

TESTS OF ETERNAL LIFE

A Devotional Commentary on the Book of 1 John

by Paul G. Apple, January 2002

ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE MATURES AS WE PASS THREE PRACTICAL TESTS OF:

- FELLOWSHIP = WALKING IN THE LIGHT
- SONSHIP = PRACTICING RIGHTEOUSNESS
- ABIDING = FAITH AND LOVE BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

1 John 5:13 *"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life."*

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Paul Apple, 304 N. Beechwood Ave., Baltimore MD 21228.

webmaster@bibleoutlines.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul majored in English at Princeton University and graduated in 1979 with a Master of Divinity degree from Grace Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, IN. He lives in the Baltimore area with his wife Karen. He has worked in management roles for several local companies while engaging in pastoring and preaching responsibilities at Solid Rock Community Church. His four children (and one daughter in law) enjoy a wide range of educational and professional pursuits while sharing in common a love for the Lord Jesus.



SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS EPISTLE

TWO TRACKS OF ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

Before beginning the detailed study of this epistle, I would like to offer a critique of the opposing evangelical view to show the significance of the issues involved -- how they touch on issues such as Lordship Salvation, the nature of the gospel message, the nature of true repentance and saving faith, the approach to eternal security, the perseverance of the saints, assurance of salvation ... the list goes on and on. The Book of 1 John makes very significant contributions to this discussion and will be interpreted quite differently ... depending on one's systematic theology.

To illustrate the opposing view I am going to quote extensively from The Gospel Under Siege by Zane Hodges (published by Redencion Viva in Dallas, TX, 1981). He is a respected servant of the Lord with excellent ministry and academic credentials. This critique is not meant as a personal criticism of him at all. I just think it serves to highlight some of the differences in perspective that genuine believers have as they approach some of these difficult issues where the Bible presents a certain degree of tension that often makes us uncomfortable ... to the extent where we seek out some more simplistic formulistic solution.

I need to quote his illustrative material in the *Prologue* to The Gospel Under Siege to set the stage:

Last night Jimmy accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. This morning he is bubbling with a joy he has never experienced before.

On his way to work he meets his friend Bill. Bill has always claimed to be a Christian. He also reads a lot of books on theology. But Jimmy has never been too interested in theology up until now.

"Say, Bill," Jimmy begins, "guess what! I got saved last night. I trusted Christ as my Savior. Now I know I am going to heaven!"

"Hmmm," Bill replies, "maybe you shouldn't quite say it that way. After all, you don't really *know* that you are going to heaven."

"What do you mean?" Jimmy enquires. "The Bible says, '*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved,*' and that's what I did."

Bill give Jimmy a wise and knowing look. It is the kind of look all perceptive theologians know how to give the ignorant and the unlearned.

"But did you really believe? Maybe you just believed psychologically."

"What do you mean?" Jimmy is feeling a little depressed now.

"I mean," Bill continues sagely, "you can't *know* yet whether you have real saving faith."

"How can I know that?"

"By your works. You'll have to wait and see if you live a real Christian life."

"Jimmy is dejected. "You mean that if I sin, I'm not a Christian after all?"

"No, I don't mean that," Bill assures him. "All Christians fail once in a while."

"But how much do they fail? I mean, how bad does it have to get before I find out I'm not saved?"

"Well, it can't get too bad for too long."

"But how bad? For how long?" Jimmy feels desperate.

"I can't tell you exactly. But a true Christian doesn't practice sin. If you find that you are practicing sin, that will show that you didn't have real saving faith to begin with."

"What if I do pretty good for several years and then things start going bad?"

"In that case, maybe you weren't saved to start with."

"Maybe? What do you mean by that?"

"I mean," Bill's tone is solemn, "you'll probably have to wait until the end of your life before you can be sure you are a true Christian. You have to persevere in good works, or your faith wasn't real."

"Do you think I can be sure before I die?"

