification, fellowship with Christ—they are all experiences, and precious ones at that!

The Primary Testimony

Going straight to the issue of salvation, the Spirit confirms that the primary Divine testimony relates to God's Son. There can be no beneficial relationship with God apart from Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Father testifies of the Son in order that we might come to God, and be received by Him. While God has something to say about us, He has more to say about the Son. Even though He testifies of our obligations, He speaks more of His Son's accomplishments. He has

“borne witness concerning His Son.” He has spoken of Him through the ceremonies of the Law. He has testified of Him through the Prophets. He has declared Him through John the Baptist, and through the Apostles. Through all of these means, and the Spirit as well, He has also spoken of Him to the human conscience.

Jesus Speaks of the Witness

Jesus spoke of this activity of the Father. He rose into lofty realms when He made this known. We cannot expect to comprehend it if we insist on dwelling in the lowlands of flesh and blood. Jesus traces our faith back to Divine activity—which is a source of great consolation and assurance. “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me **draws him** ; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be **taught by God** .' Therefore everyone who has **heard and learned from the Father** comes to Me” (John 5:44-45).

Confirming that Jesus is speaking of faith—of believing in Him—He continues. “Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life” (John 5:46-47). Later, confirming this is the matter in question, Jesus adds, “But there are some of you who **do not believe** . For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, **Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father**” (vs 64-65). The believing, therefore, was evidence of the drawing of God.

Our First John text elaborates on that drawing, connecting it with God’s testimony “concerning the Son.” The Son is the heart of His witness, and the focus of His revelation.

The Necessity of the Witness

This Divine witness— “the witness of God” —is not a novelty. Rather, it is a necessity. Jesus made this clear when He said, “**no one knows the Son except the Father** ” NKJV (Luke 10:22). **That condition demands Divine activity. While it is true that God uses means, primarily the Scriptures, and especially the Gospel of Christ, God nevertheless is active in the matter of drawing our attention to the Son.**

The Inner Witness

“ **The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself.**” You cannot get more personal than this—having the witness— “the witness of God” —IN yourself. It is not simply A witness, or testimony, that is possessed, but “ **THE** ” witness. It is the “witness” that is the subject of Divine exposition: “the witness of God.”

When we receive “the testimony of God,” the case is closed, and no further testimony is required. We have no care whatsoever what others may think of Jesus—not after we have received God’s testimony about Him. We receive it as the final word on the matter, looking for no corroborating human witness!

Our faith in the Son of God is evidence of Divine tutelage! If God teaches us to love one another (1 Thess 4:9), much more does He teach us to believe in and rely upon His Son! The Prophets foretold this Divine teaching. “ . . . He will teach us His ways . . . All your children shall be taught by the LORD . . . I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts” (Isa 2:3; 54:13; Micah 4:2; Jer 33:33). As if this were not enough, Jesus secured this declaration to our minds: “It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me” (John 6:45).

This testimony, as evidenced by faith, is so strong it cannot be dislodged by the arguments and oppositions of men. It is in the heart, where wicked men can neither see nor reach. *“Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony **IN HIS HEART** .”* NIV Make no mistake about this, if the arguments of men alone caused us to believe in Christ, the arguments of wicked men may also uproot that trust. The testimony of God, however, is *“greater,”* thus yielding greater results in the believer.

Men who deal with religious controversy are fond of speaking of an open mind, pleading with their listeners to thoughtfully consider what they say. While there is certainly place for this, there is something else to consider. When we receive *“the testimony of God,”* the case is closed, and no further testimony is required. We have no care whatsoever what others may think of Jesus—not after we have received God’s testimony about Him. We receive it as the final word on the matter, looking for no corroborating human witness!

The One Who Does Not Believe

Keep in mind, John is showing us the source of our faith. He has traced it back to the acceptance of Divine witness. Now he comes to grips with the one who does not believe what God has witnessed concerning His Son. *“He who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son.”*

When one has been exposed to the Gospel, and does not believe, or trust, in the Son, it is not an innocent matter. The presence of doubt cannot be approached as though it were a legitimate form of intellectual honesty. The Spirit does not excuse the unbeliever because he has no inner witness. Rather He soundly judges him, and that with words most stern. Such a one has made God a liar! **There is nothing more serious than failing to believe what God has said about His Son!** God takes the rejection of His witness personal, refusing to grant a single ounce of integrity to the one rejecting it. Such a one has made God a liar! He has set himself above God, rejecting His witness as though he was superior to God, and God was subject to him.

Just as surely as God honors faith, He condemned unbelief. In fact, faith is always recognized by Him, and a lack of it is always damned by Him. He is ever true, *“he that believeth not, shall be damned”* (Mark 16:16). We must not view this as though it were stated too strongly. It is a precise representation of the case, stated by Jesus.

THE SUBSTANCE OF THE WITNESS

*“**11 And the witness** (record KJV , testimony NIV) **is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.**”* The Spirit does not leave us wondering about God’s witness. He takes us strait to the heart of it—the witness He has given of His Son. This is the witness that is *“IN”* the one believing in the Son. Because that witness can be muffled by theological distractions and personal foolishness, the Spirit clearly identifies it. He does so to assist us in centering our attention upon it. To put it another way, this is a Divine invitation to believe, not for the first time, but for the duration of time.

Eternal Life

This is the heart of Divine testimony: *“**God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son!**”* If our views of God, Christ, the Spirit, salvation, and the Scriptures do not bring us to this conclusion, we are off-center! If this is *“the witness,” “the record,”* or *“the testimony,”* we have really heard nothing profitably until we have heard and embraced this! **Death is the consequence of sin, and life**

is the consequence of salvation!

Let us be clear on this matter. The Spirit does not invite us to do some research on this subject, proving it to be true by an analytical approach to “*eternal life*.” Rather, He affirms a truth, leaving us obligated to believe it, embracing it, and depending upon it. “*God has given us eternal life.*” It did not result from our doing, but was “*the gift of God*” (Rom 6:23), given to us by a gracious God.

Herein is a great and liberating truth. Remember, Jesus said, “*And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*” (John 17:3). God has, then, given us to KNOW Him, fulfilling His promise: “*they all shall know Me*” (Jer 31:34; Heb 8:11). Our acquaintance and familiarity with God is not owing to our own activity, but to the gift of God. If we will not quench the Spirit, this witness will become apparent to us. We will possess it in ourselves. That is another way of saying we will know we have eternal life.

If the witness of God is that He has “*given us eternal life,*” should that not be a matter given much consideration by us? It should be heard in our preaching and teaching, and found throughout our literature. Wherever Jesus is confessed, much should be made of eternal life. Yet, in many circles with which I am familiar, it is scarcely mentioned, and is often even the cause for offense. It seems men have little interest in it.

To be sure, God has spoken on other matters, but always with this in mind: that He has “*given us eternal life.*” That is His witness! He does not say His witness is that we are the church. He does not affirm His testimony is that we have received the Spirit. While these things are true, they are not the heart of the matter. The center post of Divine witness is this: God has “*given us eternal life.*” In all of His dealings with you, it will eventually get down to the matter of eternal life. That is the bottom line.

In the Son

I am continually challenged by the care the Spirit takes when revealing things pertaining to life and godliness. “*Eternal life*” is not simply something men possess independently of anything else. Some imagine this is the case, and so have concocted doctrines that teach men they are secure even though they entertain little interest in eternal things. “*This life is in His Son!*” It is as secure as your identity with Jesus. It is as certain as your fellowship with the Son (1 Cor 1:9). If a person is aloof from Christ, the witness of God cannot be heard.

Not only is the acceptance of God dependent upon our faith in the Son, our awareness of that acceptance is also reliant upon our faith. It is not possible to know you have eternal life if you are not believing in and in fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Inherent in this witness is the fact that believers already possess eternal life. This will be strongly affirmed in the next verse, and is to be acknowledged by us.

THE SOURCE OF LIFE

“12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.” Eternal life is given on a personal basis— “He who has the Son.” It is not possessed because we are in the church, but because the Son is in us! We are involved in this matter, for we “receive Him,” believing on His name (John 1:12). From this perspective, having the Son of God is His response to our love of and response to Him. As it is written, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him”

(John 14:23). While we make much of this—and thus we should—we must **expand our thinking on the subject**.

At the root of this affirmation is the fact that we can know we have the Son—else the statement would carry no weight. I am grieved that in many circles it seems as though such knowledge does not even exist, nor is it encouraged

God is also active in the matter of us having the Son. It is written, “*that He (The Father, v 14) would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*” (Eph 3:16-17). Thus we have a twofold witness of our possession of Christ. Our own response to Him, and the working of the Spirit within, strengthening us so Christ may continue to reside within us.

At the root of this affirmation is the fact that we can know we have the Son—else the statement would carry no weight. I am grieved that in many circles it seems as though such knowledge does not even exist, nor is it encouraged. The expression “*he that hath the Son*” is more an appeal to our conscience than a mere theological statement. It is not intended to prove a point, but to confirm that we have eternal life. It presumes the individual who has the Son knows that to be the case.

Without clouding the text with further attempts to explain it, here is the testimony of a man who had the Son. It will assist us in knowing whether or not we have Him. “*I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own goodness or my ability to obey God's law, but I trust Christ to save me. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. As a result, I can really know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I can learn what it means to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that, somehow, I can experience the resurrection from the dead! I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be. No, dear brothers and sisters, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven*” New Living Translation (Phil 3:7-14).

If one imagines the above text has no relevance for all believers, the Spirit adds, “*All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you*” NIV (verse 15). At the point there is measurable progress in this matter, the assurance that Christ is in you will be confirmed.

In order to encourage us to acquire this knowledge, our text speaks firmly, yet puts the truth within our reach. “*He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life*” NKJV . There is no leniency at all in this affirmation. This assists us to focus our attention on the key matter—having the Son. Here all hope of life is excluded if it is not sought in Christ Jesus. Those, therefore, who appear to be virtuous, yet do not possess the Son, are not what they appear to be. They need the Son, else they are neither alive to, nor accepted by, God.

Eternal life, then, hinges upon the personal possession of the Son of God. Therefore, all acceptable thoughts, words, and works proceed from that reality—having the Son of God. Merit, then, cannot be acquired apart from Christ. Divine acceptance cannot be realized independently of Him. Everything depends on having the Son. Where, then, should our

emphasis be placed? What role should Jesus have in our preaching and living? The answer is obvious.

