

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN
Introduction and 1 John 1:1-4
September 21, 1992

Intro: Last year we concluded our study in the Gospel of John. We started that study in the Fall of 1989, so it took us almost three years to get through that Gospel.

We had a little extra time last Spring, and so we went through 2 John, and then 3 John. I told those of you who were here then that we would be taking up 1 John this Fall.

1 John is very much like 2 and 3 John, short, very heartwarming, and very practical. Unlike 2 and 3 John which were addressed to individuals (2 John to an unnamed lady, and 2 John to a man named Gaius), 1 John was written to a group. Without going into a lot of detail, there is strong evidence for believing that this letter was addressed to the same churches to whom the Apostle John had earlier written the book of the Revelation. These were the churches where the Apostle John ministered in his later years. And so that accounts for the pastoral nature of the epistle. It is very likely that Ephesus was the place of writing.

It was written toward the close of the first century. The dates given vary from 90 to 100 A.D. Serious problems had arisen in the church. What Paul had told the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:29, 30 was certainly prophetic. But it is important for us to see that the aged Apostle John, probably in his 90's, did not try to expose the errors that were troubling the churches as much as he sought to teach the truth to expose the error with the truth. The best way to expose error is by teaching the truth. The entrance of God's Word gives light (Psa. 119:130), and in the light of God's Word we see light (Psa. 36:9). And so the best defense against error is the knowledge of the truth. This is the reason we need to know as much about our Bibles as we possibly can. There wouldn't be as much nonsense going on in churches today if the Lord's people really knew the Word of God.

One of the main problems that affected the early church came from a sect known as Gnostics. Their name comes from the Greek verb, to know (ginosko). The opposite of a Gnostic is an agnostic. An agnostic claims that he does not know, and often that it is impossible to know. Spurgeon like to apply the Latin equivalent for an agnostic which was an ignoramus. The Gnostics claimed, however, that they knew, that they knew more than the apostles knew, more than was taught in the Scriptures. And there were two main groups which were troubling the early Church:

- 1) The Cerentian Gnostics who taught that our Lord was just a man, but that the Spirit of God came upon Him at His baptism, and departed from Him at the Cross. And so it was a direct attack upon the Deity of our Lord.
- 2) The Doketics, on the other hand, denied the true humanity of Christ. They taught that matter, such as a human body, was evil, and therefore it was unthinkable that Deity would appear in human form. They taught that the Lord was something of a phantom, and that, if you reached out to touch Him, you would be grasping the air.

The Apostle John answers both of these heretical teachings in his epistles. But, as I have pointed out, he did not go into a thorough examination of their teaching; he simply declared the truth which would show that the Gnostics were wrong.

It is good for us to remember that false doctrine usually is focused upon some departure from the truth concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. And so

this makes it important for us to know the truth about Christ's Deity, and about His humanity. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to lead a person into error who knows and believes what the Scriptures teach about Christ. And when I say that, I have reference not only to Who He is, but to what He did, i.e., His work. So in your reading and study of the Scriptures, focus your attention always on Christ. When people come along with their strange doctrines, find out what they teach about Christ, if they teach anything at all about Him.

However, we need to recognize another fact which comes out in the epistle. It is this: It is impossible to have purity of life where the doctrine is false. And so in addition to the doctrinal error there was moral corruption in the churches. That is why John spoke so strongly about sin, and about the world, as well as referring at different points throughout the epistle to the anti-CHRIST teaching.

Let me mention one more thing before we turn to the text.

Perhaps you already know this. If not, you will soon be aware of it. One verb which appears almost 40 times in this epistle in various forms is the verb, know. It is generally thought, and I agree, that verse 13 of chapter 5 gives us the reason that John wrote this letter. (Read.) And so this means that John was dealing in this epistle with the doctrine of assurance. And assurance leads to fellowship which is John's emphasis in chapter 1.

Now let me contrast this with what we learned about the purpose that John had in writing the Gospel of John. Cf. John 20:30, 31.

His purpose in writing John's Gospel was primarily evangelistic. He wrote so that his readers would become convinced that Jesus was the Christ, and to show them that they could only have eternal life if they were trusting in Him. That is why the Gospel of John is an excellent book to get people to read who do not understand Who Christ is, and why He came to earth.

In 1 John, John was writing to a different group. He was writing to those who were trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. He was writing to teach them how they could know that they were saved. So 1 John is the book to get Christians to read, or professing Christians to read, to see the evidences, the proofs, that a person has eternal life. If a person is not really a Christian, reading 1 John may be used by the Lord to open his eyes to see that he needs Christ. On the other hand, if a person is a Christian, his faith will be confirmed and strengthened by reading and understanding what the Apostle John has written for us.

I hope this brief background will help you to understand why the Apostle John wrote as he did.

Let me encourage you to read this epistle as often as you can during the weeks we will be considering it together. It takes less than 20 minutes to read it aloud. All of us have that amount of time which gets away from us every day, and so reading 1 John will be a good way for us to redeem that time. Reading and re-reading the epistle will be a great blessing to you, will help you to understand it, and will enable you to profit more from our times together each Tuesday morning.

Now let us turn to the text.

The first four verses give us:

I. THE PROLOGUE (1 John 1:1-4).

A prologue is an introduction, or a preface. It helps us to understand what we are going to get in the epistle, or letter.

1:1 The Apostle John began this letter in much the same way that he began his Gospel. Cf. John 1:1, "In the beginning..." The Apostle John believed in the eternal existence of the Son of God. John did not think that He was one of God's creatures. John did not believe that Jesus was only a man until He was baptized, as the Cerentians did. He believed that Jesus Christ was eternally the Son of God.

Furthermore, John believed that our Lord was a real human being, not a phantom. He said that he (and others) had heard Him, had seen Him with their own eyes, had looked upon Him, and had even touched Him. This is a grand statement of the true humanity of our Lord.

So we have both Deity and Humanity in this first verse of the epistle.

The Gospel of John tells us some of the things that John had heard the Lord say. The Gospel of John tells us some of the many times that He had seen the Lord. The Gospel of John tells us that John leaned on our Lord's chest when they were at the table. On numerous occasions the Lord was touched by people. John was an eyewitness. He could speak with authority both as a man and as an apostle. Thus, his testimony would contradict the false teachings of the Gnostics.

An English commentator who wrote early in this century had this to say about the apostles:

The men who have founded Christianity and written the New Testament, were no fools. They knew what they were talking about. No dreamer, no fanatic, no deceiver since the world began, every wrote like the author of this Epistle. Every physical sense, every critical faculty of a sound and manly understanding, every honest conviction of the heart, every most searching and fiery test that can try the spirit of man, combine to assure us that the Apostles of Jesus Christ have told us the truth as they knew it about Him, and that things were even as they said and no otherwise. Ay, and God has borne witness to those faithful men through the ages since and put the seal to their testimony, or we should not be reading about these things to-day (Findlay, G. G., Fellowship in Life Eternal, pp. 88, 89).

Why did John repeat himself when he said, "Which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon"?

The word "seen" means that they personally, with their own eyes, had through seeing the Lord, become firmly convinced that He could be no other than what He claimed to be. "Looked upon" speaks of the fact that this conviction had come to them after seeing Him again and again over an extended period of time. So John was not relating something that someone else had told him; he had been with the Lord, had watched Him carefully, and was thoroughly convinced of His Deity and His humanity.

These words are repeated in verses 2 and 3. This shows how strongly convinced John was that he really knew Who the Lord was. This ought to strengthen our faith.

He called the Lord, "the Word of life." What did he mean by this?

"The Word" suggests in the Greek not just a single word, but the whole message. As we learn from Hebrews 1:2, God has spoken in His Son. In Christ we have the whole message of eternal life. He is the life! As we are going to learn in 1 John 5:12, if we have the Son, we have life; if we do not have the Son of God, we do not have life. He is the One Who gives life, Who is life, and Who has shown in His appearing what eternal life is. These are very profound statements, and yet meant for us to grasp.

1:2 Twice in this verse we are told that "the life was manifested," that is, He appeared. He eternally was "with the Father," but He appeared to us, the apostles, John said. And so we have in that word "manifested" the fact of the incarnation. His appearance as a Man in no way changed His Deity. Although the Lord assumed a human form, yet in His Deity He was exactly the same that He had been throughout eternity past "with the Father." Be sure that you have these truths well established in your heart and in your thinking, and never let anyone else make you think differently.

John had been telling his people how he came to know the Lord and to understand Who He was. But here he was also saying that it was not just for themselves that the apostles saw and knew the Lord, but they were commissioned to "bear witness, and shew" unto his readers "that eternal life." So what the Apostles learned by personal experience with the Lord, those who came after were to learn the same truths about the Lord through the words of the apostles. To "shew" is to declare, to make known through the spoken word and the written word.

But what was the ultimate purpose for which the apostles were to proclaim what they knew about "the Word of life"? The answer to that question is in verse 3.

1:3 "That ye also may have fellowship with us."

The object God had in sending His Son was to bring us into fellowship with Himself and His Son, a fellowship which we as believers share with the apostles and with each other.

What is "fellowship"?

When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, he said this in 1 Cor. 1:9:
 God is faithful, by whom ye were called
 into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The basic idea in this word fellowship is a participation. God has called us to participate in all that He is, and in all that His Son is and has done for us as our Savior. As difficult as it may be for us to comprehend what it means, we are in God, and God is in us. We are in Christ, and Christ is in us. And all that God is, and all that Christ is, are ours. And out of this comes our communion with the Members of the Godhead, and with all who are joined to Them like we are.

So it is right to say that God has saved us that we might have fellowship with Himself, and with Christ, not because He was lonesome, but that we might share in all that They are, and glorify Them and manifest Them to others, as the apostles have to us.

Once we know this, we can sing in a new way the words of that hymn, "What a fellowship, what a joy divine!" Probably one of the best illustrations of fellowship is to be seen when the Lord ministered to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He told them about Himself, and He left them with burning hearts. Dr. Ironside spoke of fellowship as those times when I tell you what I know about Christ, and you tell me what you know about Him, and then our hearts are blessed.

After this John added one more, very important verse to his prologue.

1:4 "And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."

The best MSS indicate that the word "your" should be our. What are we to learn from this?

To be sure, when we experience fellowship with God and with the Lord Jesus Christ, our joy is full. But John would have us to understand that there is always something lacking in the joy of any Christian, as great as it may be, if he is not passing on the message of Christ and seeing others brought into this blessed fellowship.

I have been speaking on Sunday morning from the book of Romans, chapter 1, emphasizing, as Paul did, his commission from God. And we saw last week that he felt himself a debtor to God to tell others about Christ because that was the only way they would ever be saved. Nothing brought him greater joy. Here in 1 John 1:4 the Apostle John was saying the same thing: "And these things write we unto you, that our joy may be full." To have a full joy means that it needs nothing else to make it complete.

Perhaps this is the place for each of us to ask ourselves, "What gives me the greatest joy?"

Our answer ought to be that it is twofold, as it was with John:

- 1) Fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, out of which will come:
- 2) A burden to tell others about the Savior, to see them saved, and then walking with the Lord.

Findlay, whom I quoted before, had this to say about the apostles:

They felt themselves to be in direct communion and communication every day with the Almighty Father in heaven, and with His Son Jesus Christ whom they had known and loved on earth. To this fellowship they invite and summon all mankind (p. 90).

Mr. Findlay also said,

We have a great secret in common--we and the Apostles. The Father told it to Jesus, Jesus to them, they to us, and we to others. Those who have seen and heard such things, cannot keep the knowledge to themselves. These truths belong not to us only, but to "the whole world" (2. 2); they concern every man who has sins to confess and death to meet, who has work to do for his Maker in this world and a pathway to find through its darkness and perils (p. 89).

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

1 John 1:5-10

September 28, 1992

Intro: As you read this short First Epistle of John, it is apparent that the Apostle John had several things that he wanted to accomplish in writing the epistle. His first mention of a purpose was in verse 3 which we considered last week. He was concerned about fellowship. (Read.)

However, prior to that he had made a strong reference to what Christians should believe about the Person of Christ, i.e., Who He is. It is clear that the believers to whom he was writing had been exposed to some false teaching about the Lord. We know that he wrote at a time when some groups known as Gnostics were have a big influence on the early Church. We see evidence of their influence in Paul's letter to the church at Colosse. When John wrote, probably 30 or 35 years after Paul wrote Colossians, the Gnostics were still a threat to the doctrinal purity of the early Church.

One group, the Cerentians, taught that Jesus was just a man, but that the Spirit of God came upon Him at His baptism, but left Him at the Cross. So this was a direct attack upon the Deity of Christ.

The other group, called Doketics, felt that all matter was evil, and that since the human body was matter, it was unthinkable that God would ever have a human body. And so they looked upon Jesus, not as a real man, but as a phantom. This was an attack upon the Humanity of our Lord.

John answered both of those false teachings in verses 1 and 2 of this epistle. It is clear, in the light of what he had to say about fellowship in verse 3 that there can be no true Christian fellowship unless there is agreement about Christ, that He was both God and Man, the God-Man.

We need to keep this in mind in our day. There are many who profess to know the Lord who are willing to compromise on this point. But there can be no compromise on any truth of Scripture, and that is especially true about the Person of Christ. In order for us to know that He can save us, it is absolutely essential that He be both God and Man.

Finally, we saw in verse 4 last week that John took particular joy in writing this epistle. He was never happier than when he was telling others about Christ and helping them to know how they should live.

Today we come to verse 5. In this verse, and going down to the end of chapter 1 John was pointing out the nature of God, and how the nature of God determines the conditions of our fellowship.

1:5 According to George Findlay in his commentary on 1 John, the Apostle John was pointing out here in verse 5 the meaning of true Christian fellowship. He spoke of it as "religion." I would prefer to call it the Christian life. But here is his quotation. I like it.

Religion, as the Apostle John conceived it, consists of two things: true knowledge of God, and fellowship with God and with each other in that knowledge (p. 95).

I think that this is what John was saying here. There can be no real fellowship unless there is agreement on the character of God, and that our relationship with each other is based upon that knowledge.

What did John declare about God? He said, "God is light, and in him is no

darkness at all." (Repeat.) Note also verses 6 and 7.

"Light" and "darkness" are terms which are used here symbolically, and even if we do not understand what they mean, we can see what they mean if we read down to the end of the chapter. "Darkness" speaks of sin, of unrighteousness. Therefore, "light" must mean holiness, the complete absence of sin. God is holy, and there is no unholiness in Him. He has never sinned, and He never will! "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

The Greek text is very intensive. Lit. it says, God is light, and darkness in him is not, not one, or nothing! It means that there is not any sin, not even the slightest trace of sin, in Him!

This was not true of what the Gentiles had been taught about their heathen deities. Their gods were a combination of goodness and wickedness, or kindness and cruelty. They could be one thing at one time, and just the opposite at another time. They would never know how their gods might treat them. But to speak of the true and living God as One Who was always holy, never unholy, was a major change in their idea of God.

But notice how John learned this about God. Did he come up with this idea Himself? Absolutely not! He prefaced this clear statement about God by saying, "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you." To whom was John referring when he said, "We have heard of him"?

Whenever you come to a pronoun in Scripture, do like you would do in almost any other writing, go back to see who the writer was talking about. If you do that here, you will see that the last person to be mentioned was "his Son Jesus Christ" in verse 3. We all ought to know by now that the Lord Jesus Christ had two reasons for coming to the earth:

1) He came to provide salvation for us by His death and resurrection. But the other reason was this:

2) He came as the final revelation of God.

He revealed God in His Person. That is why it is so important to believe in His Deity. But He also revealed God in His teaching. And here John was saying that Jesus Christ told us, and showed us, that "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."

The prophets of the OT declared the same truth. Whether you read the writings of Moses or David or Solomon or Isaiah or any of the other prophets, you will find that they are united in what they declared about God. God is holy, and nothing but holy. God is righteous, and nothing but righteous. God is good, and nothing but good. God can be angry. His judgments are to be feared. But even in His anger, His wrath, God never sins. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all"--not a trace of sin is ever to be found in God. He is absolutely perfect.

When the Lord called Moses, and spoke to him about of the burning bush, do you remember what the Lord said to him?

Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet,
for the place where thou standest is holy ground (Ex. 3:5).

Is it any wonder that the following verse tells us that "Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God"?

When David was confused because he did not understand God's dealings with him, he stopped his complaining when he said, "But thou art holy, O thou

that inhabitest the praises of Israel" (Psa. 22:3).

When Isaiah saw the Lord, he also the seraphim above His throne. What were they saying, and possibly singing?

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts:
the whole earth is full of his glory (Isa. 6:3).

In the book of Amos (2:7) the Lord charged the people of Israel with sin because they had profaned his "holy name."

Habakkuk (1:13a) said, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity."

What about the Lord Jesus?

Do you remember how He addressed His Father in prayer in John 17? Six times He addressed the Lord as His "Father." In two of those six times He added two different adjectives. In verse 11 He called God, "Holy Father." In verse 25 He called God, "Righteous Father."

The main reason that so many people are confused about the issues facing us today is because they are ignorant of God. They do not know that He is Light, and that there is not the slightest trace of sin in Him. They do not know that right and wrong are not determined by a vote of the people, nor by Congress, nor by the Supreme Court, nor even by our President. When we really understand what it means, it changes everything for us. Such knowledge is the first step in bringing people to Christ.

And so, if we are to have fellowship with God, it must be "in the light." He not only "is light," but He is "in the light."

1:6 Therefore, "If we say..."

That is very strong language, and there is more strong language in this epistle, but this is a point on which we cannot afford to be wrong. And so the Apostle John, the beloved apostle, wanted to make himself very clear. We are inclined to feel that "the beloved apostle" would never use language like this. Solomon wrote in Prov. 27:5, "Open rebuke is better than secret love." Let us never be afraid to speak the truth, and to speak forcibly like John did.

Don't be easily convinced by what people say. I am sure you have noticed that verses 6, 8, and 10 in this chapter begin with the same words, "If we say..." And perhaps you have noticed the words, "He that saith," which you find, e.g., in 2:4, 6, and 9. As Findlay said (p. 100--not a direct quotation), sin disrupts human society, and sin disrupts our fellowship with God.

Talk can be very cheap. There were many people in John's day, professing Christians, who were saying things that were not true! Probably many of them were true believers who were lacking in the understanding of the truth. If we claim to be in fellowship with God while we are living in sin, we are lying, whether we know it or not, because we are not doing the truth. Notice that the truth is not only something to believe, but it is something to do. Or, as I heard one man express it years ago, "We not only need to believe the truth, but we need to behave it!" If God is in the light, and we are walking in darkness, it is impossible for us to be in fellowship with God. I don't think that John was saying here that such

a person was not saved. That might be the case. It would all depend upon how long a person continued to walk in darkness. But let it be written upon our hearts that a sinning saint is not walking in fellowship with a holy God. How very important it is that we be careful about the way we live every day.

This verse is one of many in Scripture which teach that if a person knows the Lord, his life is going to be different. John was speaking of how we live when he spoke of our walk. "Do not the truth" could lit. be translated, Do not practice the truth.

1:7 This verse continues the thought of verse 6, and in the KJV is the last part of the sentence which begins in verse 6.

John is not saying in this verse that we will ever in this life be equal to God in our walk. But as Spurgeon pointed out in his Daily Readings for the evening of August 31, this is our goal, our ideal, to walk with the Lord "in the light." And to emphasize his point, he said this:

The youthful artist, as he grasps his early pencil, can hardly hope to equal Raphael or Michael Angelo, but still, if he did not have a noble beau ideal before his mind he would only attain to something very mean and ordinary.

If we are living our lives so as to be in fellowship with God, we are aiming at a goal we can never attain in this life. However, that will mean that we will always be seeking to become more like He is so that our fellowship can be dearer and closer every day.

And what happens when we are walking in fellowship with the Lord? "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

I don't know if anyone can really and fully understand what the Apostle John had in mind when he wrote these words, but I will tell you what I think he meant.

If sin hinders fellowship, how can any of us ever claim to have fellowship with God because we are continually sinning. And oftentimes we are sinning when we are not as sensitive to sin as we could be, and ought to be. We can sin by doing sinful things, but we can also sin by failing to do good things. There are sins of commission, and there are sins of omission. We sin by what we do, or do not do, but we can also sin by what we think, or fail to think. We have to deal with sin every day we live. How then can we ever hope to have fellowship with the Lord.

Well, let me say this: There are degrees of fellowship. We do not all enjoy the same degree of fellowship with the Lord. Some have more; some less. Have you ever listened to a speaker, or been reading a book, when you have told yourself, "I wish I were living as close to the Lord as that person does, or did" (in case it is someone who is now with the Lord). I have felt that way about Charles Spurgeon and John Flavel and George Muller and Hudson Taylor and Amy Carmichael and Lewis Sperry Chafer and Edith Willies, and many, many more, just to mention some who are now in heaven. None of them was perfect, but they certainly were headed in that direction. They continue to battle sin right to the portals of heaven. How could there be fellowship if they still had sins?

I think that the Apostle John, who also enjoyed amazing fellowship with the Lord was telling us here that as we walk with the Lord, we are continually being cleansed from our sins as we walk with Him. The sins

begin to drop off and the cleansing of the blood of Christ makes it possible for us to enter more closely into fellowship with the Lord.

When we speak of fellowship we are talking about walking with the Lord. This is what Enoch did, and it delighted the heart of God to such a degree that the Lord took him home even though he had only lived about as third as long as the people were living in his generation. Noah walked with God. So did Abraham, and Moses, and David, and on and on we can go as we think of people we have met in our Bibles. None was perfect, but all experienced that continual cleansing of the blood that was yet to be shed so that fellowship with God was the greatest reality of their lives.

In Psa. 130:3 we read,

If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities,
O Lord, who shall stand?

To "mark" our sins is to keep them in mind, to remember them. But the Psalmist went on to say,

But there is forgiveness with thee,
that thou mayest be feared (Psa. 130:4).

I would not for a moment excuse any sin that you and I commit. But neither do I believe that every single sin has to be confessed to the Lord. When the Lord brings sins to mind, of course they need to be confessed. But we have many sins which we are not aware of, many sins which we have forgotten. If the Lord marked all of these, and did not forgive them until they were specifically confessed, we would never be able to enjoy fellowship with God. What we need to be concerned about is walking with the Lord. As we walk with Him, the sacrifice of Christ continues to cleanse us and fit us for fellowship, and deeper fellowship with the Lord. It is wonderful to be forgiven, and it is even more wonderful and amazing to be cleansed.

1:8 I would like to link this verse with what John wrote later in this epistle in chapter 3, verse 5. There he said concerning our Lord,
And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins,
and in him is no sin.

John was declaring in 1 John 3:5 that our Lord had no sin nature. As a Man He continued to be God, and so did not even have the capacity to sin.

Often when the word "sin" appears in Scripture it has this meaning, not our sins, but our nature. I believe that was how John was using the word "sin" in 1 John 1:8. I.e., if we say that we have no sin nature, "we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." And if "the truth is not in us," that means we are not saved!

People don't like to hear about sin. They don't like to be told that they have a sin nature. To deny that we have a sin nature, i.e., to say that "we have no sin," is to make ourselves like God. That type of person is really self-deceived! It is not very likely that he is deceiving anyone else. We are all like David said he was in Psa. 51:5, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity..." Our Lord is the only Person to be born into this world who was not a sinner by nature.

So beware of the person who claims to have "no sin."

What is the truth? See the next verse.

1:9 Instead of saying that we have "no sin," we need to "confess our

sins" which means that we need to say the same thing about them that God does. This is what it means to confess them--to say that they are sins, that we are defiled by them, and we have grieved God by committing them.

Now John was speaking of sins we are aware of, those sins which we commit day by day.

The promise that John gives us here from the Father is that when our sins are confessed, He will be faithful and just to forgive them. Faithful to whom? To you and to me? No, He doesn't owe us anything. He is faithful to His Son Who died for our sins. The Father will never fail to honor the work of His Son on the Cross. And by His death our Lord made it possible for the Father to be perfectly "just" in forgiving us of sins for which we deserve to be condemned and cast from His presence forever.

What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
Oh, precious is that flow, that washes white as snow;
No other fount I know; nothing but the blood of Jesus.

By the death of our Savior we are not only forgiven, but cleansed! Both are miracles of the grace of God, and every day we should thank God for the wonderful provision that He has made for us by the precious blood of His Son.

1:10 Occasionally you will find a person who denies that he has ever sinned. He may believe that he can, but that he does not, and has not. God has said that he has sinned, that "there is not a just man upon the earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Ecc. 7:20).

Therefore, to say that "we have not sinned" is to make God "a liar," and obviously "His Word is not in us." Are we going to argue with God? God says that I have sinned; will I dare to say that I have not sinned? Who is finally going to win in that dispute?

We are talking about fellowship with God. Sin is the obstacle to our fellowship with Him because "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all"--none whatever! Therefore, if I am to have fellowship with Him I must be in the light, and walk in the light. The only way that can be possible for any of us is through the cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is, it is only by the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross that you and I have any hope of fellowship with the Lord.

John has laid down the basic truths of fellowship in this first chapter. As we go on he will make it even clearer as to what is involved in our walking in the light. Read and re-read this epistle until its truth is written on your heart by the Holy Spirit.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

1 John 2:1-6

October 5, 1992

Intro: We come today to chapter 2 of 1 John, and I hope to be able to cover the first six verses. John had been dealing with the question of sin because his main message he had declared to be fellowship with God, and because the one thing that hinders fellowship with is sin.

He had begun by saying in 3 he sought their fellowship. More than that he delighted in their fellowship--a fellowship that was "with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." But immediately John pointed out that if we are to have fellowship with God, it must be on the basis of the character of God. He "is light, and in him is no darkness at all." That is, God is holy, and there is not the slightest trace of sin in Him. Therefore, the person who claims to have fellowship with God, or, to state it another way, the person who claims that he knows God, that he is a child of God, and lives in sin, is a liar because he does not practice the truth. You will find all of this in verses 6 and 7.

Then, in the last three verses of the chapter, John took up some claims he had evidently heard from other people, claims which every child of God must reject. The first was that we no longer have a sin nature. See verse 8. The second was the claim that we have not sinned, probably meaning that they had not sinned since becoming a Christian. See verse 10. Both of these claims are untrue, and must be rejected in the strongest possible way.

Then, as we come to the beginning of what is chapter 2 in our Bibles, the Apostle John became very tender and affectionate with his readers as he continued to speak about sin. Let us see what he had to say. (Read vv. 1-6.)

In vv. 1, 2 we have the standard set for every Christian, plus the hope we have when we fail.

2:1 We see the Apostle's tenderness and affection for the people to whom he was writing when he said, "My little children." It is the Greek word, ΤΕΚΝΙΑ. In Dr. Ironside's commentary on The Epistles of John he suggested that it would be better translated simply children, or dear children.

He used this expression six times in the epistle. Cf. 2:12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21. It is a term which teachers commonly used with their students, but coming from John to his fellow-believers it certainly had reference to their position in the family of God. And the main idea in the Greek word ΤΕΚΝΟΝ, from which ΤΕΚΝΙΑ comes, is that it speaks of one who has been born into the family, genuine children in the family.

Such an expression would be used by the Holy Spirit to open the hearts of his readers to what he had to say to them.

"These things write I unto you" -- As we have already seen, John used this expression to call attention to what he had to say. By these words he was making a point which he did not want them to miss. Cf. 1:4, but see similar expressions in 1:3 and 5.

"That ye sin not" -- The NASB translates this correctly: "I am writing these things to you that you may not sin." A. T. Robertson pointed out in his Word Pictures In The New Testament that

John has no patience with professional perfectionists (1:8-10), but he has still less with loose-livers like some of the Gnostics who went to all sorts of excesses without shame (VI, 209).

While we do not believe in sinless perfection, neither do we believe that it is necessary for the people of God to sin. In fact, John is going to deal with this problem of sin in the lives of believers more specifically as we go on in the epistle. But his purpose in speaking of fellowship with God in the light is to show that it is not necessary for believers to sin. We can, but we do not need to. That is different from our condition before we were saved. Then we could sin and did sin because we were the bondservants of sin. Now we can still sin, but we have been delivered from sin's tyranny. The goal for every child of God should be: No sinning! Cf. 3:9; 5:18.

"And if any man sin," or lit., And if anyone sin, i.e., man or woman, young person or child. Unfortunately even though we may not sin, and cannot continue on in sin, yet we do sin. And we need to know what happens when we do. In verse 9 of chapter 1 we learned that we are to confess our sins. Here in this verse we see the heavenly counterpart of the confessing that we do on the earth. The two verses must not be separated from each other.

"And if any man sin" -- Dr. Ironside tells a very interesting story about this statement. I will give it to you in his own words. There was a little girl who had been left by her parents with another family while they were away, and when at last the mother and father returned for her and she was on her way home, she said to her father: "Daddy, there are four little boys at that house where I have been staying." "Yes, I knew that," he said. "Daddy, they have family worship there every night." "I'm glad to hear that," [her father responded]. "Daddy, every night their father prays for those four little boys." "That is very nice," [her father replied]. "He prays, Daddy that God will make them good boys, and that they won't do anything naughty," said the little one. [Again her father said,] "That is very nice." She was silent for a moment and then said, "But, Daddy, He [the Lord] hasn't done it yet."

We are all like that, aren't we? We know that we don't have to sin, and we don't want to sin, but we do. And so we have to say with the little about whom Dr. Ironside told this story. "The Lord hasn't done it yet." But we can thank God that the day is coming when the Lord will do it, and our sinning days will be over.

We will see in a moment how we can be kept from sin, but what is it that we need to know when we do sin? Here it is: **"We have an advocate with the Father Jesus Christ the righteous."**

Note the words **"we have."** This means that we not only "have," but we continually have.

What is an advocate?

It is the Greek word παράκλητος. John is the only NT writer who uses this word. You will find it in John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7. Lit. it is someone who is called to our side to help. But He is with the Father, there to plead His blood, the merits of His sacrifice, for us when we sin. If we got what we deserve when we sin, we would be cast forever from the presence of the Father, but instead we have an intercessor, a Lawyer to plead our case before the Judge of all the universe. It is only because

of Him that we are forgiven and cleansed, fellowship is restored, and the blessing of God is again upon us.

And how important it is for us to know that the Lord Jesus as this very moment is the Righteous One. Although we cannot say what goes on between the Father and the Son when we have sinned, yet we know that it is not our confession that makes God favorable toward us, but it is the intercessory work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have our restoration in Christ.

After this the Apostle John made one of the greatest statements about salvation that we have in all of the Word of God. Let me read it to you again.

2:2 Many of you know that I believe in particular redemption, sometimes called definite atonement, or limited atonement. By these terms I mean, not that we can put any limits on the value of the death of Christ, but there were limits on the purpose of the death of Christ. The problem that men of God have struggled with throughout church history has been this: Did Christ die to provide salvation for all people, but not actually guaranteeing that anyone would be saved, or did He die to guarantee the salvation of certain ones, those chosen by the Father and given by the Father to the Son?

I believe along with Charles Spurgeon, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and many others that Christ died to secure the salvation of the elect. I believe that the death of Christ was sufficient to save all who have ever lived, but I do not believe that was the purpose that Christ had in dying.

We all have to admit that not everyone is being saved. And yet, if we stop to consider the character of God, we know that God is mighty enough to save everyone if that had been His will. We also know that man is so depraved in his sin that no one would be saved unless God sovereignly draws us to Himself.

However, this verse is one of the texts which seems to contradict the doctrine of particular redemption. (Read.) It says that Christ, our Advocate, "is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Does this not mean that Christ died to save everyone?

Let me point out three things in answering the objection which seems to be raised by this chapter.

First, we know that the Father has chosen particular people to be saved. The Bible speaks of them as elect. Cf. 2 Thess. 2:13, 14. (Read.) Now let me ask you this: Would Christ have a different purpose from His Father regarding the salvation of sinners? If so, what would this do to the unity of the Godhead? You will never find any difference whatever between the Three Persons of the Godhead.

Second, look at the word "propitiation." We have all had to practice saying that word. What is "propitiation"?

Johann Albrecht Bengel, a German who was born in 1687, and died in 1752, has given us a great work covering all of the books of the New Testament. It has been called Bengel's Gnomon. He said that "propitiation" means that the offence of our sin to God has been taken away by the death of our

Lord Jesus Christ. He means what others have meant when they say that Christ, by His death, has completely satisfied God for everyone for whom He died. Propitiation means that God is satisfied.