"Maybe, Listen, Jim, I've got to rush to work. We'll talk about this some other time. Okay?"

"Yeah, okay. See you, Bill."

Bill rushes off. Jimmy is devastated. All the joy he had experienced since last night has suddenly evaporated. He is now filled with questions and doubts.

Jimmy has become a casualty in **the siege of the Gospel!**

Talk about a "straw man" approach! What believer wouldn't be repulsed by the approach taken by Bill in responding to the joy of Jim's testimony of conversion? But this type of emotional rhetoric glosses over the depth of the real underlying issues and fails to do justice to the view of salvation that says "Where there ends up being no fruit it is because there never was any true root."

My understanding of the Biblical perspective on Assurance of Salvation is that there are two different tracks which are designed to complement one another. These two tracks are not mutually exclusive but are designed to exist together and even grow as one matures in the faith.

1) TRACK #1 --

Subjective Faith and confirmation by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

This track is immediately operative upon conversion so that Jimmy is totally correct in giving testimony immediately as to his confidence of being in the family of God and being certain of his final destiny in heaven. One's faith should continue to grow even though at times there may be periods of severe doubt .. so that even this track does not remain at some static level.

2) TRACK #2 --

Objective confirmation by the demonstration of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in one's changed life.

God has been extremely gracious to provide this other barometer of our spiritual standing. For there are times when our heart will condemn us and call into question the validity of our relationship with God. But *"God is greater than our*

heart, and knows all things. (3:20)" At times like these when the introspective believer is wrestling with some specific area of trial, he can look to the types of general tests of life presented in 1 John and have his confidence renewed on Track #2 that he truly is a child of God.

With that introduction, let's go on to examine some of the arguments raised by Zane Hodges in Chapter 5 of his book -- "*1 John: Tests of Life?*"

A major stream in the commentary tradition on 1 John holds that the epistle ought to be viewed as offering "tests of life." That is, John confronts his readership with questions about the quality of their Christian experience from which they may draw the conclusion that they either are, or are not, true believers. Should they fail to measure up, they have no reason to think that they possess eternal life.

It would be hard to devise an approach to John's first epistle more hopelessly misguided or more completely self-defeating. If the premise on which this approach is based were true, it would be quite impossible for either the original audience of 1 John or any of its subsequent readers to possess the assurance of salvation. Since the writer repeatedly enjoins the "abiding" life marked by obedience to Christ's commands, one cannot really be certain until the end of his earthly experience whether he has abided or persevered in the requisite obedience. Meanwhile, one must entertain the possibility that he is a spurious Christian!

As noted above, the concept of dual tracks of assurance completely deflates this type of straw man approach. In addition, the Biblical concept of *abiding* needs to be investigated more thoroughly. Is John talking about remaining vitally connected to the life of Christ as a branch remains on the vine (as opposed to being cut off and dying so that the contrast is between believers and non-believers) or is he talking about some type of subjective quality of closeness to God that all believers will exhibit in varying degrees (so that the contrast is between good believers and carnal believers)? See the Appendix for a fuller treatment of this concept of abiding.

The concept of "fellowship" is another key word in the epistle. Hodges agrees that part of the overt purpose of 1 John is found in its prologue "*and there the purpose is defined clearly as 'fellowship' with God.*" But he goes on to interpret this word in its common colloquial Christian usage today rather than in its historical context: "It almost goes without saying that 'fellowship' is not to be defined as a virtual synonym for being a Christian. King David was surely a regenerate man when he committed adultery and murder, but he could not be said to have been in God's fellowship at the time! Even on a human plane, a son or daughter may lose fellowship with a parent even though they do not thereby lose the family relationship. The equation of 'fellowship' with 'being a Christian' (or something similar) is extremely far-fetched. Fellowship, like abiding, is a fully conditional relationship and this fact is sufficiently demonstrated by the statements found in 1:5-10. Fellowship, of course was precisely what was threatened by the advent of the antichrists. Since the readers had a divine promise about eternal life, nothing

these false prophets could do or say could destroy the readers' fundamental relationship to God. But should the readership begin to listen to the doctrines of these men, their experience of fellowship with the Father and the Son would be in jeopardy. Up to now, the readers had apparently resisted the false teaching successfully (4:4). The Apostle wishes this resistance to continue (2:24-27)."