CONCLUSION

It should be abundantly evident to everyone that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the very heart of the Kingdom. Everything hinges upon Him. What God gives comes through Him. What we give to God goes through Him. There is no concourse with God apart from Him. There is no greater accomplishment than to believe on the Son! From that fountainhead flows everything that is good and acceptable. Every benefit received from God comes because we believe. On the name of the Son of God

There are certain guarantees associated with believing on the name of Christ—i.e., embracing Him as God has presented Him in the Gospel. 1--Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God (5:1). 2--The one who believes Jesus is the Son of God overcomes the world (5:5). 3--The individual believing on the Son of God has the witness in himself (5:10). 4--Believing on Jesus is a commandment (3:23). We do well, therefore, to place a great emphasis on believing in Christ. Whatever makes it difficult for us to believe on Him should be thrust from us. Whatever contributes to our faith in Christ should be heartily embraced.

Something with such declared effects cannot be a mere procedural in appropriating salvation. Yet, that is how some people approach believing on the Son of God—as though it took place in a moment of time, then was left in pursuit of more mature matters. Take care that you view faith, or believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, as God does. Let your view of it be shaped by the Word of God, not the dogma and opinions of men. In so doing you will experience the greater witness of God. It will be yours, and you will have it in yourself. It will stabilize your spirit and rejoice your heart.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Book of 1st John

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #10

WHAT CAN BE KNOWN

5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. 14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, 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 the petitions that we have asked of Him. 16 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. 17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death. 18 We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. 19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. 20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. 21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen. (1 John 5:13-21, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The great heart of God is revealed throughout Scripture. Remembering that the Holy Spirit is really the Author of Scripture, it becomes apparent that God has an intense interest in our spiritual well being. Take, for example, this wonderful book of First John. It was written in order that we might have fellowship with the Father and the Son (1:3). It also was written in order that our joy might be brought to a full measure (1:4). Again, its stated objective is that we do not sin (2:1). And finally, it is written in order that we might know we have eternal life. While John the beloved himself intended that these objectives be met, his intentions were

brought into being by the greater intention of Almighty God. These things are, in fact, what the Lord desires for us. More than that, they are what He is intent on us realizing. He therefore speaks of them, and assures our hearts they are all within our reach. They are no mere dream. Does that not testify to a great God, a loving God, and one of great compassion and interest?

Throughout this brief, but powerful, volume, the importance of spiritual knowledge is emphasized. The knowledge of reference is not heady, or merely intellectual. Rather, it is an inner knowledge that is related to confidence, assurance, boldness, and persuasion.

The Prevalence of Knowing

Using the King James Version as a base, the word “*know*” is mentioned twenty-seven times in this book (2:3,4,5,18,20,21,29; 3:2,5,14,15,19,24; 4:2,6,13; 5:2,13,15,17,19,20). “*Knoweth*” is used six times (2:11; 3:1,20; 4:6,7,8). “*Known*” is used five times (2:13,14; 3:6; 4:16). The NIV uses “*know*” thirty-three times, “*known*” five times, and “*knows*” three times.

This is not second-hand knowledge, derived by mental disciplines and research. Such knowledge is, indeed, lawful, but it cannot produce confidence, assurance, or boldness in the presence of the Lord. One may very well know all there is to know about narcotics: how they are made, and what dreadful results they yield in those taking them. Yet, that knowledge cannot impart moral power to the individual. It cannot so strengthen the will, and fortify the resolve. In this sense of knowledge, there are precious few people who have fallen into sin who did not have a good degree of theoretical or speculative knowledge concerning their vice. It could not keep them from sin.

There Are Higher Examples

I have no doubt but that the Scribes and Pharisees would blend very well with the theological institutions of our day. They did not, however, have any real utility in the matter of salvation, nor were they suitable examples to be followed.

But there is no need for us to go to such paradigms to show the inferiority of philosophical language. We have the Old Covenant as a God-ordained example of the need for something more than information and human reasoning. In the Law, precise instruction was given. The details were remarkable, providing examples, explanation and other factors required for human reasoning. The outcome of obeying these ordinances was given, together with the penalties for violating them—and there was no ambiguity in either. Summarizing the emphasis of the Law, which comprised the words of the covenant, the Spirit declares, “*for by the law is the knowledge of sin*” (Rom 3:20).

No Saving Power

This “*knowledge*,” however, possessed no saving qualities. That is why this particular expression is preceded by the words, “*Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight*,” It is not the type of knowledge delineated in the book of First John. Nor, indeed, is it the kind chronicled in the New Covenant, i.e., “*they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them*” (Jer 31:34).

The Scribes and Pharisees

This valid, yet lower, form of knowledge can be mastered by men in the flesh—at least that appears to be the case. Just as king Agrippa was an “*expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews*” (Acts 26:3), so the Scribes and Pharisees were expert in the text and ordinances of the Law. For this reason, and this reason alone, Jesus said they sat “*in Moses’ seat*” (Matt 23:2). Their expertise in the Law was so minute, that Jesus said, “*All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do*” (23:3). Yet, that knowledge was not sufficient to extricate the soul from sin. Thus, He continued, “*but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers*” (23:3-4). I have no doubt but that the Scribes and Pharisees would blend very well with the theological institutions of our day. They did not, however, have any real utility in the matter of salvation, nor were they suitable examples to be followed.

Faith Reasons Differently

Without belaboring the point, there is a higher form of knowledge. Its foundation is not reason, but faith—which is a higher form of rationale. Faith simply does not think after the manner of the flesh. It sees no inhibition in a man whose body is “*as good as dead*” and a woman whose womb is “*barren,*” bringing a son into the world. It does not view a giant seasoned warrior as a formidable opponent, or great and high walls around a city as a serious obstacle. When confronting a great Sea, faith reasons you can pass through it on dry ground. It can trust in a God that can be neither seen nor touched with the senses. It finds no difficulty in believing an atonement has been accomplished that cannot be confirmed by a single piece of tangible evidence. Yet, faith reasons in such a manner as to propel the individual into the ways of the Lord, and that with great joy.

Knowledge Based Upon Faith

Our text speaks of this kind of knowledge—knowledge that is based upon believing God. Throughout this Epistle, the Spirit has affirmed the reality of both God and Christ. He has buttressed our faith by confirming Christ came into the world for a reason, and that the reason was accomplished. With great power, He has declared there are people who are born of God. They are the children of God, have access to God, and have been made superior to Satan and all of His devices. The only proof we have of these things is the testimony of God! But, that is all the confirmation faith requires—a word from God! Upon the basis of such a word, faith reasons, “*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*” (Phil 4:13).

For this reason, knowledge is something to be added to faith (2 Pet 1:5). It does not cause faith to come, but rather is produced in the energy of faith. Men do not believe because they know the truth. Rather, they know the truth because they have believed. This arrangement demands that Divine affirmation be believed before the knowledge in question can be acquired. Jesus declared this when He said, “*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” NKJV (John 8:31-32). “Abiding” is another view of believing or trusting, showing the impact of faith upon the individual possessing it.

A Reaffirmation

I must again affirm that this kind of knowledge—the knowledge that is founded upon faith—is the subject of this study. It is not academic, or impractical, knowledge. It is not the imagined knowledge of the philosopher, which is speculative—like a man groping in a dark and unfamiliar place. You can come to God on the basis of true knowledge. You can resist the devil in its power, and please the Lord in your life.

If the realities the Spirit has affirmed are really believed, the benefits promised can be really known! The believer can have confidence they are possessed, and be assured of their reality and effectiveness. But the concentration must be placed on believing, not on knowing. When you believe “*the record God has given of His Son,*” your heart is thereby prepared for the knowledge. That knowledge is then personalized to you.

KNOWING YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE

Here is a book that has been written to persuade those in Christ that they have eternal life. This is, then, something the Father desires for us. It also is something inherent in salvation—something Christ’s atonement brings with it.

“13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.” The tender regard the Lord has for us is apparent in this expression. Here is a book that has been written to persuade those in Christ that they have eternal life. This is, then, something the Father desires for us. It also is something inherent in salvation—something Christ’s atonement brings with it. We may also conclude the knowledge of eternal life is required for us to live triumphantly in this present evil world. It is axiomatic that God makes no provisions that are not practical and essential.

Believing on the Name of the Son

The language is strange to the legalist, for it is higher than he can reach. Believing on the name of the Son of God is being convinced in the heart that He is precisely the One declared by God. The Gospel, in its essence, is “*the record God has given of His Son.*” The “*name*” of the Son of God is the Person declared in that “*record,*” or testimony. In this instance, the word “*name*” does not denote an appellation or designation. It rather speaks of personage, celebrity, and reputation. It is WHO Jesus is and WHAT He has accomplished according to the will of God and in the behalf of the people. The individual believing on the name of the Son adheres to Him in that capacity, trusting wholly in Him for salvation in all of its varied aspects. The believer leans totally upon the Son for deliverance, guidance, tutelage, intercession, and strength.

The Gospel of John

In his Gospel, John had a similar objective. “*But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name*” (John 20:31). It is thought by many John’s Gospel was written to those who are not in Christ. There is, however, no Scriptural evidence to support this. It is more likely that it was written to fortify the faith of believers against the barrage of false teaching that was being leveled at them. That marvelous Gospel lifts high the Divinity and glory of Christ as a shining beacon in the midst of erroneous views of the Savior being perpetrated by men.

I can tell you from experience that it requires considerable effort to extricate ones self from the restrictive notion that Christ’s main attention is devoted to the lost. It is true that Jesus presented Himself as the Good Shepherd that left the ninety and nine sheep to seek and save the lost one (Luke 15:3-7). However, His primary residence was the sheepfold. And, when He found the lost sheep, that is where He returned. The shepherd did not live in the mountains. His primary identity is with the sheep.

The Centrality of Believing

The necessity of a strong faith, and of the knowledge we have eternal life, are central in spiritual life. The burden of the Apostolic writings is focused on producing these results. The awareness of this revolutionizes our approach to Scripture.

A Few Examples

As believers, we are told God's own righteousness will be imputed to us "*If we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead*" (Rom 4:24).

Those in Christ are not addressed as though they were already in heaven. Rather, we are told we will be saved "*If thou shalt . . . believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him (Christ) from the dead*" (Rom 10:9-10).