Now, if God is satisfied by the death of His Son, and He died, as some say, for everybody who has ever lived, then how can fail to save every person who has ever lived. To state it another way, if Christ died for me, and God is satisfied, then I must be saved. If Christ is the propitiation for the sins of Adolph Hitler, then Hitler has to be saved. If Christ died for the sins of Mohammed, then Mohammed has to be saved.

But let me make another point: If Christ died for all, and God is satisfied that the sins of all men are atoned for, but some are not saved, then is God not unrighteous to have required Christ to pay for the sins of people who will spend eternity in hell, and then make them spend eternity paying for the same sins?

I had a brother-in-law, David Mouton, Lucille's brother, who died several years ago. He and Lucille, on one occasion that I know of talked for a long time about what is known historically as Calvinism. David at one time professed to be a Christian, but for most of his life actually denied the faith. But he made this statement to Lucille from a purely human standpoint about the death of Christ which really made sense to me. This was his statement as nearly as I can remember it. He said, "It makes more sense to say that Christ died for all and that all will eventually be saved, than to say that He died for all, and yet some will never be saved."

"Propitiation" is a powerful word, too powerful to describe anything less than the complete satisfaction of God concerning the sins of those for whom Christ died. Therefore, we must conclude that the purpose of the death of Christ was to guarantee the salvation of all of those who will eventually be saved. It was not a provision for all, but a guarantee for God's elect.

But those who do not believe in particular redemption will say that people who go to hell are not going to be judged for their sins, but because they have not received Christ.

Well, this raises the question that has troubled many of the Lord's people: What about the people who never hear of Christ? Paul asked how people could believe on the One of Whom they have not heard. We need to get the Gospel out to the whole world, but, if we believe in the elect, and that God's purpose is to save the elect, then it is very possible that many people will die who are not chosen of God and who never have heard of Christ.

What did Paul say about the judgment of the wicked? Let me read to you Eph. 5:1-6. (Read.) This does not sound like their sins have been put away. The wicked will be judged for their sins.

But one problem still remains with this verse, and this is the third point that I said I wanted to make.

How are we going to handle John's statement that our Lord is "the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world"? Does this not describe a universal redemption instead of a particular redemption?

We will see that this is no problem as far as the doctrine of a particular redemption is we consider what John meant by "the whole world." Did he mean all people without exception, or was he using this statement to say that if people were to be saved anywhere in "the whole world," it had to be through Christ, and only through Christ? He was saying that Christ died for people throughout the whole world, and that wherever people are to be saved in any part of the world, in any generation, it is only through the sacrificial death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are very important issues concerning the death of our Lord which all of us need to think through. We have a weakened Gospel today, and we portray God as being a weak God. The Gospel of the grace of God is the revelation of what a mighty God has determined from eternity past concerning the salvation of His people--a plan which is being carried out in complete perfection.

So as we come to the end of the second verse of 1 John 2, it is very clear that the Apostle John wants us to know that a true Christian will not continue to live a life of sin, but will be seeking by the grace of God to live a life of victory over sin, which is the mark of a true child of God.

But now let us go on to verse 3.

2:3 We know that our deliverance from sin is traceable to the Cross of Christ. But how do we see that deliverance worked out in our daily lives? At this point John's message takes on a positive note, whereas before it has been necessary to speak negatively about sin.

Note that verse 3 begins with an "and" to show that John was continuing on with the same subject, even though the verse shows that we will be looking at the problem of sin from a different perspective.

Let me read verses 3-6. (Read.)

It has always been easy for people to profess to be saved without really being saved. And so the Holy Spirit, in the Word, has given us certain tests which we can apply to our lives whereby we can "know" that we are saved. So whether or not we live in sin, and how we deal with the problem of sin, can show us where we stand with the Lord.

The test here is THE TEST OF OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF GOD.

The Apostle John we seeking to oppose the doctrines and practices of the Gnostics. I have told you that their name came from the Greek verb, to know: γινώσκω. In this verse, and throughout this epistle, John used the verb γινώσκω to show what true knowledge is as opposed to false knowledge.

The mark of any true Christian is that he is keeping the commandments of the Lord Jesus. "His commandments," as we examine the context, has to refer to the commandments of our Lord.

There are many who only see the 10 commandments when they see the word "commandments." The law, the Mosaic Law as such, is only mentioned in this epistle in 1 John 3:4. The Law still helps us to identify sin. But the Mosaic Law does not justify a guilty sinner, nor does it sanctify a saved sinner. Dawson Trotman, who started the organization known as The Navigators, tried to count the commandments of the NT, and he said that

there were approximately 500! I have never tried to count them, but I have a NT in which I have tried to mark them. All of us need to know what they are. We need to pay attention to them as we read our Bibles. And the Apostle John would have us know that if your heart is drawn to the Word of God so that you not only want to know what the Lord wants you to do, but you have a great desire to do it, then you can know that you know Him, i.e., Christ.

A. T. Robertson has suggested that we can translate this third verse in this way:

And hereby we know that we have come to know him,
and still know him,
if we keep on keeping his commandments.

God knows whether we know Him, or not, but He wants us to know. And the test is our relationship to the Word of God. This means that the NT ought to be a description of the way you and I are living.

And will you note that the Apostle John did not say,
And hereby we know that we know him
because we can remember the time and place
where we professed faith in Christ,
or where we publicly confessed Christ.

John never said anything like that. Neither did Paul, nor Peter, nor our Lord, nor anyone else in Scripture. The evidence that we are saved is something that can be seen in our lives every day we live. If you can take your Bible home on Sunday, and never look at it until the following Sunday, then you had better search your heart very carefully. It is very probable that you are not truly saved. But if you love the Word, and are seeking to understand the Word, and attempting by God's grace to let the Word of God direct you in your life, then John says you can know that you know the Lord.

Don't try to soften the Apostle's words. Take them as they are, and apply them to your life. Don't think for the moment about anyone else; think about yourself.

What did John say in verse 4?

2:4 He said the same thing that he did in verse 3 only from the opposite point-of-view. Notice those words again, "He that saith." This is the person whose speech is correct, but his life is empty as far as the Word of God is concerned.

Again, John's words are very strong. If the life and the lips are not conveying the same message, the person speaking is a liar, and the truth of God is not in him. This means that he is not saved. Robertson translated this verse, "The one who keeps on saying: 'I have come to know him,' and keeps on not keeping his commandments, is a liar" (IV, 210).

In verses 3, 4, and 5 John spoke of keeping the Word. This means to do what the Word tells us to do, or not to do what the Word of God forbids. Bishop Westcott says this about keeping the Word:

The phrase expresses not only the fulfilment of specific injunctions... but also the heedful regard to the whole revelation made by Christ as a living and active power, of which the voice is never silent (p. 48).

So John said it positively, and then negatively, because he wanted every reader to get the point he was making, and make the application to his or

her life. Be sure that this is what you do--NOW, not later. It is very important that you know that you know.

The last two verses in this section tell us what will be the results, at least two of them, when we are living our lives according to the commandments of our Lord:

- 1) The love of God is being perfected in us.
- 2) Our lives will be more and more Christ-like.

No two things are more important for us as the people of the Lord: loving the Lord, and becoming like our Savior. Let us see what John has written.

2:5. The expression, the love of God, is not an easy one to explain because it can mean:

- 1) The love of God as an attribute of God.
- 2) His love for us.
- 3) Our love for Him.
- 4) His love being manifested through us to others.

What does it mean here? Being perfected can have reference to the last three especially. It means that our understanding of it becomes more complete, as does our manifestation of that love to God and to others. It is important to see how this is related to our obedience to the Word. The Lord told His disciples in the Upper Room Discourse (John 14:21, 23) that we show our love for Him by our obedience to His commandments. But this, in turn, gives us a greater understanding of God's love for us, and leads to a greater manifestation of the love of God through us to others. Therefore, it is basic to our fellowship with God and with each other that we be obedient to the Word of God. Cf. 1 Jn. 4:12, 17, 18.

And this leads to greater assurance: "Hereby know we that we are in him." Note that here John does not just say that we know Him, or that the truth is in us, but that "we are in him." Cf. 2 Cor. 5:17 and 21 where the Apostle Paul used this expression.

2:6. Here the Apostle John leads us on to another wonderful result of obedience to the Lord and His Word.

In verses 6 and 7, ^{of ch. 1} John had mentioned our walk. Here he comes back to that expression again, as he does also in v. 11. Westcott said that it does not merely speak of outward conduct, but that it covers "the whole activity of life" (p. 19). It is an OT expression which both Paul and John use in their writings.

So what it means is that our lives, if lived according to the Word, are evidence of our union with Christ. And such a life follows the pattern set by the perfect Man in His life on earth. We will walk, live, like He lived. And it is from the Word that the Lord by His Spirit gives us the desire as well as the strength to live like the Lord Jesus lived.

"Ought" suggests that such a life is not optional with the people of God. We are under a divine obligation to be obedient to the Lord, an obligation which must be fulfilled.

Concl: And so we see the tremendous importance of the Word of God in the life of a believer. It is upon our obedience to the Lord that our fellowship with the Lord rests. It is through our obedience to the Lord that we have the assurance of salvation. It is through obedience to the Word of God that the love of God is perfected in us--which is a part of

what it means to be in fellowship with the Lord.

The Apostle John has given us in this epistle tests by which we can know that we know Him. Our relationship with sin constitutes the first test. Our response to the Word of God gives us our second test.

Are we like the Lord Who loved righteousness and hated iniquity, or can we be comfortable with sin? Do we excuse sin, or do we seek always to avoid it? What answers does your life give to these questions?

How about the Word? Do you love it? Is it, like it was to the Psalmist, more important to you than silver or gold? Or, as it was to Job, "esteemed" more important than his "necessary food"? Cf. Psa. 19:10; Job 23:12.

I do not think that there is any doubt but that many church members, or those who go regularly to church, who are deceived as to their true relationship to God because they have never applied the tests of Scripture to their own lives. There is nothing more important for any of us in this life that we are saved. And, if we are, we should know it. So let us search our own hearts, and ask the Lord to search our hearts, so that we can know that we are saved and not go into eternity deceiving ourselves, only to learn the truth too late.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

1 John 2:7-11

October 12, 1992

Intro: As we come to this section we have already had two tests which the believers of that time were to apply to themselves to make sure that they were truly saved, truly the people of God. The first was the test of sin. The Apostle John introduced that by saying in 1:5 that "God is light," and that if we are to have fellowship with Him it must be "in the light" (1:7), and not "in darkness" (1:6). Light is a symbol of holiness and righteousness; darkness is a symbol for sin and unrighteousness. The second was the test of obedience to the Word of God, with special emphasis placed upon the commandments of our Lord.

Now, as we come to verse 7 we see that the Apostle John was introducing a third test: the test of love. And the love that he had in mind was love for the brethren as his first word in verse 7 clearly indicates. So we must assume that when he wrote about brothers in verses 9, 10, 11, he was speaking of their Christian brothers (by which he was also including the ladies who know the Lord).

But let us go to the text to see how he approached the subject.

2:7 Here he said that it was not a "new commandment," but "an old commandment" which they had "from the beginning."

Before we think about the commandment to which the Lord was referring, let me warn you against people who want you to believe something new. New things are appearing all of the time, and those who are spreading them would have us believe that our doctrines are out-of-date. However, we need to remember that simple saying,

If it is true, its not new;

and if it is new, it is not true.

These saying applies, of course, to divine truth. Those religious teachers who would try to convince us that our Bibles are wrong, or that they are incomplete, or that they have been replaced by some new teaching, are false teachers. And we need to avoid them. The Bible cannot be improved upon. It is not out-of-date. Its message is absolutely true because it is the infallible, unchanging Word of God.

So John said, in so many words, "I am not giving you something that is new and different from what you have heard before; I am giving you the old commandment which you have had from the beginning." It was not new in terms of years, but old, "from the beginning."

The commandment John was speaking about was not recent, but old, and yet not worn out nor replaced by some other commandment of a different kind.

What did he mean, "from the beginning"?

I personally do not agree with those who say that John was going back just to Christ with this expression. We will see in just a moment that he would say that it was "new" even though it was "old." And it was Christ who gave them the "new commandment."

So I think that John was saying that from the very beginning of God's revelation to man, His people have had this commandment, written first in their hearts, and then given in the Mosaic Law. And it must have been to the Law that he was referring because he said here in verse 7 that "the old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning." But

he still has not told us what that old commandment was.

2:8 Here what he was saying becomes more uncertain because, after saying that it was not new, here he said that it is new. How are we to explain this? How can it be "old," and yet "new"?

Obviously it was the same commandment with a stronger emphasis, and a new fresh enlargement of the old commandment. It is the old commandment enlarged upon and strengthened.

What, then, is the old commandment, and what is the new commandment?

Well, we can tell by looking at verse 5 that it probably has something to do with love. And that idea is strengthened by what we read in verses 9, 10, and 11 where John also was writing about "love," love for the other members of the family of God.

What was the "old commandment"?

The old commandment to which John was referring here was what our Lord called the second most important commandment in all of the Law. I am sure that you remember what the first two were. Cf. Matt. 22:34-40. (Read.)

So they had known for a long, long time, "from the beginning," that they were to love God first, and their neighbors second. But they were to love their neighbors as they loved themselves. And both of those were big orders. In fact, no one could possibly fulfill those commands without the blessing and help of God Himself.

CF. 1 JOHN 5 - THIS IS PROOF.

ALSO 1 JN. 3:11, 22-24a; 4:21.

What was the "new commandment"?

The "new commandment" was given by our Lord Jesus Christ, and you will find it in John 13:34, 35. (Read.)

Now you can look at these two commandments and they are basically the same. They both speak about the love that the people of God should have for each other. But the Lord made two new details to His new commandment that were not in the old commandment:

- 1) In the first, the Lord God spoke of loving their neighbors; in the second our Lord spoke of loving each other as His disciples. In the text we are considering in 1 John, John made it even more specific in that he was speaking to the Lord's people as brothers and sisters in the family of God. I am not going to labor the point, but the old commandment seems to have been spoken to Israel as neighbors in the commonwealth of Israel; the new commandment of our Lord addressed His people as disciples and as members of God's family--a new emphasis in the NT.
- 2) In the first, the old commandment, the Jews were commanded to love their neighbors as they loved themselves. In the new commandment they were to love each other as the Lord had loved them. It was the same kind of love, but raised to an infinitely higher level. So the commandment itself was the same, old, and yet new. I hope you can see this. And the Lord even indicated what John taught in the verses before us, that their love for each other was a proof of their salvation: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

Now look at the words, "which thing is true in him and in you." What did

John mean by this?

He meant that neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit had to tell the Lord Jesus to love His people because it was "in him" to do it! And the same thing is true, and has always been true, of the people of God. A new Christian does not really need to be told to love the Lord's people. He finds that such a love is already in his heart. So, when he reads the Lord's "new commandment," he has no argument with that.

Let me give you an illustration from Scripture, in fact, from this very epistle we are now considering together. Cf. 1 John 3:11, 12.

Let me ask you a question: Did Cain know that he was doing the wrong thing when he killed Abel, his brother? Of course, he did. In his heart he knew that he was responsible to God to love his brother. But instead he killed him. Why did he do it? Because he knew that Abel was doing the right thing, and he was doing the wrong thing in bringing the sacrifice that he brought. Now this was before the Law was given; God had put this in Cain's heart.

Let me give you another illustration from Scripture regarding what God has put in the hearts of people. Cf. Rom. 2:14, 15.

Does a person who has never read the Bible or even heard of it, know that it is wrong to kill, to lie, to steal, to commit adultery, etc. Of course he does! Why? Because God has written the Law in his heart. And please don't let anyone tell you differently.

Does a doctor have to tell a mother to take care of her baby? Of course not! He may have to show her how to do it, but it is already in her heart to do it. In fact, she will devote her time completely to that baby, if that is what it takes.

So nobody really has to tell us as believers in Christ that we should love our fellow-believers. We need to be told how much we should love each other, but not that we should love. That is in our hearts just like it was in the heart of our Savior.

Now let us look at the remainder of verse 8.

The Apostle John gave a reason here as to why he was emphasizing the "new commandment." It was "because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth."

We need to make an important correction in the translation of this part of the verse. John did not say that "the darkness is past." That would mean that sin was a thing of the past, and that we don't have to be concerned about it any more. But we all know that is not true. What he did say was that the darkness is passing away. It is not gone, but it is leaving! We can all thank God for that. We still live in a sinful world, a very sinful world. And we ourselves still have sin in us, sin which causes us to fail at times in keeping the commandments of our Lord. Sin often breaks our fellowship. Sin can split churches. The darkness is passing away from us, but it is not all gone. And so we need the Word of God to point out to us even what we know in our hearts we should be doing. This explains for us why we will always need the Word of God. "The true light is now shining," and has been shining brightly ever since we came to know the Lord. There was even evidence of the light before that. And the

longer we live, the more we know of the Word and of the Lord, the more we love Him and do His will, the brighter the light shines. But we still do not see everything clearly. The light has not completely driven the darkness away, but it will! The Word of God brings additional light to the light God has written upon our hearts. How thankful we should be for that!

Do you remember what Solomon wrote about "the path of the just"? He said,
 But the path of the just is as a shining light,
 that shineth more and more unto the perfect day (Prov. 4:18).
 We will always need the additional light that the Word of God gives us.
 Psa. 119:105 tells us,
 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
 It also tells us in Psa. 119:130,
 The entrance of thy word giveth light,
 it giveth understanding to the simple.

So, in reading verse 8, read the first part of the verse with the last part and you will see why it was necessary for God to give us His Word, and why it was necessary for John to remind us of this commandment which is written in our hearts--a commandment which is both "old" and "new."

When John called the light, "the true light," he was indicating to the believers to whom he was writing that anything else is darkness, and so they should not listen to the Gnostics with their false doctrine.

But at this point John was ready to make the point that he wanted to make.

2:9 Here we have that statement we have noticed before: "He that saith."
 It is a reminder to all of us to make sure that our lives support
 what we say with our lips; that our walk measures up to our talk.

The person who says that "he is in the light," is a person who claims to be a child of God. So by profession he is a brother. But if he hates another who is a brother, the one making the claim has never been in the light, and continues to be "in darkness even until now."

Strong, in his concordance, says that this word hate can even mean to love less than one should. It can mean just that you feel no need for that person. You reject them. It would mean that the person who claims to be "in the light," but is not, really enjoys the company of unbelievers more than he does the fellowship of the people of God. Hating can be a simple case of preferring others. It is impossible for a child of God to be indifferent toward other believers, or to disregard them. We may be drawn to some more than others, but a true child of God will always love and prefer others who are in the faith.

2:10 Here we see how obedience to the Word and our love for the Lord's people help us to keep walking in the light of the Word of God. The last part of this verse probably refers, not to the effect that one believer has upon another, but how a believer's obedience or disobedience can affect his own life. If we are abiding in the light, loving the Lord's people, these things will keep the child of God from being tripped up in his own life. Our disobedience may make it difficult for others, but we, after all, are the ones who can suffer the most. "An occasion of stumbling" means that which makes one fall.

Therefore, one of the best ways to guard ourselves from trouble is to make

sure that we are living our lives the way the Lord wants us to live.

2:11 Things, for the man who professes to be saved, but does not possess salvation, will only get worse. He is like a blind man who does not know where he is going because he is still living in the darkness of sin because he is not saved.

People who are "in darkness" will always "walk in darkness" even though they might profess to be saved. They may be church members, even can be on the governing board of a church, sometimes even get into the ministry. John was not talking about a believer who may fall into sin; he was speaking of the person who lives that way. They may be exposed to the light, but they cannot see it because they are blind. Bishop Westcott says that the word "goeth" means "leaving the present scene" (p. 57). And he says also that the word "blinded" suggests not only being unable to see because it is dark, but the destruction of the organ of vision itself.

John was dealing here with a most solemn truth. He was pointing out what a serious thing it is to be surrounded by the light, but not receptive to it. It can bring a person to the place where he cannot, as a judgment from God, see the truth. The Apostle John was referring to this when, in his Gospel he was speaking of the disciples who were turned away by the Lord's teaching. They "went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66b). Cf. also 1 John 2:19.

If this description should fit any of us, what can be done to change our condition? Let me read a verse which Paul wrote which gives us the answer: 2 Cor. 4:3-6. (Read.)

We can never tell where God may be pleased to work. Let us make sure of our own relationship with the Lord, and pray that we may so live in this world that the Lord may use our lives to awaken others to their need of Christ.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

1 John 2:12-17

October 19, 1992

Intro: The Apostle John had indicated earlier in this epistle that he was concerned about his fellowship with them, and the fellowship that all of them as believers would have "with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1:3b). And then he proceeded to state the conditions of that fellowship. They were:

- 1) Walking in the light, i.e., avoiding sin, and/or confessing it when sin has been committed.
- 2) Obeying the commandments of our Lord.
- 3) Loving each other.

On all three of these points the Apostle John was very strong.

He used the word "lie" in 1:6. He used the word "liar" in 2:4. And in 2:9 he accused the person who says that he is in the light, and yet hates his brother, is actually "in darkness," and so is not telling the truth. So he used strong language to get his point across.

However, although the Apostle John had been named by our Lord, along with James his brother, as "sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17), yet the grace of God had mellowed him even in his youth so that he was later known as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20). His writings showed tenderness, not hardness.

There have been many explanations for the verses we come to today, and we all have to admit that they are not easy to interpret. Let me tell you what they appear to mean to me, and then you decide for yourself if what I am about to point out fits into the pattern of the book.

Let us begin by considering the Apostle John's three repeated statements.

2:12-14 By repeated statements I mean that John spoke about children, fathers, and young men, and then he repeated himself, saying essentially the same things a second time. Look at them.

Now let me give you a brief lesson from the Greek text of these verses.

The KJV does not bring out how the difference that there is in the Greek between the first series of statements where he said, "I write," and the last three where according to the KJV, the NKJV, and the NIV it seems that John used the same tense of the verb: the present tense. However, the last statement of verse 13, and both statements in verse 14, are written in a different tense. The old ASV and the NASB bring out the difference.

John spoke in the present tense in the first three statements, so they are right in our KJV. But he used the aorist tense in the second three statements which we would usually translate, I wrote. So it would appear in English as "I wrote." But the aorist is sometimes used to express some action which has been completed. And so we could translate the last three times that John used the word write as "I have written."

Therefore, it seems that the NASB, and the original ASV, are right when they translate the first three as, "I write"; the last three as, "I have written." But why the difference?

Let me give you what I think is the answer to that question.

I believe that John said, "I write," in the first three statements because he was talking about his belief about his readers as he was writing! We could even translate those verbs as, I am writing. So he meant that he was not writing what he was writing at that moment with any other idea in his mind than that they were truly saved. He wanted to make that perfectly clear.

But then, he did not want them to think that what he had already written was with any other idea in mind, and so when he said, "I have written," he was looking back over what he had written from 1:1 to 2:11.

It might have appeared that he was questioning their salvation by what he was continuing to write, or by what he already had written. But he wanted them to know that was not the case. He believed that they were saved. He strongly believed that they were saved. But false teachers had come in among them, and so the Apostle John was writing to remind them of the true marks of a child of God (1) for their own assurance, and (2) so that they would not get careless about the things that are so vital in Christian fellowship.

Perhaps it is best summed up by what John wrote in 2:21. (Read.)

It may be, and probably often has been the case, that 1 John has awakened false professors of salvation to the realization that they have not been saved. But the main purpose of the book is to minister to believers, true believers, to keep them walking in the truth that they might be assured of their salvation, their relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.

A real Christian is not going to be offended when the identifying marks of a Christian are pointed out to him. He may have gotten careless about sin, or careless about His obedience to the Word, or careless about his attitude toward his fellow-believers. We all need to be remind of what we should see in our lives if we are saved. And so the Apostle John wanted to assure them that he was not questioning their salvation.

But let us look further into verses 12, 13, and 14.

I don't think that John was addressing the people of God according to their age groups. By that I mean that when he said "children," he was not addressing the Beginners and Primary Departments. When he addressed the "young men," he was not thinking about Junior High, High School, and College. When he addressed the "fathers," he was not talking about the Adults. John was writing to the family of God. I do not believe that he was just writing to the male members of that family, but to the males and females. But Scripture often gives prominence to the men where women are also included. What John was doing here was recognizing that in the family of God we are all at different stages of development, or growth. And so he was seeking to write so as to include all of the Lord's people, dealing with the truth that both the most immature and the most mature in the faith, as well as those who were in between, would profit from.

So John was not dealing with them in natural age groups, but according to their growth in the family of God. An old man or woman can be a babe in Christ, either because he or she has just been saved, or because he or she has never grown very much in the Lord. It would seem that John was helping all of us in this passage to be able to identify where we are in our fellowship with the Lord. Are we children in the faith, or fathers and mothers, having matured in our faith, or are we growing and strong as

believers, moving from spiritual childhood to maturity in Christ?

This is what I believe is the meaning of these verses. They form a temporary interlude in the message John was giving them because he wanted to be as sure as he could that they were coming along with him.

But now let us look at these three groups, and see how they can be identified.

First of all, let us think about those who are "children" in the faith.

The word for "children" which John used in verse 12 is different from the word "children" that he used at the end of verse 13. The first is τεκνία, which John used in 2:1. The second is παῖδια, which John used again in 2:18. Both are terms of endearment. The word in verse 12 speaks of being a genuine member of the family, and the word in verse 13 of those who are similar in development. Vine says that this latter word applies to those who are the youngest believers in the family of God--and I would add, the most immature.

There is nothing disgraceful about being a child in the family of God. But it is tragic when one remains a child. Some would say that it is impossible for a true child of God to remain an infant, or immature, but passages like 1 Cor. 3 and Heb. 5 indicate that it is possible.

What do "children" in the family of God understand? Verse 12 indicates that they know that the sins are forgiven them "for his name's sake." This has to be a reference to Christ. It is because of Christ, and all that His Name implies, that our sins are forgiven. A babe in Christ may not know a great deal more, but he will know this.

Moving down to verse 13 we see that a babe in Christ, or one who is young in the faith, will know that God is his (or her) Father. Paul told the Romans that we "have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15b).

What about "fathers"?

This does not always mean a person with children, although Paul applied this term to himself as a father of those whom he had led to Christ. See 1 Cor. 4:15. A father is one advanced in age who gives evidence of maturity in knowledge and in life. In Church history we speak of the Church Fathers. By that we mean the leaders, men who have had a tremendous influence on the foundation and early growth of the church. What a blessing the fathers and mothers in the faith have been to the body of Christ!

Spiritually there is a great difference between a child and a father, and that is brought out twice in this section where fathers in the faith are identified as those who "have known him that is from the beginning." This obviously is a reference to Christ. "Have known" means that they had known Him in the past, and they continued to know Him. This is a personal knowledge, which has been a growing knowledge, and which has resulted in a most precious fellowship. Those who are mature in the faith, whether men or women, are always more inclined to be occupied with the Person of Christ. They find their delight in Him. They love to learn of Him, and their lives are characterized by fellowship with Him. The Apostle John was certainly one of the "fathers."

What about the "young men"?

One thing every Christian soon learns is this: We have a very real, very powerful, and very determined Enemy. He did not even hesitate to attack our Lord. "Young men" describes those who are neither "children" nor "fathers," but who are, as Westcott said, "in the full vigour of opening life" (p. 60).

In both references they are described as those who "have overcome the wicked one." This is the Devil whom they have overcome. They are not living in defeat, but in victory. "Have overcome" means that you have overcome him in the past, and you continue to overcome him.

No Christian ever reaches spiritual maturity without great conflicts with the world, the flesh, and the Devil ("the wicked one," "wicked" because the result of all that he does is bad, always bad, never good).

Why are they able to overcome the Wicked One? Because they "are strong, and the word of God abideth in" them! No believer can be strong without the word of God. To have it "in" us, means that it strengthens and directs our lives. This is obviously why Paul told the Ephesians in Eph. 6:10-20 to put on the whole armor of God. Every part of the armor has something to do with the Word of God. It is the Word which protects us against sin. It is by the Word that we grow. It is the Word which imparts joy to our lives.

"Children...fathers...young men..." Wherever we are in our spiritual growth and development, this epistle of John is for us, to help us to see where we are spiritually, to increase our fellowship with the Lord, and to give us continual assurance that we belong to the Lord.

After these words, the Apostle John continued with his message.

He had just spoken of "the wicked one," the Devil. Now he would go on to speak of "the world," and in speaking of "the world," he has to mention "the flesh"--the only time that the word "flesh" is used in this way in the epistle.

2:15 We are to love our brethren and sisters in the Lord, but we are not to love the world. When we get to verse 16 we will see what John meant by the world. But let me say here that John was not saying that we are to hate the people of the world. But we are not to love "the world, neither the things that are in the world." A. T. Robertson says that the prohibition means either or both, that they were to stop loving the world, or not to form the habit of living it, nor the things that are in it.

Paul used the verb ἀγαπάω when he spoke of not loving the world. Let me deal with this verb for just a moment.

If you have ἀγάπην love for anything, it means that you prefer it, you seek its welfare, you take pleasure in it, you prize it above everything else, you are unwilling to abandon it, or to do without it.

James wrote in Jas. 1:27 that we are "to keep" ourselves "unspotted from the world." Paul said in Rom. 12:2 that we are not to be "conformed to this world."

We live in a world that has its own way of life which is completely

different from the way a child of God is to live. This is not the way that the people of God are to live, whether children, or fathers, or young men. We are not to seek the approval of the world. We are not to make advancement in this world as our goal. We are not to rejoice in the things which we possess. Money is not to be our main concern. We are not to be trapped by the world's desire for pleasure, for the good life. We are not to be lovers of fine clothing or good food. It is easy for any of us to be trapped and enslaved by the things of this world. If the Lord gives us certain things of the world, we are to use them for His glory, but they are not to be the reasons for our existence. Cf. Col. 3:1-4; Matt. 6:33.

The John added, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. We cannot love the world and God at the same time. A person who consistently and habitually loves the things of this world, is demonstrating that he (or she) is not a child of God.

2:16 Here the Apostle John defined the world. It includes three things:

- 1) "The lust of the flesh."
- 2) "The lust of the eyes."
- 3) "The pride of life."

What did he mean by these expressions? Notice that he said that this is all that there is in the world as he was using the term, "world." Everything in the world falls into one of these three categories.

It is significant that Eve was tempted in three ways. It is equally interesting that the Devil tempted our Lord in just three ways, and then left Him.

Eve saw that the forbidden fruit was "good for food" (Gen. 3:6); this is "the lust of the flesh." It was also "pleasant to the eyes"; this is "the lust of the eyes." Thirdly, it was "to be desired to make one wise"; this is "the pride of life."

In our Lord's temptation Satan wanted Him to turn stones into bread; this was "the lust of the flesh." Next he told our Lord to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple; this was "the pride of life." Finally, Satan showed Him all of the kingdoms of the earth which Satan promised Him if He, the Lord, would fall down and worship him, the Devil; this is the lust of the eyes.

What does these three expressions mean?

"The lust of the flesh" -- Flesh is a word for the human body, and it is also used to describe our old, fleshly, sinful nature. "The lust of the flesh" would include both, i.e., what our bodies desire and what our sinful natures desire. Paul described "the works of the flesh" in Gal. 5:19-21.

"The lust of the eyes" -- We are told in Gen. 3 that Eve's trouble started "when she saw..." Achan took some of the spoil of Jericho when he "saw" the Babylonian garment, and the silver and the gold, coveted them, and took them. David sin with Bathsheba was the result of seeing her bathing herself. We read in Prov. 27:20,

Hell and destruction are never full;
so the eyes of man are never satisfied.

Solomon wrote in Ecc. 1:8 that "the eye is not satisfied with seeing." It always creates in the heart a desire to have what it sees. How the Devil

has use TV commercials and programs and movies to lead countless numbers of people into sin. I heard it said long ago that sin often enters the heart through the eye-gate. The thief knows about "the lust of the eyes."

"The pride of life" -- Selfish ambition has ruined many. Our desire to glorify ourselves, to seek the praise and adulation of men, is "the pride of life." It can often be seen in educational circles. The world is inclined to pay attention to the person who boasts about his achievements. We see this in our political campaigns.

The emphasis in the world is upon man, his pleasure, his glory, meeting his needs, satisfying his desires.

None of this is "of the Father, but is of the world." Because of sin even many of the good things which God has given to us have become the means by which we are corrupted more and more. Sight is wonderful, but it can lead us into sin. Food is necessary, but eating and drinking often lead to the greatest of sins. It is good to live a useful life, but if it is not designed for God's glory we can be destroyed by it.

