

**TRUTHS WE KNOW and A DANGER WE FACE**

1 John 5:18-21

**Intro:** We come this morning to the final words of John in this delightful epistle which has meant so much to the people of God down through the years since it was written. It is a perfect companion to the Gospel according to John. In the Gospel of John we learn what the Gospel is; in this first epistle out of three which John wrote, we learn how to identify those who have truly believed the Gospel. Living in a world of change, it is wonderful to know that there are certain things that do not change. God does not change. He is eternally the same. The Lord Jesus Christ does not change. He is “the same yesterday, and today, and forever. What He has been, He is not, and He always will be. The Holy Spirit does not change. The Bible does not change. The Word is “forever settled in heaven.” The Lord Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my Word shall not pass away.”

Perhaps you remember those words of the hymn, *Abide with Me*, which says in the last part of the second stanza,

Change and decay in all around I see;  
O Thou Who changest not, abide with me.

Those words were written back in 1847, I wonder that Henry Lyte, the writer of that hymn would say if he were alive today.

Our world does show not only change, but decay, great decay. The United States has never been perfect, but many of us can remember when it was vastly different than it is today, and the difference today has not been up but down, not forward but backward, not better but worse. Most people seem totally blind to the fact our country is on a fast decline. And it is because we have turned away from the Unchanging God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the God of holiness Who despises all sin. You may think that it doesn't make any difference how we live, but if you think that way, it is because you are totally blind to what is going on today. We are finding out with all of the tragedies that are taking place in the world today, and especially in our country, that the price of doing our own things is far greater than we are prepared to pay for it.

One reason I love the Bible is because the Bible gives us hope. It tells us what is wrong with us in God's sight, but it also tells us what God did in sending His Son into the world to take upon Himself the judgment that was ours because of our sins. God alone can change us so that we will

want to do His will instead of destroying ourselves by doing whatever we want to do. The Gospel of John gives us that good news; the epistle of 1 John tells us how we can know that God has forgiven us, and changed us, and given us new hearts. The Apostle said, “I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12). And if we know Christ as our Savior, we can say that too.

Or think of those wonderful words which we often quote to each other in Romans 8:28, “And *we know* that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” He did not say, I hope, or I think, or I guess, but “I know.” How did he know it? Because God had revealed that to him, and had him write it down in his letter to the believers at Rome, and then God has preserved what Paul wrote so that we would believe what Paul believed, and apply it even when bad things happen to us. In addition, Paul had experienced it in his life. You and I have, too.

Here in 1 John the Holy Spirit has given us a letter in which over and over again, some forty times, the Apostle John declared what we can believe with the utmost certainty. And it seems that he couldn't conclude this epistle without saying again in verse 18, “We know . . .” And then again in verse 19, “And we know . . .” And then you find the same in verse 20, “And we know . . .” And in the middle over verse 20 you find another “we know.” It is “that we may know Him that is true.”

We know these things because it is written in our Bible. God had John write it there, and God has preserved it so that we can read it this morning. There is no need to revise the Bible because it is all true, and truth does not change. Truth comes from God. Therefore, faith comes by hearing the Word of God as we read in Romans 10:17, by hearing it over and over again.

Now one tragic thing we have to recognize as we read these verses is that not all true Christians know what the Apostle John said that “we know.” We ought to know these things, but not all Christians, unfortunately, do not read the Bible. Or they don't read it very much. So if we can't say “we know” as John said in these verses, then make it your business to find out what he said so that you will be able to say with him, “we know.”

Now let us look at verse 18. What did the Apostle John say here that we

know?

## **I. WE KNOW HOW TO IDENTIFY A CHRISTIAN (1 John 5:18).**

Perhaps John was saying that “we know” this because this is not the first time that he had said this in this epistle. Look back at chapter 3 and verse 9. (Read.)

A Christian, a child of God, believes that there is such a thing as sin. He knows that sin is anything that is displeasing to God. He know that God judges sin, that the wages of sin is death. That is why a Christian turns to Christ. God has opened his eyes to see that in God’s sight he is a sinner. He learned that unforgiven sin can take a person to hell. He also learned that Christ died to save sinners because He died, taking the sinner’s penalty upon Himself, paying the sinner’s debt, so that by His sacrifice sinners can be forgiven and receive the gift of eternal life. This is what our Lord said in words you will find in John 3:16.