The matter of being joined together with those who have gone on to be with the Lord is also tied to believing. We are told God will bring those departed saints with Jesus, to be joined to us "*if we believe that Jesus died and rose again*" (1 Thess 4:14).

In this very Epistle, not taking our faith for granted, the Spirit reminds us that God's commandment is "*That we should believe on the name of the Son of God*" (1 John 3:23).

How is it that believing on the name of the Son of God is so rarely the subject of contemporary preaching, teaching, and writing? Why does it seem to be taken for granted that those who wear the name of Christ have reached the pinnacle of believing, and thus need to believe no more? Why have some demeaned believing by viewing it as a mere "step" in a series of responses culminating in initial salvation? Is it not true that every sensitive soul feels the need for stronger faith? Who is the trusting soul that sees no need for a more firm persuasion of the truth of Christ Jesus as declared in the Gospel?

The Western church has, indeed, fallen upon hard times. In a massive departure from the faith, little effort is being devoted to maturing and stabilizing the faith of the saints of God. Churches are filled with spiritually immature people, and most everyone knows it. Strong confidence, rejoicing in hope, and stability of soul are admittedly scarce. Rarely will you hear a word addressed to those who "*believe on the name of the Son of God,*" in order that they might "*know*" what they possess in Him. But this is the mind and manner of the Spirit, as made abundantly clear in the text before us.

We Are Being Changed

Jesus has finished His earthly work, but they have not finished their's. He has been glorified, but they have not. He is in heaven, but they remain in the world. It ought to be apparent that there is no room for indifference in them.

Those who "*believe in the name of the Son of God*" are in the process of being prepared for glory. They are being "*conformed to the image*" of God's Son (Rom 8:29), and being changed "*from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of our God*" (2 Cor 3:18). Jesus has finished His earthly work, but they have not finished their's. He has been glorified, but they have not. He is in heaven, but they

remain in the world. It ought to be apparent that there is no room for indifference in them. That is why great volumes of teaching are directed to the saints—those who believe on the name of the Son of God. There remains in the best of us remnants of unbelief that must be expelled.

Receiving A Greater Witness

To “*believe in the name of the Son of God*” is to trust in Christ Jesus as He has been declared in the Gospel. It is to receive the greater “*witness of God*,” and to shape our lives around Christ’s Person and work. For some, this is not sufficient. They imagine that verbal commitment to Jesus is the highest and most notable achievement by men. But this is not the case, for commitment to Christ and labor for Him are dependent upon something else. They are the fruit, and not the tree. They both spring from faith, and the persuasion that we have eternal life!

Paul’s Testimony

In explaining something of his own involvements with the Lord, Paul spoke of his own persuasion. “*I **know** whom I have believed and **am persuaded** that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day*” NKJV (1 Tim 1:15). Where such a conviction is lacking, living for Christ will become a burden, and salvation will be easily neglected. This accounts for the instability and vacillation of many professed believers.

Knowing we “*have eternal life*” is more a necessity than a luxury. The Spirit did not move John to write in order that we might enjoy a sort of spiritual hors d’oeuvre. The nature of life in this world demands that we be certain about having eternal life. As is evident from our text, it is possible to have eternal life and not know, or realize, it. But this is not at all a favorable condition. Too, because of the warfare of faith, it is possible for such wonderful knowledge to diminish, and even disappear from our conscience. Therefore we must be brought to this knowledge, then have our comprehension of it fortified by Divine affirmation.

Knowing That We Know Him

Knowing that we have eternal life is knowing that we know Him. As it is written, “*And hereby we do **know that we know Him**, if we keep His commandments*” (1 John 2:3). He does not say “obey,” but “*keep*,” which is an inward matter—something accomplished in the heart. This can only be achieved by faith.

Intuitive Knowledge

This is what might be called a settled intuitive, or instinctive, knowledge. By intuitive, I mean a direct knowledge that is not based upon rational thought and inference. This does not mean there is no place for rational thought and inference. It rather emphasizes that they are **confirming**, not foundational, of what we instinctively have been brought to know. Such knowledge is more related to believing, resulting in confidence and assurance.

Rationality, or the ability to reason, is involved, but at a much higher level. In spiritual life, faith is the fountain of saving knowledge, not natural reasoning.

To put it another way, knowing we have eternal life is actually **believing it more firmly**, for faith is the root of true spiritual knowledge. Knowing we have eternal life is being persuaded, or convinced, that we possess it. **There really is only one reason for believing, or knowing, we have eternal life—God has said so!** Again, these clear affirmations are in order. “*He who believes in the Son **has** everlasting life*” (John 3:36). “*He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me **has** everlasting life*” (John 5:24). “*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me **has***

everlasting life” (John 6:47). “*Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood **has** eternal life*” (John 6:54). “*And this is the testimony: that God **has** given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son*” (1 John 5:11).

Living In Persuasion

Knowing we have eternal life involves living in a full persuasion of that reality. Such wonderful knowledge brings with it confidence and hope. It enables the soul to stand in trial, and wax strong in spiritual battle. It dissolves the power of delusion, and empowers us to run the race, casting off every weight and the sin that so easily besets us. How marvelous is this knowledge!

It Cannot Be Proved In the Flesh

What sort of external or fleshly evidence could any person assume to present to confirm they have eternal life? What form of human rationality can be brought forward that can bring us to such a conclusion? Such wonderful knowledge is acquired by believing what the Lord has declared—such as is provided in this Epistle.

Let the person step forward who has been convinced he has eternal life through an apologetic argument. Which archaeological discovery has persuaded men they have everlasting life, or are in fellowship with the Living God through Christ and by the Holy Spirit?

Religious sophists boast of the effects apologetics, archaeological finds, and tangible evidences have had upon their faith. But which of them will say that the dead sea scrolls have confirmed to them they have eternal life? Let the person step forward who has been convinced he has eternal life through an apologetic argument. Which archaeological discovery has persuaded men they have everlasting life, or are in fellowship with the Living God through Christ and by the Holy Spirit? The very notion is so utterly absurd there is no further need to deal with it. Even those ascribing inordinate value to such things will not say that they made them sure they possess eternal life.

The Means of Knowing

There are two means employed in this Epistle for the accomplishment of the intended knowledge—i.e., knowing we have eternal life.

The Role and Power of Jesus

First, the indispensable role of Jesus is powerfully declared. He is absolutely central in our salvation. Consequently, there is no point in spiritual life where He recedes into the background, is given second place, or is to be taken for granted.

1 Jesus is “*that eternal life*” (1:2)

2 He is “*the Son of God*” (1:3,7)

3 He is “*the Christ*” (2:22; 5:1)

4 The blood of Jesus Christ “*cleanses us from all sin*” (1:7).

5 He is our “*Advocate*” with the Father (2:1).

6 He is “*the Righteous*” (2:1)

7 He is the “*Propitiation for our sins*” (2:2).

8 We shall be “*like Him*” (3:2).

9 He is “*pure*” (3:3).

10 He was manifested “*to take away our sins*” (3:5).

11 We “*live through Him*” (4:9).

12 He is the “*Savior of the world*” (4:14).

Evidence of Affiliation

Secondly, the Spirit holds before us the evidence of our affiliation with Christ. This confirmation is essential.

1 Keep His word (2:5)

2 Loving the brethren (2:10).

3 Doing the will of God (2:17).

4 Acknowledging the Son.

5 Doing righteousness (3:7).

6 Keeping His commandments (2:23; 3:24).

7 Loving in deed and in truth (3:18-19)

8 When we discerningly hear the Word of the Apostles (4:6)

9 Dwelling in love (4:16).

10 Overcoming the world (5:4-5).

11 Believing on the Son of God (5:10).

You will notice that all of these are spiritual in nature. They are things that cannot be substantiated in the flesh. They can only be confirmed by faith. That condition does not diminish the power of the knowledge affirmed. Rather, it proves the knowledge to be superior.

All of these are matters that can become clearer to us—and the more apparent they become, the more we will be convinced we “*have eternal life.*”

The Appointed Objective

By saying we can know we have eternal life, the Spirit has revealed God's objective for us. From the standpoint of our activity, our focus is to "*believe on the name of the son of God*" –to embrace Him more fully, see Him more clearly, and hear Him more precisely. The result of that is knowing we have eternal life. While the objective of this Epistle involves knowing we "*have eternal life*," the Spirit does not simply restate this over and over. Rather, He makes strong appeals to our faith, grounding it in solid Divine statements.

It is no wonder that such powerful affirmations are made by the spirit regarding the possession of eternal life. Although these have already been mentioned, they are worthy of reiteration. "*He who believes in the Son has everlasting life . . . he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life . . . Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life . . . Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life*" NKJV (John 3:36; 5:24; 6:47,54).

Death Cannot Terminate It

Further, this life will not be broken by death, which knowledge causes confidence to spring up in the heart. "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me **shall never die***" (John 11:25-26). Eternal life is not interrupted by death. Knowing God and Christ through vital union and fellowship is not suspended in death. That is why it is written, "*We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord*" (2 Cor 5:8). But it is not enough to simply hear these words, they must be believed, else we will not know we have eternal life.

The Reason for Defeat

Many a soul has been conquered by the devil because they did not know they possessed eternal life. Some have been subjected to such distorted and confused preaching and teaching that such knowledge is nearly impossible. However, if we do not know we have eternal life, and if we do not realize we are being fitted for glory and the possession of an "*eternal inheritance*," there really is no reason for life. Religion thus becomes an encumbrance, and satisfaction is sought elsewhere. That is why people embrace religious folly.

There Is Satisfaction to be Realized

However, if we choose to come to Jesus, and receive what He has been appointed to give us, we will realize a joy and satisfaction the world can neither conceive nor give. That is precisely why Jesus said, "*whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life*" (John 4:14). Make it your aim to know you have eternal life—to be persuaded in your heart that you possess it! God has moved holy men to write so you can know this. It will produce joyous fruitage within you. Knowing you have eternal life is a matter of Kingdom priority. Much depends upon your possession of this knowledge. The extent of your fellowship with God, your joy, and your confidence depend upon this vital life-giving knowledge.

ASKING IN CONFIDENCE

“ 14 And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.”

It is imperative that we avoid taking a view of this wonderful text that dulls its meaning, or puts it far from our thinking. Once again, we are dealing with Divine affirmations—utterances that cannot be shaken, and upon which faith can rest.