The very fact that these things (and others which could be included) are "not of the Father," is reason enough why we are not to love the world.

Notice another reason in our last verse:

2:17 You don't learn this from most of our politicians, or entertainers, or professional athletes, or newscasters, or educators. You only learn this from the Word of God. The world is passing away. This present evil system is not going to last forever. It is under the judgment of God, doomed. And so is "the lust," the desires, the appetites, that move and control men throughout their lives. Amass a great fortune, build a lovely, expensive home, drive the finest cars, wear the finest clothes, win the greatest honors, but when it is all over, if this is all you have, you have nothing. You can't take any of that with you.

"But he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." The Greek means, he that keeps on doing the will of God abides forever. Cf. Rom. 12:1, 2 again.

What does it mean if we do the will of God? It means, according to what we have learned, that we love God. Instead of loving the world, we love God. We prefer Him. We seek to promote His glory. We take pleasure in Him, and treasure Him above everything else and everyone else. We are unwilling to leave Him, or to do without Him. He means more to us than all of the world's honors, or pleasures, or riches, or positions.

Dr. Ironside closed his comments on these verses with the words of a hymn which go like this:

Take the world, but give me Jesus,
All earth's joys are but in name,
But His love abideth ever,
Through eternal years the same.

Whether you are a child, or a growing, vigorous youth, and a mature older person in the family of God, make sure that the world is not directing your life, but that the Lord is. His Word points the way.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

1 John 2:18-29

October 26, 1992

Intro: We have learned so far in our study of 1 John that the aged Apostle wrote that the believers who first received this epistle might test their professed faith in Christ so that they would know that they were truly saved. Cf. 1 John 5:13. This accounts for the predominance of the word know which John used some forty times throughout this epistle.

Up to this point we have had three tests:

- 1) The sin test (1:5-2:2).
- 2) The obedience test (2:3-6).
- 3) The love test (2:7-17).

As we come to 2:18 we have a fourth test:

- 4) The doctrine test (2:18-29).

We have seen even in John's introduction to this epistle that he was concerned about false teaching which had already appeared in the early church. Cf. 1 John 1:1-3. It was false teaching which focused upon the Person of Christ. And we need to recognize that any teaching which changes in any way what the Scriptures teach about the Person of Christ, will also have an effect upon His Work. It follows also that such major changes would affect the lives of the people of God. And so the Apostle John knew that he was not dealing with an insignificant problem, but one of major importance.

Remember that the false teachers were called Gnostics. One group, the Cerinthians, denied the Deity of Christ. The other group, the Doketics, denied the true humanity of Christ. The Spirit of God did not see fit for John to mention either group. This probably was because He knew that the same teaching would come up throughout the history of the church, but with different names. And so the Apostle John was more concerned that the people of God be acquainted with the false teaching that was being spread, rather than with names. If they recognized the false teaching, then they would not be deceived regardless of the title the false teachers might take.

Let me take this opportunity to mention something which I have mentioned before, and that is the importance of Bible doctrine, or teaching (because that is what doctrine is, teaching). And there is no teaching that is more basic in Scripture than the doctrine of Christ. If people are wrong where Christ is concerned, they are not going to be right any place else. And so we have come to a very important part of 1 John, and of the Scriptures themselves.

Let me give you a brief survey of these twelve verses (vv. 18-29).

John began this section by warning them of false teachers. Then he reminded the people of God that they were not ignorant of the truth, and how they had come to know the truth. In verses 22 and 23 he identified the false teaching, and then in the remainder of chapter 2 he encouraged them to "abide" in what they had been taught, and to do it until the Lord returns.

Now let us turn to the text.

2:18 He introduced this section with a special term of endearment. It is the same word that he used in verse 13, but different from the word

that he used in verses 1 and 12 of this chapter. Here it is the word _____. And John only used it twice in the epistle: 2:13, 18. I don't agree with those who think that he was only addressing the most immature group of verses 12 through 14. It seems to me that he was addressing all of the Lord's people, as he did with _____ in 2:1. He was speaking to them as an old man, possibly feeling that he was very much of a spiritual father to them. But it expressed his love for them.

"It is the last time" -- Lit., it is a last hour. This is actually a term which speaks of the present age in which we are living, speaking of the time from the first coming of our Lord to His return. E.g., the writer of Hebrews said in Heb. 1:2 that God "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." It certainly is true that conditions will deteriorate more than ever the closer we get to the coming of the Lord, but the Word makes it clear that this whole period is going to be a period of false teaching, of sinning, of degeneration, and so John was reminding them that they should not be surprised by the false teaching, but that they should actually expect it.

"And as ye have heard that antichrist shall come" -- They knew that there would eventually be one special Antichrist, but they were also aware that there would be many lesser antichrists who would seek to do the same thing on a lesser scale which the Antichrist would seek to on a major scale.

What does antichrist mean?

The Apostle John is the only one who used this term, and he used it five times, and only in his epistles. Cf. 1 John 2:18 (2x), 22; 4:3; 2 John 7. The word actually means two things:

- 1) One who is against Christ.
- 2) One who would replace Christ.

The Antichrist will probably not appear until after the Church is removed from the earth. He is also known in Scripture as "the man of sin," the Lawless One, and the False Prophet. He will be Satan's last major effort to do away with Christ, and to destroy the Lord's work. But throughout this final age there have been, and will continue to be, many antichrists, teachers who deny what the Scriptures teach about Christ, and who will seek to get the Lord's people to follow them rather than following the Lord.

The fact that there are such antichrists and antichristian teachings is evidence that this is "the last hour."

2:19 Here John was probably speaking of those who were antichrists, as well as those who became their followers. We need to be careful not only about people who come into the church from the outside spreading their false teachings about Christ, but we must not be surprised if and when antichrists and antichristian teaching arises from within the professing church.

Let me remind you of one thing that Paul told the Ephesian elders when he was leaving them for the last time. His words are found in Acts 20:29, 30:

For I know this, that after my departing
shall grievous wolves enter in among you,
not sparing the flock.
Also of your own selves shall men arise,
speaking perverse things,

to draw away disciples after them.

This verse is enlightening, encouraging, as well as serving as a warning. We can certainly see that John believed that once you are truly saved, you are saved forever, but he also believed that if you are really saved, you will persevere in the truth.

The prepositions are especially instructive in this verse (19).

"They went out from us" -- This means that they left, and they did not come back.

Why did they go? "Because they were not of us." That is, they claimed to be the children of God. They attended the meetings of the church. They may have even had responsible positions in the church. But "they were not of us." They were never really saved.

"If they had been of us, they would...have continued with us." "No doubt" is not in the Greek text. The translation is stronger without those two words.

Why did they leave, and leave not to come back? "That it might be made manifest that they were not all of us," or, as the NKJV renders it, "that none of them were of us." The Greek actually says, and this is corrected in the NKJV, "That they might be made manifest..." The Lord was using those circumstances to show who really belonged to Him, and who did not.

Several things of importance stand out in this verse.

First, there are, always will be, people in the church who are not saved. This is a sad fact, but it is true.

Second, when the church is forced to take a stand on the Scriptural teaching concerning Christ, there will be those who will leave. This means not only concerning the Person and Work of Christ, but also His teachings.

Third, true believers will stand for the truth, although it is possible that for a time even real believers can be turned aside. This explains the reason for the exhortations which John gave in this latter part of chapter 2.

Perhaps this would be a good time to point out John's use of the word which is translated "would have continued" here in verse 19. It is also translated here in this epistle with the words abide and remain and dwell. It is a very important word in 1 John, and is found 11 times in chapter 2, 7 times in chapter 3, and 5 times in chapter 4--a total of 23 times.

In chapter 2 it appears in verses 6, 10, 14, 17 before we get to verse 19. Then it appears again here in verse 19, three times in verse 24, twice in verse 27, and once in verse 28. The exact emphasis in each verse is, of course, indicated by its use in the verse. Here in verse 19 it has to do with continuing on with believers, rejecting the false teachers and their antichristian teaching.

This is the word which our Lord used in John 15 when He told the disciples to "abide" in Him, and He in them. In thought it is a word related to fellowship. It speaks of that intimate relationship with Christ which we

have as a result of our salvation.

What we need to learn from verse 19 is that we need to beware of those who are willing to compromise with the teachings of Christ and/or with what the Bible teaches us about Christ. Our churches must never tolerate any departure from the Scriptures. I have recently had contact with a man, a relative of mine, who seems to think that we do not need to depend upon the Scriptures for our knowledge of Christ and the Gospel. When you see where a person stands with reference to Christ, you can see where he or she stands with reference to God, and to the Gospel, and to the Church, the Body of Christ.

But let us go on to verse 20.

2:20. We might think when we read this verse, and verse 27, that we as Christians can ignore godly teachers, past and present, and strike out on our own. That is not what John was saying. If that had been the case, he would not have been writing this epistle.

What he was doing here was combatting the claims of the false teachers. False teachers always try to give us the impression that we can't really understand the truth unless we learn the truth from them! They try to make us dependent upon them. And so the Apostle John was pointing out why that was not true. God has given us teachers. We all have been blessed by the teaching of godly pastors, or Seminary or Bible School teachers, or godly parents, or a godly friend. But we all need to recognize that there is really One Who is our Teacher. He is the Holy Spirit. Our Lord spent much of His time with His disciples in the Upper Room, and then on the way to Gethsemane, seeking to get this into their hearts. We had our Lord's teaching about the Holy Spirit and His teaching in John 14, 15, and 16. And no doubt as he wrote what we have in the remainder of this chapter, John was reminded of that precious time he enjoyed with the other disciples as the Lord taught them about the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

This was the subject of my thesis when I got my degree from Dallas Seminary: The Teaching Ministry of the Holy Spirit. At the beginning of each school year at the Seminary, Dr. Chafer used to speak to us from 1 Cor. 2 about the school with the faculty of One. I heard practically the same message four times, and I would gladly have listened to it four hundred times! How easy it is to forget this truth which is so basic to our fellowship with God, to our knowledge of the Scriptures, and to the effectiveness of our ministry. As I have said before, every bit of truth that you and I understand from the Scriptures, we have been taught by the Holy Spirit. Some of it may have come as we were reading the Word by ourselves, or while we were listening to someone else read it, or in a Bible Class, or in a church service, or during a radio broadcast, or a message on TV. BUT IT IS ALWAYS THE CASE THAT BEHIND THE TEACHER WHOM WE SEE IS THE TEACHER WHOM WE DO NOT SEE, BUT HE IS THERE, AND HE IS GUIDING US IN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE TRUTH.

Now let us look at this verse.

Speaking to all of his readers, children, young men, and fathers, he said, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One." It was not something they were to seek; they were to recognize that this is what they had.

What is "an unction"?

The Greek word is χρίσμα. It is the same word which is translated in verse 27 two times as "anointing." It basically means something that is smeared on, like an ointment, like the oil which was applied in the consecration of priests, or kings, and sometimes even of prophets. Symbolically such a ceremony in the OT was regarded as enduing a person with the Holy Spirit and divine gifts. Thayer says in his Lexicon that this word χρίσμα "is used of the gift of the Holy Spirit, as the efficient aid in getting a knowledge of the truth" (p. 672).

When Paul wrote his second epistle to the Corinthian church, he said this about their anointing in 2 Cor. 1:21, 22:

Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ,
and hath anointed us, is God;
Who also hath sealed us,
and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

This unction, this anointing is "from the Holy One." John was probably speaking here of the Lord Jesus. This is what the Lord called Himself in his letter to the church at Philadelphia, "He that is holy" (Rev. 3:7). The unclean spirit mentioned in Mark 1:23, 24 said to the Lord, "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." And the Lord Jesus, in speaking to His disciples about the Holy Spirit, said, "Whom I will send unto you from the Father." In John 14:26 He said that the Father would send the Holy Spirit in His [Christ's] Name.

So there is no doubt that John was speaking of that anointing by the Holy Spirit which every believer now has.

Consequently, "Ye know all things."

Some of the MSS give the reading, "And you all know it." If that is the correct reading, then, of course, we realize that John was simply pointing out truth which they had been instructed in.

But I am inclined, in view of the circumstances about which John was writing, to accept the reading of the AV. If that is the case, what could John have meant, "And ye know all things"?

Obviously he was speaking of know the truth of the Word of God. Have you ever met a person who knew everything about the Bible? I have met some who thought that they knew everything. But it does take long in talking to a person like that to find out that they don't know as much as they think they know.

I certainly would never claim to know everything about the Bible. What is more, I don't expect to live long enough to learn all that there is to know. I know that you would say the same thing about yourself.

Then what did John mean, "And ye know all things."

I believe that he was saying that, with the Holy Spirit as our Teacher, we have the possibility of knowing anything that is written in this Book. Did not our Lord say, when speaking of the Holy Spirit, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth"? Cf. John 16:13a.

So, in this context where John was speaking about the antichrists who try to make us think that we need them, John was saying that with the Holy

Spirit as our Teacher, we are not dependent upon those false teachers. If the Holy Spirit is the Author of Scripture (and He is!), and He has been given to every single one of us, then we have the best Teacher we could possibly have, and we can tell the false teachers to get on their way! Let us never let anyone get us away from the Word, nor make us feel that we do not have all of the truth because we do not have their teaching and their books. We have God's Book, complete and inerrant and infallible. And we have the Holy Spirit to teach us, often using others, but guiding us carefully in our understanding of the truth. Any other teacher would mean a big step down from the One we already have.

And please note that word "have" before we leave this verse. If you "have" the Holy Spirit, then you do not have to seek Him. Just recognize Him and depend upon Him. He delights to teach the things of God, and especially to show us the things of Christ.

2:21. Note from this verse that John was not hesitating to remind and to exhort and to give further teaching to those who already knew the truth. In fact, he was depending upon what they knew to convince them that he was not misleading them. When he spoke of "the truth," he was speaking of "the truth of God," the truth contained in the Scriptures which they had then, and the teaching of the Apostles. If the antichrist teachers were right, then the Scriptures and Christ and the apostles were all wrong. But John said, "You know the truth, and you know that the truth does not contain any lies."

What a wonderful thing it is to have such confidence in the Scriptures! And remember that we are reading the work of an old, saintly Apostle John. The years that he had known the Lord and had known the truth had only convinced him all the more that "no lie is of the truth." We can read this same book which John wrote almost 2,000 years ago, and know that it still is true, it contains no lie, and is worthy of our complete trust.

Who is the liar then? John answers that question in verses 22 and 23.

2:22. The one who is lying is the person who says that Jesus not the Christ. To deny is to contradict what the Scriptures say. It is to reject the teaching of Scripture, to refuse to accept it. Man is not to pass judgment on the Word of God; it is the Word of God which passes judgment upon man. And all teaching regarding the things of God must be accepted or rejected by whether or not it is in harmony with the Scriptures.

The Cerentians would distinguish between Jesus and Christ, saying that Jesus became Christ at His baptism, but ceased to be Christ on the Cross. The Bible says that Jesus is the Christ, and that the Christ is Jesus. In His humanity our Lord was always the Christ. He was born the Christ, He lived as the Christ, He died as the Christ, and He went to heaven as the Christ.

And, as the last part of this verse shows, if you deny the Son, you deny the Father also. This sound very much like the Lord's words recorded for us in John 5:23,

That all men should honour the Son,
even as they honour the Father.
He that honoureth not the Son
honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.

The whole Gospel of John was written to prove the fact that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." If this is not true, and the Gnostics were right, then we have no salvation, and no true knowledge of God. To contradict what the Scripture teach about Christ is to make the Bible the greatest hoax that has ever been circulated on the earth.

Let me say it again: Judge all teaching by what it declares about the Lord Jesus Christ. If such teaching deviates in the slightest way from what the Bible teaches, it cannot possibly be of God. The teacher is a liar, and he is antichrist.

2:23 Notice here how the Apostle John uses Son, meaning Son of God, as being interchangeable with Christ in verse 22. So, as John wrote in John 20:31, it is important to believe that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." He rightly claims each name and title. They are His in the fullest sense, and no other can lay claim to them. Deny His humanity, deny His Messiahship, deny His Sonship, and the Bible identifies you as a liar.

"Acknowledgeth" is a translation of the Greek verb, ὁμολογέω. It means to confess. We learned from 1 John 1:9 that to confess means to say the same thing. If we reject the teaching of Scripture concerning Christ, then we cannot possibly be saved. To have the Father is to be saved; not to have the Father is to be lost. But if we say the same thing about the Lord Jesus Christ that the Father has said, and that the Word declares, then we are saved because we have the Father and the Son.

And so taking verse 23 with verse 20 we see that a true child of God has the Holy Spirit, and he has Christ, and He has God. But Christ is the key to salvation. He is the key to fellowship with the Father. No one can come to the Father who does not come through Christ.

2:24 The word "therefore" in this verse shows that John has reached a point in his epistle where he is ready to exhort the people of God.

Some times the KJ translators have used different English words to translate the same Greek words, but it seems to me that it would have been more helpful to translate them with the same word so that we can get the true force of the Greek in English.

I feel this way about verse 24.

Earlier I spoke to you about the verb μένω. It is found three times in this verse, and it is translated with three different words. Mark them in your Bible if you wish. The words are "abide," "remain," and "continue." The NKJV has corrected this and uses the word abide in all three places:

Therefore let that abide in you
which you have 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.

Robertson say that the force of the "you" in the first part of the verse would justify translating it, "But as for you..." John was saying that there is nothing to gain, but everything to lose, by turning away from Christ to accept the teaching of the Gnostics. He was saying, "Don't give up anything that you have been taught "from the beginning" about your Savior.

And then comes the promise: If you keep it "in you," then you are going to continue to enjoy fellowship with the Son and with the Father. Remember that John was concerned according to 1:3 with their fellowship with God and with Christ. To abide in Christ is to have fellowship with Christ. It is the practical enjoyment of the union that we have in salvation with the Father and with the Son. That union can never be broken, but we always need to be concerned about maintaining our fellowship with the Members of the Godhead. That is the reason we are to be careful about sin, to be careful about our obedience, to be careful about our relationships with our fellow-believers, and why we must never turn away from Christ and what the Scriptures teach of Him.

Is doctrine important? It is very important! Let us trust the Holy Spirit to continue to teach us that we may enjoy greater fellowship with the Father and with His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

2:25 Behind all that John has said stands the promise of God. Amazingly it is eternal life, a life of constant and eternal fellowship with God and with His Son through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The word "fellowship" sums it all up. "Eternal life" is our participation in all that Christ is. And this means abiding in that wonderful relationship now, throughout time, and then into all eternity.

November 2, 1992

2:26 In a certain sense this verse applies to the entire first epistle of John. The greatest defense that we have against error is in our fellowship with the Father and His Son. Fellowship, as we have just seen, means abiding in Christ, walking with Him, obeying Him, learning of Him, trusting Him to supply all of our spiritual needs, and every other need.

"Seduce" -- This means that the antichrists were out to deceive them, to lead them astray, to draw them away from Christ. And that was the reason that John had put such a strong emphasis upon their need to abide in Christ, to continue in the doctrine which they had been taught. If we neglect our fellowship with the Lord, which also means neglecting the Word of God, or forgetting what we have learned, then we are in much greater danger of being deceived.

Deceiving is a main method which the Devil employs against us. The antichrists are most dangerous when they use the Bible, and use Biblical terms, but they mean something completely different from what the writers of Scripture had in mind. I read a message recently which was delivered in one of our large, prominent churches. He was dealing with the subject of homosexuality, and he did his best to show that since God is a God of love, He is inclined to overlook what He doesn't like, and we should do the same because we are all sinners. He tried to make the Bible a collection of documents which men started to bring together about 1,000 years before Christ, and that these documents were merely human works which were dependent upon the transmission of what people remembered about their history, etc. And so we need to accept homosexuality because we are living in a world where all are sinners of one kind or another, and we have to learn to accept what we do not like. He said nothing about the righteousness of God. He said nothing about man's need of salvation. He spoke of the Son of God, but said nothing about the Cross, or about what Jesus did when He died on the Cross. He was taking the Bible away from his people. He was excusing their sin. He was misrepresenting God. He told them nothing about their need of salvation. In fact, he said that

the Bible was not a book about heaven. It was a slick presentation of error which many people would not recognize because he used some Scripture and spoke of the Son of God. I noticed that he never spoke of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is a deceiver. He is blind to the truth. And yet he occupies one of the most prominent pulpits in our city.

How important it is for us to know our Bibles, and to stand by the truth which we find there! And it is especially important for us to know what the Bible teaches about Christ. Beware of anyone who comes along with another doctrine. The very fact that our churches are doing very little Bible teaching today is opening the door to all kinds of error. The only way we can identify error is by knowing the truth. Don't look upon deception as something that could affect someone else, but not you. All of us need to be constantly on our guard against the many deceivers who are in the world even today.

Listen to what John Calvin wrote about this verse:

When we hear that he wrote concerning seducers, we ought always to bear in mind, that it is the duty of a good and diligent pastor not only to gather a flock, but also to drive away wolves: for what will it avail to proclaim the pure gospel, if we connive [shut our eyes, or pretend that we do not know what is going on] at the impostures of Satan? No one, then, can faithfully teach the Church, except he is diligent in banishing errors whenever he finds them spread by seducers (XXII, 199).

2:27 As we saw last week, this verse is closely related to verse 20.

Our "anointing," or "unction" (v. 20), which we all have, speaks of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Let me remind you again of 2 Cor. 1:21, 22:

Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ,
and hath anointed us, is God;
Who hath also sealed us,
and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

The anointing, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, is a gift from God which we cannot lose. He remains. As our Lord told His disciples in the Upper Room, the Holy Spirit has come to abide with us "for ever" (John 14:16).

Paul was referring to the gift of the Holy Spirit in 2 Tim. 1:14 where he said,

That good thing which was committed unto thee
keep by the Holy Spirit which dwelleth in us.

The only people who do not have the Holy Spirit are the people who are not saved. Cf. Rom. 8:9.

This is probably teaching which many of you have heard before, but it is important for all of us to know it, and to remember it. This teaching is definitely a safeguard against those who are deceiving antichrists. John said here that this anointing, this gift of the Holy Spirit, "abideth in you." That is, He is there, and He is there to stay! We can grieve Him. We can quench Him. We can ignore Him. But He will never leave us.

But why is it primarily important for us to know about the Holy Spirit? Is it so we will great witnesses bringing many to Christ. No. The Lord doesn't use all of us the same way. Is it so we will be great, famous preachers. No. The Lord may see fit to bless some as messengers of the

Word of God, but there is nothing in Scripture that would tell us that He is going to use us all in this way? What about tongues? Or healing? No. It is not any of that. It is primarily important for us to know about the Holy Spirit because He is our Teacher. Men may try to convince us that we do not have all of the truth until we have heard them, or taken their course, or read their books. But, as I have brought out before, the Lord uses people, but we always need to remember that every bit of truth which we know has come to us from the Holy Spirit. And so don't pay your money to go hear someone who claims to have some special insights, insights which may not be based upon Scripture at all. You and I have the Holy Spirit with us twenty-four hours of every day, seven days a week, fifty-two weeks out of every year, and every year that we will live on earth until we see the Lord.

And John mentioned here several things about the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit which we all need to know:

- 1) He teaches us "of all things." That is, there is no part of Scripture that is unknown to the Holy Spirit. After all, He is the Author of Scripture. There is no book of the Bible He is unfamiliar with. There is no doctrine which He does not know. And He brings to us truth which we need to know at particular times in our lives.
- 2) He never deceives you. He never tells you anything but the truth, i.e., the truth of Scripture (because that is what we are talking about). You will never get a "lie" from the Holy Spirit. He is absolutely dependable. This does not mean that our comprehension will always be perfect, but it does mean that the Holy Spirit will guide us into the truth, step by step, and as long as our hearts are open to Him, we will not go wrong.
- 3) The result of the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit is greater fellowship with Christ. "As it (He) hath taught you, ye shall abide in him," i.e., Christ. The Holy Spirit never leads us away from Christ. He never makes us question anything that the Bible teaches us about Christ. One way that you can determine if you are being taught by the Spirit is to notice your own fellowship, your relationship, with Christ. Matthew Henry said on this passage that the Holy Spirit in His teaching "lays a restraint upon your minds and hearts, that you may not revolt from him," i.e., Christ.

How we should all thank God for the gift of His Holy Spirit! And it will make a difference in the way we live, as well as in how we hear the Word of God, if we remember that the Holy Spirit is always with us, and that He will never depart from us. This is a part of the assurance of our salvation and of our security in Christ.

As we leave this verse and the place that it has in this chapter, let us notice that the fact that we have the Holy Spirit does not eliminate the need we all have to beware of the antichristian teachers who would draw us away from Christ.

2:28 Having said the above, John, the aged apostle, now proceeds to give his readers a special exhortation: "And now, little children, abide in him," i.e., in Christ.

Again we have that word of special endearment, "little children," ΤΕΚΝΙΑ. John would win their hearts by the expression of his heart. He loved them. He loved them dearly, and had not greater joy, as he told Gaius in 3 John 4, than to hear that his children were walking in the truth.

"Abide in Him" -- John first heard these words from the Lord Jesus, and it probably had been all of sixty years since that time as he walked with the Lord and the other disciples toward Gethsemane. Only the Lord had said, "Abide in me, and I in you..."

Dr. Ironside expressed the meaning of these words very faithfully when he said, "To abide in Him (Christ) is to live in fellowship with Him" (The Epistles of John, p. 90).

Cf. what the Apostle said about "fellowship" in 1:3, 6, 7. Fellowship obviously means being with Him, but it means more than that. It means drawing upon Him for the needs of our own lives. If we are to have fellowship with Him, then we must walk in the light. We must avoid sin in all of its forms. Worship is a part of fellowship. Learning of Him is a part of fellowship. Opening our hearts to Him is a part of fellowship. Prayer is an essential part of fellowship. Abiding in Him means that we must obey Him. Our Lord said, and His words are recorded in John 15:10,
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.

The Lord's Supper is to be observed in fellowship with the Lord as we remember Him in His death.

There is no greater, more all-inclusive exhortation, than this, "And now, little children, abide in him." When John said that, he said everything that any believer needs to be concerned about in his daily life. Are you abiding in Him? The blessing of the Lord in our lives is dependent upon this, that we are abiding in Christ.

But what incentive did John give to his "little children" so that they would see the importance of their fellowship with the Lord? It was this: Our Lord is coming back. We don't know when, but He is coming! For almost sixty years John had waited in hope of his Lord's return. All of that time had gone by, but John had not given up his hope that the Lord was coming back, and He could arrive at any time. And John said that we don't want to be ashamed before Him when He does come.

John wanted his "little children" to "have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."

To "have confidence" would mean that we can be assured when the Lord comes that we are doing what He always wants us to do.

After all, it is an amazing thing that the Lord even desires to have fellowship with us. When we plan our days, do we plan them around and in keeping with our time with the Lord? We keep rebuking ourselves because we are not taking the time for fellowship with the Lord, but it is so easy to allow the pressure of other things to exclude us. Or, trials may have caused us to feel resentful toward the Lord. Or, as our text would show, it might be that we are inclined to follow some teaching about the Lord which is a departure from the Word of God.

"Ashamed" -- To be ashamed is to be put to shame. It is that pain that we can feel in our hearts when we are aware that we are guilty of some wrongdoing. Let me ask you this: Do you feel that your failure to maintain fellowship with the Lord is sin? We would not know that it is possible for us to be ashamed when the Lord returns if John had not told us. To be

ashamed is to be disgraced, to be covered with reproach. Why? Because we have not been abiding in Christ, we have not been living in fellowship with Him. We have not been walking with Him. They all mean the same thing.

If the Lord were to come today, what would our feeling be? Would you be ashamed, or would you be ready for Him? If you and I really believe in the coming of the Lord, we are going to be living each day in expectation of His return. And that means to be abiding in Him. how important it is for us to make sure that every day we are walking in fellowship with the Lord.

Dr. Chafer used to warn us at Seminary not to be in any place we would not like to be found when the Lord returns. And he told us not to be doing anything that would cause us shame if the Lord were to come while we were doing it.

2:29 In 1:5 we learned that "God is light." Here in 2:29 the Apostle John was speaking of Christ, and he called Him "righteous." Both expressions can be used of God, and both can be used of Christ. And they mean the same thing.

This is a place where the word "if" needs to be translated by the word since. There is no doubt but that our Lord is righteous, absolutely righteous. This word suggests approval when measured by a certain standard. The Lord in His character and in His life has never been anything but pleasing to God, and so fully accepted with God. If we claim to have been "born of him," in this instance, Christ, then we must expect to see the same kind of evidence in our lives that was true of Christ. It is not perfect in us, but it is there, nevertheless.

To be "born of him," that is, born of Christ, means that we have received life from Him, His life, just as we have received our physical life from our physical parents. See verse 25. And this, too, is a place where we find more assurance of our salvation. We want to be like Christ, and we will be like Christ, not perfectly, but the unmistakable evidence is there.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

1 John 3:1-12

November 9, 1992

Intro: The last verse of chapter 2 gives us the first reference to spiritual birth in this epistle. John had used the word τεκνία, "little children" (2:1, 12, 28--2:13, 18 use παῖδια). τεκνία means an offspring, one who has been born into a family. But in 2:28 we have the first use of γεννάω, which speaks of begetting children, or of those who have given birth to children. Therefore, to have been "born of him," that is, born of Christ and/or of God, means that one is a child of God. And, as in physical birth, the parents pass on their nature to their children, so being born of God means that we have God's life in us, and we even now have the characteristic of Christ and of God, which is "righteousness." If that characteristic is not in a person's life, even though it is very imperfect, that person has not right to claim to be a child of God.

One other word which John has been using which speaks of the family relationship which we as the Lord's children have with each other, is the word brother, or brethren. Cf. 2:7, 9, 10, 11. So we can conclude that, as we would say, being a Christian means being born of God into His family where we are the children of God and brothers and sisters to each other. And, as John has already pointed out in chapters 1 and 2, we can be identified by (1) the sin test, (2) by the obedience test, (3) by the love-of-the-brethren test, and, finally, (4) by the doctrine test.

Now for the next twelve verses (1 John 3:1-12) we are going to learn more about the children of God, and see them also by way of contrast with "the children of the devil," especially from verse 8 on.

Incidentally, while we are also the sons of God, John never uses that expression for the Lord's people in this epistle. Every time in this epistle, and in 2 John that he spoke of "the Son," it had reference to our Lord Jesus Christ. He spoke of Christ as a "Son" 22 times in 1 John, twice in 2 John, and not at all in 3 John. So, although we have "sons" in 1 John 3:1, 2, that is not a correct translation. It has been corrected in the NKJV. What John wrote was:

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us,
that we should be called the children of God...

Beloved, now are we the children of God...

Bishop Westcott says that the only time the Apostle John used son of a believer's relationship to God is in Rev. 21:7:

He that overcometh shall inherit all things;

and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

"Child" emphasizes our relationship with God by birth; "son" speaks of our privileges in the family of God. The Apostle John was not thinking about our privileges in the family of God, but just of the fact that we are in the family of God, and how we can be sure that we are the children of God. It is in Romans and Galatians especially that the Apostle Paul was concerned about what it means to be a son in the family of God.

But let us go to 1 John 3. Let me read the first twelve verses for you. (Read.)

In the first three verses John spoke of the present and future condition of the children of God. In verses 4 through 12 he again applied the sin test.

3:1 "Behold" is used here as more than an attention-getter. It probably

should be translated, Look, or See! John seems to have been transported out of this world for the time being after he wrote those words, "Ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him." He seems to have been overwhelmed by the thought. He had obviously contemplated it with great blessing to his soul many times before, but here it came with a fresh impact upon him, and he did not want his readers to miss what he was seeing with the eye of faith.

His thought seems to have been something like this: "It would have been enough for God to forgive us of our sins. That is a blessing far beyond anything that we could ever deserve. But He has given us eternal life. He has assured us that we will be in heaven. And the crowning glory of all is that He has brought us into His family, and made us His children." And then he seemed to say with that word, "Behold," "Can you think of anything more wonderful?"

Now get the picture. Here is an old man. Just how long he had been saved it is impossible to say, but it must have been at least sixty years, maybe longer. But the important thing for us to see is that he had never gotten over the fact that he, John, the son of Zebedee, who with his brother James had been called "sons of thunder," that he, of all people, would have been brought into God's family. It is remarkable to see that after all of those years the old Apostle John had not gotten over the wonder of being saved. He could not think of this truth without also thinking of how he had been drawn to Christ, probably through the preaching of John the Baptist. Whatever the circumstances of his salvation may have been, here he was after all of these years saying, "Look, see, behold this, all of you [because it is in the plural], think of how much God had to love us to save us, and then to bring us into His family as His born children!" He couldn't get over it!