We Christians today talk about falling into and out of fellowship with our Heavenly Father with unconfessed sin being the main determining factor. But what we are really addressing is the **enjoyment** of that fellowship relationship. When you look at fellowship as the sharing of the eternal life provided by God (see Prologue to Epistle) it is evident that genuine believers have an eternal unchanging relationship of fellowship to both God the Father and other members of the family of God that is not affected by our experiential walk.

Hodges goes on to write: "The principal source of confusion in much contemporary study of 1 John is to be found in the failure to recognize the real danger against which the writer is warning. The eternal salvation of the readership is not imperilled. It is not even in doubt as far as the author is concerned. But seduction by the world and its antichristian representatives is a genuine threat which must be faced." Actually the very real danger of **apostasy** (a departure from the truth on the part of those who had been professing the truth and outwardly in fellowship with the community of believers although never genuinely saved) in terms of caving in to these antichristian representatives is exactly what John is addressing. But those in Hodges' camp never seem to admit to the possibility of apostasy because of their "Easy Believism" approach to salvation.

They rightly want to maintain that the gospel message is one of by grace through faith alone without any works involved as a condition for salvation. That is where the title comes from: The Gospel Under Siege -- making the combatative charge that those who come from a more Calvinistic persuasion (where the perseverance of the saints is part of one's systematic theology and the possibility of apostasy as defined above exists) have committed the heinous error of perverting the gospel. The distinction they fail to grasp is that the emphasis on a changed life as confirmation of genuine conversion (on the second track of two complementary tracks) is not at all synonymous with making good works a prerequisite for entrance into salvation. What type of conversion or salvation is it where no fruit actually results?

Hodges' conclusion appropriately serves to reinforce what he has already stated ... once again revealing that he has completely overlooked the possibility of this "Two Track" approach to assurance:

"The assurance of the believer rests squarely on the direct promises in which this offer is made, and on nothing else. [i.e. Track #1] It follows from this that the assertion that a believer must find his assurance in his works, is a grave and fundamental theological error. It is an error that goes right to the heart of the nature of the Gospel proclamation. It seriously distorts that proclamation and creates in its place a new kind of message that would have been unrecognizable

to the New Testament writers... Preachers and theologians cannot have it both ways. Either a man can be perfectly sure that he is born again and going to heaven at the moment he trusts Christ, or he cannot. If works must verify a man's faith, then he cannot."

The bottom line is that from **an interpretation standpoint**, 1 John truly is about "tests of life" with the emphasis on this second track of assurance. From **an application standpoint** many of the pastoral concerns of Hodges (and others) are certainly helpful in terms of motivating believers to live in closer fellowship with the Father, abiding in a deeper sense, etc. Certainly we all benefit from applying to our lives those challenges that call us to love our brother, to separate from worldliness, to embrace the truth, to recognize error, to continue to confess our sin on an ongoing basis, etc. We can all improve in terms of drawing closer to God. But that is by way of application -- not interpretation. When you look at the contrasts presented in the epistle (between light and darkness, between life and death, between truth and error ... read through the book on your own and make a list of these contrasts ...) it is evident that these are black and white distinctions between believers and non-believers. John is presenting pass / fail tests that are designed to increase our level of assurance as believers.

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.
- Fanny J. Crosby

* * * * *

Check out the Appendix for a Book Review of [The Gospel Under Siege](#) by Johnny V. Miller, with the assistance of William Larkin and Paul D. Wright from Columbia Bible College and Graduate School of Bible and Missions, Columbia, SC that was published in *Trinity Journal*, Spring 1983, Volume 4 NS, NO. 1.