It may appear as though John has suddenly changed the subject—but he has not. He will now show us the impact of knowing we have eternal life. This is nothing less than the fruit of faith, and it is precious. First and foremost, it produces confidence “*before Him.*” Here is something that precious few have ever experienced—to stand before the Living God with assurance. Isaiah did not feel this way when he saw the Lord “*high and lifted up*” —at least not at first (Isa 6:5). Yet, this is the heritage of the people of God, to stand confidently before the Lord of glory.

Those acquainted with the Lord know that He is able to keep us from falling, and present us joyfully confident before Him. As it is written, “*Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy*” NKJV (Jude 24). Yet, such marvelous confidence can begin now, while we remain in the body! Many, untaught in the ways of the Lord, are not aware of this wonderful benefit.

Anything!

When it comes to the matter of prayer, there are not many places where we are encouraged to believe “*anything*” we ask can be received. God once asked Solomon, “*Ask! What shall I give you?*” NKJV (1 Kgs 3:5). There was one whom Jesus asked, “*What do you want Me to do for you?*” (Matt 20:32). While yet among them, and in anticipation of His return to heaven, Jesus told His Apostles, “*If you ask **anything** in My name, I will do it*” (John 14:14). Before Christ’s enthronement at the right hand of God, such Divine commitments were rare, indeed. Our text, however, shows they have become common to those who live by faith.

But our text puts the promise within our reach: “*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.*” NKJV It is imperative that we avoid taking a view of this wonderful text that dulls its meaning, or puts it far from our thinking. Once again, we are dealing with Divine affirmations—utterances that cannot be shaken, and upon which faith can rest.

There Are Conditions

There are two conditions attached to these statements. First, “*If we ask any thing according to His will .*” Second, “*if we know that He hear us .*” You must be convinced in your heart of the truth of these assertions. If the conditions are met, the promises will be realized! No person of sound spiritual mind can deny this.

According to His Will

God Himself operates in strict accordance with His will. As it is written, “*He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth*” (Dan 4:35). Further, that “*will*” is pleasing to God, being the expression of His own Person and purpose. Thus, the appointments associated with salvation are said to be “*according to **the good pleasure of His will***” (Eph 1:5).

That “will,” while a “mystery” before Christ (Eph 1:9), can now be known by the saints of God. As it is written, “*that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding*” (Col 1:9). When, therefore, we consider asking according to the will of God, we are not referring to a sort of stabbing in the dark. Asking “*according to His will*” is a form of fellowship with God. It is, from one perspective, seeing what He is doing, and asking to be involved in the process.

The Supreme Example

Jesus is the supreme Example of asking according to the will of God. The Divine will was the environment in which Jesus operated. In fact, He confined Himself to that area. As He said, “*I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things*” (John 8:28). And

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again, “*I speak that which I have seen with my Father*” (John 8:38). And again, “*The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise*” (John 5:19). And again, “*for I do always those things that please Him*” (John 8:29).

Knowing the will of God is more than intellectual acquaintance with that will. It encompasses being personally involved in that will, as was our blessed Lord: i.e., DOING the will of God (Matt 7:21; 12:50). Our Savior clearly declared this is what dominated everything He said and did. “*My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work . . . I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me . . . For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me*” (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38).

Asking Anything According to His Will

Asking something according to the will of God, therefore, is the result of abiding in the will, doing it, and shaping our lives around it. It assumes a preoccupation with that will, and a hearty submission to it. A promise of the magnitude of the one we are considering, cannot be based upon some mere intellectual and casual acquaintance with the text of Scripture.

And how is it that a mortal can ask “*anything according to His will?*” A large part of it is **knowing we have eternal life** –which is the point of this text. Such knowledge brings with it an acquaintance with the Lord—a understanding of His “*ways*” (Psa 103:7; Isa 2:3; Micah 4:2). Our familiarity with God, or lack thereof, shapes both the content and tone of our prayers. Our desires are also determined by the degree of our knowledge of God’s ways. **Remember, God’s will is within the perimeter of His ways.**

Asking something according to God’s will is desiring something He is pleased to give. It is seeking for things He has determined we are to have. It is reflecting His purpose in our prayer. It is no wonder we are taught to think within the framework of the will of God. “*For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that*” (James 4:15; 2 Sam 15:25,26;

Acts 18:21; Rom 1:10; 15:32; 1 Cor 4:19).

Our text says if that condition is met, “*He hears us.*” NKJV This does not refer to a mere knowledge that we have said something. Hearing, in this instance, means focused hearing—that God pays special attention to what is being said. For example, when Israel murmured, “*the Lord heard it,*” and “*His anger was kindled*” (Num 11:1). Too, when Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because “*he had married an Ethiopian woman,*” “*the Lord heard it*” (Num 12:1-2). On the other hand, the Lord “*heard*” the cries of a believing poor man, and “*saved him out of all his troubles*” (Psa 34:6). The Lord, indeed, “*heareth the poor, and despiseth not His prisoners*” (Psa 69:33). In this sense, God “*hears the prayer of the righteous*” (Prov 15:29), because His ear is attentive to them (Psa 34:15; 1 Pet 3:12).

Therefore, by saying “*He heareth us,*” we are to understand our prayer is acknowledged by the Lord. He listens attentively to such prayers, devoting His attention to them. Such prayers are not uttered in vain, praise the Lord.

Knowing He Hears Us

But the matter does not end there. It is not enough that our prayers are heard, they will be granted! That is the promise of our text. “*And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.*” The Spirit is very precise in the statement of this reality. He does not say if the Lord hears us He will answer us. Rather, He focuses on our knowledge, or persuasion, that He has heard us: i.e., “*If we know that He hear us.*” He will not allow us to drift into philosophical thought on this matter, but draws us back to the knowledge that springs from faith.

Again, the example set before us is the Lord Jesus Himself. Hear Him as He speaks to the Father. “*Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me. And **IKNEW** that Thou hearest Me always*” (John 11:41-42).

Confident Asking

In Christ both Jews and Gentiles “*have access by one Spirit unto the Father*” (Eph 2:18). Again, it is written, “*By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand*” (Rom 5:2). The great dispensary of grace—“*the throne of grace*” — is open to all who are in Christ Jesus. What is more, the Savior who is seated upon that throne is able to be “*touched with the feeling of our infirmities*” (Heb 4:15). In view of this wonderful circumstance, we are urged to “*come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*” (Heb 4:16).

But we are not speaking of a mere formality. While relatively unknown among believers, it is possible to pray confidently—within the will of God, and with a sense of expectancy. Thus, it is written, “*we have boldness and access **with confidence** through faith in Him*” NKJV (Eph 3:12). If, therefore, we are not able to come boldly, or we lack confidence, it is NOT because there is no provision in Christ for such things.

Behind this wonderful promise is the assumption that believing on the name of the Son of God moves us into the heart of God’s will. It will not allow us to seek our own selfish will, but joyfully involves us in the purpose of God. Faith will never take us outside of the will of God. Only unbelief can do that. Further, faith will always push us toward the center of God’s good will and eternal purpose, never placing us at variance with the good and acceptable, and perfect will of God. While this ought to be apparent to all of us, contemporary religion has made it exceedingly difficult to maintain this awareness. Such vain religion tends to lull men

into “*the sleep of death*” (Psa 13:3), so they become insensitive to the Word of God. Thus enslavement to sin becomes inevitable.

The Spirit will now provide us a concrete example of this truth—namely, that God hears and grants the petitions that are pleasing in His sight. As you might expect, the example will prove challenging to us. He will not set some simplistic matter before us, but will speak of things that are lofty and require a strong and unwavering faith. Rest assured, what is said is within your reach, else the Spirit would not have moved John to affirm it.

A VIRTUALLY UNTAPPED RESOURCE OF POWER

“16 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. 17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.”

A Remarkable Text!

That this is an remarkable text cannot be denied. It is so remarkable, that many believers have never heard a single word said concerning it. Others are not even aware it is in the Word of God.

That this is an remarkable text cannot be denied. It is so remarkable, that many believers have never heard a single word said concerning it. Others are not even aware it is in the Word of God. The text is powerful in every version of Scripture. Allow me to give you a few of them. “*If any one sees his brother committing what is not a mortal sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not mortal.*” RSV “*If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death.*” NASB “*If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life.*” NIV “*If a man sees his brother doing a sin which is not bad enough for death, let him make a prayer to God, and God will give life to him whose sin was not bad enough for death.*” Basic Bible English “*If you see a Christian brother or sister sinning in a way that does not lead to death, you should pray, and God will give that person life.*” New Living Translation “*If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that is not a deadly sin, he has only to pray, and God will give life to this brother.*” New Jerusalem Bible

Here, then, is an example of receiving what is asked—and a notable example it is. Further, it represents something of great concern to all believers. In it we also see the believer working together with God. Additionally, the importance of being retrieved from sin is seen, and the essentiality of spiritual life.

The immediate reaction of some to this text is to identify what it does NOT mean. Thus some, supposing to add strength to the text, emphasize that this does not negate the human will, i.e., the will of the transgressor. Whatever truth there may be in that observation, it is not the focus of this text. Nor, indeed, is there the slightest hint that it should be a dominating consideration in our embrace of the text.

Seeing A Brother Sin

First, the text confirms a mutual interest of the brethren in one another: *“If anyone sees his brother sinning.”* This is not a look-for-a-fault gaze, but one that has a mind to the safe arrival of brethren in glory. Seeing a brother sin is something that saddens the heart, and awakens profound spiritual concern. In this case, the one beholding the sin does not run to the offender and point out the error of his way.

Among those with whom I have walked, I have rarely heard this text emphasized. Because there is a marked tendency toward legalism, the emphasis has largely been placed on confrontation and possible expulsion from the assembly. Indeed, those responses are addressed in the Scriptures, and are not to be despised (Matt 18:15-18; 1 Cor 5:4-5; Gal 6:1). However, remember the Spirit has been emphasizing the love of the brethren in this text. He therefore sets before us a primary means through which this love is expressed.

Sinning Unto Death

*“ 16 If any man see his brother sin a sin which is **not** unto death . . . There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.”* Immediately the Spirit informs us that all sin is not alike. There is a sin that is *“unto death,”* or leads to death. Such a transgression mandates the death of the one committing it, and no prayer can avert that decease. As affirmed later in this verse, *“There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.”* At once we see the seriousness of it, and the necessity of a distance between ourselves and iniquity. There is a sin that renders prayer for the individual pointless, for a line has been crossed, and death is the sure result.