When we see this in the Word, we need to ask ourselves, "Have we gotten over the miracle of grace that God performed in our lives when He saved us, and made us His children?" We need to think about this more than we do. We need to look at God's love for us, love which our heavenly Father bestowed upon us when He made us His children through the new birth. It would help all of us just to say this verse over and over again until our hearts are moved perhaps as never before with the thought that God could love you and me that much.

The word that John used for "love" here is our old friend ἀγάπη! This is an excellent time for us to review what we learned about ἀγάπη love when we were learning about the test of love for our brothers. Remember that ἀγάπη love is manifested toward those you prefer above all others, those you cannot leave alone or behind, you cannot do without them, you delight in them, and you would seek their greatest welfare and blessing. This is the way that we are supposed to feel about each other, but isn't it amazing that this is the way that God feels about us? He couldn't leave us in our sin. He can't do without us. He delights in us, and prefers all of us above everyone else! It is no wonder that John spoke of God's love for us, His children, as "what manner of love..." You may see many great examples of love in this world--the love of a young man and a young woman for each other, or the love of parents for their children, the love of a soldier who will risk his life to rescue his buddy who has been wounded in battle, or a brother who will risk his life to go into a burning building because he has a little brother and a little sister in that building who will die in the flames if he does not get them out.

We continually see great examples of love, but you will never find anything that begins to compare with the love that the Lord has for His people. Cf. John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:9, 10.

When John said, "What manner of love," he was saying that you can look wherever you want to, you will never find a love that can even begin to approach the love of God for us. It is as high above human love as the heavens are above the earth! There can be no comparison with it. And when we realize that it has been directed toward us, it ought to bring tears of joy to our eyes, and a new song of praise to our lips. Put "the Father" with "us," and you have the greatest contrast that can possibly be made! He has made us His children! What can we say!

This is a love that is totally undeserved. In fact, God would have been absolutely righteous to have forgotten all about us, and let us go on our way to hell. But His heart would not let Him do that! He had to have us for His very own, and He willingly sent His Son to die for us so that He could cleanse us from our sins, and bring us into His family. Oh, what love is this! He has given us His love, and He has made us His children.

You can see from this that the reason we have been saved is not because of anything in us, but it is because of the love that is in His heart for us. Let me show you an OT illustration of this. Please turn to Deut. 7, and look with me at verses 6 through 8. (Read and comment.)

Now let me point out for your blessing two words which are in some MSS which do not appear in our Authorized Text. Right after the words, "that we should be called the children of God," some Greek MSS have the two words, καὶ ἐσμὲν. Do you know what they mean? They mean, "And we are!" Not we may be, nor we hope to be, nor even that we shall be, but we are! We are right now! This is not something that we have to wait for until we get to heaven. Right not, at this very moment, if we are saved, we are the children of God! And do you know what else this means? Since God has done this for us, and "called" us His sons, since we have been born into His family, we can never be "un-born." You never heard of an un-birth, and you never will! There is not such thing.

And so when the Apostle John said, "And we are," he meant that we are the children of God right now, and we always will be! What precious truth this is! It is no wonder that John wanted us to see what he was seeing.

We come to a change of atmosphere in the last statement of verse 1. We are suddenly pulled down from glory back to earth again. We are the children of God now, but we are not in heaven yet. We are living here in this ungodly world, which is getting worse morally all of the time. Here the Apostle John said, "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not."

Back in verses 15 through 17 of chapter 2 we learned a little about the world. We learned that the world, and all that is in it, is "not of the Father." The people of the world do not know our God. They do not know our Savior. They have not been "born of God." They are not children of God. And so they don't know us. That is, they don't understand us. They don't recognize us in the decisions that they make. They march to a different beat. They don't understand why we are against homosexuality. They describe it as bigotry. They think that we don't like what they are doing because we hate them. They don't understand that we are against homosexuality because God has declared Himself against it. They don't

understand why we are against abortion because they don't understand when it is that God gives life.

Do you remember what Peter said about how the people of the world feel about us after we are saved, especially those who have been our friends. In 1 Pet. 4:3, 4 you will find these words:

For the time past of our life may suffice us
to have wrought the will of the Gentiles,
when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine,
revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:
Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them
to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.

However, when you feel shut out by the world, remember that our dear Lord was treated the same way. Perhaps at this point John was thinking about what the Lord had said while He was walking with His disciples toward Gethsemane. Here are His words:

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.
If ye were of the world, the world would love its own:
but because ye are not of the world,
but I have chosen you out of the world,
therefore the world hated you (John 15:18, 19).

The world does not understand our way of life. It does not understand our attachment to the Bible. The people of the world simply cannot understand us, nor do they want to. However, remembering who we are, and how we came to be what we are, will help us to face the way the world ignores us and, at times, opposes us.

3:2 John may have brought us down, but he began to soar again in the words that we find in verse 2.

He repeated for special emphasis what he had just said at the beginning of verse 1. He spoke of what we are now, and then immediately began to speak of what we shall be.

Dr. Ironside told the story of a great artist who planned to paint a very large work of art which was to be the masterpiece of his life. He stretched a very large canvas upon on one side of his studio, erected scaffolds on which he could stand and paint. Then he began his work. He had some very large brushes with which he began to put various colors of paint on the canvas. He would paint a while, and then get down off of the scaffolds to look at a distance at what he had done. One day, after he had been working on his masterpiece for quite some time, adding one color here, and another color there, a friend came into his studio. The artist asked him what he thought of the picture. The man replied that it looked to him like a lot of splashes of paint which didn't mean anything. Then the artist said, "Oh, I forgot. You can only see what is there, while I can see the picture as it is going to be."

It is wonderful to see what the Apostle John was looking at, according to verse 1. He saw who he and all of the people of God are, and why they had such a glorious relationship with God. But the Lord enabled him to see, at least in part, according to verse 2, what he and all of us will be some day when the work of the Lord is finished in us.

Even he did not see the picture clearly. He said, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." By this he meant that God has not fully revealed what

we will be like when His work in us is completed. We have a general idea, but the details are yet to be added. The finishing touches still need to be put into the picture. God sees the finished picture, but He hasn't shown it to us as yet.

But then he went on to say that there are three things that we do know.

First, we know that our Lord is going to be manifested. The Apostle John used the same verb twice in this verse, the verb which is translated "appear." It is a word which speaks of a visible manifestation, one of the Biblical words for a revelation. The same verb was used in verse 28 of chapter 2. John did not speak of the Lord's return as just an event, but as the revelation of our Lord in all of His glory. I would take it that John was saying that He will be far more glorious when He returns than He was when He left. He will be the same Person in the same body, but His glory will no longer be veiled. It will be displayed then as never before.

So we have to wait until He returns. And do not have any misgivings about it: our Lord is coming back, probably soon, maybe even today.

The second thing that we know is that "we shall be like him." We know that. There is no doubt about that either. This is the whole purpose of salvation. God finds His greatest delight in His Son, and, because He also delights in us, He has ordained that the goal of salvation is to make us like the Lord Jesus is.

We know that there will always be a difference between Him and us. We are not going to become Deity as He is, but, nevertheless, there is going to be a great family likeness for all of us. No one will be able to question then but that we are the children of God. The angels will say then, speaking of us, "They look like the Lord." Even our bodies will be glorified like His. Paul said that in Phil. 3:20, 21. This is the whole meaning behind Rom. 8:28, 29, and 30.

One thing we do know about our likeness to the Lord is that morally and spiritually we will be perfect. From the moment of our glorification we will be able to say what the Lord said while He was here on earth, a statement which none of us can make now. I refer to our Lord's word, "I do always those things that please him," speaking of the Father. Cf. John 8:29b.

The third thing that we know is that "we shall see him as he is." Then our Lord's prayer in John 17:24 will be answered:

Father, I will that they also, whom thou has given me,
be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory,
which thou has given me: for thou lovedst me
before the foundation of the world.

John had a special revelation of our Lord late in his life which he described in Rev. 1. But I am sure that I am right when I say that when the Apostle John declared here in 1 John 3 that "we shall see him as he is," he was still to see the Lord in even greater glory when he finally saw the Lord in heaven. The sight of the Lord for all of us will be so great, so transforming, that we will be instantaneously changed into the likeness of our Savior. We will still look differently from each other, but all of us will be glorified.

There is no doubt about any of this. It is absolutely certain because it is all the result of what the Lord is going to do in completing His work of salvation in us. This is why Paul could right Phil. 1:6, and why Jude wrote as he did in Jude 24, 25.

Let me ask you this morning, Do you really want to be like the Lord? As we have lived through childhood and into our adult years, we have known many people we have admired, and perhaps they have been what is often called "a role model." Perhaps it was some athlete, or some musician, or some teacher you had, or some national hero. But, you know, all of those become insignificant when placed beside the Lord. People can disappoint us, and we often disappoint the people who may be looking up to us. But our Lord never disappoints us. The more we know about Him, the more we love Him. And the more we love Him, the more we want to be like Him.

I love that old hymn which expresses what ought to be the prayer of all of us who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ:

Oh, to be like Thee! blessed Redeemer,
This is my constant longing and prayer,
Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures,
Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear.

Oh, to be like Thee! full of compassion,
Loving, forgiving, tender and kind,
Helping the helpless, cheering the fainting,
Seeking the wandering sinner to find.

Oh, to be like Thee! lowly in spirit,
Holy and harmless, patient and brave,
Meekly enduring cruel reproaches,
Willing to suffer others to save.

Oh, to be like Thee! while I am pleading,
Pour out Thy Spirit, fill with Thy love;
Make me a temple meet for Thy dwelling,
Fit me for life and heaven above.

Oh, to be like Thee! Oh, to be like Thee!
Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art!
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness;
Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart.

If that is your prayer, then you will be interested in 2 Cor. 3:18. (Read and comment.)

Everything that God brings into our lives, or allows to touch our lives, is with this in mind: to make us more like our Lord Jesus Christ. These two verses really give us the whole story of salvation, don't they? They tell us why the Lord saved us in the first place--because of His love for us, and they tell us what His ultimate purpose in our saving us is--to make us like His Son.

But how can you tell that you are really serious about becoming like our Lord? Verse 3 gives us our answer.

3:3 (Read.)

The Greek actually says, "And all who have this hope in him purifies himself just as He [our Lord] is pure."

I have told you many times that "hope" in Scripture, as it is used here, does not mean that there is some question about it all taking place. Remember the Apostle's words in verse 2, "We know." It is a "hope," not because it is uncertain, but because it is still future for all of us. We all have this same "hope," a blessed, absolutely certain prospect. But the evidence that we are headed for heaven and glory can be seen in the fact that we spend our lives here on earth purifying ourselves to make ourselves just like our Lord.

But someone is bound to say, "Isn't that works? How can we make ourselves pure?"

Remember that grace does not eliminate our responsibility to be what the Lord wants us to be, and to do what the Lord wants us to do, even to think what the Lord wants us to think. Of course, it is impossible for us to purify ourselves if we are thinking in terms of what we can do for ourselves. But "it is God which worketh in you [and me] both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). God is always working in us for this very purpose. We find that we have a growing distaste for sin. We begin to cry out to the Lord to help us to be what He wants us to be. He brings us to His Word, and gives us the grace to be obedient to Him. The Apostle John did not give us the details here because Paul had already done that in Romans and Philippians and in many other places in his epistles. And our Lord had pointed the way to His disciples when He commanded them to abide in Him! We separate ourselves from that which will defile us, and we separate ourselves unto all of the influences God has given us, His Spirit, His Word, the fellowship of His people, so that our lives can become more and more like our dear Savior.

James used this word in Jas. 4:8 when he wrote,
 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.
 Cleanse your hands, ye sinners;
 and purify yours hearts, ye double minded.

And Peter used the same word in 1 Pet. 1:22 where he said,
 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.

May the Lord help us to see what the Apostle John saw, and to respond with all of our hearts to do those things, by the grace of God, which will be blessed by the Spirit of God to make us more like the Lord Jesus as we walk in daily fellowship with Him.

November 16, 1992

3:4 This verse begins in much the same way that verse 3 begins. Both verses could be translated, Everyone who... That is, everyone who has this hope... Then, by contrast, everyone who... That is, everyone who commits who commits sin. So the very form of these two verses would indicate that they stand in contrast with each other. The person who has the hope which is described in verse 2 purifies himself from sin; he does not go on sinning. On the other hand, he who continues in sin "commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness" (NKJV).

A literal translation of this verse would go like this: Everyone who does

the sin also does lawlessness, for the sin is the lawlessness. This amounts to a definition of sin. If you sum up what sin is in its entirety, it is lawlessness. Sin is the violation of what we know to be acceptable in God's sight. As Romans 1 and 2 indicate, even though the Gentiles did not receive the Word of God in the same way that the Jews did, yet God wrote the law in their hearts. Cf. Rom. 2:14, 15. Therefore, sin is man's refusal to do what God wants him to do, as well as being the determination to do what God forbids. This is sin. The word is often translated as "iniquity" in the KJV.

So the one who has "hope" in his heart, spends his days seeking to do that which pleases God. On the other hand, the man who keeps on sinning is refusing to do the will of God, and this is actually what sin is! So the person who continues on in sin obviously is without "hope." More than that, he treats the will of God with contempt, which is what wickedness is.

Verse 4 is closely related to verse 3, as we might expect. There are two ways of living: one in which a person seeks to purify himself; the other is one in which he disregards the fact that God has revealed His will, and refuses to be submissive to it. John did not speak in this verse of "the law." "Transgresseth also the law" is the translation of two words which mean doeth lawlessness. And "the transgression of the law" is the translation of one Greek word: lawlessness.

We are to purify ourselves, according to verse 3, as our Lord is pure. In this connection it is well that we remember our Lord's words in Psalm 40:7, 8:

Then said I, Lo, I come:
in the volume of the book it is written of me,
I delight to do thy will, O my God:
yea, thy law is within my heart.

So, to be like the Lord means, among other things, that we are going to live in obedience to His revealed will.

3:5 The kind of behavior which is described in verse 4 indicates that the person who lives that way is not a child of God. And here in verse 5, and then in verse 6, we find out why he cannot be a child of God.

Here is one of the things that we who are the children of God, "know." That "he" [Christ] "was manifested to take away our sins, and in him" [Christ] "is no sin." So, if He came to take away our sins, and in him is no sin," and we are to be like Him, then it is inconceivable that a child of God would live in violation of the will of God.

Let us look for a moment at that verb, "manifested."

This is a prominent verb in 1 John. It appears a total of eight times. Cf. 1:2 (2x); 2:19, 28; 3:2, 5, 8; 4:9. The adjective form is in 3:10.

It speaks of something becoming visible, or made known, which before had not been visible or known. It speaks here, as it does in 1:2, of the appearance of our Lord on earth as the God-Man, the incarnate Son of God. It speaks of His first coming. He came on a mission from the Father. His mission was "to take away our sins."

"Take away" means to lift up and carry off. This was the verb that John the Baptist used when He spoke of the Lord as the Lamb of God in John

1:29. This is the word that Joseph of Arimathaea used when he requested of Pilate "that he might take away the body of Jesus" (2x in John 19:38). It speaks of what our Lord did on the Cross. He took our sins upon Himself, and carried them away where we would never see them again. The Lord Jesus appeared on earth to be our Sin-Bearer. Cf. 1 Pet. 2:24; Isa. 53:6. This is the great doctrine of substitution.

However, it also means that the relationship of a child of God with sin can never be the same once he has been saved. It is impossible for him to go on living in sin. (We will see more about this in verses 6 and 9.) A child of God does not enjoy sin, and he longs for the day when it will be impossible for him ever to sin again.

"And in him is no sin" -- Bishop Westcott said, "This fact at once explains how Christ could take away sin, and how sin is incompatible with fellowship with him" (The Epistles of John, p. 103). It is important to see that John used the word "is," not was. He was "without sin" before He came to earth. He was "without sin" all of the time He lived on earth. And He continues in heaven now and forever "without sin." This means not only that He never sinned, but that He did not have the capacity to sin. He, according to Rom. 8:3, came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" because He was a human being, but He did not come in sinful flesh! There is a world of difference between those two statements. This statement puts our Lord on an equal basis with the Father about Whom John said in 1:5, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

Here we can include some other statements with regard to our Lord and sin:

- 1) He "did no sin" (1 Pet. 2:22).
- 2) He was "without sin" (Heb. 4:15).
- 3) He "knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21).

A denial of the truth of the sinlessness of Christ, or of the impeccability of Christ, is a denial of our salvation. And for us as believers to overlook this truth, is to exclude ourselves from fellowship with God and with Christ.

3:6 We have learned that abiding in Christ means to have fellowship with Christ. It means that we are trusting Him, drawing upon Him for every need in our lives, enjoying Him and worshipping Him. And so John makes the point here that the person who claims to be in fellowship with the Lord does not continue on in sin. He does not live in sin. This describes the character of a child of God. It is what Bishop Westcott called his "'prevailing habit.'" It does not exclude the possibility that he can sin, but that is not his way of life. His life in connection with sin has been forever changed; he can never go back and live like he used to live. If he does, it means that he has never "seen" the Lord, nor "known him."

Seeing the Lord means understanding Who He is and Why He came, what He did in order to deliver us from our sins and give us eternal life. This was very likely meant to be an exposure of their false teachers. We need to remember that the person who is not straight concerning what the Bible teaches about Christ, cannot be right in anything else that they teach about man's relationship with God. We have to see Him before we can know Him. To know the Lord is to believe in Him. It is to trust Him for all that is involved in our salvation: justification, sanctification, and glorification.

Another thing that we can see in these verses is that the person, whoever he might be, who is confused about Christ, is confused also about the life that we ought to live. True morality is the result of a true understanding of Christ and of faith in Him.

Notice that John did not say that such a person has known the Lord, and then has lost his salvation. He said that he never has seen the Lord, nor has he ever known the Lord. Cf. 2:19. A teacher may claim to have a lot of knowledge, but if he is wrong about Christ, don't trust anything else that he may tell you.

3:7 We come again to our familiar word of affection, of endearment:

"Little children." The Greek is _____. They were not to let anyone "deceive" them. This is the crucial test, the sin test. Or, to state it positively, the righteousness test. And so John is repeating and re-emphasizing what he said in 2:29. We begin with Christ. He is righteous, perfectly righteous, totally pleasing and acceptable to God. If we claim to know Him, then we will be living like he lived. Cf. 2:6.

We talk a great deal about righteousness, but what is it?

Theologians talk about two kinds of righteousness:

- 1) Imputed righteousness.
- 2) Imparted righteousness.

What are we talking about when we talk about righteousness?

Thayer in his Greek Lexicon describes it this way: It is the state of one being what he ought to be in order to be acceptable with God. That is a good definition. Others have defined it as that which measures up to a standard. We have certain standards which we all must abide by. If you ladies go in to buy three yards of cloth, the salesperson is not being righteous if she sells you 8 feet instead of nine. When you go in to buy gas, and ask for 10 gallons, there is a certain amount that must be delivered to you if the station attendant sells you gas. Anything less is unrighteous.

God has His standards. He has revealed them to us in the Word of God. To go to heaven we have to have the full approval of God. He cannot accept anything less than absolute perfection. None of us can measure up to that standard. It is too high for us; we are sinners, defiled, and worthy only of God's judgment. So what has God done. He sent His Son to die for sinners so that in taking away our sin, we are also clothed in God's righteousness through Christ. This is what 2 Cor. 5:21 says. (Quote.) This is IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS. We do not deserve it. We cannot earn it. But because of Christ's sacrifice, the righteousness of God is put to the account of all of those who are trusting in Christ.

However, that is something that we cannot see. We do not get a written certificate which says that we are righteous in God's sight, fully acceptable to Him. Our standing before God, our acceptance with Him, will always be demonstrated by righteous living, living that also has God's approval. This is imparted righteousness. It is imparted to us as we abide in Christ, or, to state that another way, as we have fellowship with Christ as branches have fellowship with the Vine. The whole story of righteousness can be defined in two words: UNION AND COMMUNION. We are united to Christ, and the righteousness of God is imputed to us; we walk in fellowship with Christ, and His righteousness is imparted to us, and we portray it in the way we live. We have to be righteous before we can live

righteously.

Here in verse 7 John said that we are not to let anyone make us think differently about our relationship with the Lord. Again let me say that we do not live perfectly righteous, but righteousness becomes the character of one who truly has seen the Lord, and has come to know Him.

So again we see how important it is to believe in the absolute, the perfect righteousness of Christ. Anyone who is born of Him is going to be living like the Lord lived, i.e., living so as to please God. That which pleases God is righteousness. If we break away from this standard of Christian faith and life, we are departing from the very plain teaching of Scripture.

3:8. The reverse is also true.

The person who continually sins, who continually ignores and/or deliberately violates the Word of God, "is of the Devil." And you can identify such a person because "the devil sinneth from the beginning." That is, sinning is a way of life for the Devil. This is his character. He cares nothing for the ways of God. Righteousness is abhorrent to him. In all of the activity of Satan from the first time that he appeared to Eve in the Garden of Eden, all we can see is sin. He may sometimes appear as an angel of light, but it is only that he may sin the more, and get others to sin with him. The person who is continually sinning draws his inspiration and pattern from the Evil One even though he or she might not know what he is doing.

This led John to state another reason for the coming of Christ.

He (Christ) "was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."

The word that John used here for "destroy" means to loosen, that is, to break up, to bring to an end.

In Hebrews chapter 2 we have three reasons given for the incarnation and subsequent work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Please turn to that passage. Cf. vv. 9, 14, 15, 17, 18. Verse 14 is the one that is similar to what we are considering in 1 John 3:8. But a different word is used here for "destroy." This means to render him powerless, and eventually to put a complete end to all of the works of the Devil. It is the Greek word

The doom of Satan was sealed at the Cross. But he is yet to be cast into the lake of fire. He still goes about "seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). The work of Christ would not have been complete if He had not made provision for the defeat of Satan. While Satan is working tirelessly day after day, ruining as many lives as he can, yet through Christ it is possible for sinners to be delivered from his tyranny, transformed, and made into the people of God. We cannot set ourselves free from Satan, but the Lord can deliver us. Therefore, our work in the Lord is not in vain.

3:9 John states this great truth once again. How important it is for us to hear is, believe it, and never forget it. He said that everyone who is born of God does not go on doing sin. There are no exceptions. It applies in all cases. The character of the life of a child of God is completely different from those who are in the world.

Why is it that we cannot go on living in sin?

"For his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin," cannot go on habitually and continually sinning, "because he is born of God."

What did John mean by "his seed"?

Some say that this is a reference to the Holy Spirit. That is a possibility, but it seems to me from what John tells us in this epistle that he was speaking of the life which we have in Christ, eternal life. Cf. 2:25. See also 5:11-13.

When we receive Christ, we receive life. He is "the life" (John 14:6). We have eternal life. It is divine life. It is the life that is imparted to us through our fellowship with the Lord.

One definition of a seed, if we are talking about a seed which we would plant in the ground, is that it contains within itself that which the plant will eventually become. We all know, don't we, that life for us as human beings began at conception. That is why we know that abortion is sinful in God's sight. It is putting to death a life which God has given. The analogy follows for eternal life. God has put within us the seed of eternal life. The Greek word for seed is the word from which we get our English word, sperm. The Greek is _____. We are alive spiritually. We have eternal life now. As we have fellowship with the Lord, as we abide in Him, gradually that life which is in us is manifested more and more until, when the Lord comes, or we go to be with Him, "we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is."

This divine life within us, eternal life, Christ, makes it impossible for the child of God to go on living like he used to live, in sin. And the more the child of God lives in fellowship with His Lord, the more He becomes like His Lord Who is the absolutely righteous One.

So you see that the one who is born of God cannot go on living in sin because he has that eternal life which keeps him from it. FOR ANOTHER ASPECT, SEE ALSO JEREMIAH'S EXPERIENCE W/THE WORLD- JER. 20:7-9. CP. 1 PET. 1:13-25.

3:10 And so the difference between the children of God and the children of the Devil is not something vague and hard to recognize. It is "manifest," it is very clear so that there can be no question about it. Lit. John said, Everyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, neither he who does not love his brother.

How do you know that you are a child of God?

John said, "Two ways."

- 1) You live righteously.
- 2) You prefer and support and want to be with the people of God.

Here it is stated negatively for emphasis, and to bring home the truth with greater force. If these two characteristics are absent from a person's life, he, or she, is not a child of God. Neither will be present perfectly, but both must be present to some degree, and increasingly so as life goes on.

November 23, 1992

3:11 As we go through this epistle there are statements which indicate

that the Apostle John always has the false teachers in his mind, the Gnostics. They represented what is usually true of false teaching: they have come to give something new. Undoubtedly the entrance of false teaching had affected the fellowship of the Lord's people. Some were inclined to accept it; others were not. And so there was a division in the making. And so once again the Apostle John emphasized that the people of God need to remember that which they have "heard from the beginning." For us this means that we need to stand by the revealed Word of God which we have in the Scriptures. For those early Christians in John's day it meant the same thing because all of the NT had been written except for the epistles of John, and possibly the book of The Revelation of Jesus Christ. "From the beginning" probably means that which the Lord taught, and that which His apostles continued to teach after our Lord went back to heaven.

This verse should remind us of what we had back in 2:7, 8. John had re-introduced this subject of love at the end of verse 10, and it will continue to occupy his attention to the end of this chapter.

The word translated "message" is used only by John, and just twice: 1:5 and here. They were not ignorant of this, that they were to love each other. Therefore, anything that caused division was to be looked at with suspicion. Loving each other means true fellowship with each other. The truth preserves our fellowship, but error will destroy it. And we see this in the following verse.

3:12 The Apostle John used an OT incident to illustrate his teaching. It was actually a negative illustration -- "Not as..." We need to see that John was illustrating his teaching with an example from the OT.

Cain was John's illustration of what we should not be.

We all should know that Cain was the firstborn son of Adam and Eve. "His brother," who is not named here, was Abel. The account is found in Gen. 4:1-16.

These men were brothers in the flesh because they both had the same father and mother, but they were not brothers in the Lord. Abel definitely was a child of God. Abel is the first person mentioned in Hebrews 11, and we are told that it was "by faith" that he "offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts, and by it he being dead yet speaketh." And so we have God's testimony that Abel was righteous.

Cain, on the other hand, while according to our verse here in 1 John, was not a child of God, yet he was a religious man. He also brought a sacrifice to the Lord, but he did not bring what Abel brought. The writer of Hebrews called Abel's offering "a more excellent sacrifice." Now there was nothing wrong, as far as I can see, for Cain to bring an offering of "the fruit of the ground." That was done regularly after the Law was given. It was called the firstfruits offering. However, Lev. 23:12 tells us that when the firstfruits were brought, they were always to be accompanied with "an he lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt offering unto the Lord."

We are not told in Genesis 4 what the Lord had told Cain and Abel about their offerings, but we can be absolutely sure that they both knew what they were to bring. Whether or not the same conditions applied which were required later under the Law, we do not know. I am inclined to believe

that they did. But what we do know is that Cain had no blood sacrifice, but Abel did!

The first appearance of false teaching in the Bible is found in Genesis 3 when the serpent, who was the Devil, lied to Eve about what God had said. In chapter 4 we see false teaching in action. Cain knew what God wanted, but he refused to bring it. He had his own way which he thought was perfectly acceptable. He was like a lot of people today who do not think that the blood of Christ is necessary in order for us to approach God. They ignore God's way, although it is clearly taught in Scripture, and come their own way. They think it is important to worship God, but how you do it is not important.

What was the result?

We read in the latter part of Gen. 4:4 and the beginning of verse 5, these words:

And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering:

But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.

The primary idea in the verb, to have respect, is that of discerning, and consequently to look upon what these men did with either favor or disfavor. The Lord accepted one and rejected the other. It made no difference how sincere Cain might have been (although we should even doubt his sincerity), he was wrong, and he was rejected.

So, what did he do? Did he rebuke himself, repent, and bring a blood sacrifice. No! He got angry, and when he had the right opportunity he killed Abel even though the Lord tried to reason with him.

What did the Apostle John say here in verse 12 about what Cain did? He said that it was "evil." "His own works were evil." Solomon said in Proverbs 15:8,

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,

But the prayer of the upright is His delight (NKJV).

People who reject God's way, people who deny that the blood of Christ is necessary for the forgiveness of our sins, are an abomination to the Lord regardless of how religious and devout they may appear to be. And the important point that Paul was making here is that their rejection of the Word of God proves that they are not really the people of God! We will see how the Apostle John brought that out in the verses that follow.

So we are reminded by this reference to Cain and Abel that when you find a lack of love toward a child of God, you know that you are dealing with a person who is still spiritually dead. There was no reason for Cain to get mad at Abel. Abel didn't force Cain to do what he did. Actually Abel had nothing to do with Cain's offering. But rather than repent, and then make things right with the Lord, Cain got angry with Abel and killed him.

Abel was the first martyr. He was killed by his own brother for doing what God wanted him to do. You will often see how intense hatred is shown toward those who insist on the blood of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. Many have laid down their lives throughout human history because they stood faithfully for salvation through the sacrifice of Christ.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

1 John 3:13-24

November 23, 1992

Intro: In the verses just before the passage which we are about to consider, the Apostle John had re-introduced the subject of love for the brethren as being one of the main evidences that a person is saved. He continues with that here, but begins by showing that we must not be surprised, or amazed if we get the same kind of treatment from the world which Abel got from his brother.

3:13 Robertson suggests that this verse could be translated, "Cease wondering," or we could also translate it, Stop being amazed when you experience the hatred of the world. The attitude of the world is often a shock to a new Christian. By "the world" the Apostle John meant the world of unbelievers. Sometimes you will find them even in the church. You can recognize them by their opposition to the truth. However, the world outside is not friendly with the church when the church is what it ought to be. In fact, the thing that ought to trouble us is when things go well in the world for the church. The Lord did not find it that way, nor did the Apostles. And often you will find that the strongest opposition comes from religious non-Christians.

Hatred and love, or hatred versus love, are the subject of verses 13 through 15.

The Lord spoke of love and hate as He walked with His disciples toward Gethsemane. Cf. John 15:17-25. (Read.)

Hatred means rejection, and usually it leads to persecution in some form. A true Christian usually does not have to leave his former worldly friends; they leave him. It must not surprise us that non-Christians do not want to come to church. If they do, it is usually a sign that the Lord is dealing with them. But normally they stay away. We must not be surprised at that. We must expect it. There is something wrong if we don't experience opposition from the world.

3:14 The hatred of the world for the truth and for the people of God is so strong that when a person starts to love the brethren, you can be sure that he has "passed from death unto life." The world is in death; the church is in life.

"We know" is present assurance. The Apostle John teaches us that we can "know" that we are saved.

More than this, we can know that we are saved now, and will continue to be saved. "Have passed" is in the perfect tense in the Greek, as it is in the English, but the Greek speaks of something that has taken place in the past, and continues into the present. There is even the idea here that when we pass from death to life it is a permanent change. We are not going back into death again. Salvation is present, we know it, and it is permanent. And the proof, the evidence, is that we love, and continue to love, "the brethren." We are in the family of God. Cain was in the family of Adam and Eve, but he was not in the family of God. Abel was in both families, and that is why Cain hated him.

"He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." We might have thought that when Cain was preparing to present an offering to the Lord, he was a child of God. But what happened afterwards did not show that he had been, but was no more. It showed that he never had gotten out of death.

Do we understand what spiritual death is? How can we define death?

Death basically is a separation. When we die, we do not cease to exist, but our spirits are separated from our bodies. Spiritual death is separation from God. When we are saved, we are united with God, and this is what it means to have eternal life. The contrast between spiritual death and spiritual life is even greater than the contrast between Lazarus when he was in the tomb as compared with what he was when he came out of the tomb. There were outward evidences that he was not dead any longer, but that he was alive!

Those who are spiritually dead are separated from God. They have no spiritual life. They continue on in sin. They have no interest in living according to the Word of God, nor do they want to be around the people of God. Bible teaching, doctrine, bores them. But all of that changes when we receive eternal life. Then we begin to act and live in just the opposite way. And the Apostle John would have us know that if the evidences of eternal life are not there, that person is spiritually dead. You can see that the Apostle John was drawing a very clear and sharp contrast. We are either dead or alive; there is no possibility of being half way between the two. But it is important to remember as far as the evidences of salvation are concerned. They do not come and go; they are there all of the time. They are not there in perfection, but all of the signs of spiritual life will be present when a person really knows the Lord.