OUTLINE OF 1 JOHN

TESTS OF ETERNAL LIFE

ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE MATURES AS WE PASS THREE PRACTICAL TESTS OF:

- FELLOWSHIP = WALKING IN THE LIGHT
- SONSHIP = PRACTICING RIGHTEOUSNESS
- ABIDING = FAITH AND LOVE BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

NOTE: I would like to give credit to Professor James Boyer from Grace Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, IN for his excellent class on I John. The main divisions of this outline (highlighted in red) and the overall direction of this study follow Dr. Boyer's excellent outline and approach.

(1:1-4) INTRODUCTION -- GOD MANIFESTED HIS LIFE TO BE PROCLAIMED, SHARED AND ENJOYED

A. (:1-2) THE LIFE OF GOD WAS MANIFESTED TO BE PROCLAIMED

1. The Apostles Experienced God's Life First Hand
2. Assurance of God's Life Demands Proclamation

B. (:3) THE LIFE OF GOD WAS MANIFESTED TO BE SHARED

1. Shared in Mutual Fellowship Among Believers
2. Shared in Mutual Fellowship with the Godhead

C. (:4) THE LIFE OF GOD WAS MANIFESTED TO BE ENJOYED

1. God's Eternal Life is the Basis of True Joy
2. Fullness of Joy Results From Proclaiming God's Eternal Life

I. (1:5 - 2:27) THE TEST OF FELLOWSHIP IS WALKING IN THE LIGHT

A. (1:5-7) THEME OF SECTION 1

1. (:5) The Character of God Establishes the Absolute Standard of Light
2. (:6-7) Fellowship Demands that Our Walk Be Consistent with the Light

B. (1:8-10) WALKING IN THE LIGHT MEANS TAKING SIN SERIOUSLY

1. By Not Denying Sin
 - a. (:8) In Principle -- "we don't have a sin nature"

self deception; divorced from the truth
b. (:10) In Practice -- "we haven't sinned"
blasphemy; divorced from God's Word

2. (:9) By Confessing Sin

C. (2:1-2) THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST ALLOWS US TO TAKE SIN SERIOUSLY WITHOUT DESPAIRING

1. Our Goal is to Completely Avoid All Sin (to take sin seriously)
2. Our Failure Casts Us Upon the Ministry of Christ

D. (2:3-6) WALKING IN THE LIGHT MEANS OBEDIENCE

1. (:3-5) Obedience to the Revealed Word of God Indicates One is Walking in the Light
2. (:6) Obedience to the Revealed Walk of God in Christ Indicates One is Walking in the Light

E. (2:7-11) WALKING IN THE LIGHT MEANS LOVE

1. (:7-8) The Commandment of Love Should Be Familiar and Yet Fresh
2. (:9-11) Love or Hate Exposes Your Spiritual State

F. (2:12-14) ASIDE: ALL BELIEVERS NEED ENCOURAGEMENT AS THEY APPLY THESE TESTS OF FELLOWSHIP

1. The Fundamental Blessings of Salvation Should Encourage All Believers
2. The Proven Experience of Trusting the Unchanging God Should Encourage the Mature Believers
3. Spiritual Victory in the Midst of Conflict Should Encourage the Younger Believers

G. (2:15-17) WALKING IN THE LIGHT MEANS SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD

1. Total Separation from the World is Commanded
2. An Examination of the World Proves that Love for the World and Love for God are Mutually Exclusive

H. (2:18-28) WALKING IN THE LIGHT MEANS ABIDING IN THE TRUTH

1. (:18-19) Abiding in the Truth Requires Recognition of those Forces That Oppose the Truth
 - a. (:18) We are living in the age of antichrist -- of apostasy and final opposition to Christ
 - b. (:19) Departure from the truth unmasks antichrists
2. (:20-23) All Christians Have Two Sufficient Resources for Abiding in the Truth