The Spirit does not precisely define this sin so that it may be catalogued, and thus avoided by mere routine. Nor, does He guarantee that such a sin will be apparent to us. He merely states that we should not expect our prayers to be guaranteed of effectiveness in all cases. There are some cases that cannot be helped.

Some Examples of Sinning Unto Death

There is also the matter of a sin that leads to ultimate condemnation—a sin from which recovery is not possible. In this case, spiritual life cannot be conferred upon the transgressing one under any circumstances.

THE FLOOD. We do have some examples in Scripture of sins that led to death. They are sobering when considered, and should instill within us a certain fear of living in a haphazard manner. A large example of such sin can be found in the days of Noah. In that case, sin was so gross, and of such magnitude, that the demise of the entire world came to pass. It was the sin of the people that led to their death, which was the consequence of their transgression (Gen 6:5-7). Once the decree of death was issued, there was no possibility that it could be reversed.

ER AND ONAN. Er was Judah’s firstborn son. The Scripture tells us *“he was wicked in the sight of the Lord.”* The exact nature of his wickedness is not specified, but the result of it is. It was sin leading to death, for it is written, *“and the Lord slew him”* (Gen 38:7). According to the Law, Judah told Onan to go in to his brother’s wife, in order that she might have seed. When he refused to do consummate this deed it is written, *“the thing which he did displeased the LORD; therefore He killed him also”* (Gen 38:9-10). His sin led to his death.

JUDAS. The dreadful sin of Judas necessarily led to his own death. Of him it is written,

“from which (the Apostleship) Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place” (Acts 1:25). The very phraseology of the text strikes fear into lethargic hearts. There is a place reserved for those committing such transgressions—and it is not in heaven. Further, their sin leads to their death of both body and soul.

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA. On the surface, the sin of Ananias and Sapphira may not appear to be worthy of death—but that is only according to appearance. No exhortation was given to them to repent. They chose to lie to the Holy Spirit and to God, and that led to their death (Acts 5:5-11). No prayer was made for them, and no attempt made to recover them.

SOME AT CORINTH. The church at Corinth came behind in no “gift,” but they were dreadfully behind in the matter of spiritual maturity (1 Cor 1:7; 3:1-4). Of particular note is their conduct at the Lord’s table. They were so dishonoring of the Lord, that some of them died because of it. It is written, “For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died” NRSV (1 Cor 11:29-30).

THE ULTIMATE SIN. There is also the matter of a sin that leads to ultimate condemnation—a sin from which recovery is not possible. In this case, spiritual life cannot be conferred upon the transgressing one under any circumstances. The identity of this sin is general. “But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin” NIV (Mk 3:29). Again, Jesus said, “Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come” (Matt 12:32). This sin cannot be the rejection of Christ, as some suppose, for that can be forgiven upon repentance and faith. At precisely what point this sin occurs, we do not know. But once it occurs, prayer is of no avail for the person. The sin has led to ultimate death.

Thus the Spirit informs us our prayers are not omnipotent. There are people who cannot be helped by them. That is, however, an exception, and not the rule. He will now tell us what the confident prayer of a righteous man can do.

Beyond the Point of Prayer

There are some whose sin has carried them beyond the point of prayer. Such are in a place where intercession by the most holy individual is of no avail. The Lord does not speak often of such people, nor with lengthy discourses. He does, however, say enough so we can be aware of where sin can lead a person or a people.

On one occasion, God said to Jeremiah, “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). Again He said, “Therefore **pray not** thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble” (11:14). And again, “Then said the LORD unto me, **Pray not** for this people for their good” (14:11). Emphasizing the dreadful condition in which Israel had descended, the Lord added, “Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth” (Jer 15:1). To Ezekiel, the Lord said of wayward Israel, “Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD” (Ezek 14:14). Again, “Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness” (Ezek 14:20).

In my judgment, the average professing Christian needs more discernment in these two

areas: the seriousness of sin, and the power of prayer. Our text expands the horizon of both subjects. Let none imagine they can trifle with sin! Nor, indeed, let any sensitive soul delay praying for those who are sinning!

Asking for the Sinning Brother

“ 16 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death.” Here is a marvelous promise! A brother in retrogressive motion, falling backward, as it were, by personal sin, can be rescued from that fall by the prayer of a kindred believer. At once we see that sin begins to remove spiritual life from us, so that it must be restored. Further, the sinning brother may be so dull of heart and conscience that he is completely insensitive to his need. He also may not readily hear exhortation or rebuke. But that is not the end of the matter! God will give the brother life for our sake! Hallelujah!

There also comes a point where the sinning “brother” is impotent to pray for himself. If he is going to be helped, it will be by the prayers of the godly. Sin dulls the conscience, weakens the soul, and causes the person to think only of himself and this world.

I have declared this to be a virtually untapped resource of spiritual power. Rarely is such a recourse found among professed believers. But that is not a necessary condition, and can be remedied by faith. The Lord was merciful to Job’s condemning friends when Job prayed for them (Job 42:8-10). God, you will remember, spared Israel because of Moses’ prayer (Ex 32:9-14). The curse brought upon Miriam because of her disdain for her brother Moses, was reversed by his prayer (Num 12:1-14). Israel was also spared because of the effectual prayers of Samuel (1 Sam 12:19-23).

In my judgment, the contemporary church has so diverted the attention of the people from Divine fellowship, that the thought expressed in this text can scarcely enter their minds. An institutional mind set does not think after this manner. Faith, however, will bring you to the point where you can not only “see” a brother sin, but “ask” in his behalf.

He Shall Give Him Life

“ . . . he (the one seeing the brother sin) shall ask and God will for him (because of the one doing the asking) give life to those who commit sin not leading to death.” NASB I have already mentioned people who were blessed because of the faith and prayer of another. Now our text makes the matter personal. **Because of the individual praying, the one needing recovery will be given life!**

Remember, this is the Spirit’s exposition of verses 14-15. “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.”

Life Is Needed

Among other things, we see from this text that sin directly impacts upon spiritual life. Whatever the doctrines of men may conclude about believers, or brethren, sinning, we must pay strict heed to this text. It tells us such people need “life” –life from God! The gravity of the situation is confirmed by the total absence in Scripture of any hope for those who are dead toward God. Sin, like a gigantic grave, causes men to be swallowed by death. As soon as a person in Christ begins to sin, they begin to die. **The life of God cannot be sustained while the individual is sinning.**

The Impotence of the Sinner

There also comes a point where the sinning “brother” is impotent to pray for himself. If he is

going to be helped, it will be by the prayers of the godly. Sin dulls the conscience, weakens the soul, and causes the person to think only of himself and this world. I do not believe this is generally known, for sin is altogether too rampant in the professed church. It has absorbed too many of the world's manners.

He WILL ask

The phraseology of the passage is salient. He does not say the person seeing his brother sin OUGHT to ask, but that he “*WILL ask.*” Further, the issue is not WHAT he will ask, he “*will ask*” for LIFE, which will be given. The prayer will also be focused, and not like an aimless cloud floating about in the heavens—it is for a specific sinning brother. It is as though he were prompted to do so by the Spirit—moved along in the heavenly places to work together with God. The prayer is more instinctive, or intuitive, than intentional. By that, I mean the pray is a result of walking with God, dwelling in heavenly places, and living by faith. It is a product of New Covenant life.

Who can estimate the joy produced by such an answered prayer—by life being given to a sinning brother! In such a prayer the two cardinal points of First John are lived out. (1) Believing on the name of the Lord Jesus, and (2) Loving the brethren.

JAMES' EXAMPLE. James provides us with an example of this kind of prayer. He refers to it as “*the prayer of faith.*” It is my understanding that this is the kind of prayer being addressed by our text. It is one prayed in confidence, and within the will of God. It cannot be prayed mechanically, or without the involvement of the heart. Further, it is prompted by faith. Of this type of prayer, James writes, “*and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him*” NASB (James 5:16) There life is given because of the prayer of another. The ailing believer was raised from his sickness, and his sins were forgiven. That is life. It would be well for those in Christ Jesus to ponder this text often.

Later in this same passage, James says much the same thing as is stated in our text. “*Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover*

Notice, the Holy Spirit carefully guards against us developing a casual attitude about sin. He does not say “**MOST** sin is not unto death,” but “*there is A sin that is not unto death.*”

Neither, indeed, does He say “**ALL** sin is not unto death,” but “*there is A sin that is not unto death.*”

a multitude of sins” NKJV (James 5:19-20). As in our First John text, the effective return of an erring one is traced to a single individual, not to group prayers: i.e., “*any man . . . someone.*” How appropriate and challenging are the words preceding the James' text cited above. The whole passage is a fitting commentary on the text we are considering. “*The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins*” NKJV (James 5:15b-20). What a marvelous stimulus to faith! May you explore the possibilities here declared.

All Unrighteousness Is Sin

“17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.” The recovery from sin thus described is not intended to diminish the heinousness of sin to us. Sin is to be hated, and its consequences to be feared. Although there is some sin that can be resolved, and other sin which cannot, still all sin has the same essential character. It is *“unrighteousness.”* This word—*“unrighteousness”*—means wrongfulness. It is wrong because it does not square with the Law of God or the character of God, which is reflected in the Law. *“Unrighteousness”* is conduct that is unlike that of God Himself. Let it be clear in your mind: anything that is unlike God, or that conflicts with His holy Law, is sin.

Lest all hope be dashed to the ground, and yet compelling us to take a most serious view of sin, the Spirit adds, *“and there is a sin **not** unto death.”* There is a sin from which recovery is possible. There is a sin for which the prayers of the faithful avail. Which sin is it? We do well to hope and pray it is the one we have committed!

Notice, the Holy Spirit carefully guards against us developing a casual attitude about sin. He does not say *“MOST sin is not unto death,”* but *“there is A sin that is not unto death.”* Neither, indeed, does He say *“ALL sin is not unto death,”* but *“there is A sin that is not unto death.”* No person believing this word can feel comfortable in sin of any measure—not if their heart is sensitive. Too, there is a ray of hope held out for the person walking in the light, that his prayer may be the means of recovery. How blessed ponder this truth.