3:15 The Apostle must have been thinking here about Cain. His jealousy of Abel led to hatred, and hatred led to murder. I think that Bishop Westcott was right when he said of this verse that hatred is not just the first step toward murder, but hatred means being involved in "the same moral position" (p. 113).

And John concluded this verse by expressing the assurance just as strong about one who hates as he did in verse 14 about one who loves. Murderers surely can be saved, but as long as they go on hating and murdering, you know that they do not have eternal life. "Abiding" means residing in him as a permanent possession. And that is the only kind of salvation that there is, the abiding kind.

November 24, 1992

3:16 But we need to know what it means to love the brethren. The world has its own idea of love, but we need to know the distinctive character of the love that we are to show to each other. It certainly is not an erotic love. The word for this kind of love, _____, is never used in the NT.

This verse describes the love that believers have for each other. It is the manifestation of God's love which has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, as Paul taught in Rom. 5:5.

The word "perceive" is the Greek verb for know. It is in the perfect tense, meaning that we have known this before, and continue to realize that it is true. What? Our understanding of love. It is seen in the way in which God demonstrated, proved (Rom. 5:8), His love for us: Christ laid down His life for us. Robertson pointed out that this is the same idiom that the Lord used of Himself in John 10:11 and 17 and following. It was a perfectly voluntary thing that the Members of the Godhead did.

They were not obligated to us in any way, but because of their love for us, Christ came, and Christ died, to save us from our sins.

The love of God is not only to be seen in the sacrifice of Christ, but even before that as we consider Who God is, and Who Christ is, and then look at who and what we are, it is unbelievable that Christ, the holy Son of God, would stoop to becoming a Man, in order that He might die for and save sinners like we are. There was no merit on our part, but total demerit. God should have forgotten all about us, and left us in our sin to suffer all of the consequences of our sin. But it was His love for us that constrained Him to send His only begotten Son "that we might live through Him" (1 John 4:9b).

And so loving the brethren means that in our dealings with each other we must do what He did. The big difference is that we are not to manifest this love toward unattractive sinners, but toward saints whom the Lord loves and has transformed. Another difference is that we are just like they are, sinners saved by grace. Therefore, we need to love others just like we have been loved, and saved, even though we are totally undeserving.

For the Lord to have "laid down his life for us" suggests the deep humiliation which He experienced in becoming a Man, and then in suffering such a terrible, shameful death as the death on the Cross.

November 30, 1992

3:17 The Apostle John has been dealing with love as a positive evidence of salvation. But let us remember that he had reference to love for our brethren, i.e., our love for each other in the family of God. It is true that becoming a child of God should make us more compassionate toward all people, but we have a special responsibility toward other believers. We are misinterpreting the Apostle's words here if we take this as meaning that the church should become involved in social welfare. That is not our calling. Churches who head in that direction usually depart from the Gospel ministry. Churches that are liberal today headed in that direction by preaching what used to be called, a social Gospel. And today evangelical churches are in danger of falling into the same trap. Our calling is not to solve the world's social and economic problems. Well meaning Christians who block entrances to abortion clinics are giving the world the wrong impression of what it means to be a Christian. We cannot reach the world by trying to bring about social reform.

One reason for the emphasis upon social action in churches is the hope that when we help people, it will make them more receptive to the Gospel. It is one of man's methods for trying to reach people with the Gospel. And yet those of us who have had experience in dealing with people who will call and want you to buy a ticket for them so that they can get to Seattle or San Francisco, or some other place, know that it rarely if ever reaches people with the Gospel. In many cases it just encourages people to go on living worthless lives. Let the people of the world carry on their social work; we have a higher and holier calling.

Now, having said that, let me say that the situation is different with people in our churches. And this is what the Apostle John was speaking about when he wrote this verse. It is a verse very similar to what James was saying in Jas. 2:15-17. There, too, he was speaking about "a brother or sister." (Read.)

One who "hath this world's good" is a person with food and/or clothing, the necessities of life, and he "seeth his brother have need." "Seeth" means that he actually is in personal contact with this person. He actually is one who has looked personally upon the person who is in distress. This would mean that the person in need was not some other place in the country, but right in the vicinity of the person who is able to help. If the person who can help his brother in Christ shuts up, i.e., closes the door of his heart, or his compassion, and goes away like he knew nothing of the need, then John says, "How dwelleth the love of God in him?" If, as verse 16 says, the Lord laid down his life for us (and He did), then "we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

I hope you get the picture. No Christian, however well-to-do he might be, is capable of meeting the needs of every Christian who is in trouble. But when any of us sees a need, when it is right within the sight of our eyes, or someone close enough that we know them and their circumstances, then we have a God-given obligation to help. That is the meaning of the word "ought" in verse 16. God has placed an obligation on us to help our brother in need.

Probably every church in the city is besieged these days with calls from people they have never heard of, asking for help. Some people will even make collect calls from other cities asking for help. And you never know what you might be contributing to, if you just give money to people whenever they ask for it. Buy a meal for some hungry person if you have the opportunity, but be sure to tell them about the Lord. Don't just give money. You may be supporting a drinking habit or a drug addiction. People will often get angry with you if you don't help, but we can't help that. Help when you can, and feel so inclined. Lucille and I prefer to help through our church; let the people of the world support their worldly organizations. Even those organizations are often using money in a way that a Christian could not approve.

So answer that question at the end of verse 17. We are all more inclined to want to get money than to give money. The Apostle Paul taught that covetousness is idolatry. See Col. 3:5. Believers know that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35b). The offerings which were taken in the NT were either to support those who were ministering the Word, or to help believers who were in need. Cf. Phil. 4 as one example. Romans 15:25-28 is another example. See also Paul's instructions to Timothy regarding the care of the widows in 1 Tim. 5:3 ff. In churches that have elders and deacons, this is usually the responsibility of the deacons, as we would learn from Acts 6. That passage also teaches us that the elders must not be pulled away from the ministry of the Word to meet needs of this kind as a regular thing. However, everyone in a church ought to be on the lookout for needs in people's lives within the church where the church would be able to help.

A person who objects to this, or who is content to go on his or her way and leave a child of God in need, is throwing serious doubt upon the reality of his own faith in the Lord.

3:18 The tone of this verse would make it appear that the Apostle John did not have his readers in mind when he wrote verse 17. It was as though he were saying, "Let others do as they will, 'let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.'" He meant, "Let others talk about how they love the Lord's people, let us be more concerned about actually showing our love by what we do for them."

We need to get familiar with four words in this verse:

- 1) "Word."
- 2) "Tongue."
- 3) "Deed."
- 4) "Truth."

By "word" John was rebuking those who always talk about love, but they never see to put their love into action. When he added "tongue" it was probably to point out that this is not the part of our bodies by which we are really going to help people. We help them with our feet by going to them, and then we help them with our hands by what we give to them, but the tongue alone cannot help or change any person's condition. The tongue can help after we have used our hands and our feet, but not without our hands and feet.

The Apostle John was certainly not saying that we should not speak words of encouragement, but he was rebuking those who never do anything but talk. They may indicate with their tongues that they are going to help, but somehow they never get around to doing anything.

Instead, we need to help "in deed and in truth."

"In deed" means by work that we do, help that we give. A person who may have a difficult time talking may be very effective in working. When we were at Central Bible I remember one year that our Youth Director got concerned about the older people in the church. He discovered one elderly lady who had a load of wood delivered to her house, but had not been able to get it stacked. Some of the young people went over, split the wood, and got it into a shelter where it would stay dry during the winter months. That was loving "in deed."

In considering these four words it seems that:

- 1) "Word" stands in contrast with "deed," and
- 2) "Tongue" stands in contrast with "in truth."

It is easy for anybody to use their tongue, saying all of the right things, and yet not doing anything. The person who just uses his tongue is not sincere; the person who acts to help in some way is sincere. This is what "in truth" means--to really love, to show that your love is genuine.

The benefits that come to the person who does not just talk about it, but who shows his love by doing something, are given in the next verse.

3:19 REMEMBER THAT ONE OF THE MAIN SUBJECTS IN 1 JOHN IS ASSURANCE, ASSURANCE OF SALVATION! However, the Apostle John never says that you and I can know that we are saved if we remember the time and the place where we trusted in Christ. Instead, he has mentioned things that are characteristic of anyone who really knows the Lord. There are many Christians who cannot tell you exactly when they trusted the Lord. I am one of them. And so if I had to remember the time and place I could never be assured of my salvation. I would just have to "hope" that I had.

When the Apostle John wrote in this verse, "Hereby...", he meant, By this. By what? By the love that you show in practical ways to the people of God you can "know that you are of the truth." That is, that you have done what you have done because the truth of God is really in your heart, and that the truth has saved you, the truth has made you a child of God. I have said many times, and I say it again, no one is ever saved without the

Word of God being used by God to save us. We are "born again...by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet.1:23). So to be moved to some self-sacrificing act for another child of God, is proof that you have been saved. And therefore, we "shall assure our hearts before him." This is more than just a good feeling that you have done something good for someone else; this is a divine testimony in our hearts given by God that we really belong to him.

"Assure" means that we are convinced, we are confident, we are persuaded, that we belong to the Lord. And notice that it is our hearts which are assured--not a temporary or momentary thing, but a deep sense of assurance that we do indeed belong to the Lord.

3:20. Notice how the Apostle John kept referring to the heart here after mentioning it in verse 19. It is important to pay attention to what our heart tells us. But sometimes our hearts condemn us. The Devil has a hand in this because he keeps reminding us of things in our lives which seem to indicate that we are not saved. We remember our past sins, and we feel condemned. We look back and see the opportunities we have had for helping some child of God, but we didn't do anything. We feel guilty because we seem to be so lukewarm in the way we serve the Lord. Our hearts condemn us in many ways.

But notice the next thing that the Apostle John said: "God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things."

This statement makes me think of the Apostle Peter and how the Lord restored him after he had so tragically denied three times that he knew the Lord. I am sure that none of us can fully appreciate what Peter went through after doing what he said that he would never do. Do you remember how the Lord questioned him? Please turn to John 21, and let me read to you verses 15 through 17. (Read.) Notice especially verse 17, and the latter part of the verse. Each time he had told the Lord, "Thou knowest that I love thee." But finally, in his grief that the Lord had asked him three times, "Do you love me?", said, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." And then the Lord told him to get on with his work of shepherding the sheep!

It is wonderful to know, not only that the Lord knows, but that the Lord knows "all things." That can't be said of any one of us. We see each others failures, and are often critical of each other. But if we knew all things, like the Lord does, we would feel differently about each other.

Therefore, when your heart condemns you, and you feel deserted by the Lord, what should you do? Go to the Lord, which means for us, going to the Word, and let the Lord point out to you from the Word what He knows about you, and then you will have peace. King David, in writing Psalm 103, wrote in verses 13 and 14,

Like as a father pitieth his children,
so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.
For he knoweth our frame;
he remembereth that we are dust.

The omniscience of God ought to strike terror to the people of the world, but it is one of the greatest sources of comfort that we as the Lord's children have: "God...knoweth all things." We look at our sins and our failures, and our hearts condemn us. But "God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things." And so the way to get beyond our self-

condemnation is to look at God in His Word. We should not ignore the messages that come from our hearts, but we must remember that God's authority and understanding is greater. He is sovereign over even our hearts, and can bring peace where otherwise we would condemn ourselves because we do not know all things as He does.

3:21. And so when our hearts are at rest, then we have "confidence toward God. None of us loves the people of God the way we should. We have all failed. But how wonderful it is that when such truth is presented to us, as it is here in this passage, our hearts respond because we know that it is the truth. At the same time our hearts condemn us. But it is the Lord's purpose, not to cast us off, but to lift us up and to cause us to treat our fellow-believers in the way that is pleasing to the Lord.

3:22. This is the first of two very important passages on prayer in this epistle. The second is in chapter 5:14, 15.

But what is the purpose of bringing in a statement about prayer at this point in the epistle?

This is a second blessing which results from doing the will of God in loving our brethren. The first blessing mentioned here in this passage is assurance. The second is answered prayer. Therefore, when we are not experiencing answers to our prayers, we need to ask ourselves, "Is there anything in my life which is not pleasing to the Lord, or in which I am not pleasing the Lord?" Unanswered prayer can be an indication that there is something in our lives that the Lord wants us to change.

Peter, in his First Epistle, spoke of a similar way in which we may be hindering the answer to our prayers. Cf. 1 Pet. 3:7. This is especially for husbands, but the principle applies to all believers. Here are Peter's words:

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them [your wives]
according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife,
as unto the weaker vessel,
and as being heirs together of the grace of life;
that your prayers be not hindered.

"Whatsoever we ask" -- The reason the Lord can open up our praying to "whatsoever we ask" is because, when a child of God is determined to live in a way that is pleasing to the Lord, it makes a difference in the requests that he brings to the Lord. If we are going to please the Lord, it is not left up to us to decide what we are to do. It means keeping the Lord's commandments. It is impossible to be pleasing the Lord if we are not living in obedience to the Word of God. So we need to pay careful attention to what the Lord has told us in His Word that He wants us to do, as well as what He does not want us to do. It is not just knowing what we should do, or not do. It is in doing, or not doing them. And it does not mean that we pay particular attention to obedience when we want something from the Lord. The Apostle John was speaking of an obedience that is a way of life. It is what we are continuously, habitually, doing. Prayer brings us face to face with how practical we are with the truth. The command of the Lord which led up to this verse is given in verse 18.

Obeying the Word brings assurance, and also gives us greater joy in seeing prayer answered. Always our first prayer in any situation is that we will be able to do the will of God. How important it is for us to realize the priority that obedience must have in our lives from day to day.

This led the Apostle John to restate in the next verse what he had said in verse 18, only in a larger way.

3:23. "And this is his commandment." He spoke of it as though it were one, and yet he gave two. The point is that they are inseparable. We cannot really obey the one without obeying the other. One has to do with our Lord; the second part has to do with the Lord's people.

The Apostle John was speaking of believing in this verse in the same way that he used it at the end of 1 John 5:13 where we have a restatement of one of the major reasons, if not the major reason, for writing this epistle. He wanted the Lord's people to continue to trust Him. When we are faced with temptation to sin, we surely need to trust the Lord. When we are faced with the need to obey the Lord, we need to trust Him to enable us to do it. When we are faced with the need to love the people of God, we need to trust the Lord. We never will get beyond the place where we need to be trusting the Lord continuously.

Only then can we really love each other as we should--willingly, consistently, and joyfully.

We are to "believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." Here again we see that John was thinking of the false teaching to which these believers had been subjected. We trust the Lord as being the very Person that He claimed to be, and that His disciples knew that He was: God's Son, Jesus Christ. We must be careful never to depart from what the Scriptures teach about our Lord.

And then we need to "love one another, as he gave us commandment." Is this not a reference to John 13:34, 35? (Quote.) The pattern of our love for each other is the love that the Lord has shown toward us.

And then we come to see another result of continual obedience.

3:24. Continual obedience means continual fellowship--abiding in Christ, and He is us. "Dwelleth" is our verb to abide. The greater our obedience, the greater our fellowship. And our fellowship with the Lord is assured by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Can you see how all of these things are linked together? It is not that we pass one or two of the various tests of eternal life that John has mentioned. It is not like taking an exam with 10 questions, but you will get a passing mark if you answer five of them correctly. They all belong together--deliverance from sin, obedience to the Lord, correct doctrine, loving the brethren, fellowship with the Lord, abiding in Christ. John goes over them more than once because he wants us to know what the tests are, and he wants us to make sure that we have a passing mark.

Remember: No one lives completely without sin. No one obeys the Lord all of the time. No one understands the doctrines of Scripture perfectly. And our love for each other always needs to be improvement. But the point is that these are the absolutely essential traits of any person who has really come to know the saving grace of Christ. Let us examine our own hearts, and make sure that John was painting a word picture of our lives, and of the way we want to be.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

1 John 4:1-6

December 7, 1992

Intro: For the second time in this epistle the Apostle John got into the doctrinal test. The first was in 1 John 2:18-29. The difference between the two sections is well brought out by Bishop Westcott of Cambridge University in his commentary on 1 John. This is what he had to say:

The progress of thought is parallel to that in ii. 18-29..., but the argument of St John has passed to a new stage. There his teaching was centred in the Messiahship, the Sonship of Jesus: here in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. There he insisted on the original message of the Gospel: here he appears to regard the fuller interpretation of the message. This section in fact presents the conflict of the Faith with its counterfeits in the last form, as a conflict of spiritual powers, seen and unseen (p. 139).

George G. Findlay, a Welshman (1849-1919), in his commentary on 1 John, also made what to me is a helpful observation. These are his words:

St John has just laid down, in chap. 3. 23, the basis of a true sonship to God and the ultimate ground of a Christian man's assurance, as consisting in two things--faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God, and mutual love such as He [the Lord] enjoined. Verse 1-6 of chapter 4 serve to set forth and guard the first of these foundation principles, and verse 7-21 to enforce the second (p. 311).

And so it is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and love for the people of God which identify a person as a Christian.

We can see that the Apostle Paul was in complete agreement with the Apostle John as to these two distinguishing characteristics because of what he wrote to the Colossian believers in the epistle which he wrote to them from Rome. He said this:

We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
praying always for you,
Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus,
and of the love which ye have to all the saints (Col. 1:3,4).

Therefore, in these verses at the beginning of 1 John 4 we see that the old Apostle was stressing again that a Christian is a person who has some very positive convictions concerning Who Jesus Christ was, and Who He continues to be!

The last verse of chapter 3 tells us that our fellowship (abiding) with Christ is actually confirmed "by the Spirit which he hath given us." So the assurance of our relationship with Christ is given to us by the Holy Spirit Who indwells us.

The Apostle Paul would say "Amen" to this also because you will doubtless remember his words in Rom. 8:16,

The Spirit itself [Himself] beareth witness with our spirit,
that we are the children of God.

And so we can see that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is very important both with regard to what we believe, as well as to the love which we have for each other. He is our Teacher. Every morsel of spiritual truth that we know, we have learned from the Holy Spirit. Our Lord made that perfectly clear to His disciples in John 14-16. And the Apostle Paul said that "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit

which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:8b).

So John's last thought in chapter 3 was about the Holy Spirit. His first comment in chapter 4 is there are other "spirits" which we have to contend with which are not "of God." And so we learn something here that is very important, and Bishop Westcott pointed that out in the comment I read to you a moment ago. Let me repeat what he said about the first six verses of chapter 4 in comparison with what the Apostle John had already said about the antichrists and their teaching in chapter 2. This is Bishop Westcott's statement: "This section in fact presents the conflict of the Faith in the last form, as a conflict of spiritual powers, unseen and seen" (italics mine).

It has been evident in the Bible from Genesis 3 on that the Devil is very interested in destroying the Word of God if he possibly can. And so we are ready to see what the Apostle John wrote in 1 John 4:1.

4:1 Notice how he began: "Beloved."

It is always acceptable to the people of God to point out error, particularly if they have been inclined to receive it. The Devil does everything that he can to keep people from being saved, but, having failed at that, the next thing he does is to get them off of the track doctrinally. I have seen this happen time and time again. People will be saved, or at least profess to be saved, and then it is not long before they get into some false teaching. They aren't discerning enough to know that there is false doctrine as well as true doctrine. And so they are inclined to follow anyone who seems to want to help them understand the Word of God.

When Paul wrote to the Galatians churches, churches which had been greatly influenced by teachers who were corrupting the doctrine of salvation by their application of the Law. This is what he said to them:

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 (Gal. 1:6, 7).

And then he went on to say that regardless of who might teach a doctrine different from the Gospel of Christ, whether it be he or even an angel from heaven, he was to be accursed!

We need to judge teaching, not by the charisma of the teacher, nor by the number of his followers, but by whether or not it is true to the Word of God.

When the people of God are being threatened by false teaching, that is the time for the true teacher of the Word to use a great deal of tenderness. That is why the Apostle John began this section by saying, "Beloved."

The Apostle Paul gave Timothy some excellent advice along this line when he wrote,

And the servant of the Lord must not strive;
but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,
In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves;
if God peradventure will give them repentance
to the acknowledging of the truth;
And that they may recover themselves
out of the snare of the devil,

who are taken captive by him at his will (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

Behind all false teaching Paul saw the hand of the Devil. And John saw the same thing. And from the frequent mention of false doctrine in Scripture, it is clear that the people of God need to be constantly warned against the false teaching which is always prevalent.

And so John said to the Lord's people, very lovingly, that they were not to believe "every spirit." Instead, they were to "try the spirits whether they are of God." With this language John was looking behind the false teacher to the false spirit which was behind his ministry. The false spirits would be fallen angels, or demons, who are behind the false teacher just as the Holy Spirit is behind the faithful teacher of the Word of God. The "false prophets" mentioned at the end of this verse are the human representatives of the Satanic "spirits" from whom their teaching actually comes.

Let us never for one moment minimize the activity of Satan. It is just as true today, maybe even more so because we are closer to the end of this age, that "many false prophets are gone out into the world." We have them in the major cults; we have them also in the so-called faith-healers. And remember that one of the dangerous things about false teaching is that it can be right in some respects, and yet it leads a person to a false hope.

Believers then, and believers now, are to do two things according to this verse:

- 1) They are not to gullibly accept any religious teacher that may come along. "Believe not every spirit." So your first attitude toward that teacher who comes to your door, or toward even some friend who tries to teach you something, should be skepticism. Don't be deceived into thinking that he, or she, uses the Bible, that it must therefore be true. And don't think that just because some things sound good that it is all good. The Devil delights to use Scripture. He even used it with the Lord. Cf. Gen. 3:1 ff. Please turn to this passage. It is very important in understanding the work of Satan where false doctrine is concerned.

Secondly,

- 2) "But try the spirits whether they are of God." Trying is testing, examining, to find out if the teaching you are hearing has come from God, or from those who are false teachers empowered by evil spirits. And when I say that false teachers are empowered by evil spirits, I do not mean that they are immoral, sinister people. Probably most of the time they are sincere, upright people who really believe they are doing the work of the Lord. But they have been duped into believing a doctrine which is not true.

Why did the Apostle John call them "prophets"? In the preceding section on doctrine (2:18-29) the Apostle John spoke of Christ and the antichrists; here he spoke of the Holy Spirit and false prophets. But why did he call them prophets?

Bishop Westcott points out that the term "false prophets" speaks not only of a false teacher, but of one who "supports his claims by manifestations of spiritual power" (p. 140). And is this not what false teachers do? They will tell you how this person or that person has been greatly helped by the doctrine which they are spreading. This is true of the New Age people. This has been true for a long time of the Christian Scientists. The charismatics will tell of the wonderful healings that are taking

place. The "false prophets" will try to get you to believe that the results which they claim are taking place are proof that their doctrine is true.

And note that they are not lacking in zeal. In fact, the false teacher will often put the teacher of the truth to shame by his zeal. The Apostle John expressed it here by the words, "are gone out into the world." The false teacher does not wait for people to come to him; he goes after them. This is exactly what the Lord told the apostles to do. And they did it. But somehow the Church has lost that zeal today. We build nice buildings with the latest equipment, and put on elaborate programs designed to make come, but somehow we have lost sight of our calling to "go...into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). The perfect tense of the verb in the original which is translated here "are gone out," indicates that they have gone out, and they continue to go out. It is a ministry that continues, and will continue.

So there are many good things that can be said about the "false prophets."

What test are we to apply to the teaching which we hear? Remember: We are not to judge the teaching by the friendliness of the person who comes to us, nor by his, or her, popularity, nor by the numbers of his followers. Doctrine is to be checked by the doctrine, the teaching of Scripture.

Verses 2 and 3 give us our test.

4:2 All truth comes from the Holy Spirit. He is the Author of Scripture, and He is the Teacher of Scripture. Therefore, it is by the Word of God that we are to judge all teaching. But there is one area of truth that is supremely important: It is what this prophet actually teaches about Jesus Christ. Did He come in the flesh, or not?

The Lord asked the most important question that can be asked when He inquired of the Pharisees, "What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?" (Matt. 22:42).

On this point, cf. 1 John 2:22. In this first doctrinal test, the question was concerning the Person of Christ. The question proposed in chapter 2 was, "Is the man Jesus the Messiah, the Christ?" In John 20:31 we see that Messiah includes the idea of Deity. It would also mean that Jesus was the fulfillment of OT Messianic prophecies. He was the One Who was looked for as the coming Redeemer. Anyone who denied that Jesus was the Christ was actually antichrist, against Christ, not for Him. And such a denial would also indicate that the person denying this of Christ was denying the Father also because the Father claimed our Lord as His Son. He did this speaking from heaven; He did this by the miraculous works which our Lord performed.

Now let us return to our text in 1 John 4:2. How do we recognize the ministry of the true Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit?

When John said "every spirit," he most likely was speaking of the ministry of the Holy Spirit through every true servant of the Lord. The Apostle John was not the only one who believed what he was about to say about the Lord. Many had taught this. And as often as we hear this taught, we can be sure that it is the message of the Holy Spirit.

In a way, the first test mentioned in 2:22 has to do with identifying the Lord on earth as the Messiah. This second doctrinal test has to do with the question, When did He become Jesus Christ?

Notice how John spoke of the advent of our Lord. It was a coming. You and I were born; we had no previous existence. Our existence began at conception. Was this true of our Lord Jesus Christ? No! We rightly speak of His pre-existence because His conception in the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit was not the beginning of His existence. He is eternal because He is the Son of God. But He came to earth, was born as a human baby, and was from His conception all that He ever had been as the Son of God. While He was not given the name "Jesus" until He was born, yet He was all that is implied in that Name when He was born. He was the Christ before He was born, but He continued to be the Christ through all that was involved in His becoming a Man.

This was definitely an answer to the teaching of the Cerentians as well as the Docetics. The Cerentians said that our Lord became Christ after He was born, at His baptism, and that He ceased to be Christ on the Cross. The Docetics denied that our Lord was ever a true Man. And so to say that He came as Jesus Christ, answered the Cerentians. To say that He was really "in the flesh," i.e., a true man, answered the Docetics. And by this statement the Apostle John, without mentioning either group, was showing that by the teaching of those two Gnostic groups they were showing that they were not "of God."

This is what the Apostle John declared in verse 3.

4:3 And here the Apostle stated the same principle, the same test of the truth, in a negative fashion. He stated it positively in verse 2; negatively here in verse 3.

And then he went on to identify such a denial with the antichrists he had mentioned in chapter 2. They might speak of Christ, but they did not teach the truth about Christ, and so they were "false prophets" who were not to be trusted nor followed.

December 8, 1992

The word "confesseth" in both of these verse, 2 and 3, is in the present tense, which speaks of a confession that is going on continually, and is therefore prominent in their teaching, present with the teaching that is "of God"; continually absent from the teaching that is antichrist. It does not mean that there is a denial of the incarnation, but that it is simply absent from the teaching. And so we need to learn to pay attention to what is not being taught as well as to what is being taught.

Listen to another excellent statement from the pen of George G. Findlay:
 ...Jesus Christ is the storm-centre; the battle sways this way and that about the person of the King. Now at one point, now at another, "the spirit of error" assails His man-sided being. Every kind of antipathy [aversion, repugnance, distaste] that Christianity excites, in the modern as in the ancient world, impinges on our Lord's name and person; its shafts strike on the great shield of the Captain of Salvation, from whatever quarter they are aimed. Behind other problems of life and religion, since Christ has stepped into the arena, there always emerges this: "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, ma?" "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" This is or Lord's

accost [approach, or greeting] to the world, and to each soul He meets; He gives this challenge distinctly to the age in which we live. It is a question that searches the inmost of the mind, and probes each man to the quick. As one thinks of Jesus Christ and fells towards Him, so in his very self he is.

"Herein," says St John, "you may know the Spirit of God" Sound knowledge in matters of this kind is based upon spiritual facts and acquired by a spiritual perception. One may repeat the creed with reasoned assent, and yet come short of "confessing Jesus Christ." The apprehension of a person, not the acknowledge of a dogma, is in requisition [acquiring the right to call one's self a Christian]. To reach and lay hold of Christ in His living personality, requires an aid above intellect and nature. "No man can say Jesus is Lord," declared the other theological Apostle, "except in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12. 3). "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah," exclaimed Jesus to His first confessor; "flesh and blood did not reveal it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 16.17). The adoring, self-surrendering faith in Jesus Christ, which cries out in His presence, "My Lord and my God!" is an inspiration, [a supernatural influence which qualifies me to receive and communicate divine truth] never a mere attainment; it is the gift of God, meeting the soul's effort and yearning toward its Redeemer. To this confession the individual witness, along with the whole living Body of Christ, is enabled and compelled by the Spirit "which we have from God." That Spirit is in fact the Supreme Confessor; and the proof of the Saviourship and Godhead of Jesus rests essentially upon the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the consciousness of the Church, and through the Church to the world in its successive epochs. "He shall testify of me," said our Lord concerning the coming Paraclete, "and you also shall testify" (John 15. 26, 27).

(This quotation is from Findlay's Fellowship In Life Eternal, pp. 319, 320.)

In this quotation Dr. Findlay has reminded us that the knowledge of the truth which leads to salvation is all of God. It is a supernatural work. It is not something that we initiate--ever! And, as Dr. Findlay has said so well, we can say our creeds, and sign our doctrinal statements, but unless the Spirit of God has borne testimony to our souls, it is all just a surface profession, and leaves our souls unchanged. We have lost sight of this in these days when the main emphasis is upon man's willingness to receive Christ, and his decision. Salvation is a divine work, and none of us would ever have understood Who Christ is if it had not been for the work of the Holy Spirit in communicating the truth to our souls.

Notice how quickly the Enemy had gone to work after our Lord ascended back to the Father. John said, speaking of the antichrists and their anti-Christian teaching, "Whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world." The Devil is busy, with his demonic forces, twenty-four hours of every day, every day of every year, and all of the years of our lives, doing everything that he possibly can to keep people from understanding Who Jesus Christ is. How thankful we can be for what John wrote in the next verse! If verse 4 were not true, no one would ever be saved. The work of evangelizing the world is a conflict between the power of God and all of the Satanic forces of hell. We are no match for the Devil, but the Holy Spirit is infinitely greater than he is.

4:4 In verse 3, at the beginning of the verse, the Apostle John mentioned those who are not "of God." Here he said that the believers are "of God." This is a very interesting expression, and it is important that we understand what it means.

The preposition that is used here, as well as in verse 1, where we are told to "try the spirits whether they are of God," is the preposition _____. It is used also in verse 2 where we read, "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God," and in verse 3 as mentioned in the preceding paragraph.

When this phrase is used of a believer it speaks of the fact that we belong to God. We have been "born of God." Cf. 2:29; 3:9. Our relationship to God is the result of what God has done in us. We have come from Him, or lit., out of Him. Contrast this with what John said in 2:19. Even our fellowship with each other is described by this preposition _____.

Now because we are "of God," it is clear also that we "have overcome them." We have overcome the false prophets and the evil spirits who are behind them. We have overcome them in the past, and we continue to overcome them, is the thought. In spite of all that the Devil may have done to keep us in darkness and ignorance, "we have overcome them." The spiritual conflict did not stop when we were saved, but it continues on. And yet we have been preserved "because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."

Who is "in" us? It seems from 3:24 that the Apostle John must be speaking of the Holy Spirit.

As I have mentioned many times before, the Apostle John was writing at the close of the first century. It had been probably sixty years since the ascension of our Lord. And, as Charles Simeon remarked in his sermon on this verse, "it is surprising that it [the Gospel] gained so speedy, so extensive, and so permanent a footing in the world" in view of the tremendous opposition which the early Christians faced in and from the world. (See Vol. 20, p. 469). The spread of the Gospel is a spiritual battle every inch of the way. In view of the persistent opposition to Christ and His Word, it is nothing short of a miracle that the Gospel still exists today, and is still being used to win sinners to Christ. But we need to understand that none of this is to the glory of the Church, nor to the glory of any individual Christian. All of the glory belongs to God and to Christ and to the Holy Spirit.

If the Holy Spirit is "greater," then we must confess that those who possess "the spirit of antichrist are at the very least, great! In fact, there are times when the forces of the Evil One seem to be greater than the Holy Spirit. People are always more inclined toward error than they are to accept the truth. If it were not for the Holy Spirit, no one would be saved. John speaks of our deliverance as our victory, but actually the victory is the Lord's. And, in our ongoing conflict with the forces of evil we continue to see victories won because of the mighty wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit. If it were not for the work of the Spirit, our work would be in vain. But because He dwells within us, and works through us, we continue to see wonderful victories of grace as people come to Christ.