- a. All Christians have the indwelling Holy Spirit
 - b. All Christians know the truth that is adequate for abiding
God's revelation = the Apostolic Word about Christ
3. (:24-28) These Two Resources Encourage Abiding in the Truth Until We Reach the Goal

II. (2:28 - 3:23) THE TEST OF SONSHIP IS PRACTICISING RIGHTEOUSNESS

A. (2:28 - 3:1) THEME OF SECTION II

1. (:28) Perseverance in Fellowship Results in the Confidence of Sonship
2. (:29) The Character of God Determines The Character of Sonship
3. (3:1) The Love of God Established the Condition of Sonship

B. (3:2-10a) OUR LIFESTYLE REVEALS OUR FAMILY IDENTITY

1. All Men Will Live in One of Two Lifestyles
 - a. A Lifestyle of Righteousness
 - b. A Lifestyle of Lawlessness
2. Our Lifestyle Reveals the Source of our Spiritual Being
 - a. The Source of the Devil
 - b. The Source of God

C. (3:10b-13) TRANSITION: A LIFESTYLE OF PRACTICING RIGHTEOUSNESS INVOLVES LOVING THE BRETHREN

1. Failure to Love Marks You as a Child of the Devil
2. God's Standard of Righteousness Has Always Been Love
3. Negative Example: Failure of Cain to Love Abel
4. Expect Hatred (Not Love) From the World

D. (3:14-23) LOVE FOR THE BRETHREN PRODUCES SECURITY

1. (:14-15) Love for the Brethren Proves Our Relationship With God
 - a. (:14a) Loving Indicates Life
 - b. (:14b-15) Hating Indicates Death
2. (:16-18) Love for the Brethren Will Be Like Christ's Love for us
 - a. (:16) Our Pattern in Loving -- Christ's love for us
 - b. (:17-18) Our Obligation to Love -- Concrete Test
3. (:19-23) Our Love for the Brethren Produces Security and Serenity of Soul
 - a. (:19-21) Confidence in God's Presence
 - b. (:22-23) Confidence in Prayer

III. (3:23 - 5:12) THE TEST OF ABIDING IS FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST AND LOVE FOR THE BRETHREN BY THE INDWELLING HOLY SPIRIT

A. (3:23-24) THEME OF SECTION III

1. The Relationship Between the Test of Sonship and the Test of Abiding
2. Explanation of the Concept of Abiding -- cf. John 15

3. Faith in Jesus Christ -- its development to this point in 1 John
4. Love for the Brethren -- its development to this point in 1 John
5. Indwelling Holy Spirit -- Its emphasis in this third section

B. (4:1-6) TRUTH IS THE BASIS FOR FAITH AND LOVE -- SPIRITUAL TEACHING MUST BE EXAMINED TO IDENTIFY ITS SOURCE

1. (:1) Christians Are Commanded to Exercise Discernment
2. (:2-3) The Touchstone for Orthodoxy is a True Confession of Jesus Christ
3. (:4) God's Children Have Victory Over False Teachers By the Holy Spirit
4. (:5-6) The Source of Spiritual Teaching Determines the Audience

C. (4:7 - 5:3) THE SACRIFICE OF LOVE PROVES A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

1. (4:7-12) Three Arguments for Loving the Brethren (4:7-12)
 - a. (:7-8) Based on God's Eternal Nature -- Love is Consistent with His Nature

 - b. (:9-11) Based on God's Historical Gift -- Love is Consistent with His Example
 - 1) (:9) The Manifestation of God's Love = the Sending of His Son
 - 2) (:10) The Initiator and Essence of Love
 - 3) (:11) Our Response to God's Example

 - c. (:12) Based on God the Holy Spirit -- Loving the Brethren Assures Us that the Holy Spirit is Working in Our Lives

2. (4:13-16) The Holy Spirit Produces the Assurance of Abiding
 - a. (:13) Proposition Stated
 - b. (:14) The Holy Spirit Inspired the Testimony of the Apostles which is the Basis for Faith and Love

c. (:15-16) The Holy Spirit Produces the Faith and Love Which Provide the Assurance of Abiding