Adding to the sobriety of this text is the affirmation that attends the announcement of the effectiveness of the Gospel of Christ. *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness”* NKJV (Rom 1:18). The worst possible view of the character of sin must be embraced by the believer—*“unrighteousness.”* Here is something that is *done* that, by its very nature, incurred the wrath of God. *“But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but **obey unrighteousness**, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile”* (Rom 2:8-9).

Thus, the Spirit has sensitized our hearts to the absolute seriousness of sin, and to the relevance of prayers for those whose sin does not lead to inevitable death. He has so directed our thinking as to discourage minimizing the enormity of sin or exaggerating the effectiveness of prayer. A sinning brother is always serious, and must never be viewed as ordinary or acceptable in any way. On the other hand, our prayers, while infinitely more effective than men are prone to think, are always subject to the will of God. There are some matters that cannot be resolved by prayer. However, bless God, there are cases that can be effectively changed by the prayers of righteous people. Such prayers require discernment (see a brother sin), and asking according to the will of God. Both of these are the result of a strong faith. They are part of the heritage belonging to those who believe on Christ, and are to be pursued with zeal.

A RESTATEMENT OF THE CASE

“18 We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.” This is a restatement of a most marvelous truth, and an enhancement of it as well. Earlier we read, *“Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God”* (3:9). The *“new man”* is the matter in reference, not the total human personality (which is comprised of both the *“old”* and *“new”* men (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10). There is a *“another law”* in our members that wars against the law of our mind (Rom 7:23). But it is not part of, nor does it reside in, the *“new man,”* or what is

“born of God.” It is true that *“evil is present”* with us (Rom 7:21). But it is not resident in the *“Divine nature,”* of which we are made partakers (2 Pet 1:4). The part of you that is *“in Christ”* has no evil in it, and thus *“cannot sin.”*

Those who insist on translating these verses (3:9; 4:18) *“go on sinning NIV ,”* or *“sin habitually,”* or *“does not have the habit of sin”* Robertson , have done us no favor. They argue from the strength of the language tense (Linear present active indicative). But their argument is weak. The word for *“commit”* (3:9) is **poiei/** (poi-e-i), and is used thirty-two times in Scriptures. It does mean continual, or *“from now on.”* The notion of *“habit”* is not, however, resident in the word as used by the Spirit. The idea is that of the introduction of a new life, that makes no allowance for sin—not even a single sin.

The believer is actually cast upon the horns of a dilemma. Within him are two competing natures, with two differing sets of desires and capabilities. They are the *“flesh”* and the *“Spirit,”* the *“new man”* and the *“old man,”* the *“law of the spirit of life”* and the *“law of sin and death.”*

“Whoever is born of God” is the *“new creation”* (2 Cor 5:17). It is the part of us that is *“one spirit”* with the Lord (1 Cor 6:17). It is the *“new man”* that is to be *“put on”* (Eph 4:24), and the *“Divine nature”* of which we are made partakers (2 Pet 1:4). That part of us *“does not sin”* NKJV , else it would differ nothing from the flesh. What value is there in the new nature, if it also sins? If *“Christ in you”* can sin—even a single time—what have we gained by being in Christ and He in us?

Jesus Explains

The doctrine is best explained by the words of our Lord. *“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”* (Matt 7:17-18). Will theological sophists read this to mean a good tree can occasionally produce bad fruit? Or that the good tree produces mostly good fruit? It may interest you to know that precisely the same original words are used in the Matthew text as in First John 3:9 (i.e., *“cannot bring forth”*). The nature of the *“good tree”* forbids the production of bad fruit. So the nature of *“whoever is born of God”* forbids the expression of sin.

Walking in the Spirit

This same truth is taught elsewhere—namely that what is born of God does NOT commit sin. *“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you SHALL NOT fulfill the lust of the flesh”* NKJV (Gal 5:17). Fulfilling the lust of the flesh is but another view of sinning. Are there any who care to affirm this means we will *generally* not fulfill the lust of the flesh, but occasionally may commit sin? Who will say that one can, in fact, *“walk in the Spirit,”* and yet commit sin? Sin is always the result of walking in the flesh, and never occurs when we walk in the Spirit. You simply cannot walk in the Spirit and sin.

This is powerfully confirmed by James. *“But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death”* (James 1:14-15). And, who is the fool who will affirm that the new nature desires to sin, or has lusts that lead to death? If such were the case, the *“new creation”* would not be new at all, but only a replication of the condemned old nature.

The believer is actually cast upon the horns of a dilemma. Within him are two competing natures, with two differing sets of desires and capabilities. They are the *“flesh”* and the

“*Spirit*,” the “*new man*” and the “*old man*,” the “*law of the spirit of life*” and the “*law of sin and death*.” There are unalterable laws associated with these two natures— things that cannot be controverted. “*For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live*” NKJV (Rom 8:13).

Our text is confirming to our hearts the absolute surety and safety of walking in the Spirit and putting on the new man. While none of us can boast of being perfect in this area, all of us can truthfully say any transgression found in us is traced back to the “*old man*,” and never to the “*new man*.”

The Reason for the Circumstance

He Keeps Himself

The Spirit fortifies the statement with strong reasoning. The reason whoever is born of God sins not is traced to the nature of the new life: “*he who has been born of God keeps himself*.” The new creation is intrinsically alert and sensitive. We should not be surprised at this, for it is written, “*And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace*” (John 1:18). In Christ Jesus, there is a very real participation in the Divine nature.

Being born of God, and possessing the nature of God, the “*new man*” has no attraction to sin or the things of the world. It is suited for glory and not for this world. The one who “*keeps himself*,” will NOT follow a stranger (John 10:5).

One might wonder why such a statement is made after we have been told to pray for a brother we see sinning. Are these not contradictory thoughts? i.e., a brother sinning, and whatever is born of God NOT

There is nothing in the new creation that Satan can take hold of, or to which he can make an appeal. That new nature is suited for heaven, and has no affinity whatsoever with “*this present evil world*.” Thus the devil cannot bring the new creation— “*whoever is born of God*” —into his power.

sinning, but “*keeping himself*?” Not at all, for we have before seen that there is more to us than what is “*born of God*.” The remnants of sin remain in us, and must be subdued in the power of the Spirit. If we choose to live in the Spirit, we will be successful in subduing the flesh, or mortifying our members upon the earth (Col 3:5). That success, however, will be strictly determined by the degree to which we “*walk in the Spirit*.”

For clarity, our text is NOT saying *the Christian* cannot sin because he keeps himself. It is not *the believer* who cannot sin, but rather keeps himself. Carefully the Spirit declares it is “*whoever is born of God*” that does not sin because he keeps himself. That is the “*newness of life*” in which you have been raised to walk (Rom 6:4). It is what is transferrable to glory.

The Wicked One Does Not Touch Him

“ . . . *and the wicked one does not touch him*.” There is a part of you to which the devil has no access—a part he cannot take hold of. If this were not the case, it would not be possible to “*not make room for the devil*” NRSV (Eph 4:27).

This text does not mean Satan does not stir up trouble for the saints, or that he cannot affect our earthly nature. Paul spoke of firm resolves he had made that were aborted because “*Satan hindered*” him (1 Thess 2:18). He testified of a grievous thorn he bore that was a “*messenger of Satan*” (1 Cor 12:7). But these do not violate our text, for they were all experiences in the body, not in the spirit.

The word “*touch*” does not mean a mere superficial or outward touch—although our text is true even in that sense. It means to take hold of or harm. In other words, Satan cannot have his way with “*whoever is born*” of God, because he has no access to him. There is nothing in the new creation that Satan can take hold of, or to which he can make an appeal. That new nature is suited for heaven, and has no affinity whatsoever with “*this present evil world.*” Thus the devil cannot bring the new creation— “*whoever is born of God*” —into his power.

Jesus also referred to this glorious condition. “*If anyone walks in the day, he DOES NOT stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him*” (John 11:9-10). Our Lord does not mean that such a person only stumbles occasionally, or that stumbling is not habitual. He means precisely what He says. There is nothing about the light that is conducive to stumbling! In our text, there is nothing about “*whoever is born of God*” that is inclined to, or can, sin. Nor, indeed, is there anything about the “*new man*” that is vulnerable to the enemy of our souls.

The Reason for the Statement

Our text brings great consolation to the believer. It confirms to the heart the superiority of Divine life, and the guarantee of its influence if we will walk in its power. You will never instill confidence in the people of God by telling them they will only sin occasionally, or that the “*newness of life*” they have received does not sin habitually. All of that nonsense may have an show of wisdom in the area of linguistics, but it is impotent in the matter of living unto God. The people of God do not need studies in language, but Divine affirmations their faith can grasp.

You have been given a new nature that is throughly acceptable to God. It is a nature with which the Holy Spirit can dwell, and to which He can witness. It is a nature that is not prone to sin, and to which Satan has no access. That is something you can believe! Launch out upon the truth of this and see if it is not true. We all know very well what the flesh, or “*old man,*” is capable of doing. It is time for us to learn more of the marvelous nature and capacity of the “*new man.*” There is an area to be explored with expectation.

CIRCUMSTANCES TO BE KNOWN

“***19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.***” This is New Covenant language: “*We know.*” In Christ we have been brought into the realm of surety. Here, where the truth is known, we have been “*made free.*” No longer are we characterized by the ignorance that dominated us when we were “*dead in trespasses and sins.*” The faith has brought us out of the philosophical and speculative pits, bringing us to a realm of clarity and assurance. At least twenty four times the Holy Spirit, speaking for the children of God, says “***WE KNOW.***” Not “*We think,*” or “*We have this opinion,*” but “***WE KNOW.***” This is the language of the redeemed! These are things we know.

- That the law speaks to those who are under the law, to stop their mouths and render them guilty before God (Rom 3:19).
- That the Law is spiritual, but, of ourselves, we are carnal (Rom 7:14).

- That the whole creation is groaning in travail and expectation (Rom 8:22).
- That we do not know what we should pray for as we ought (Rom 8:26).

There are some matters in which opinion is not only worthless, but is like a robber that plunders the soul. In an academic world, men are anxious to hear the opinions of another on matters. But in Christ, we have received *“the love of the truth,”* and attach no value whatsoever to human opinion.

That God works all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28).