Now what we need to know is that when a person really trusts the Lord Jesus for salvation, there is a great change that takes place in his life. He doesn’t enjoy sinning like he used to. He find that he can still sin, but he also learns that he doesn’t want to sin. In fact, he realizes that the chains that bound him to his sins have been broken. He is no longer a slave of sin, but now he wants to please God. When the Apostle John said that “whosoever is born of God sinneth not,” he meant that he doesn’t live in sin anymore. He does not continue in his sin. Sin is no longer a way of life for the one who is born of God. He has new life from God which causes him to want to please God instead of pleasing himself.

Now there have been a couple of interpretations given to the second statement in verse 18. A child of God is one who has been born of God, or begotten of God (the two expressions mean the same thing when applied to true Christians. But we also know that that expression, “begotten of God,” can apply to our Lord. He is called “the only begotten Son of God.” So some apply this second statement to Christians; others apply it to Christ and say that John was speaking of our Lord. If you have the KJ translation, you can see that those who translated this verse believed that John was speaking of Christians. The NKJV does the same applying it to believers. If you are using the NASB, it is applied to Christ. The way it is translated in the NIV, it seems that it could be taken either way.

The good thing about this expression is there is a sense in which both translations are true. God keeps us saved, but we are also to keep ourselves from sinning against the Lord. Look at the last verse of this epistle and you will see that the Apostle John, writing by the Holy Spirit said to his readers, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” In 1 Timothy 5:22, Paul told Timothy, “Keep thyself pure.” In James 1:27 we find James exhorting believers to keep themselves “unspotted from the world.” In Jude 21 Jude told believers, “Keep yourselves in the love of God.” This was evidently an appeal for them to live a life of obedience to the Word of God. But in that same epistle Jude said in verse 24, “Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling . . .”

So what is the answer to this problem? Well, the truth is that God keeps us saved. But it is also true that you and I have responsibilities for our lives to stay away from sin, to keep out of situations where we are tempted to sin. A Christian who has had a problem with drinking in his life before he was saved, needs to stay away from bars and from friends who would try to get him drinking again. But only the Holy Spirit can give us the strength to say no to sin. How thankful we can be that the Lord gives us the strength to resist sin, but it is because, as the Apostle Peter said, we “are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5).

The last statement of verse 18 is a promise: “And that wicked one toucheth him not.” We Christians have an enemy. He is a powerful enemy. He is crafty and deceptive. But God is keeping us, and if we are careful to keep ourselves, this enemy of our cannot touch us.

How wonderful it is to be able to say “we know” about these truths. In knowing them, and believing them, and acting upon them, we are safe.

Let’s move on quickly to verse 19. Here we see:

## **II. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CHRISTIAN AND A NON-CHRISTIAN (1 John 5:19).**

There are non-Christians who are good church members. Being a church member does not save you. Those who are saved are “of God,” as we have learned before in this epistle. See chapter 4, verse 6. A true Christian has been born of God. He has his life from God. That is why he has been changed. He is a new creature.

But on the other hand (and here is another reference to the wicked one who is the Devil. The whole world is under his power and control. This does not mean that God no longer is sovereign, but for His glory the Devil at the present exercises great power in the world. He is called the god of this world, and he does everything in his power to keep people from hearing the Gospel. Unregenerate people are the bondservants of sin and Satan. And we need to keep this distinction in mind. There are just two kinds of people in the world – the children of God and the children of the Devil.

The knowledge that we are of God is a deep and abiding conviction. It ought to be a lot stronger after having gone through this epistle of John. If it isn't, you need to go back over these five chapters again. Review the tests. Apply them to yourself, and ask God to give you the assurance that you have passed from death to life even though the evidences of your salvation are not as strong as you would like for them to be.

Now to verse 20. The Devil is not in this verse. But the grace of God is written all over this verse. The only way that anyone can get into the family of God is by the grace of God. This twentieth verse focuses upon God's Son, Jesus Christ. So here we have

### **III. THE GRACE OF GOD IN SALVATION (1 John 5:20).**

The people of the world do not know and do not care if they should know, that “the Son of God is come.” Oh, they may know the Bible story of the birth of Christ, but they do not understand what is involved in the statement that we find here: “And we know that the Son of God is come.” This is the most amazing event in all of human history. For the Son of God to come means that God was doing something that could not be accomplished in any other way.