3. (4:17 - 5:4a) Love for the Brethren Produces Assurance

a. (4:17-18) Love Faces Judgment Day with Confidence

- 1) (:17) Confidence Results from Christlikeness
- 2) (:18) Christlike Love Knows No Fear of Judgment

b. (4:19 - 5:3) Love for the Brethren Evidences Love for God

- 1) (:19) Our ability to love depends on the divine initiative
- 2) (:20-21) Any claim to love God can be tested by practical love for the brethren
- 3) (5:1) Those who love God will also love God's children
- 4) (5:2-4a) Love for the brethren means love for God means obedience to God's commands

D. (5:1-12) THE VICTORY OF FAITH PROVES A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

1. (5:1-5) True Believers Will Demonstrate a New Nature

a. (:1) Our loving relationship to the brethren demonstrates our new nature

b. (:2-5) Our faithfulness to God's command to love demonstrates our new nature

2. (5:6-10) Our Faith and Our Assurance Rest Upon the Historical Validity of the Witnesses Which God Has Provided

a. Faith in God's Witness of the Incarnation

- 1) Baptism of Jesus
- 2) Crucifixion of Jesus

b. Faith in God's Witness by His Spirit

- 1) Dominant Witness
- 2) Impressive Witness

3. (5:11-13) Our New Nature is the Assurance of the Possession of the Son Himself--Thus Eternal Life

- a. (:11) Eternal Life is in the Son
- b. (:12) Possession of eternal life is determined by our response to the Son
- c. (:13) Theme of Epistle: God Wants All Believers in His Son to Have Assurance of Eternal Life

(5:13) THEME VERSE --

"THESE THINGS HAVE I WRITTEN UNTO YOU THAT BELIEVE ON THE NAME OF THE SON OF GOD, THAT YE MAY KNOW THAT YE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE"

(5:14-21) CONCLUSION

TEXT: 1 JOHN 1:1-4

TITLE: INTRODUCTION: THE ESSENCE OF TRUE FELLOWSHIP

BIG IDEA:

GOD MANIFESTED HIS LIFE TO BE PROCLAIMED, SHARED, AND ENJOYED

I. (:1-3a) THE LIFE OF GOD WAS MANIFESTED TO BE PROCLAIMED

- A. The Source of this Life of God -- Preincarnate Existence from all Eternity
 "What was from the beginning"
 "the eternal life, which was with the Father"

Where have we heard this emphasis before? cf. the opening to John's Gospel

Continuous existence from the beginning with particular manifestation in time and space; the divine Christ did not just come upon Jesus at His baptism.

- B. The Interaction with this Life of God -- The Apostles Experienced God's Life First Hand

Objective validation by John and the other apostles (cf. John 1:14) -- He really is both perfect God and perfect man. This first hand personal knowledge that John is communicating far surpasses any so-called superior knowledge of the Gnostics.

1. Auditory -- *"what we have heard"*
2. Visual --
 - a. Long Distance -- *"what we have seen with our eyes"*
 - b. Up Close and Personal -- *"what we beheld"*
3. Tactile -- *"and our hands handled"*
 checked it out thoroughly; special emphasis on the post-resurrection appearances (Luke 24:39) so that there could be no question that a physical body was involved

Paradox: that John could have heard and seen someone who was from the beginning; Jesus told the Jews: *"before Abraham was born, I AM"* (John 8:58)

What is the result of people's first-hand interaction with us? We are as close as they are going to get to the current historical manifestation of this life of God. What do they hear from us? What do they see? What do they closely observe as they check us out? May it be the eternal life that is Christ Himself living through us. (cf. *Out of the Salt Shaker* -- there is a danger that we isolate ourselves in Christian circles and never allow

the world to examine us. The willingness to be proclaimers involves the spirit behind the evangelism book entitled: *"I'm Glad You Asked"*

C. The Nature of this Life of God --

1. *"concerning the Word of Life"*

2 Possibilities:

- the Word which is Life -- renaming (Boyer, Lenski)
- the Word which gives life (Stott)

2. *"the eternal life"*

The reality of our fellowship depends upon the reality of the life of Christ; otherwise our assurance is empty; our faith is in vain; we are still in our sins.