- That an idol is nothing (1 Cor 8:4).
- That our labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor 15:58).
- That if our present bodies are dissolved, we have another one in heaven (2 Cor 5:1).
- That no immoral person has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God (Eph 5:5).
- That the Law is good if a man use it lawfully (1 Tim 1:8).
- That we were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet 1:18).
- That it is the last time (1 John 2:18).
- That every that does righteousness is born of God (1 John 2:29).
- That when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).
- That Jesus was manifested to take away our sins (1 John 3:5).
- That no murderer has eternal life abiding in him (1 John 3:15).
- That we have passed from death unto life (1 John 3:24).
- That we are of the truth (1 John 3:19).
- That He abides in us (1 John 3:24).
- That we love the children of God (1 John 5:2).
- That if God hears our petitions we will have what we desired of Him (1 John 5:15).
- That whoever is born of God does not sin (1 John 5:18).
- That we are of God and the whole world lies in the power of the wicked one (1 John 5:19).
- That the Son of God is come and has given us an understanding (1 John 5:20).

When, therefore, our text says *“We know we are of God,”* it speaks in perfect harmony with the very nature of spiritual life. This is not a new aspect of the Kingdom of God. Let us have done with a vacillating form of religion that leaves the people uncertain of everything, groping in the dark for answers, and never in possession of confidence! There are some matters in which opinion is not only worthless, but is like a robber that plunders the soul. In an academic world, men are anxious to hear the opinions of another on matters. But in Christ, we have received *“the love of the truth,”* and attach no value whatsoever to human opinion.

We Are of God

To be “*of God*” equates to being “*born of God*.” Some more contemporary versions render the text, “*We know that we are God's children*” NRSV , and “*We know that we are children of God*” NIV . This is a wonderful bit of knowledge to possess, and appears to be as rare as it is wondrous.

Confidence that we are the sons of God is not a spiritual luxury. Our Lord’s first recorded temptation involved challenging that He was the Son of God (Matt 4:3,6). And, when He was upon the cross that point was once again challenged (Matt 27:40). Since “*the servant is not greater than his Lord*” (John 13:16; 15:20), we should expect Satan to make every effort to convince us we are not the children of God. Even though the professed church does not appear to know it, our adversary knows that when we are not confident of our relation to God, we are more vulnerable to his devices.

Earlier in this Epistle, the Spirit spoke of knowing we are of God in different language. “*My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him*” (3:19-20). That assurance, or spiritual knowledge that we are “*of God*,” has an incalculable effect on the way we live. It changes the way we read the Scriptures. It impacts upon what we pray for, and how we pray for it. Hope thrives in the midst of such knowledge, enabling the believer to triumph over the most difficult circumstances.

Do you know you are “*of God?*” Do you know that you are “*born of God?*” The salvation of God provides for such knowledge. It is not a luxury, but is the norm of the Kingdom. This is involved in “*they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them*” (Jer 31:34; Heb 8:11). In this knowledge, you can face the most fierce assaults of the devil, and gain the victory.

The World and the Wicked One

The knowledge we gain in Christ is extensive. Not only do we know we are “*of God*,” we know “*the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one*” NKJV . In saying “*in wickedness*,” the KJV emphasizes the effects of Satan’s influence. The other versions, which are technically more accurate, emphasize the source of the wickedness in the world. “*The whole world is under the control of the evil one.*” NIV “*The whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*” NASB, NRSV

Those outside of Christ are limited to the world, and are therefore under Satan’s control. He is unquestionably “*the god of this world*” and “*the prince of this world*” (2 Cor 4:4; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). You may recall when the devil tempted Jesus, he made reference to his dominion in this world. “*Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish"* NKJV (Lk 4:5-6). Our Lord did not object to Satan’s boast, knowing that this world had, in fact been given to the old serpent.

It is necessary to confirm the truth of this statement to our hearts. Here is a perspective of the whole of humanity outside of Christ. Everyone that is not “*born of God*,” regardless of their culture and seeming goodness, is under the dominion of Satan.

Because the entire world order has been rejected, Satan has been given control over it. As soon as a person becomes a friend of the world, he forges an alliance with Satan, and thus becomes the enemy of God (James 4:4). For this reason it was stated earlier, “*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the*

world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:15-16). Those who live according to the flesh are under Satan's control, for they are confined to this world. Further, if one is not "*of God,*" it is utterly impossible to live in any other way.

One of the great tragedies of our time is the absence of this knowledge in the professed church. The growing prevalence of worldly manners in the church confirms this truth is little known. Make no mistake about this. When professed believers go to the world for wisdom, it will come from the devil who controls the world. Whether it is economics, social relationships, institution building, or how to influence people, those who borrow from the world receive from Satan. For the believer, the only lasting knowledge is found in Christ Jesus. As it is written, "*Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*" (Col 2:3). If men want to obtain lasting wisdom and knowledge, it must be appropriated through Jesus Christ. It is all "*hidden*" in Him, so that it cannot be obtained by the disinterested or the unconverted.

Whatever is received from the world must be held tenuously and not trusted. Our quest is for "*every good gift and every perfect gift*" that "*is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning*" (James 1:17). These gifts equip us to "*use this world*" and "*not abuse it, for the fashion of this world passeth away*" (1 Cor 7:31). Our knowledge that "*the whole world lies in the power of the evil one*" assists us in conducting our lives in harmony with the good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom 12:2).

It is necessary to confirm the truth of this statement to our hearts. Here is a perspective of the whole of humanity outside of Christ. Everyone that is not "*born of God,*" regardless of their culture and seeming goodness, is under the dominion of Satan.

The Spirit strongly affirms this to be the case. The affirmation is made in strong and impressive words. "*Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others*" (Eph 2:2-3). Again it written, "*But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness*" (Rom 6:17-20). And again, "*For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another*" (Tit 3:3). These by no means exhaust the references to our condition apart from Christ. However, they will suffice to buttress the statement that "*the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.*" NKJV

If anyone still questions the reality of the truth declared, ponder the statements of these few texts. These clearly affirm the universality of sin and dominion to Satan, with not a solitary exception, saving the Lord Jesus Christ.

- We walked according to the course of this world, and according to the prince of the power of the air.
- Satan works in the children of disobedience, among whom we all were.
- We were by nature the children of wrath.
- We were the servants of sin.

- We had to be freed from sin.
- We yielded our capacities to uncleanness, and to progressing iniquity.
- We were free from righteousness.
- We were foolish and disobedient.
- We were deceived and served various lusts and pleasures.
- We lived in malice, envy, and hatred.

This is not the way *some* of us were, as though it represented only a portion of our race. This is the way we ALL were. We were ALL of the world, and consequently we were ALL under the dominion of Satan. How true, therefore it is: *“the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”* NIV Those who know they are of God, also know this to be the case.

ETERNAL LIFE! ETERNAL LIFE!

Jesus has come to make us spiritually intelligent—to make us knowledgeable according to the Spirit. This is a knowledge that yields certainty to the believer, giving him confidence to traffic in heavenly realms.

“ 20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.” Here again is something KNOWN by the household of faith. It is an area of general knowledge, and will be known if we believe on the name of the son of God and love the brethren. It should be apparent to all that the coming of Jesus Christ initially, and in the life of faith, is pivotal in Scripture. Here is where our faith can be strengthened, and our hope made more firm. Already we have been reminded Jesus was sent into the world that *“we might live through Him”* (4:9). He was also sent into the world to be *“the propitiation for our sins”* (4:10), and to be *“the Savior of the world.”* He was *“manifested to take away our sins”* (3:5), and to *“destroy the works of the devil”* (3:8). But there is even more!

Christ Jesus has a present ministry—one that is being executed in our behalf. He is, for example, our *“Advocate with the Father”* (2:1). Presently, because He is alive for ever more, His blood *“cleanses us from all sin”* (1:7,9). This verse deals with the present ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is based upon the accomplishments of His atoning death and destruction of the works of the devil—but it is going on right now.

The Son of God IS Come

Other versions read *“the Son of God has come.”* The reference is not to Christ’s earthly ministry and atoning death, as in previous references to His coming. This is a reference to what He is presently doing. The idea of the words *“has come”* is HE IS HERE NOW—WITH US. That is why I prefer the words *“IS come.”* In salvation, Christ takes up residency in the believer. It is, after all, *“Christ IN you”* which is *“the hope of glory”* (Col 1:27). This indwelling is not a luxury, but is critical to our acceptance by God. In order for His indwelling to be permanent and effective, we are *“strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man (in order) that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith”* (Eph 3:16-17). The results of Christ dwelling with us confirms its indispensability.

- Rooting and grounding in love (v 17).

- Comprehending “*the breadth, and length, and depth, and height*” of salvation (v 18).
- Knowing the love of Christ (v 19).
- Being filled with all the fulness of God (v 20).

When our text says “*the Son of God is come,*” it is referring to this essential indwelling: i.e., He has come to dwell within us. This is the personal aspect of our salvation—the participatory part. The Spirit will now elaborate on why the Son of God IS come, and is resident within us.

He Has Given Us An Understanding

Jesus has come to make us spiritually intelligent—to make us knowledgeable according to the Spirit. This is a knowledge that yields certainty to the believer, giving him confidence to traffic in heavenly realms. It is a knowledge that can only be given by Jesus. It cannot be attained through human disciple, or with natural resources. It is as high above us as the heavens are above the earth (Isa 55:9).

The Inadequacy of Natural Knowledge

This circumstance—Jesus coming to give us an understanding—confirms the inadequacy of natural knowledge. It is not that God gave us His Word, and we figure it all out with our minds. I realize some entertain this view, but it is still wrong. We need a Teacher—a heavenly Teacher! Some one must come and “*give us an understanding.*” If this were not the case, Jesus would not have come to “*give us an understanding.*” It is still true, “*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*” (1 Cor 2:14). This is confirmed by the failure of the world’s religious “*princes*” to recognize the Lord of glory. Even though they were disciplined students of Scripture, when confronted with the incarnate Word, they “*crucified the Lord of glory*” (1 Cor 2:8).

Even after we have been “*born of God*” and possess a new nature, we still must be taught by the Son of God. The “*natural man*” does not even have the capacity to be taught by Jesus. The new creation MUST be taught by Jesus! It must acquire an understanding from the Son of God.