4:5 Those who are not "of God" are "of the world, that is, a part of this

world order which is under the control and direction of the Evil One.
Review 2:15-16.

Here John was saying that the people who follow a false teacher do so because they are "of the world." They may have professed for a time to be saved, but if a person turns from the truth and turns to error it is because they are "of the world" and not "of God." Again, remember what the Apostle John wrote in 2:29. It is very distressing to us who know the Lord to see someone we thought was saved turn from the truth, and turn to error. If they can go away and stay away it is because they have never really known the Lord nor His truth. This is a part of the test of faith which we need always to keep in mind.

4:6 Here John repeated what he had said in verse 4 at the beginning. The person who knows God will hear those of us who speak the truth. The one who is not of God will not hear us.

This may be a very enlightening commentary on the day in which we live. Perhaps you have wondered how the professing church can stray so far from its foundations. Church music is following the pattern of the world in its music. The pastor feels a greater need to be an entertainer than he does an expositor of Scripture. We have all of our fancy methods by which we are really telling the Holy Spirit that we don't need Him anymore. I wonder if John would say that this is because we have so many people in our churches today who are actually "of the world," not "of God." Therefore, they don't judge a church by whether or not it stands for the truth of the Word of God. They judge it by whether or not it meets the needs which they think are most important--needs which are distinct from their salvation and their fellowship with the Lord.

I know that it is not pleasing to many people to speak like this, but as we look at the church today we have to admit that there is something terribly wrong with the way the church is going. We actually have concerts and seminars in our church which you cannot attend unless you pay to get in. I wish someone would show me some precedent for this in the Word of God.

We may not be able to stop the church from taking the direction in which it is going, but we certainly don't have to go along with those who are responsible for the present trends. We are going to know that things are changing for the better, if they ever do, when people come to church to hear the Word of God, to pray, and to enjoy fellowship together in Christ. First John is one epistle that people need to read and re-read, because, if 1 John is true (and it surely is), then millions of people are kidding themselves when they call themselves Christians.

Enough said! Let us go on to the next section in this important epistle.

And so John concluded this particular section by saying, "Hereby we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

1 John 4:7-21

December 14, 1992

Intro: When we pass from verse 6 of chapter 4 to verse 7 we pass for the moment out of conflict into communion--communion with each other, and communion with God. And our communion is characterized, among other things, by our love for each other and by our love for God.

This is actually the third time that John has turned his attention to our love for each other in the family of God. The first was in 2:7-11; the second, 3:10-18, but he mentioned it again in 3:23.

It is hard to say that any one of John's main points is more important than the others, but we can say that he put a very strong emphasis upon this particular need in our lives, the need to love each other. He evidently had never forgotten those words of our Lord found in John 13:34, 35. And neither should we. The Apostle John, like the other apostles, was a stickler for correct doctrine, for obedience, and for living righteously, but all of those without this made the others less important than they otherwise would have been. Doctrine can divide us. Obedience can make us critical and censorious of those who do not live like we live. And our attempt to be holy can make us proud if all is not motivated by our love for God and for each other.

When our Lord prayed for His own in John 17, He was most concerned about our oneness. There can be no oneness without love for each other. And we need to keep in mind that we are not only to love others, but we are to make sure that by our lives we are making ourselves loveable to others in the family of God. It is easy for us to want others to love us, but we can be oblivious to things in our lives which may be making it difficult for others to love us. What we all need to aim at in this is genuineness, reality.

But let us examine John's words in this latter part of chapter 4.

4:7 "Beloved" -- used by John five times in this epistle: 3:2, 21; 4:1, 7, 11. He practiced what he preached. It is evident that his epistle was motivated by a deep and sincere love for the Lord's people.

And notice that he spoke in the first person plural: "Let us," not, "You make sure that you love God." The Apostle John makes himself an example to all who teach the Word, as well as to those who are responsible for giving guidance to others in the family of God, such as parents, SS teachers, or one friend helping another. We need to be just as concerned that we are doing what the Lord wants us to do as we are that other people do what the Lord wants them to do.

In this verse and the following verse we have not only the exhortation, which has been given before, but an emphasis upon the fact that when we love each other we are demonstrating that we are really born of God, and that we really know God. Therefore, this becomes a means of assurance for us, and a testimony to others.

The love which John was talking about was the love which is "of God." Here is our preposition ____ again. He was not talking about a merely human sensual love, but a divine love. And, as John went on to show in the following verses, if we are to understand how and for what purpose we are to love each other, we need to spend time learning about the love of God for us. John was saying that when we love like God loves, and for the

same reason, we are showing that we are born of God and that we know Him. Our love for each other comes from our fellowship with God. When we do not love each other we are announcing that something is wrong in our fellowship with the Lord, and possibly that we are not what we profess to be. When we have trouble loving each other, it is to the Lord we must look to give us the love which we need "for love is of God." We as the Lord's people are not always easy to love. But difficulties of this kind are designed by the Lord to make us realize more fully how dependent we are upon the Lord to fulfill even a command like this which at the first may sound very simple, and easy to obey. But then we run into trouble, and we must come back to the Lord.

4:8 Being born of God, and knowing God, and loving the people of God, all go together. So, if we don't love the Lord's people, it is because we don't know the Lord, and we haven't been born of God. And so our love for each other is a most vital test of our faith.

4:9 This verse and the following verse show us as well as any verses I know, why we should love each other. What is our purpose in loving each other? Is it just that things would go well between us? No, we are about to learn that God's love for us had a distinct purpose, and our love for each other has the same distinct purpose as well. This is why verses 9 through 11 are good verses for all of us to learn. Here we see why God loved us, and why we are obligated to love each other.

This verse really tells us two things:

- 1) We learn the extent to which God loved us.
- 2) We learn the purpose behind His love for us.

There is no love among people that can compare with the love of God for His people. "He sent his only begotten Son into the world." The false prophets would deny this fact in one way or another. They would say either that He was not really the Son of God, or that He was not really a man. They tamper with this basic truth. They will change anything that they can about it. Let us examine the words carefully.

God manifested His love toward us by sending His Son into the world. This is a short statement, but it is packed with meaning. Here we have the outworking of a purpose that was planned before there was a man. The meaning is intensified when we think of how precious the Lord Jesus is to the Father. He is the One in Whom the Father finds all of His delight. And then, when we think of those who are included in that little pronoun "us," we see the love of God more clearly. The "us" does not point to good, righteous people who might in some way be deserving of such a love from God. No, the "us" were guilty, defiled, sinners, not deserving of the love of God any way you might look at them. God's love is based upon His grace, not upon our merit. God sent His Son into the world to become a Man, a true human being. He came by birth, conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. So He was the Son of God while Mary was carrying Him for those nine months in her woman, the Son of God just as He had been eternally.

And it was not that God had many Sons; He only had One, "his only begotten Son." And He sent Him into the world. Not one of us can possibly understand the meaning of this statement as it affected God. We have the same idea in John 3:16, don't we?

What was the purpose of the Son's mission into the world?

Note the special way in which John spoke of this. He spoke of "us" and "we" here in verse 9. God did not send His Son into the world in order that everyone might be saved. God knew what His purpose was, and His Son came to do His Father's will. If God intended to save everyone, then the mission of Christ was a failure. He came to provide salvation for the elect of God, for those you see coming to Christ day by day. Christ came that "we" might have life, "that we might live through him." We were dead, dead in trespasses and sins, dead because of sin. He came to give us life which meant that He came to deal with our sins in such a way that God would give us life when otherwise we would have experienced eternal death. Christ came to provide an eternal blessing for us. He did not come to show us how we could save ourselves; He came "that we might live through him." This is the Gospel. John did not go into detail here, but the significance of the Gospel message is all contained in these verses.

Now think of this in connection with the purpose that we should have in loving each other.

The Lord Jesus came to meet our need spiritually. He came that we might have life. Now you and I cannot save anyone, but the purpose of our love for each other is to help each other spiritually. We are not going to do anything that would be a hindrance to the Lord's people in their fellowship with God; our purpose should always be that we leave people better off spiritually than when we went to them. Our spiritual good was the reason for God's love for us in Christ. The spiritual good of the Lord's people is the reason for our love for them. Christ came to give, and we must do the same.

Read 1 Cor. 13 with this in mind. And look at Rom. 14:13 in the light of what we have here in 1 John 4:9.

Now let us look at verse 10.

4:10. There is a different emphasis in verse 10 when we compare it with verse 9 although they seem to be saying essentially the same thing when we first read the two verses.

If we want to understand God's love, we see it in the fact that He loves us! It should not surprise us that we should love God. It is amazing that we didn't love Him first. But we didn't! The amazing thing about God's love is that He would love us! That is truly amazing! And let it be said here that if God had not loved us first, we would never have loved Him. He initiated our relationship with Him by loving us when we were altogether unlovely, and before we ever gave Him a thought.

But what makes verse 10 different from verse 9?

In verse 9 we see how we benefited from the coming of Christ; in verse 10 we see what the coming and death of our Lord meant to the Father.

I call your attention to a word we had once before in this epistle, the word "propitiation." Cf. 2:2. What does this word mean?

It means that God is satisfied. God is satisfied with the work of His Son. He is satisfied with the sacrifice that His Son offered for our sins. He is so satisfied, in fact, that nothing else remains to be done before we can be forgiven, and even clothed with the righteousness of God. Propitiation is a very powerful word. God "sent his Son to be the

propitiation for our sins." This word means that those for whom Christ died will most certainly be saved, and will find perfect and eternal acceptance with God.

And so we see that God and Christ by their love for us sought to accomplish two things, and two things were accomplished:

- 1) Christ came to provide us with spiritual life.
- 2) He came to do everything that was necessary to satisfy a holy God.

If we are manifesting the love of God to each other, what should we be concerned about? Two things:

- 1) Being a blessing to our fellow-believers, a spiritual blessing.
- 2) Pleasing God by the way we love each other.

This is why John went on to say what he did in verse 1.

4:11. Here is our word of endearment again: "Beloved."

And then he went on to say, "If God so loved us," i.e., if this were His two purposes in loving us, to bring us life, and to satisfy God, "we ought also to love one another." The objects of His love for us and the objects of our love for each other must be the same.

January 4, 1993

This is probably the greatest argument for us to love each other, the fact that God loves us. And this is the basis of our fellowship with each other--our love for each other. It is ridiculous to speak of fellowship if there is no love.

The word "ought" suggests an obligation, or a duty, a debt. It is not a debt which we owe to each other, but a debt which we owe to God. It is a debt which we must always be working on, and yet a debt which we can never fully repay. We can always see unlovely things about each other, but that is when we need to remember the terrible unloveliness God saw in us, and still sees in us in our unperfected state. And yet His love for us never wavers. We should seek by the grace of God to have the same love for each other.

In Eph. 5:1, 2 the Apostle Paul exhorted the Ephesian believers to:

Be ye therefore followers [imitators] of God, as dear children;
And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us...

There is no greater example of love than the love that God and Christ have for us. Our love for each other is to display the same characteristics which we see in God's love for us. Notice that Paul said, "Walk in love." He was not speaking of occasional manifestation of love, but our lives are to be characterized by love. This is one of the distinguishing marks of a true child of God.

4:12 This statement should remind anyone who is familiar with the Apostle John's writings, of John 1:18. (Read and explain.) The verbs in the two verses are different, but the meaning of the two is identical. No human eyes have ever seen God, the Father. The point in John 1:18 is that Christ came to reveal the Father, and to reveal Him completely.

The thing that John was concerned about, and which we also should be concerned about, is that the Lord Jesus Christ has gone back to heaven. How, then, will people today have evidence not only of the existence of

God, but also of the glory of His Person? This is what the Apostle was about to point out.

As amazing as it may seem, the role which the Lord Jesus had when He was here on earth, is the role which we as the children of God have in the world today. We are to reveal God to the people of the world. We certainly cannot do it like the Lord Jesus did, but this verse indicates that we are to do it, to do it continually, and to do it with greater effectiveness the longer we live. But how do we do it? We do it by our love for each other. Our love for each other is to be a testimony to the world of the existence of God, and especially of His love.

The Devil cleverly creates situations to make us shy away from some of the greatest doctrines of Scripture as well as some of the greatest responsibilities which we have. He has done that with:

- 1) The Fatherhood of God.
- 2) The brotherhood of man, or God's children.
- 3) The humanity of Christ.
- 4) The unity of the Church.

And the same is true of the love of God. The world and the apostate church have spoken of God's love to the neglect of His righteousness. To avoid making the same mistake, we often are afraid to speak about the love of God. And yet there is no more wonderful truth in Scripture. Twice in this chapter we read, "God is love" (vv. 8, 16). This means that His very nature is characterized by love. If that were not the case, you and I would not know the Lord. This is a glorious truth! How many times in our testings, and/or in our failures, have we been comforted by these great words. It is the nature of God to love.

The world needs to know this. Paul said in writing to the Romans that it is the goodness of God that brought us to repentance and salvation. Cf. Rom. 2:4. God's goodness is simply a manifestation of His love. How many people you suppose have been saved through hearing John 3:16? We will never know until we get to heaven. God's goodness does not eliminate His righteousness, nor does it even set it aside. But remember that there would not have been a Cross, there would have been no salvation for any sinners if it had not been for the love of God.

How can people today be convinced of the existence of God? It is not by miracles of healing, nor by speaking in tongues, nor by special visions. John is saying in this passage that it is by the love that we as believers show for each other!

In the latter part of this verse the Apostle John was not saying that if we love each other, then God will dwell in us, but if we do not love each other, then He will not dwell in us. The meaning of this verse is that if we love one another it is proof that God dwells in us, and that His love is being perfected in us. THE WORLD CANNOT SEE GOD, anymore than we can, BUT THE WORLD CAN SEE US! AND GOD HAS ORDAINED THAT THE WORLD BE ABLE TO SEE IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH OTHER, BY OUR LOVE, THAT THE VERY PRESENCE AND NATURE OF GOD IS BEING DISPLAYED IN US!

If we heard half as much about the love of believers for each other as we do about loving the sinner, there would probably be more sinners being saved. One of the most essential conditions for God's blessing through His Church is the love that believers are to have for each other. The Lord often withholds His blessing until believers are rightly related to each other in love within the Church.

"His love is perfected in us" is taken by Bishop Westcott to mean that "the love of God is in us in its completest form." Cf. p. 152. When the love of God is displayed by us for each other, it has attained its fulfillment, its completion.

And so, while it is still true that "no man hath seen God at any time," yet when believers love each other, people, saved and unsaved, see the evidence that there is a God and that He is a God of love. But even more than that, such love is evidence that God Himself is dwelling in us. And so like Christ, only to a lesser and imperfect degree, we are in the world to reveal God. This is the emphasis down through verse 16.

4:13. Compare this verse with the latter part of 3:24.

I personally do not believe that God dwells in us by His Spirit, or that Christ dwells in us by the Holy Spirit. It is with the Holy Spirit that we have to do, but it seems to me that the Scriptures teach that we are indwelt by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. However, it is the Spirit Who makes these great truths a reality and of practical significance to us. This mystical and mysterious and yet real indwelling of God is made known to us by the Holy Spirit.

The word "dwell" is our familiar word abide. This is not an occasional relationship, but an abiding relationship, a living relationship. It was just as true yesterday as today, and it will be just as true tomorrow as it is today. The difference among us as believers is not how much God dwells with us, but how we depend upon this relation and live in the light of it. God Himself will keep us reminded that He lives in us. It may take failures for us to realize this. It may take great trials. But if we really belong to Him, the Lord will make us realize the nature of our relationship to Him, and bring us to trust more and more in Him Who lives within us.

4:14. All through the preceding verses the Apostle John had used the first person plural. And so there is no need to think at this point that he was speaking just of himself, or of himself and the other apostles, when he said "we" which appears emphatically in the Greek text. The truth that John had been declaring is a truth which applies to all believers alike.

Our fellowship is meant to be a testimony to the very existence of God, and that He is a God of love. This, in turn, leads to the proclamation of our testimony.

John is undoubtedly using the verb "see" as meaning to understand, or to see with the eye of faith. He was speaking of spiritual realities. The Spirit brings us to a conviction about Christ and His mission on earth which is just as strong and certain as if we had lived on earth when He was here. And, yet, in many respects it is stronger. It is so strong, in fact, that "we...do testify," not just by our lives, but with our lips. And we keep on saying it, "That the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world."

It would seem that the Apostle John was introducing a third purpose for his epistle: the believer's witness to the world. The first two were:

- 1) Fellowship.
- 2) Assurance of salvation.

This verse gives us the only true witness. Our salvation originated with the Father. It had to do with His Son. He was sent to be "the Saviour of the world." The Son was to do everything necessary for the salvation of sinners, leaving nothing undone. He did not come just as a potential Savior, but as a real Savior. By "the world" here the Apostle John would not mean that Christ came with the intention of saving everyone. He meant that wherever sinners throughout the world would be saved, it would only be through the Son that people could be saved. As I have said many times recently, God does not have many ways of salvation. He does not even have two! Christ is the only Savior. The stronger our fellowship with Christ is, the more assured we will be that this is the truth of God.

January 11, 1993

4:15 G. G. Findlay, in his commentary on 1 John, pointed out that this section we are in, is the longest paragraph in the epistle. That is, he dealt with the subject of these verses, which is love, longer than he did the same subject, or any other subject, throughout the whole epistle. The paragraph begins with verse 7 and continues on to the end of the chapter (v. 21). John's burden is that the people of God would love each other. And yet it is not a love which is separated from the confession that all true believers hold to, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that His coming into the world was an expression of God's love--His love for the people of God. In verse 7 he said that we ought to love each other because love is of God, and our love for each other is evidence that we really know God. In verse 11 he added the idea that "if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." And our love for each other is proof that God is indeed dwelling in us. And this, then, is our confession, "that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (v. 14).

We must continually remember that John is seeking to confirm the faith of those who had been subjected to the teaching of the Gnostics who had very false ideas of Christ. And so in verse 15 we come to the true confession of one in whom God is dwelling, "that Jesus is the Son of God." The Gnostics would never say this. Nor were the Gnostics known for their love. When John spoke of such a confession, he was not speaking of just the statement of a creed, but of a person who was deeply convinced that Jesus (the man) was truly the Son of God in the flesh.

The Apostle Paul made a statement in writing to the Corinthian church which closely parallels what the Apostle John was saying in this verse. I refer to his words in 1 Cor. 12:3,

Wherefore I give you to understand,
that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed:
and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord,
but by the Holy Spirit.

Cf. 1 John 2:22, 23.

And so when a person confesses that "Jesus is the Son of God," that confession is evidence that God is abiding in that person, and that that person is in God.

Listen to these words from Mr. Findlay (p. 345):

But why should the assertion of the Godhead of Christ be made just here? how does the confession of this determine God's dwelling in men? ... Much every way. The great doctrinal affirmation of verse 15 comes in between the statements of experimental religion made in verses 14 and

16, and is the link connecting them; it supplies the key to both. "We..." the Apostle writes in verse 14, opposing himself and his readers to men who profess a different doctrine--"we have beheld and do bear witness that the Father hath sent the Son as Saviour of the world" (ver. 14); and again, with the same emphasis, "We...--not those others--"have known and have believed the love that God hath toward us." For it is only those who discern in Jesus the Son of God, who see in His coming the mission of the Son sent by the Father for the world's salvation, who apprehend the scope of the Christian redemption and can testify with effect thereto; to others it must seem a lesser and lower thing. Understanding as these do--as they alone can do--the transcendent greatness of the Saviour and His infinite preciousness to God, they realize the love of God which gave Him to the world.

And then a little later (p. 346) Mr. Findlay added these important words: The acknowledgement of the Divinity of Christ is necessary for a proper sense of the love of God (italics mine). It was no inferior messenger, no creature-angel, no effluence or emanation, or single ray of His glory out of many; it was the Only-begotten, "the fulness of the Godhead," the Word that was God with God in the beginning, whom "God sent into the world, that we might live through Him." By the Divine glory of Christ we estimate the love of the God who gave Him to our race. The largeness of His salvation is measured by the majesty of the Saviour's person (italics mine).

This is the message of John 3:16, isn't it? (Quote.) And of Rom. 5:8. God's love can be shown if He were to send an angel to help us in a difficult situation, but for Him to send "His only begotten Son" for sinners like we are, is evidence of a love beyond our ability to understand.

4:16 Cf. again the "we" of verse 14 with the "we" here. There may be many, very many, in the world who cannot say this, and who don't even want to say it, but the Apostle says that "we" can. The only reason that we can say it is because of the amazing grace of God.

Notice that John said, "The love that God hath to us." This is a distinguishing love, the love that He has for His own, His own throughout the world wherever they may be.

The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in to the world to be the Saviour of sinners is the greatest possible proof that "God is love." And so, if He dwells in us, we are going to love those whom He loves. We may need to be exhorted to love each other, but no argument will be needed to prove to us that this is what we ought to do.

4:17 "Herein is our love made perfect." What did the Apostle have in mind?

"The love of is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5). If God is in us, His love is in us. And if His love is in us, it will be expressed by us in the love that we have for each other, those whom the Father loves. As we love each other (as the Apostle has exhorted us to do), His love is perfected in us. We grow in love. There is a maturing of that love. It becomes in our fellowship with God and with each other the dominant characteristic of our fellowship. And it is this which gives us "boldness," i.e., confidence, assurance, "in the day of judgment."

The Apostle has set before us the certainty of the coming of the Lord, and the need we have to prepare for it. Cf. 2:29; 3:3. See also 3:18-21. The person who has trouble getting along with the people of God, and who can even stay away from church so that he has nothing to do with them, is a person who needs to be concerned about his own relationship with the Lord. There is something terribly wrong with a professing Christian whose best friends are non-Christians.

It is the Apostle John's teaching that the true love of God is perfected only where there is a true confession of Christ, and where believers are united in a loving fellowship with God and with each other through Christ.

"Because as he is, so are we in this world." This means, as God is, so are we in this world. Some say that the "he" is a reference to Christ, and the meaning of the verse would be the same if that were the case. But it seems to me that John was speaking here about God, knowing God, dwelling in God, and having God dwelling in us. And, of course, that it only possible through Christ. But I believe John was speaking of God. As God is--our life is in Him, our resources are in Him, and we are to make it our aim to live in this world so that He may be revealed in us. And the way in which John was emphasizing how that should be, was in our love for each other.

Think of what a testimony it would be to the world if we really loved each other, and were concerned for each other, and were continually humbling ourselves before each other, the way the Lord Jesus did when He was here on earth. John 13:1 speaks of His love for His own, and then John went on to tell how it was the Lord who took a towel and washed the feet of the disciples.

Read Matt. 20:20-28.

"This world" is a place which knows practically nothing about our God, and His Son. John was teaching the people of God in his day that we are to show the world that God is a God of love by the way we love Him and the way we love each other.

4:18 The Apostle went on to speak of perfect love in this verse.

The fear that he was speaking of must be the fear of "the day of judgment." See verse 17. But it could also include the fear of present judgment, or discipline at the hand of the Lord. But when we are living in the love of God, and showing that love to the Lord's people, "there is no fear," but perfect peace. "Perfect love casteth out fear," i.e., fear and love do not dwell together.

There are many fears that people have. I heard once that there is a "fear not" in the Bible for every day in the year, i.e., at least 365 of them. The way of peace and happiness is in a life of love toward God (and Christ), and our fellow-believers. And remember that the love we are thinking about with reference to other believers is a love which causes us to seek their highest spiritual good.

4:19 There is no "him" in the Greek text of this verse. It simply reads, We love, because he first loved us.

In our relationship with the Lord, we were not the initiators. He loved first, and this is the only reason that it is possible for us to love as

He loves. Most people today are not concerned about their own spiritual welfare, let alone the welfare of others. And so when we begin to think of how we can help others spiritually, it is evidence of God's love in us, actually, of God in us. Otherwise we would never love with the kind of love believers are to have for God and for each other. We love God, and so we want to obey Him, to please Him. We love each other, and so we want our lives to be a blessing and an encouragement to others. That is why we pray for each other, and that is why we want our lives to be examples for others to follow.

4:20 As in chapter 1, the Apostle John again spoke here about the difference that there often is between profession and performance. The Greek does not say "man," but anyone. It makes no difference who the person might be, to claim to love God while hating his brother, is utterly impossible, and shows the person making such a claim to be a liar. As John has been saying all through this chapter, the seen is the proof of the reality of the unseen. People cannot see God, but they can see the evidence of God's presence in our lives, and that is seen in our love for each other, the people of God.

4:21 We come to the first two commandments again. Loving God and our brethren is not just a good idea, or a suggestion which we need to consider, but it is a commandment of the Lord. And we cannot be living in fellowship with the Lord if we are out of fellowship with each other.

The Spirit of God surely had a reason for leading the Apostle John to write at such length about love. This was so desperately needed among the Lord's people in that day, as it is in our day. Let us ask the Lord to show us how these verses need to be applied in our own lives. There are probably no commandments more important than these because, if we are to fulfill them, they reach out into every area of our lives. A loving child of God is going to be humble, holy, and obedient, seeking to live in all ways by the Word of God.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

1 John 5:1-5

January 18, 1993

Intro: The Apostle John's writings, especially in his epistles, is very different, say, from the writing of the Apostle Paul. In Paul's epistles it is fairly easy to tell when he moves from one point to another. That is not the case with the Apostle John. First John is very difficult to outline because John moved back and forth among the same subjects more than once. He relates them to each other in different ways. Let us notice how he did this in the first five verses of chapter 5.

He mentioned here:

- 1) Believing that Jesus is the Christ.
- 2) Being born of God.
- 3) Loving God.
- 4) Loving our fellow-believers.
- 5) Keeping the commandments.
- 6) The world.

All of these have been mentioned before.

This is the first time that the word faith is used, although John has spoken about believing, which is the same. However, this is not the first time that we have seen the word "overcometh." In 2:13 and 14 John spoke of the "young men" in the faith who had "overcome the wicked one." And then in 4:4 we read where John said that the Lord's people to whom he was writing had overcome the false teachers because the One Who was in them was greater than the one who is in the world--an obvious reference to the Holy Spirit, and then to the Devil.

But as we come down to this last chapter it seems that his main purpose in these five verses was to make clear how it is that we overcome the world.

There are three main ways in which the term world is used in Scripture:

- 1) The earth.
- 2) The people in the world.
- 3) The present condition of the world--opposed to God and alienated from Him. The earth is the place of this evil, and the people of the earth are a part of it. The child of God is "in" it, but not "of" it, according to our Lord's prayer in John 17. And there we see that it was His prayer that we, His people, should be kept "from the evil," or the Evil One. John's point here in 1 John 5 is that we would be able to overcome the world.

Let us review what John wrote in 1 John 2:15-17 about the world.

We have three enemies:

- 1) The world.
- 2) The Devil.
- 3) The flesh, our old sinful nature.

We are going to learn in this passage how we can overcome the world. But Paul also got into this subject at the beginning of the practical section of the book of Romans. Cf. Rom. 12:1, 2. (Read.)

Therefore, when we put Paul's exhortation with John's we see that both were making the same point although they expressed it in different ways. They stressed how we live and the choices which we make.

Overcoming the Devil is discussed by Paul in Eph. 6:10-18. (Read.) This is very practical teaching, but has to do mainly with the Word of God and prayer.

Overcoming the flesh takes us to Romans 6. This has to do with practical sanctification. Paul's words in Rom. 6:11-13 are tremendously important for every Christian to know and obey. In 2 Tim. 2:22 Paul told Timothy,
Flee also youthful lusts:
but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace,
with them that call on the Lord out of a perfect heart.

These are all passages of Scripture which are of tremendous importance as we face the trials and temptations of life here on earth. God has provided for our victory, but He has also appointed ways and means by which we are to win the victories.

How did John approach it here in 1 John 5? Let us see what John said about overcoming the world.

5:1 He emphasized once again the importance and necessity of the new birth. John called it being "born of God." He has mentioned this before in 3:9 and 4:7. We have seen that this means not only receiving life, spiritual life from God, but that God is the One Who brings about our new birth. Lit. the expression means that we are born out of God as the Author, the Cause, the Source of our new life.

And so, anticipating what John is leading up to, his emphasis upon overcoming the world, he was saying here in so many words that no person can expect to overcome the world who has not been "born of God." In other words, a non-Christian cannot take the teaching which we are about to receive, and live by it. That is impossible. Victory over the world requires first that a person must be saved, must have eternal life.

And what do you always find about a person who is "born of God"? You find that he has an unshakable faith "that Jesus is the Christ." This means that he believes that Jesus, the Son of Mary, was also the Son of God. He believes in His Deity. He believes that He came as the Anointed One of God to provide salvation from sinners. No person who doubts what the Bible teaches about Jesus Christ can be a Christian. John made that clear in John 20:30, 31.

More than that, one who is born of God loves God. That, too, is an evidence of true salvation. As John said here, "And every one that loveth him that begat," that is God. "Begot" is a word which is used in human birth of the father's role in the birth of a child. In spiritual life it means that we have received our life from God. We have our life from Him.

But John's point here is that if we are born of God, then we will love God, and we will love everyone else who has truly been born of God.

So we have three characteristics of a true Christian, a true child of God, one who has been "born of God":

- 1) He believes that Jesus is the Christ.
- 2) He loves God.
- 3) He loves all others who are born of God.

When Lucille and I were married denominationalism was very strong. We were in a Baptist denomination, but the leaders of our group were not only

concerned that a person be a Baptist, but they wanted to be sure that you were their kind of a Baptist. You not only had to be baptized, but you had to have been baptized by the right person, or they would require that you be baptized again. In their meetings you never heard what was going on in other evangelical groups. In fact, I guess Lucille was in college before she learned that anyone but Baptists had gone to China.

The teaching of this particular group was that the local church was the body of Christ.

Now they were not alone in their emphasis. Other Baptist groups, and other denominations felt the same way about their group.

Why am I bringing this up? I am bringing this up to emphasize what John was saying here in this verse. He did not say that if you are "born of God" you will only love the Baptists, or the Presbyterians, or the Lutherans. He said that you will love everyone who has been "born of God." This goes beyond denominational lines. It extends to all believers in Christ wherever they may be.

What is the situation today?

It may be the same in many of the large denominations, but there is another idea that has come to the forefront in more recent years. It is this: That we need to love and accept and work with and have fellowship with anyone who comes along and shows any interest at all in what we are doing. There is definitely an ecumenical emphasis among people who profess to be Christians. We no longer ask them what they believe about Jesus Christ. In fact, we will work with them even if we know that they do not believe that "Jesus is the Christ." And we do not ask if they have been born again as it is defined in the NT. The main thing is that we get together. Doctrinal lines are down. The Gospel is watered down. And you can be accused quickly of being a bigot if you insist on the very things that John was emphasizing in this first verse of John 5.

The Devil is very clever. Either he limits our vision to our own group, and we won't have fellowship with others, or he sees to it that we lay aside doctrine and the necessity of the new birth for the sake of getting as many people together as we can.

A few years ago I went by one of the downtown churches which I knew was liberal, and looked at the announcement board at the front of the church. Do you know what the pastor's subject was? "YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN." It looked good, and sounded good, and I am sure that it pacified many of the people in the church who thought that their pastor believed the Word of God, but I am as sure as I am that I'm standing before you today that the pastor did not teach what the Lord taught in John 3, or what John taught here in 1 John. They taught regeneration; that pastor could not see beyond personal reformation--which is not salvation.

Remember that just because a preacher uses Biblical terms is no proof that he believes Biblical doctrine. This is a day in which we need to find out what people really believe, and if they do not believe that John said here that a true child of God will believe, then it is impossible to have true fellowship with them. Religious darkness and spiritual life cannot possibly participate with each other in fellowship.

What we need is to get back to the teaching of the NT. Doctrine is

important--the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine of the new birth, and the nature of true Christian fellowship.

I hope you understand what John was teaching here.

Now let me express the teaching of this verse in another way so that you will see its relationship as we move on to the subject of overcoming the world.

John was saying that salvation is a divine work. He was saying that everyone who has experienced this divine work believes that "Jesus is the Christ," and that he loves God. More than that, he loves the Lord's people. And this means that if he loves the Lord's people, he is going to want to be with them, to have fellowship with them. So he will want to be under the ministry of the Word. He will want to worship with those who know the Lord. He will want to work with other believers in serving the Lord. He will be praying for his fellow-believers, and helping them spiritually in any way that he can. This is what is involved in loving the people of God. John was saying a great deal when he penned the words of the first verse of this chapter.