Why has it made a difference in our lives? It is because of what God has taught us through His coming. Don't take any credit for what you know about Jesus Christ because you didn't figure it out on your own, and neither did I! God has “given us an understanding an understanding,” not only as to Who He was, and is, but “that we might know Him that is true,” *true* meaning the one and only true Savior. In giving us understanding He has shown us that our salvation is not deserved, and cannot be earned, but that it is a gift from God through Jesus Christ Who is “the true God, and eternal life.” Jesus Christ is not just one of many

saviors; He is the only Savior, the true Savior, and all of this has been made known to us because it has been His eternal plan to claim us as His very own – not just for a time, but for all eternity.

Many say that they will take their chances of getting to heaven when they die. Or they have convinced themselves that there is some other way to God except through Christ. But John says here that “we know” that there is no other Savior. There is no other way. If you have the Son as your Savior, you have life. If you don’t have the Son, it doesn’t make any difference what else you have or whatever good you may have done, you don’t have life. It is just as simple as that. If you know this, give God the glory because He has given you the true understand of Christ and eternal life.

Now this is not popular teaching in the world. The world hates the truth that I have just been describing to you. Don’t put your trust in any poll that might be taken as to Who Jesus Christ is, and why He came. Go to the Word. Get your answer there. If you don’t understand, ask God to give you understanding, and then continue to read the Word. Maybe you need to go back to the Gospel of John. You will find the truth there on every page, and it will all lead you to Christ.

The Apostle John has packed a great deal into these three little verses: 18, 19, and 20. Many have expressed surprise at the way John concluding this very powerful letter. Obviously this is:

#### **IV. A DANGER WE FACE (1 John 5:21).**

This is addressed to those of us who know the Lord because John said so. We are God’s “little children.” And this is an appeal for every child of God to be careful about idols.

Now I doubt if there is much danger that anyone here this morning would turn from Christ to worship an image made like corruptible man, or birds, or fourfooted beasts, or creeping things which Paul mentioned in Romans 1:22. Plenty of people have done that, but it is hard to imagine that someone who has known Christ would stoop that low. Nothing in creation could possibly share the glory of our Lord. Well, what then did the Apostle John have in mind?

Bishop Westcott in his commentary on The Epistles of John said that “an

idol is anything which occupies the place due to God” (p. 197).

There is an interesting reference to idolatry in Paul’s letter to the church at Colosse. Let me read it to you:

5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth;  
fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence,  
and covetousness, which is idolatry:

6 For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children  
of disobedience:

7 In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them  
(Col. 3:5-7).

Paul called “covetousness . . . idolatry.” Look at the sins Paul listed along with covetousness. (See above in verse 5.) A covetousness person is a person who is never satisfied with what he has, but is always looking for something else.

I have been going back over the verses we memorized this year on the attributes of God. And one of the verses I have been reviewing has to do with the presence of God. It is Hebrews 13:5. It speaks of covetousness. Let me repeat it for you:

Let your conversation [conduct] be without covetousness;  
and be content with such things as ye have:  
for he hath said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you.

Always desiring other things, to God means that we are no longer really satisfied with Him.

**Concl:** Many years ago I was teaching the book of Revelation in what was called, The Grad Class, at Multnomah. And I got to chapter 2 and the beginning of the Lord’s letters to the seven churches of the Roman province of Asia. In His letter to the Ephesian church, the Lord spoke of His presence with them, commended them for the work they had done, and for their patience, for their orthodoxy, for their opposition to heresy, and for their persistence in serving Him. You would think from what He had said that the Ephesian church was a perfect church. But then the Lord added this:

4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou has  
left thy first love (Rev. 2:4).

Somewhere I ran across a paraphrase of that verse which went like this,  
Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because you don’t love  
Me the way you used to.

I think that this is what the Apostle John was talking about. “Beware of idols,” beware of anything that keeps you from being completely satisfied with Me.

Do you suppose covetousness was a problem at Ephesus? I don't know. Something had gone wrong in their relationship with the Lord. The Ephesian believers had not noticed it, but the Lord had. Let search our hearts to see if there is anything in our lives that has in any way replaced the love that we used to have for the Lord. If so, let us take action immediately to give the Lord the preeminent place in our hearts and lives. This is a command from the Lord: “Little children, beware of idols.”