Not A Strange Concept

This is not a strange concept. Elsewhere, the Spirit speaks of the effective teaching of the Son of God. “*This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, 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. But ye have not so LEARNED CHRIST; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been TAUGHT BY HIM, as the truth is in Jesus*” (Eph 4:17-21). Jesus’ most effective teaching is now taking place from within the saints of God.

That We May Know Him that Is True

The focus of the Son of God’s teaching is given. He does not come to merely teach us facts, but to bring us into an experiential association with the Living God: “*that we may know Him that is true.*”

Knowing God is integral to the New Covenant. It is one of

the key points of identity: *“for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest”* (Heb 8:11). Yet, this knowledge is not automatic, no can it be realized apart from Jesus giving us an understanding.

First, Jesus declared while yet in this world that He alone could effectively enable us to know God. *“All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him”* (Matt 11:27' Lk 10:22). Thus it is written, *“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him”* (John 1:18). Those objecting to this must affirm that God can be known independently of the tutelage of Jesus. That is a position that can only be embraced by unbelief, for Christ has spoken clearly on the matter, and the Spirit has moved His Apostles to elaborate upon it.

Integral to the New Covenant

Knowing God is integral to the New Covenant. It is one of the key points of identity: *“for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest”* (Heb 8:11). Yet, this knowledge is not automatic, no can it be realized apart from Jesus giving us an understanding. Not one single aspect of our new life excludes the Son of God—including the acquisition of the knowledge of God.

The believer knows the facts of the Gospel. He has a working knowledge of the Word of God, an area in which he grows and increases. He also has knowledge about his natural and spiritual self, and of the world which, in its entirety, lies under the power of the wicked one.

But over and above all of this, he knows God. The one who is *“born of God”* is acquainted with the ways of God as well as the Word of God. This knowledge of God is so effective it enables the believer to come into His presence with boldness. It is no marvel so much is said about *“the knowledge of God”* and *“the knowledge of the Lord”* 1 Cor 15:34; 2 Cor 10:5; Col 1:10; Eph 1:17; 2 Pet 1:2,3,8; 2:20; 3:18).

We Are In Him that Is True

Here, the position of the those who are *“born of God”* is compared with those who are not. Of the latter it is said, *“the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”* NIV But those who are born again are *“in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ.”* NKJV I understand this phrase to mean **we are in God through Jesus Christ**. Colossians 3:3 says it this way: *“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”* This truth is similarly stated in The first verse of First Thessalonians. *“To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”* Second Thessalonians 1:1 makes the same affirmation.

A Familiar Emphasis

This is a familiar aspect of redemptive truth. Previously in this Epistle, the Spirit has mentioned the children of God being *“IN”* 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”* (4:15-16). He has also spoken of *“abiding in Him”* (2:6,27,28; 3:6,24; 4:13). Colossians 2:6 admonishes us to *“walk in Him.”* We are also declared to be *“complete IN Him”* (Col 2:10). The point of our present text is that this reality has been facilitated and made clear to our hearts, by the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Although I have mentioned this previously, it bears repetition. This is the unity for which Jesus prayed on the eve of His betrayal. *“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will*

believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one , as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us , that the world may believe that You sent Me . . . I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:20-21,23).

It is not possible to be “*in God*” apart from Christ, or independently of the understanding He alone gives.

This is the True God

Quickly, the spirit demolishes any notion that this indispensable knowledge can be acquired in any other way. Unless the knowledge, or understanding, has come from Jesus Himself, it is not valid. All other purported knowledge of God is speculative and fallacious. Such fraudulent knowledge cannot enable one to escape the pollution of the world (2 Pet 2:20). Nor, indeed, can it bring to men “*all things that pertain to life and godliness*” (2 Pet 1:3).

Our acquaintance with God and position in Him can only be accomplished through the Lord Jesus Christ—the Anointed One. The statement, “*This is the true God,*” is another way of saying what Jesus affirmed in John 14:6. “*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*”

It is ever true, “*yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live*” NKJV (1 Cor 8:6). All other gods are nothing more than idols, even if they bear the same names as the real Father and Son. Jesus alone can effectively bring us into fellowship with the Father, or a true knowledge of Him.

When the text says “*this is the true God,*” the Lord Jesus Himself is also intended. There is no effectual knowledge of, or identity with, the Father apart from Him. He is our only means of acquiring the saving knowledge of God. He is able to give us this understanding because “*all fulness*” dwells in Him— “*the fulness of the Godhead bodily*” (Col 1:19; 2:9). Thus we are shut up to the Lord Jesus and His personal instruction for eternal life.

This Is Eternal Life

Knowing the Lord involves intimacy—familiarity that is personal and productive. It is a formal relationship, but not merely formal. That is, there is a certain structure within knowing God. It is bounded by faith and love, and made solid through spiritual knowledge. However, eternal life involves participation in the Divine nature and partaking of Christ Himself

Eternal life is not something merely conferred upon us. Nor, indeed, is it an impersonal condition into which we are locked upon a profession of faith. This text confirms it is the result of Christ giving us an understanding, that we might know God.

More Than A Relationship

Some have referred to this as a “relationship,” as compared with the adoption of a mere creed, or living under the imposition of law. While there is some truth to this expression, it falls far short of the reality of the case. The term “relationship” does not infer a favorable or enjoyable condition. Israel had a relationship with God through the Law—the First Covenant—

but it was neither favorable nor enjoyable for them because their hearts were far from the Lord. Judas had a relationship with Christ as an Apostle and the treasurer of the small band—but it was not a good one, for he was “*a devil*” from the beginning (John 6:70). Satan himself has a relationship to the Lord, being answerable to Him and strictly governed by Him.

Acquaintance and Fellowship

Eternal life is realized within us, through our acquaintance and fellowship with God through Christ Jesus. Jesus defined eternal life in His intercessory prayer. “*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent*” (John 17:3).

Knowing the Lord involves intimacy—familiarity that is personal and productive. It is a formal relationship, but not merely formal. That is, there is a certain structure within knowing God. It is bounded by faith and love, and made solid through spiritual knowledge. However, eternal life involves participation in the Divine nature and partaking of Christ Himself (2 Pet 1:4; Heb 3:14). There is a transformation that occurs within those possessing eternal life. Where this does not occur, God is not known. Where God is not known, Jesus has not given an understanding. Where Jesus has not given an understanding, there has been no believing on the name of the son of God.

Eternal Life Is Measured

Eternal life is measured. By that I mean it can be possessed in enlarged proportions. From one perspective, both life and death are fixed. That is, you are either alive or dead. From another perspective, however, there can be smaller or larger measures of both life and death. From one perspective, Lazarus was no more dead than Jairus’ daughter. From another, view, however, the length of time that he had been dead yielded greater results—mortification had set in, and his stank. Too, from one point of view, Jacob leaning on his staff and readying himself to die was no more alive than the two young sons of Joseph that he blessed. From another perspective, however, the young boys were more alive, with their life before them, while Jacob’s life on earth was now behind him.

So it is with eternal life. There are some who, like John, are closer to the Lord than others. There are also some like Laodicea, who are on the precipice of eternal ruin, even though recovery is possible. The phrase “*has everlasting life*” (John 3:36; 5:24; 6:47), does not mean all of it is possessed, or that there are no further aspects of it to be enjoyed. If God can be known more fully, eternal life can be experienced more extensively. If the understanding Jesus is giving continues to be received, then eternal life continues to expand and gain dominancy within us.

Paul once said he continued to aggressively pursue knowing Christ. “*Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord . . . I may win Christ . . . that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death*” (Phil 3:8-10).

Thus growth in eternal life is realized just as surely as growth in natural life is experienced. We can be more sensitive to God, more aware of His will, and more conscious our His acceptance of us. Significant advancement can be made in confidence, assurance, and hope.

A FINAL CHARGE

“21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.” Rarely will you hear such an admonition

to believers in our day! But this is a critical word. It is given with the preceding doctrine in mind. We have been told the Lord Jesus is here to give us an understanding. That understanding is a personal and effective knowledge of God. However, the Lord Jesus is not the only one offering understanding. There are also hosts of darkness perpetrating knowledge. In this world, believers occupy an intensely active domain. In it there are a host of false gods and lords. Thus it is written, *“For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. However not all men have this knowledge . . .”* (1 Cor 8:5-7).

Jesus spoke of *“false Christ’s”* (Matt 24:24). Paul wrote of some who preached *“another Jesus”* (2 Cor 11:4). The truth of the matter is that there are gross misrepresentations of both God and Christ in the professed Christian world. They are presented in *“another gospel”* (Gal 1:6). The God and Christ thus presented are not *“the true God,”* and eternal life cannot be realized through them.

Satan comes as *“an angel of light,”* and his ministers transform themselves into *“ministers of righteousness”* (2 Cor 11:14-15). These wolves in sheep’s clothing speak of God, Jesus, salvation, and eternal life. They use words like believe, hope, and obedience. But they are not from God, nor do they enable men to know Him. They are propagators of idols.

Believers are admonished to keep themselves from idols—to not allow their devotion to be turned to those who are *“no gods”* (Gal 4:8). They must not be distracted by the religion of the day, new fads, and popular doctrines. Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the Divinely appointed Administrator of the Kingdom. He alone can give us an understanding or, or acquaintance with, *“the God of salvation”* (Psa 68:20). Whoever cannot give that is not the real Jesus.

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” Cleave to the Lord with *“purpose of heart”* (Acts 11:23). Hear Him who is speaking from heaven (Heb 12:25). Hear Jesus and be taught by Him. He will acquaint you with God, thereby bringing eternal life to you. The result will be the joyful confidence of faith. It will cause you to triumph over every foe. It will bring effectiveness to your prayers.

CONCLUSION

Thus we have completed our overview of the book of First John. What a marvelous trip it has been! It has taken us to the very heart of life in Christ Jesus. The accent has been placed upon believing on the name of Jesus and loving the brethren of Jesus. The weight of our faith in Christ rests upon what God has declared about Him in the Gospel. We are depending on the effectiveness of both His death and His life. We are banking upon His advocacy before the throne, and His personal tutelage.

I exhort you to be strong in faith, thereby giving glory to God. Put to death the deeds of the body, and joyfully anticipate the return of your Lord. You are in a state of transition, being changed from glory to glory by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18). That process will continue as long as you maintain your trust in Christ and your love for the brethren. It will be aborted if your attention is diverted to the world, whether it be the religious world or the world of fleshly indulgence.