Let me ask you this morning: Is 1 John 5:1 a description of you? It ought to be. And it has to be if you truly know the Lord. You are going to be careful about the people you associate with as a Christian, but you are going to rejoice whenever you meet a person who believes in Christ and who loves God even if they do not go to your church. We need our churches, but the body of Christ is not limited to our particular congregation or denomination.

As a word of warning, will you note here in verse 1 that John put faith in Christ before loving God. Many people are inclined to reverse this, and even to leave the first one out altogether. They think that they can love God without believing in Christ. The Apostle John would say, "NO!" You cannot love God if you do not believe in Christ.

But let us go on to verse 2.

5:2. How can we "know" that we really love "the children of God"? John evidently felt very strongly that we could not afford to be confused on this subject.

It is easy for us to say that we love the Lord's people, but how can we know that we do?

John says that we know that we love the children of God when we love God. But it is easy to say that we love God, isn't it? And yet what is the proof that we love God? The answer: When we keep His commandments.

The Greek text actually says, "When we do His commandments." And this verb _____ is the one which the Greeks would use when they were successfully doing something. And the present tense of the verb means that this is something that is going on as a habit. It was not something that they felt was a good idea, or something which they did now and then. Doing the commandments of the Lord was a way of life with the person who claimed to love God and to love His people.

Think about this also in relation to your own life. How much attention do you give to the Lord's commandments? John wasn't talking just about the

ten commandments. To listen to some people you would think that there were only ten in the whole Bible. The Bible is full of commands which we need to obey. There are certainly some things which do not apply to us today, but even in the OT there are commands which we need to do! And go through the teachings of the Lord in the Gospels. And then see how He spoke through the Apostles in the epistles of the NT. When you and I read our Bibles, we need to pay attention not only to what we need to know, and what we need to believe, but also to what the Lord has asked us to do.

And we need to note that our Lord's commands are not just requests, or good suggestions. They are commands, and we are sinning against the Lord when we fail to do them. Let the force of the word "commandments" be impressed upon your heart.

5:3 There is no other way that we can really show our love for the Lord but by keeping His commandments. Cf. what our Lord said in John 14:21 and 23. (Read.)

The word "keep" here in verse 3 is different from the word which John used in verse 2. The idea of obedience is still in the word, but with the added idea of guarding, or taking care of the commandments of the Lord. We do not leave them, nor neglect them, nor do we substitute anything else for them. We guard the commandments of the Lord as a precious treasure, and our guarding is done by obeying them.

This word suggests that we do not obey the Lord as helpless slaves who would rather do something else, but we guard the commandments more than we would gold and silver.

And then John assured his readers that the commandments of the Lord "are not grievous." This means that they are not like a heavy load which is thrown on our backs which makes life a trial and a burden to us. The Psalmist said in Psa. 119:35,

Make me to go in the path of thy commandments;
for therein do I delight.

And in Psalm 112:1 we read,

Praise ye the Lord.
Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord,
that delighteth greatly in his commandments.

The Lord must have had these things in mind when He said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me..." (Matt. 11:29, 30).

The will of God is always revealed in the commandments of the Lord. Our Savior delighted to do God's will; why should we ever considering doing less than that? And when we love God by keeping His commandments, we shall find that a wonderful by-product of such obedience is that it also increases our love for each other. The greatest place of fellowship on earth is where the Lord's people live their lives in obedience to the Word of God.

It would be a great mistake for all of us to make if we did not take this time to consider just how much the commandments of the Lord have meant in our lives. Do we obey Him? Do we eagerly obey Him? Do we obey Him because we love Him? Let us pray that the teaching of John will really make a difference in our lives. As diligent as we may have been in seeking to obey the Lord, all of us can be more diligent, more obedient, more loving toward our Lord and toward each other.

Now we all know that what John wrote in these first three verses is not really new. He has been hitting on these points before, but perhaps his words here bring even greater clarity to those times before when he has spoken of love for God and for each other and the importance of our obedience to the Lord's commands. But all of this is leading up to a fresh emphasis which he has not made before.

5:4. The first part of this verse is actually a continuation from verse 3. "For" could be translated because. And so we could read the text,
 And his commandments are not burdensome
 because all that has been born of God overcomes the world.
 We could translate it, Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.

Now I want you to get the point here.

John was not saying that if you have been born of God, you will overcome the world with all of its temptations and allurements and attempts to sidetrack you for lesser things. We know that there are far too many times when we have all succumbed to temptation, or have set our hearts on things below instead of upon things above. What did the beloved Apostle mean as he came to this point in the epistle?

He meant that the one who is "born of God" overcomes the world only when his love for God is manifested by his obedience to the Lord's commands, which in turn brings him into a most profitable fellowship with the Lord's people. We cannot stand against the world, or be victorious in the world, if we are not living the life which is described in the first three verses of this chapter. There may be times when God graciously rescues us in times of temptation and need, but His will for us is that we walk in fellowship with Him and with the strengthening fellowship of His people as we all daily manifest our love for the Lord by our careful and persistent and joyful obedience to our Lord's commandments.

What is "our faith"?

Well, in this context it has to start with our believe that "Jesus is the Christ." This seems to be confirmed by verse 5. The foundation of our faith is the firm belief that "Jesus is the Christ." And then our faith is strengthened the more the Word abides in us, and controls our lives. The Word can only be abiding in us, as was stated of the "young men" in 2:14, if we are obeying it, if we are living it.

5:5 What a marvelous provision for victory over the world God has made for us in our Lord Jesus Christ! We have nothing if we do not believe Him to be the Christ, with all of the spiritual benefits which come to us from such faith. And the longer we know Him, and the more we trust Him, and the more we want to please Him, the greater will be the victory which God gives us in our day by day relationship with the world.

There is no possibility that the person who is not born again can ever be victorious over the world--or victorious over the Devil, or the flesh. They are a part of this evil world system, and in bondage to it. If anyone is to be set free, his freedom must begin with the new birth which will first be demonstrated by a firm faith in Jesus as the Christ. Then, as the Apostle John has brought out so clearly, the more he loves God, obeys the commandments of our Lord, and loves the people of God (which means fellowship), the greater will be his victory, joy, and peace.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

1 John 5:6-12

January 25, 1993

Intro: In verse 1-5 the Apostle John made it perfectly clear that no one can be considered to be a child of God who does not confess (1) that "Jesus is the Christ" (v. 1), and (2) that "Jesus is the Son of God" (v. 5). These are not two confessions, but two ways of saying the same thing. It emphasizes very specifically that the right doctrinal belief concerning our Lord is essential to salvation. It is the human confession. This, of course, must be a genuine confession, a confession which is followed by trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. But the point in the first five verses is that man's confession of Christ is necessary, not only for salvation, but for victory over the world.

As we move into the next part of this chapter, verses 6 through 12, the emphasis is upon the confession of the Godhead concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. This, in relationship to the human confession of Christ, must precede the human confession, but the Apostle John evidently gives it here following the human confession to show the support that there is for such a testimony.

5:6 Connecting verse 5 with the first part of this verse, there is no question but that John's expression "he that came" is a reference to Christ.

"This is he that came" speaks of His first advent into the world. It speaks of His coming in fulfillment of the prophecies which had been given in OT times concerning His coming. It speaks of a mission He came to accomplish. He was the long awaited Savior. It is a fact of history that "He...came." This is included in the confession that "Jesus" the Man, the human being, was "the Christ," that He was "the Son of God." He came, not just as a man, but as the God-Man.

And, lest anyone be mistaken about Whom he was speaking, John added, "even Jesus Christ."

It was very common for the Jews to speak of the Messiah, the Christ, as the coming One. When John the Baptist was in prison, he sent two of his disciples to ask the Lord, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" (Matt. 11:3). When the Lord had fed the 5,000, the men who witnessed the miracle said, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world" (John 6:14b). When our Lord came to Bethany following the death of Lazarus, Martha told the Lord, "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, that should come into the world" (John 11:27). And even our Lord Himself said,

I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world:
again, I leave the world, and go to the Father (John 16:28).

So not only was He supposed to come, but He has come, and He did accomplish all that He came to do.

But what proof do we have that it was He? This is where the divine testimony becomes so very important.

John says that He "came by water and blood...; not by water only, but by water and blood."

Now when we think of these terms, "water and blood," we have to think of them in terms of the divine testimony. Where during His life and ministry

on earth do we have a divine testimony that our Lord was the Messiah, the Son of God, which involved "water and blood"?

Some take this as a reference to the "blood and water" (John 19:34) which came out of our Lord's body when one of the soldiers drove a spear into His side. But that does not seem to give us the witness that we need since that could have happened to any human being--although it does show how intense our Lord's sufferings were.

Personally I think that John had reference to:

- 1) The baptism of our Lord. This was the "water" to which he referred.
- 2) The death of our Lord. This was the "blood."

What was it that happened at our Lord's baptism? Please turn to Matt. 3:13-17.

We have here one of those special occasions in which all three Persons of the Godhead were involved: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We have:

- 1) First, the action of our Lord in coming to John the Baptist, and then the words of our Lord when John the Baptist was hesitant about baptizing Him. (Explain how this was a testimony of His Deity--both what John the Baptist said [although this is incidental as far as the main testimony is concerned], and then what our Lord said.)
- 2) Second, the silent descent of the Holy Spirit upon our Lord following His baptism.
- 3) Third, the Father's voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17).

Matthew, from the beginning of his Gospel, had been giving supporting evidence from OT Scriptures to show that our Lord was the Messiah, but this was testimony given after our Lord came to earth. His baptism marked the beginning of our Lord's public ministry, but we have strong testimony here to His Deity.

We probably do not give proper attention to these last verses of Matthew 4. They are key verses in support of the Deity of Christ, and of His mission in the world. We have here not only a testimony of His Person, but also of His work.

It is wrong for us to say that we are baptized because our Lord was baptized. It is also wrong for us to say that we are baptized because John the Baptist baptized. Our Lord's baptism was unique; there was no other like it, and there never will be. John the Baptist's baptism was a baptism of repentance for Israel. Believer's baptism, following the ascension of our Lord, was meant to portray our union with Christ, and our intention to "walk in newness of life."

But what about John's statement that the Lord came "not by water only, but by water and blood"?

The water gave the type, the picture. It portrayed in a ceremony why the Lord came. But it was by "the blood," the sacrifice of the Cross, that we have the greatest testimony of the Deity, the Messiahship, or our Lord Jesus Christ.

We can say this because OT types and OT prophecy predicted that He would die, and that His death would be substitutionary for sin.

The crowd jeered at the Lord saying that if He were the Son of God, if He were the Messiah, He should prove it by coming down from the Cross. But He proved it by staying on the Cross, and by dying there. When the centurion felt the earthquake, and saw the darkness and all of the other things which took place which they had never before witnessed at a crucifixion, he said, "Truly this was the Son of God." Our Lord did not die as men usually die; He gave up His spirit. Much more could be said but we must realize that the whole scene during those hours our Lord was on the Cross were a grand witness to His Deity and His role as the Messiah.

"And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth" -- When the Apostle John wrote these words, the Lord Jesus had been back in heaven some sixty years. As far as we know, he was the only surviving apostle. Many who were then believers had been saved, like the Apostle Paul, after the Lord's ascension. John could give a personal and verbal testimony of the things that he had seen and heard, but it seems to me that by this statement he was claiming divine inspiration for this epistle. The Holy Spirit in leading John to write what he wrote was bearing witness to the Deity of our Lord, and since "the Spirit is truth," His testimony was to be trusted completely as being infallible in every detail.

This is like Peter wrote in the passage we considered together last Sunday night here at Trinity. Peter was saying that he and the apostles were not "following cunningly devised fables" because they had seen the Lord in His glory when they were with Him in the mount. But then he went on to say that we have something even better and more reliable than that personal experience (because sometimes we can be mistaken about some of the details when we tell about something that we have seen, or something that has happened to us). Peter said, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy." And where did he get it? "Men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." This is how we got our Bible, and this is the authentic record of what we are to believe. It is the Holy Spirit Who is the Author of Scripture, and it stands far above every other so-called authority that we have today. John and Peter had their experiences confirmed by the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures, and so we believe them, not because of what they said, but because the Holy Spirit confirmed their testimony.

5:7, 8 Some of you know that for a long time there has been a controversy among Greek scholars as to the last part of verse 7 and the first part of verse 8. The question is, Were in they in John's original text, or not? Some MSS read, "For there are three that bear record," and then they skip to verse 8 beginning with, "the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one." They omit the witness in heaven by the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and their witness also agrees.

We are not going to be able to settle the controversy, and so I am really inclined to take the text as it is in the KJV, the Received Text. There is really nothing which does not fit into the text, nor can we say that there is anything here that is not true. What both of these verses tell us is that there is perfect harmony among the Members of the Godhead regarding the Deity of our Lord, and that His Deity and Messiahship was confirmed at two of the most critical periods in His ministry: one at the beginning; the other at the end. And there is no break in the testimony whatever. And this is all confirmed by Scripture. The Bible is solid in its testimony for the Deity of Christ. To reject the Deity of Christ is to reject the Word of God. If people do not believe in the Deity of

Christ, if they do not believe that He is the Messiah, then they do not believe the Bible--and they have no right to call themselves children of God!

5:9 At the point John would show us, his readers, how unreasonable any person is to reject such overwhelming testimony as we have from God. And verse 7 informs us that this is the united testimony of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

"If we receive the witness of men" -- And we do, all of the time. Life would be impossible upon earth if this were not true. Sometimes we learn to our dismay that men we have trusted are liars, but we have accepted their witness. Judges in our courts base their decisions on "the witness of men." Even the Bible says that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter shall be established. Cf. Deut. 19:15.

Now, if we receive testimony from men, why do we find it so hard to receive the testimony of God? Since God is God, He is far greater than man is. He has never been known to lie, nor to deceive in any way. His record is perfect. We ought to trust Him immediately and without the slightest question in our minds.

God has declared over and over in Scripture in many way that Jesus Christ is His Son, and that He is indeed the Christ, the Messiah. That should settle it for every person on the face of the earth. But our sinful hearts will let us believe men while we refuse to believe God. The most basic, the very starting point of all that God has declared about Jesus is that He is His Son, He is the Christ. The Bible has many things to say, but none is more important than this. "This is the witness which he hath testified of his Son." You can't be a Christian if you don't believe this. And you certainly cannot expect to overcome the temptations and trials of the world if you do not believe this. This is the foundation of our faith!

5:10 What John declares here is a fact which only a true child of God knows to be true. The conviction that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, becomes a strong assurance in our hearts when we believe, and not before. Man says, "If I can see it, I will believe it." But the Lord says, as He did to Martha, "If we believe, then we will see." Our Lord commended Thomas because He had seen and believed, but then He quickly added, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

The Apostle Paul wrote in Rom. 8:16,
The Spirit itself [or Himself] beareth witness with our spirit,
that we are the children of God.

He doesn't do this before we are saved; He does it afterwards. We do not know how it happens, but every true child of God knows that this verse is true. We believe, and then the assurance comes. This is what John was saying in this verse. We believe, and we have the witness in ourselves. We are ready to declare from our hearts that the testimony of God in Scripture is true that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

The people who stood around the Cross told the Lord that if He would come down from the Cross, they would believe. We can be reasonably sure that none of them ever believed. God does not deal with us that way. We believe, and then we know that God's Word is true. We believe because God says it. We receive the witness of men, and so how much more readily

should we accept the Word of God.

But notice the next thing which John said.

If we don't believe God, it is tantamount to making Him a liar.

Turn back to 1 John 1:10. There John wrote that if we say that we have not sinned, when God says that we have, "we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." The person who does not believe that Jesus is the Son of God, makes God a liar. The person who does not believe that God sent Jesus into this earth from heaven, makes God a liar. The person who does not believe that Jesus came to provide salvation for sinners through His death, makes God a liar. Instead, they have to believe that Jesus was a phony, a deceiver, a false prophet. How inconsistent men are who call Him a great teacher and a great example when they deny the basic claims that are made for Him in Scripture! In reality they are calling God a liar, and they need to be told that this is what they are doing. It might wake some of them up. And there is little doubt but that this will be one of the charges laid against such people in that day when they face the Lord, the Judge of all the earth. What will they have to say then to defend themselves?

What is the testimony which God has given of His Son? We have it in verses 11 and 12.

5:11 "And this is the record" -- "Record" is the Greek word for witness, or testimony. His testimony is twofold:

- 1) That He has "given to us," or provided for us, "eternal life."
- 2) "This life is in His Son."

This explains for us why it is so important to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Being the Son of God He is not a sinner like we are, and by His incarnation He is able to do something about our plight. Cf. Rom. 6:23a. If He were only a man, then He would need a Savior, too. So we can see why it is so important to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. By His death He has provided life for guilty, hell-bound sinners. And yet we argue about Him because we do not understand how great our need is and how impossible it is that we or anyone else could ever meet our need.

Now notice verse 12.

5:12 Salvation is not hard to understand. It is very simple. If you have the Son, you have life; if you don't have Him, you don't have life. This is the equivalent of saying, If you are trusting in Christ, you are saved; if you are not trusting in Christ, you are not saved. Or we could state it this way: If Christ is your Savior, you are going to heaven; if Christ is not your Savior, you are going to hell. If you believe in Christ as your Savior, you are a Christian; if not, you are not.

How could John have been any clearer? This is what the Lord said in John 14:6. This is what Peter said in Acts 4:12. John the Baptist said,
 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life;
 and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life;
 but the wrath of God abideth on him.

One thing before I leave this verse. Notice that John does not say that

if we have the Son of God, we will have eternal life sometime in the future. We have it when we have Him. He is our life. And our life in Christ is secure as long as Christ lives. Therefore, since we know that death no longer can have dominion over Him, we know that we are eternally secure in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Concl: There is no time like the present for us to make sure that we are among those who believe the record that God has given of His Son. Christ is the only way to God. How simple the way is, and yet it is to be feared that there are many who profess to be Christians who have never experienced the new birth. The evidences of salvation which have been given to us in 1 John are missing in the lives of many who claim that they are saved. It is important for us to make sure that the Lord Jesus Christ is truly our Savior.

For those of us who do know Him, let us remember the earlier verses of this chapter. God has not only made provision in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, but for our victory over the world. But that victory comes only as we live our lives in obedience to His Word, and as we walk in fellowship with His people. If we are failing on either of these points, let us seek the Lord's help in making our lives what He wants them to be.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

1 John 5:13-21

February 1, 1993

Intro: It is apparent as we come to verse 13 of this last chapter of 1 John that the Apostle John is coming to the end of his epistle. The word know has been prominent throughout the epistle, but it seems to be especially so from verse 13 on. Therefore, it seems that we can refer to verses 13 through 20 as a series of divine certainties. We have:

- 1) The certainty of eternal life in verse 13.
- 2) Certainties related to prayer in verses 14 through 17.
- 3) The certainty regarding sin and the believer in verse 18.
- 4) Two certainties in verse 19:
 - a) Concerning our relationship with God.
 - b) Concerning the world and its condition.
- 5) The believer's certainty regarding the Son of God in verse 20.

The chapter and the book close with a solemn and most unique kind of a warning in verse 21.

Notice the word know in verses 13, verse 15 (2x), 18, 19 (related as indicated above to the two statements of the verse), and 20 (2x).

Let us begin by looking at verse 13.

5:13 Here John spoke of his aim in writing his epistle, and he spoke of it as though he had accomplished what he set out to do.

It would seem best to take the expression, "These things," as referring to the whole epistle because we have seen that this has been his emphasis, writing to believers that they might know that they have eternal life. This is the reason he has spoken about:

- 1) Sin.
- 2) Obedience.
- 3) Love for the people of God.
- 4) Overcoming the world and the Evil One.
- 5) The importance of the doctrine of the Son of God, which would mean the importance of Scripture, plus the God-given ability to be able to discern between truth and error.

John believed that if you were saved, you should KNOW that you are saved.

It may have been that people were then like many are today, they did not know the evidences of salvation in their lives. They may have been looking for things other than the right things. Or they may have been discouraged because they did not see the evidences in their perfection. Take sin, for example. People may be inclined to believe if they sin at all they are not saved. John cleared that up early in his epistle when he spoke of the need for confession, and when he spoke of our Advocate with the Father. And in addition to all of the outward evidences, John had told them in verse 10a that God has given us an internal witness that we are really trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. So we have many reasons for knowing that we know the Lord, and are truly and eternally saved.

However, the Apostle John's statement here indicates that it is possible for a person to be saved without having the assurance of salvation. And so of the several expressions we have in this epistle about John's purpose in writing, we have this statement was his main purpose, all of the other purposes being a part of this one.

We have a textual problem in this verse. Some Greek texts read like this:

These things I wrote to you in order that you may know that you have life, that is, eternal life, to those of you who are believing in the name of the Son of God.

What this does is leave out the last statement of the verse: "And that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." Good men are divided as to whether or not this last statement belongs. It may be a statement which some copyist added, but, at the same time, it certainly does not contradict anything that John has been teaching elsewhere in this epistle, or anything that is taught any other place in the NT. In fact, I believe that it gives us an emphasis which John has been insisting upon throughout the epistle. It is that a true believer will not only start to believe, but he will continue to believe. He will persevere in believing. And so I am going to treat the verse as it stands in the KJV. The last statement would emphasize that knowing that you have life will be an encouragement to you to continue to believe in the Son of God.

Notice again that eternal life is a present possession. We know now that we now have eternal life. We have it as much as we will ever have it. It may not be as manifest now as it will be later, but the evidences are present in their imperfection. We now have eternal life, divine life.

The Apostle John used the expression here of believing into (εἰς) the name of the Son of God. By this he meant to carry his readers beyond a mere intellectual agreement that Jesus was the Son of God; this was committing one's self trustfully to the name, as Thayer says in his lexicon, or in faith giving one's self up to the Person who truly bears the Name, THE SON OF GOD!

Illustration: the elevator. Knowledge + believe + trust = faith.

So John had written to those who were at that moment believing so they would know that they had eternal life, and so they would continue to believe into the name of the Son of God--believing that Jesus of Nazareth was also the Son of God Whom the Father had sent to be the Savior of the world. We believe that He is the Person He claimed to be, and the Person John said He was, Who shed His blood for our sins, and is now our Advocate with the Father until that day when we see Him and will be forever like Him.

But let us go on. Verses 14 through 17 give us certainties related to prayer.

5:14 It seems that the One to Whom John was referring here is God. As we have seen, faith in Christ brings us into fellowship with God, and fellowship with God finds its greatest expression in prayer. And there is something about the assurance of our salvation which gives us "confidence" in God when we pray. Nowhere is the assurance of salvation needed more than when we come to the Lord in prayer. Uncertainty about salvation will produce uncertainty in prayer. On the other hand, certainty about salvation leads to certainty in prayer. This must be one of the reasons John began verse 14 with the word "and," linking verses 14 and 15 with verse 13.

These two ideas are present in such verses as Rom. 8:32. (Read.) And the same can be said for verses like Matt. 6:6 and 7:11. The assurance that God is our Father, and that we are His children, gives us real confidence in prayer.

Sometimes this word is translated as boldness, but that is probably not a good translation for people living in the latter part of the twentieth century. Boldness to us can be very offensive. It describes a person who is "pushy," a person who never meets one who is superior to himself. He is "the greatest." But that is not what the Apostle John had in mind as he wrote this verse.

The word in the NT describes boldness in a good sense. It speaks of confidence, assurance. This is what it means in Heb. 4:16. John was indicating that we can come to the Lord and speak to Him freely and openly about anything that is on our hearts. The Lord always welcomes us, and delights in our fellowship. Our confidence is, according to the Greek text, toward Him. We often look at our unworthiness, or at the faulty expression of our requests in prayer, but John indicates in this verse that we must be looking to the Lord!

But our confidence is based upon His will, not ours. This is when He hears us, not when we seek to convince Him that what we want is best, but when we sincerely want His will whatever the request might be.

We need to keep this point in mind when seeking to understand what our Lord said about prayer in His Upper Room Discourse--verses like John 14:13, 14; 15:7; 16:23, 24.

Now look at the word "ask." This could be translated, Should we ask anything according to His will, or, Whenever we ask anything according to his will. But it speaks not just of praying once, and then praying no more, but continuing to ask until the answer is given. But when we pray according to the will of God, although the actual answer may be withheld in the wisdom of God until some future time, yet praying according to the will of God gives us the confidence ("we know") that the answer will eventually come.

An illustration of this is Elijah's prayer for rain. Cf. how it is recorded in the epistle of James. Cf. Jas. 5:17, 18. It sounds like he prayed once for rain, and the Lord answered his prayer. But when we turn to 1 Kings we get details which James was not led to give us. In 1 Kings 18:1 the Lord announced to Elijah that He would end the three-year drought. It was through Elijah's prayers that the Lord would bring rain. In the closing verses of 1 Kings 18, verses 41-45, we see that Elijah prayed seven times, and it was after those seven times that Elijah's servant finally reported "a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand" (1 Kings 18:44). At that point Elijah knew that the Lord was answering his prayer.

Elijah knew what the will of God was, but he prayed. And he not only prayed once, but seven times--and he would have prayed more than that if the cloud had not appeared. And so we must learn from the Apostle John's words that even when we are certain of the will of God, it may be only after numerous prayers that the answer will come.

And so it is clear from Scripture that we do not come to God to convince Him to do things our way; we come to Him that we might agree that He do things His way. This is a further means of gaining confidence in prayer, confidence that the Lord is really hearing us when we pray.

And our confidence carries over into verse 15.

5:15 The word "if" can be translated since. Once we know that He hears us, we can be assured of the answer. It might not come at that very moment, but it will most certainly come. These two verses give us great assurance in prayer, assurance which belongs only to those who are believing into the Name of the Son of God.

How do we know the will of God?

The best way to know God's will is through His Word. Anything that is contrary to the Word cannot be the will of God. Therefore, verses like these are an encouragement for us not only to get into the Word, but to turn the Word of God into prayer. This is really the best way to pray. As we read our Bibles, let the truths of the Word and the promises of the Word and the lessons of the Word become the subjects of our prayers. The more the Word enters into our praying, the greater will be our blessing in praying, and, it would appear, the greater will be the numbers of answers to our prayers which we receive from God.

But there are times when we cannot find specific answers to particular problems which we face. Shall we buy this home, or that one, or shall we buy a home at all? Where shall I go to school? What does the Lord want me to do with my life? Is this the person the Lord wants me to marry? What about sicknesses, or financial needs? What do we do in cases like these?

We move ahead to meet whatever our responsibilities we might have, trusting the Lord to open doors, and to close them. We wait for His time, and refuse to take matters into our own hands if the Lord doesn't act as quickly as we would like. He has promised to guide us. He has promised to provide for us. He has called upon us in His Word to wait upon Him and to wait for Him. As we follow the directions given to us in the Word, He makes the way clear, and gradually leads us to know what His will is.

What did the Apostle John mean when he said, "We know that we have the petitions that we desired of him"? Did he mean that we should expect immediate answers when we pray according to the will of God? No, that was not his point. The answer might be some time in coming. But he meant that we "have the petitions" in the sense that although we don't actually have the answers, yet they are certain to come.

I wonder if David did not have this in mind when he penned the opening words of Psalm 40: "I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry." We pray according to the will of God. We don't see an immediate answer, but we wait for Him. And while we wait we continue to pray. The evidence that David had that the Lord had heard him was that eventually the Lord brought him out of the "horrible pit," etc.

These verses not only teach us to pray, but they teach us to expect answers to our prayers. We can often be greatly discouraged because we do not see more specific answers to prayer. We are always seeing the blessing of God in one way or another, but that is different from seeing specific answers to specific prayers--and that is what the Apostle John was writing about in these verses. So we are not only to pray, but we are to pray in such a way and for such things that we actually can expect God to give the very things for which we pray.

Charles Simeon, in his sermon on these two verses, added what he called a caution as we exercise the confidence that God has given us in these

verses. He said:

Take care to exercise it with modesty and holy fear. It is possible enough to mistake our own feelings for an answer to prayer; and to persuade ourselves that God is directing us, when we are following only the imaginations of our own hearts. Let us, on all occasions, take the written word for our guide; and, in all doubtful circumstances, wait the issue, before we presume to refer them to God as expressions of his willingness to answer to our prayers. The truth in our text is to be improved rather for our encouragement to commit our ways to God, than for the purpose of determining positively what God has done, or will do. Let us take it with this limitation, that God will fulfil our requests, if they will really conduce to our welfare and to his glory; and then we cannot err, nor can our confidence be misplaced (Vol. 20, p. 551).

5:16 The emphasis continues in this verse and also in verse 17 on prayer. But we also see that the Apostle John here deals with the subject of sin unto death and its relationship to our prayers.

This and the following verse would lead us to see that our praying should not just focus upon our needs, but we should also be aware of the needs of others. And John Calvin says in his commentary on this verse that the Lord "would...have us regard the falls of the brethren as stimulants to prayer" (Vol. XXII, p. 267).

These verses are a solemn reminder that sin is sometimes punished by death, physical death. In fact, it would seem from what John said here that it had become so prevalent that whenever a believer got sick, this was the first reason that was suggested. Of course, sin unto death is not limited to believers, but John was writing here about a "brother." The story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 gives us a solemn illustration of "sin unto death." Paul evidently had "sin unto death" in mind when he wrote about the man who was having an affair with his stepmother. We know from 1 Cor. 11:30 that because many of the saints were eating and drinking at the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner, that Paul wrote, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." By sleeping he meant that some had died. They were guilty of sin unto death, and so the Lord had taken them to heaven rather than let them remain on earth to dishonor His Name.

We also have illustrations of sin unto death in the OT. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was the result of sin unto death. We have the story of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in Numbers 16 which was sin unto death. Actually the whole generation of adults who came out of Egypt died in the desert, and theirs was sin unto death. Aaron had two sons, Nadab and Abihu, who offered "strange fire" on the altar of incense, and died for their sin. This was sin unto death. Even Moses sinned by striking the rock when the Lord told him to speak to it, and his penalty was sin unto death. The Lord did not allow him to lead the children of Israel into the promised land.

It is a very solemn thought that such could be possible even today--but it certainly can. We are not to go around passing judgment on people because we all get sick, and we all will eventually die. But John was speaking of cases where people who know the persist in doing that which is displeasing to the Lord, usually sin which is committed over a long period of time. When a person gets to that place, and is under the judgment of God, John said, "I do not say that he shall pray for it." This would mean that the Lord's people would have some idea of what was going on.

Looking at the illustrations of "sin unto death" in Scripture, we can see no common pattern. But it appears doubtful that it is usually the case that people are judged by physical death for a first offence, or for some minor offence. Those in positions of leadership are at the greatest risk, but even there it would seem that the Lord had been dealing with that person about particular sins, and the person has not been listening to the Lord. The purpose of such a judgment is to bring the living into a greater fear of the Lord.

But this verse also teaches us to pray about a brother who may be stricken because of sin, and yet it is not God's final dealing with him. Instead of being sickness, it could be an accident in which a person is seriously injured. We call such things accidents, and yet God is really at work in everything that happens to us, isn't he? And so when we see that God is dealing with a person, but it comes more as a warning than a final sentence, pray for that person. It may be that the Lord will restore life and work in his heart to make him the person he ought to be.

February 2, 1993

5:17 In 1 John 3:4 we read that "sin is the transgression of the law." Here we are told that "all unrighteousness is sin." On the subject of righteousness, cf. 2:1, 29; 3:7, 10, 12. "Unrighteousness" was mentioned in 1:9.

The standards of right and wrong are established by the very character of God. Anything, inwardly or outwardly, which deviates from what God is, is sin. And the knowledge of God is to be found primarily and supremely in the Word of God. I say "primarily and supremely" because, as we learn in Romans 1 we do have some knowledge of God and His will given to us in our consciences, and we also see the evidence of God's power and Godhead in creation. We all need to be warned against sin, but especially against persisting in sin. That is what leads to death. But normally sin is a call for prayer to one believer who sees his brother in sin.

Therefore, the Apostle John would have us know that prayer is effective for our needs as we present our requests to God, but it is also effective as we pray about others, particularly the spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

However, before John closed his epistle he felt it necessary to state once again the certain truth concerning a believer and sin. And this we have in verse 18.

5:18 Four times in this and the following two verses the Apostle John said, "We know..." He actually uses two Greek verbs throughout his epistle which are translated know, but the meaning of the two is essentially the same. They speak of knowledge that is personal, that is clear, that is certain.

As before, John was not saying that believers will be without sin, that it is possible to reach a state of sinless perfection in this life. But he was saying that it is impossible for a believer to live in sin. If he tries to, as we have just seen, he will face the possibility of physical death as a judgment from God.

Why is it that the one who is born of God does not commit sin?

There are perhaps many reasons, but certainly one of the main reasons, the reason above every other reason, is because "he that is begotten of God [which seems to be a reference to our Lord] keepeth him [not "himself," which is the reading in some of the MSS]. And as a result "that wicked one toucheth him not." This kind of touching is more than an external, superficial touch, as Westcott brings out in his commentary, but a deep, strongly influencing touch. The word is used of the Lord touching the sick and healing them. The Evil One is always seeking to lay his hands on us to make us do what he wants us to do. But we can be thankful that, due to the protecting work of our Lord Jesus Christ, again and again, day after day, we are kept from sins which we would otherwise commit. And when we are tempted, the Lord always sees to it that the full force of the temptation never reaches us, as it reached Him. This is a grand certainty for which we ought to praise the Lord daily. He keeps us from falling. He delivers us from temptation. We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us, and continues to love us.

February 8, 1993

If we retain the reading of the Authorized Version, making the expression, "he that is begotten of God keepeth himself," refer to a believer keeping himself, we would surely have to say that this cannot be done just by the efforts a believer may exercise for himself. God works in us to do His will, but He is the One Who keeps us from falling. Cf. Jude 24, 25. And we learn from our Lord's prayer in John 17 that He keeps, and He called upon the Father to keep His own.

The passage in Eph. 6:10-18 indicates that we prepare to meet the Enemy by putting on the whole armor of God, and also by "praying always with all prayer..." We can sin, but we do not have to sin. And it is stated more than once in this epistle that a true believer will not live in sin.

And so taking this whole chapter we can see that God has made provision for our victory over the world (vv. 4, 5), and here we have victory over the sins of the flesh and over "that wicked one" who is the Devil. But while we exercise the provisions which God has made for us in the Word and in the Holy Spirit, none of the glory or credit for our victories belongs to us. It all belongs to the Triune God.

Actually the Apostle John mentioned three things in this verse that we "know" and can be assured of.

5:19 Here the Apostle John stated two other things that "we know."

The first is that "we know that we are of God." We are "in the world," but we are not "of the world." We used to be "of the world." Notice these expression in our Lord's prayer in John 17, esp. vv. 11, 14-16.

To say that "we are of God" means that we belong to Him; we are His children. We have our life from Him, and this has forever made a difference between us and the world.

The second thing John said that we know according to this verse is that "the whole world lieth in wickedness." This is an interesting statement, and is full of instruction for those of us who know the Lord.

When John spoke of "the world" here he must have been speaking of the people in the world, all of the world, in every generation, and extending

to every individual in every nation.

"Lieth" indicates a person who is stretched out, content to be where he is, not wishing for a change in position, but probably always hoping that conditions will improve.

"Wickedness" is taken by most commentators to mean the Wicked One.

And so we have the complete picture of contrast between the believer and the people of the world, the unbelievers. We are "of God." We belong to Him. We would trust Him, and live for Him. We want to please Him. We used to be "of the world," too, but by the grace of God, while we are still "in the world," we are no longer "of the world." But the world remains unchanged. It is under the dominion, the rule, of the Wicked One, and content to remain in that condition. The worldling is completely satisfied with his position, and is not looking for a change. The other side of the story is that he could not deliver himself if he decided that he wanted to be free from the Evil One. He is in bondage until, and if, God sets him free. We know this! And let us make sure that we do not forget it. We are what we are; they are completely different who are in the world. We do not pattern our lives after them, but we live according to the will of God, and for the glory of God.

5:20 The Apostle John explains here why we are different.

"We know that the Son of God is come." This is a very interesting statement for several reasons.

We need to remember that the Apostle John was writing at the end of the first century, and it is very unlikely that any of his readers knew the Lord when He was here on the earth. It would be safe to say that the majority of John's readers in the first century were saved since the Lord had been on earth. Many of them could have been second generation Christians; others had been saved right out of paganism. But for John who had known the Lord on earth, and for all of those who were saved later, he could say as a spokesman for all, that "we know that the Son of God is come." We would be willing to say that today in the twentieth century. "We know that the Son of God is come." And we can say it with the same certainty that the Apostle John said it. We have not seen Him, nor have we talked to anyone who has seen Him, but by the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts we can say with total assurance and confidence, "We know that the Son of God has come." We are not looking for a coming Redeemer. We know that He has come. We know that He became a Man. We know that He continued to be the Son of God even after His incarnation. We know that He lived a perfect life, died a sacrificial death, was raised from the dead, and has ascended to the Father. "We know" these things. There is not the slightest doubt in our minds but that He "is come." We are placing our hopes for eternity in what is meant by those words when we say, "We know that the Son of God is come." We know it not only as a fact of history, but we know the significance of His coming. We don't just hope that He has come, and that we are on the right track; we know it! And this leads us to the next statement that John made in this verse.

"We know" that He "hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true."

By "understanding" John did not just mean that God has made us familiar with the fact regarding the Son of God, but that God has caused us to

understand the meaning of His coming. Many people accept the fact that there was such a person as Jesus of Nazareth Who claimed to be the Son of God, but it doesn't mean anything to them. Our minds are darkened, we remain in a state of spiritual ignorance until our Lord opens our understanding to see what all of the facts mean. And He has done this "that we may know him that is true." That is we know that He was the Person that He claimed to be, and that His disciples said that He was. He is not a phantom, nor a pretender, but He was the genuine, the real, Son of God.

You see, if you understand what John was talking about, and if I understand it, it is because the God has given us the understanding that we have. He has not given it to everyone, but He has given it to us. And how thankful we should be!

But this is not all that we know.

We know that "we are in him that is true." He is not only with us, but we are "in him."

Now let me take you back to that expression at the beginning of this verse where John said, "We know that the Son of God is come." When you put that expression with this last one, that "we are in him that is true," you can see that there is a sense in which the Lord Jesus came, and He is still here.

I know that He ascended. And I know, as you do, that He is seated at the right hand of the Father. But we are speaking of the Son of God. We can only be one place at a time, but the Members of the Godhead are not limited as we are. Our Lord is there, and He is here. Did not Paul say, "Christ liveth in me"? And did not our Lord say, "And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," or age? Yes, He did. Therefore, living here on earth we can say that "we know that we are in him that is true." We not only "know" Him, but we are "in Him."

How reassuring are the last words of this twentieth verse: "This is the true God, and eternal life."

Early in our Lord's prayer (John 17) He said this:

And this is life eternal,
that they might know thee the only true God,
and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent (v. 3).

No believer needs to fear that he may have placed his hopes for eternal life in the wrong person. We have come to know "the true God" and the "true" Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And how is it that we have come to know the Father and the Son? Because They have "given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true." And so John brings his epistle to a close by reminding us that our salvation is not due to our wisdom, nor to our choice, but to the sovereign grace of God Who has opened our minds to the truth, and has brought us to know Him Who is "eternal life."

As I studied these verses my mind went to those wonderful words of one of Isaac Watts' hymns which ask this question:

Why was I made to hear thy voice, and enter while there's room,
When thousands make a wretched choice, and rather starve than come?

'Twas that same love that spread the feast
That sweetly drew us in;
Else we had still refused to taste, and perished in our sin.

Pity the nations, O our God, constrain the earth to come;
Send thy victorious Word abroad, and bring the strangers home.

We long to see thy churches full,
That all the chosen race may, with one voice and heart and soul,
Sing thy redeeming grace.

We know, and we understand, and we are in Him, all because of His marvelous grace extended to us in Christ.

The final word of the epistle is in keeping with what we have just been considering. In the light of what we know, and what we have, and whose we are, the last word is a warning:

5:21. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

This is the last of seven times that John used the word, τεκνία, "Little children." Cf. 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; and here.

I agree with Spurgeon who said that he did not think that the Lord was actually addressing little children here. Nor was he speaking to those whom he mentioned in 2:12 and 13, i.e., children in the faith. He was speaking to all of the Lord's people as their spiritual father, to show how much he loved them and was concerned about their spiritual welfare.

Spurgeon also said that there are a number of things which are implied by the Apostle John's use of this term:

- 1) He was addressing them as members of the family of God. And what a great privilege it is to be the children of God. The title was assuring to the people to whom John was writing that he considered them to be genuinely saved. And on this point it is good to remember what the Lord said about becoming "as little children" in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Cf. Matt. 18:3. See also Matt. 19:13-15.
- 2) This title would remind them of their need to be humble, and to remain humble. It is not common to see pride in a little child unless the child has been damaged in some way. One thing that makes children delightful is the fact that they are usually shy, and humble, and want to stay close to either Daddy or Mama.
- 3) Hopefully, too, this title would indicate teachableness. Little children are usually curious, and interested in learning. And there is nothing that delights the heart of God than for us, even when we have known the Lord a long time, to maintain the teachableness of a little child. Many times in the Psalms we see how David was crying out to the Lord to teach him. It was to the Lord's disciples that He gave the commandment in John 13:34, 35. See John 13:33.
- 4) Children also are usually very trusting, they have great faith in their parents unless their parents have given them some reason not to trust them. And along with trust comes rest. There is something very wonderful about seeing a little child nestled in his mother's arms, or his Daddy's arms, in absolute security.
- 5) Finally, Mr. Spurgeon said that the term, "little children," implies weakness. And he said that is what we are at our very best: weak. We are easily led astray, pressured into doing the wrong things. And

there is a sense in which we never outgrow our weakness.

Let me add another thing about "little children." They are often selfish, and sometimes jealous. We see this in God's children, too, don't we? We see it in ourselves.

And then we could say, too, that "little children" are usually satisfied with simple things. They will play for hours with broken toys, or spoons, or dolls which are soiled because others have played with them for years.

It seems that the Apostle John was not only calling the Lord's people, "little children," but coming at the end of this epistle it would seem that he was expressing the hope that spiritually, in the hearts and in their lives, although not necessarily in their knowledge of God and His Word, they would remain "little children." There is so much truth that opens up to us when we think of a simple and loving title like "little children."

As we go on to see what John had to say to the Lord's people, we would have to say that this is quite a startling conclusion to the Apostle John's First Epistle. When we first read it, it seems to be unconnected with what has gone before. In an epistle where John has repeated himself on the main subjects contained in this epistle, he suddenly mentioned idolatry for the first time. And we have this final exhortation, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

I have said that it seems "unconnected," but if we believe in the divine inspiration of Scripture, it has to be connected. At first glance, and remembering the age of the Apostle, we might feel that this showed the wandering of an old and tired mind. However, if it does, it is the first evidence of that which we have seen in the epistle. And I am quick to say that this loving statement is exactly where it should have been, and where the Apostle John intended that it should be. And it is exactly what it was meant to be. But let us look at it for just a moment to try to grasp the Apostle's purpose in concluding this way.

The mention of idolatry ought to take our minds back to the OT, and to the Law of Moses. It was really the subject of the first two commandments in the Decalogue. In those days idolatry was punishable by death. It was the one sin which threatened the security of the whole nation. Ultimately idolatry was one of the major reasons Israel and Judah were carried away into captivity. The jealousy of God is mentioned several times in the books of Moses as being aroused to a terrible degree by the idolatry of the people. An idol has been described as anything that we make into a god, anything that takes the place of God in our lives. It does not have to be an image. Paul called covetousness idolatry in Col. 3:5. And he spoke in Romans 1:25 of those "who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator..."

But perhaps it will help us to understand idolatry better if we think of that which is the exact opposite of idolatry. The answer is the worship of God. And our worship of God is to be an expression of our love for God.

Probably one of the most instructive passages on the idea of idolatry is found where our Lord was being tempted by the Devil. (Read Matt. 4:8-11.) He showed the Lord all of the kingdoms of the earth, and their glory, and offered to give them to the Lord if He would fall down and worship him,

i.e., the Devil. The Devil wanted to be the Lord's idol. The Matthew passage gives our Lord's response.

Most of you will remember the occasion when a lawyer asked the Lord what was the great commandment in the Law. Their conversation is recorded in Matt. 22:34-40 and in Mark 12:28-33. The Lord said that the first commandment was,

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,
and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind (Matt. 22:37).

If we obey this commandment, we will not be bothered with idolatry. Therefore, this commandment for us to keep ourselves from idols is another way of telling us that we need to love the Lord, and to serve only Him. He must be first in our lives, and all that we do should be to glorify Him. And we need to be constantly on our guard to make sure that no other affection captivates our hearts to turn us away from the Lord. We must guard against disobedience, against rebellion, against slothfulness, against prayerlessness, against the neglect of the Word, against forsaking the fellowship of the saints.

However, we must remember that this final exhortation of the Apostle John would also have to do with actual idols. There are many churches today which have their idols. People are coming into our country every day from nations around the world who are bringing their idols with them. We would be surprised to know how many homes in America have their god shelves.

"Keep" means to guard. They were to guard themselves from the ever-present threat of idolatry. There is always the danger that any one of us can have our hearts become idolatrous.

What are some of our twentieth century idols?

Sometimes we make ourselves into idols. We become overly concerned about ourselves. We get occupied with our appearance--clothing, jewelry, hair--all of those things we constantly hear about on television that make us think about ourselves.

Jeremiah's words in Jer. 9:23, 24 were a warning against three kinds of idolatry: wisdom, might, and riches. A college person can glory in his degrees, but you don't have to be a college graduate to be affected by this. There are some people who think that they know almost everything, and they learn to display their knowledge. What about might--physical strength, or political power, or positions of influence in other areas. And what a snare riches have been to people. Again, you don't have to be rich to glory in what you have.

The Pharisee who gloried that he was not like other men, not like that despised publican, had made an idol of himself.

Sometimes we glory in our children, and in our grandchildren. We love our children, and we are thankful for them, but we need to be careful that they do not occupy the first place in our hearts.

How do we guard ourselves against idols?

One way, and the best way, I have already suggested, is to make sure that we love the Lord with all of our hearts, souls, and minds. These are three areas that we need to be thinking about continually. However, we need to remember that our love for the Lord is always shown by our

obedience to His Word. And so daily attention to the Word is a strong safeguard against becoming idolatrous. Idolatry is really the greatest of sins, and so all that the Word says about deliverance from sin would apply to this sin also. I have reference to walking in the Spirit, not present our members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but presenting ourselves daily to the Lord, for His blessing, His guidance, His strength, and His defense.

The last word of the epistle is a prayer: "Amen." And so may it be. This was the aged Apostle John's final word to his "little children." And it may very well have been the concluding word of the NT since many feel that this was the last book of the Bible to be written. How appropriate that this word should linger in our hearts, and that we should carefully guard ourselves from letting idols take the place in our hearts which only our Lord should have.

- o -

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

Review

February 22, 1993

Intro: There are several reasons why this epistle is important in addition to the fact that, like all of the other books of the Bible, it is a part of the Word of God.

Some of those reasons are:

- I. It very likely was the last book of the Bible to be written, and written by the last surviving Apostle, the Apostle John. Therefore, although John wrote under the direction of the Holy Spirit, it represents his concern for the Church at the end of the first century. Since the Bible is timeless in its content and emphasis, we must assume that there would be reasons for these same concerns throughout the history of the Church, and until the Lord returns. The Church is never stronger than the spirituality of the people who make up the Church.
- II. The Apostle John has told us very specifically why he wrote this epistle. We have this in four specific statements in which John said, "These things have I written unto you..." (or its equivalent):
 - A. 1 John 1:4.
 - B. 1 John 2:1.
 - C. 1 John 2:26.
 - D. 1 John 5:13.

The first of these has to do with joy. The second has to do with not sinning. The third has to do with false teachers. The last has to do with assurance of salvation. And, as I have brought out in class, it would seem that the last of these gives us the main purpose of the epistle: the practical evidences that one is truly a child of God.

We also have John's statement of his purpose in 1 John 1:3, fellowship.

In addition we have the statements found in 1 John 2:12-14. It would appear from these statements, as well as from the fact that the Apostle John repeats his main points in this epistle, that he agreed with what the Apostle Peter said in 2 Peter 1:12-16. Every child of God needs to have the truth repeated to him. And this means that it is just as important for the mature as well as for the immature.

Speaking of the signs, or evidences, that we should look for as a testimony to the reality of a person's salvation, what are they?

III. THE EVIDENCES OF SALVATION.

These are presented throughout the epistle in a recurring fashion. The Apostle John would have us know that our profession of faith, or the profession of others, is not enough to prove the reality of faith unless the evidences are present in the life of the person making the profession. No evidence will be present in perfection, but it will be in a person's life, however weak, if there is real life.

The first is presented positively and negatively:

- A. Walking in the light, or not sinning.
 1. 1 John 1:6-2:2.

Then this point is repeated in the following passages:

2. 1 John 2:29.
 3. 1 John 3:2-10.
 4. 1 John 5:16-19.
- B. Obedience to the commandments of our Lord.
1. 1 John 2:3-8. The last two verses of this section form a transition to the next point which is love for the brethren.
 2. 1 John 3:22-24.
 3. 1 John 5:2, 3.
- C. Love for the brethren.
1. 1 John 2:9-11.
 2. 1 John 3:10b-24.
 3. 1 John 4:7-21.
- D. Correct doctrine, especially concerning Christ.
1. 1 John 2:18-29.
 2. 1 John 4:1-6.
 3. 1 John 5:1-5.
 4. 1 John 5:20, 21.

In reading through this epistle, there is often an overlapping of the way in which John mentions the tests of salvation. This shows how closely they are related to each other, and that it is not a question of having one or the other of the evidences; we must have them all!

We might make two points out of the first one above, the one having to do with walking in the light in contrast with sinning. This kind of a walk is also referred to in the epistle as doing righteousness, or as being obedient to the Word of God. And so it is important to see how one flows into another.

Walking in the light is obviously walking in fellowship with the Lord, but in the latter part of chapter 2 (vv. 24-29) as abiding in Christ.

We also see from 1 John 3:24b and 4:13 that the gift of the Holy Spirit to all believers is a further evidence that we are truly saved. It would appear from verses like this that the early Christians were taught how to recognize that the Holy Spirit was in them. This probably had to do with the way they were restrained from sinning, or severely convicted when they did sin, as well as times when they gained greater insight into the truth of Scripture.

There is one other point, however, that needs emphasizing in this epistle which is clearly addressed to the people of God. This has to do with the times John mentioned the Devil (or the Evil One), the world, and the flesh. And a part of all of this is what John had to say about the antichrist. We are not living for the Lord in a friendly world with no enemies to be concerned about, but we are living in a hostile world, and we have enemies within and without.

Let us call this:

IV. THE CHRISTIAN'S ENEMIES.

- A. The Devil, or the Wicked One.

1. The Devil (1 John 3:8, 10).*

This means he is an accuser, a slanderer, one who maligns the people of God. Cf. Rev. 12:9, 10.

2. The Wicked One (1 John 2:13, 14; 3:12; 5:18, 19).*

This describes the Devil as one who is never content unless he is corrupting others. The effect of his work is always evil. This describes the Devil as being just the opposite of our good God. Archbishop Trenchard said in his book, Synonyms of the New Testament, that the Devil is not only content to perish in his own corruption, but he is not happy unless he is corrupting others and drawing them into the same judgment which he himself is facing. Cf. p. 316. This is why he is called, the Wicked One.

It is the Devil John was referring to in 1 John 4:4 as the one who is in the world.

March 1, 1993

B. The flesh (1 John 2:16).

Sometimes the word flesh is used of the human body, as is the case in 1 John 4:2, 3 where it is used of the humanity of our Lord. But that is not the case in 1 John 2:16. There it is used of the sinful nature of man, which the child of God still possesses even after he is saved. The flesh is the seat of sin within us. It responds to temptation, is weak toward sin, and produces sin. It never is responsive to spiritual truth, and remains unchanged when we are saved. A child of God, however, is no longer in bondage to the flesh as he was before he was saved.

It is interesting that the Apostle John mentioned it in 1 John 2:16 as being a part of the world.

C. The world.

There is a major emphasis upon the world in this epistle. Note the following passages.

Its use in 1 John 2:2; 4:1, 17; 5:19 has to do with the people of the world, and so that is not a part of our consideration when we speak of the world as an enemy of the people of God. "World" in 1 John 4:1 probably speaks of the earth. The same is true of the world in 1 John 4:9.

Note: There is such a close connection between the people of the world and the ungodly world system that it is often impossible to distinguish between them in some of the verses where the world is mentioned because the reference includes both.

But the passages we need to be concerned about are the following:

1. What our attitude toward the world is to be, and a description of the world (1 John 2:15-17).

I want to come back to these verses in a moment, and also to the statements which the Apostle John made in chapter 5, verses 4 and 5. But here let me point out that we are not to love the world. John used _____.

Let me remind you of the definition which I gave to this word earlier in our studies of 1 John (see notes, p. 28). It is not correct to say that agape-love is not necessarily divine love. It is used of divine love, but here in 1 John 2:15 the Apostle John indicated that it is possible for us to have agape-love for the world. And he forbids it! Agape-love is the kind of love which makes you prefer some-thing above everything else. It is the kind of love which makes you unwilling to do without it. You delight in what-ever you show agape-love.

The Lord's first commandment was that we are to love HIM with all of our heart and with all of our soul, and with all of our mind, and some verses add, and with all of our might. In spite of this we often are guilty of trying to love the Lord and love the world at the same time. However, whatever you love with agape-love becomes your master, and our Lord said that we cannot serve two masters. Cf. Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:23. One or the other is going to win our affections more than the other. And, because we still have a sinful nature (as well as a new nature), and are living in a wicked world, with sinful people all around us, the world usually wins. This does not mean that the world is stronger than the Lord, but it does mean that there can be no compromise with the world! To have agape-love for the Lord means that He must have all of our love. And according to Matt. 10:37 that means that our love for the Lord must be greater than our love for our fathers or mothers or sons or daughters. In Matt. 12:29 our Lord added wives and houses and lands. And for a wife that would include her husband.

Now we know that the Bible does not teach the same thing about our families that it does about the world. We are never told not to love our families, only that our love for the Lord must come first. But when it comes to the world, this world of sin, we are never to love it at all. But more about this in a moment.

What else does John tell us about this ungodly world which is under the dominion of the Devil.

2. The world does not know us (1 John 3:1).
3. The world hates us (1 John 3:13).
4. False teachers are of the world (1 John 3:5).
5. Overcoming the world is a proof that one is a child of God, and the victory is won by faith (1 John 5:4, 5).
6. The whole world lies in the Wicked One (1 John 5:19).

Before we leave our study of 1 John I want to spend a little time talking about:

V. OVERCOMING THE WORLD.

It should be most encouraging to us to know from this epistle that it is possible for believers to overcome both the Wicked One and the world, as well as the flesh which is a part of the world.

Let us first ask the question:

- A. What does it mean to overcome?

It means to subdue, to conquer, to prevail, to be victorious. The word does not suggest that there can be a single battle with a final victory, but it means that it is possible for us as believers to live victoriously day by day.

The word is used in 1 John 2:13, 14; 4:4; 5:4, 5.

B. John's definition of the world (1 John 2:16).

The Apostle John includes all that we find in the world which is opposed to us as being in these three categories. And be sure to notice that the Apostle John said that these are "**ALL that is in the world.**" There is nothing in the world which is not included in one of these categories. If we are to overcome the world, we must know what our enemy is, what it is that we must overcome. Here is John's definition of the world:

1. "The lust of the flesh."

I have already defined the flesh as our old, sinful nature--unredeemed, and unredeemable. It is that part of us that is attracted by sinful things. It is that part of us which so quickly rises up in rebellion against God. We all know that salvation did not take away from us the desire, which is basically the meaning of "lust," for the very things that made it necessary for our Lord to die for us.

For Eve it was seen in the simple statement that she saw that the forbidden fruit was "good for food" (Gen. 3:6). Our Lord was tempted by Satan to turn stones into bread. Cf. Matt. 4:3. Now we all know that we need to eat. Our bodies are sustained by food. But an inordinate desire for good food, or an excessive desire for food, can easily lead to other things. Did you ever hear of a bar or tavern which did not sell food? And does not drinking usually go with it? And do we not know that drinking can so easily lead to all kinds of immorality? I have known of many men during my ministry who get so caught up in satisfying their own fleshly desires, that their wives and children go without food.

"The lust of the flesh" also includes the desire for possessions--houses and cars and all of the things that we have in our homes. Now again, it is not sinful to own a home, but it is wrong to let that be your first love. This is what leads to debt. It makes thieves out of some people who do not have the money to buy what they want. The lust of the flesh will cause some people to use their money to buy things for themselves and to let their families live in constant need.

2. "The lust of the eyes."

For Eve this meant seeing that the forbidden fruit was beautiful. Cf. Gen. 3:6. For our Lord it meant seeing the kingdoms of the earth, and desiring to be the Ruler over them. Now there is nothing sinful about beauty. All of creation was originally beautiful. There was nothing ugly about it. But looking at the wrong things creates sinful desires. For Eve, what she saw in the beauty of the fruit overruled the Word of God. "The lust of the eyes" often leads to "the lust of the flesh." Our Lord spoke of the sin involved in looking on a woman to lust after her. It means that he has committed adultery already with her in his heart.

When Achan confessed his sin which led to the defeat of Israel at Ai in the days of Joshua, he said that his sin got started when he "saw" what he

eventually took.

Hollywood keeps people coming to theaters by playing up to "the lust of the eyes." The same is true of TV. Our clothing designers depend upon this for the success of their business. This is behind the tremendously successful cosmetic business. Salesmen and saleswomen of all kinds want you to see their product, whether or be a home, or a car, or whatever.

We cannot always prevent seeing the wrong things, but we can keep from continuing to look at it, or even looking a second time. "The lust of the eyes" exercises an overwhelming influence on all of us IF we are not careful.

Solomon in the book of Proverbs has given us some wonderful advice concerning our eyes. Some verses give us counsel as to how we can be victorious over the world and its emphasis on what we see.

Prov. 4:25, "Let thing eyes look right on,
and let thine eyelids look straight before thee."
Prov. 23:4, 5,
Prov. 23:26,
Prov. 27:20,

3. "The pride of life."

John Calvin reminds us that the word used for "life" here "means the way or manner of living" (Vol. XXII, p. 188). And then he said that this includes "ambition, boasting, contempt for others, blind love of self, headstrong self-confidence" (Ibid.). Isn't it amazing that even from Christians we hear today about the importance of having a good self-image, of self-esteem, and self-love. Those things are nothing more than pride, pride as a way of life.

For Eve, eating the forbidden fruit meant that she would be wise. Cf. Gen. 3:6. The temptation which the Devil put before our Lord in this category was for Him to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple so that angels would come and save Him from killing Himself. This would have been a most spectacular display of "the pride of life."

You don't have to look far to see human pride. It is seen from the White House to the lowest of the low. Sin has made us proud. We are inclined to be proud about everything--our looks, our achievements, our possessions, our families, our churches, our friends. We as Christians even have to be careful about being thankful that we are not like other people are who do not know the Lord. Those of us who are pastors, evangelists, or in other positions of leadership can be notorious for our pride. When Paul wrote to Timothy about the office of a bishop, or elder, he said,

Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride
he fall into the condemnation of the devil (1 Tim. 3:6).

Dr. Mitchell used to call pride "the root sin," and he was right.

The book of Proverbs also gives us some important teaching about pride.

One of the seven things that the Lord hates, things that are an abomination to him, and mentioned first of the seven, is "a proud heart" (Prov. 6:17). Prov. 8:13 says that "the fear of the Lord is to hate evil," and the first evil that is mentioned is "pride," followed by "arrogancy." Prov. 11:2 says,

When pride cometh, then cometh shame:

but with the lowly is wisdom.
In Prov. 13:10 Solomon said,
Only by pride cometh contention:
but with the well advised is wisdom.
Prov. 15:25 tells us that "the Lord will destroy the house of the proud."
Prov. 16:5 says, "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord," and we all know Prov. 16:18,
Pride goeth before destruction,
and an haughty spirit before a fall.
In Prov. 21:4 Solomon said that
An high look, and a proud heart,
and the plowing of the wicked, is sin.
And we learn from Prov. 29:23 that "a man's pride will bring him low."

No one needs to tell us that the opposite of pride is humility, or a spirit of lowliness, meekness. These qualities find their supreme example in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We all have natural tendencies toward "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life"--all of us! These three things describe live in this world. But we are called from this. We are not to love the world. We are to love the Lord, and to see to it that we please Him, not ourselves. What hope is there that we can change?

In John 16:33 we find these words spoken by our Lord when He was on His way to Gethsemane, and probably just on the outskirts of the Garden:
These things I have spoken unto you,
that in me ye might have peace.
In the world ye shall have tribulation:
but be of good cheer;
I have overcome the world.

The thought of this verse is that, as He said, "In me ye shall have peace" even though we "have tribulation" in this world. How can we? Because He overcame the world, and in Him we can, too!

Let us conclude our study of John's Gospel by thinking about:

C. How we can overcome the world.

The Apostle John gives us our answer in 1 John 5:4, 5. (Read.) We overcome the world through our faith. But what exactly does that mean?

1. We need to recognize that only those who are born again have any hope at all of overcoming the world. This is stated in both 1 John 5:4 and 5.

People without Christ are in hopeless bondage to the world, the flesh, and the Devil. So we must not try to get unregenerate people to try to overcome the world, or the flesh, or the Devil, as a Christian would. It simply cannot be. What they need is Christ! Therefore, we need to give them the Gospel.

We need to remember that it is only in Christ, and because we are in Him, that we can overcome the world. How thankful we should be that we know this.

2. We need to realize that our victory over the world is based

upon Christ's work on the Cross. He died not only to save us from the penalty of sin, but from the control of sin in our lives. Our deliverance from the world's power over us was obtained for us when the Lord Jesus Christ died.

Paul explained it in these words in Rom. 6:6,
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.

We need to remember that there is an interrelationship between "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." Together they make up the very character of sin. And this is what we see even today when we look at the world. And there is nothing about the world that is pleasing to God. If Christ had not died to deliver us from sin's power, we would have no way of overcoming the world.

3. As the word faith suggests, overcoming the world requires that we simply trust God.

This does not mean that we have no responsibility. There is a great deal of responsibility in trusting the Lord. We need to make sure that we are not trusting in ourselves--and that certainly requires the grace of God because our natural tendency is to try to overcome the world in our own strength. Sometimes the Lord has to let us fail until we really understand that only He can give us the victory.

And so we need to be "looking unto Jesus" (Heb. 12:2). We need to learn to use "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Eph. 6:17). We need to pray that we will be delivered from temptation and evil, and we need to avoid those circumstances where we would be tempted. We need to find our strength in the Lord. We need the encouragement and blessing that comes to us through the fellowship we have with the Lord's people.

Spurgeon has a good comment on what it meant to the Lord in His earthly life to overcome the world. Perhaps it will help us to understand what we are up against in overcoming the world. This is what Spurgeon had to say:

...He had really overcome the world. Its blandishments [i.e., its allurements and attempts to drag Him down] He had overcome. Its temptations He had overcome. Its terrors He had overcome. Its errors He had overcome. Everything in the world that had assailed Him He had put to rout. He was tempted in all points like we are; but He remained without sin. He had overcome everything that had come to attack His holiness, His patience, His self-sacrifice; He had been victor at every point (Vol. 33, p. 658).

The Devil has seen to it that the world has invaded the lives of the Lord's people, as well as the ministry of the church. We actually promote human pride, especially in our leaders and those who participate in our services. We clap for people when they sing. What is this if it is not putting music in the church on the same basis as entertainment in the world? We are more concerned about numbers than we are about the truth. We close our eyes to sin. We continually see compromise with the Word of God. We turn to humanistic psychology in helping people with their problems rather than to the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. We are more concerned about getting "decisions" than we are seeing a work of the Spirit. Young people are coming out of our schools to serve the Lord, but

more interested in methods that "work" than they are about the ways of the Lord. We want instant results, but we know very little about what it means to wait upon the Lord. Many of our Christian schools hire secular fund raisers rather than being satisfied to make their needs known to the Lord.

Concl: If there were ever a day when we need godly overcomers, it is today! As we get closer to the coming of the Lord, the battle is going to get worse. Temptations will get stronger. The pressure to conform to the ways of the world will come with more intensity from within the professing church itself.

What do we need to do?

We need to examine our own hearts and lives, and to make sure that we are overcoming instead of compromising. Then we need to pray that the Lord will awaken His people today to the error of our ways, and to make us a people who really want to be holy because the Lord is holy. It is only as the true Church is revived that we are going to be instruments in turning people to our Savior. Let us pray for boldness to speak the Gospel, and to declare the ways of the Lord.