D. The Manifestation of God's Life -- Demands Proclamation

"and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you"

"what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also"

We are dependent upon God's revelation of His person; we can't figure Him out apart from revelation; the supreme revelation is in His Son (Heb. 1).

Importance of Proclamation: Jesus came to preach (to proclaim) and to disciple key leaders to reproduce that ministry of proclamation. We are not called to stifle this life, but to proclaim it to others. The mission of the apostles was sharing that life with others. We are not called upon to dream up the message; the revelation comes from God; we are just commanded to pass it on.

II. (:3b) THE LIFE OF GOD WAS MANIFESTED TO BE SHARED

A. Shared in Mutual Fellowship Among Believers = Horizontal Fellowship

"that you also may have fellowship with us"

Antichrists will be recognized as those departing from this horizontal fellowship. Fellowship on this plane is more easily identified (it is more visible); but it is also easier to fake.

B. Shared in Mutual Fellowship with the Godhead = Vertical Fellowship

"and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ"

Good statement of the distinction and yet equality between the Father and the Son.

The Definition of Fellowship is key to this book. It is a sharing in the eternal life of God; joint participation in a common life with God and fellow Christians.

Stott: "... that common participation in the grace of God, the salvation of Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit which is the spiritual birthright of all Christian believers. It is their common possession of life -- one with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which makes them one."

The popular usage that fellowship is "enjoying one's company" or "feeling comfortable with someone" is never suggested by the Greek word. The basic thrust of the word is to point to a common possession.

When Ryrice outlines 1 John around the theme of "fellowship" -- he is using the word in the wrong sense -- i.e. in that popular sense. From his perspective, Christians fall out of fellowship and then need to confess sin to restore fellowship (by which he means the enjoyment of that relationship). That is certainly true, but that is not the main thrust of John's approach here. The apostle is setting forth tests regarding our eternal destiny, not the extent to which we enjoy the relationship (although that is certainly a helpful application since it challenges believers to live a more consistent holy life).

III. (:4) THE LIFE OF GOD WAS MANIFESTED TO BE ENJOYED

"and these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete"

A. God's Eternal Life is the Basis of True Joy

B. Fullness of Joy Results From Proclaiming God's Eternal Life

cf. theme of Fullness of Joy in John's Gospel -- John 3:29; 15:11; 16:24; 17:13

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is it so important to point people to the historical facts of the life, death and resurrection of Christ and not get sidetracked into debates about other less important side issues? Why is the personal testimony of Christ's closest associates so crucial?
- 2) What is the impact of the perfect tenses used in this passage = "*have heard*", "*have seen*", etc.?
- 3) Note the emphasis on *sight* in these verses -- how many references do you find? In what way does sight qualify one and motivate one to be a witness?
- 4) How do we know that we are united to this very special Life of God? What does this life look like? What are its characteristics? How is it different from our old life apart from Christ?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: "The historical manifestation of the Eternal Life was proclaimed, not monopolized. The revelation was given to the few for the many. They were to dispense it to the world."

Boice: "The Gnostics had a system, just as many professional religionists have a system today. But a system is not life, nor does it transform a life. A system in and of itself is nothing. What Christianity has and the others do not have is life, in fact, the life of Jesus Himself, the One who is the creator and sustainer of all life and who as the life is also the light of men (John 1:4). It is Christ, then, who is proclaimed in Christianity."

Bruce: "This epistle, then, is justly called 'the epistle of eternal life.' It shows how and in whom that life was uniquely and perfectly manifested; it shows how the presence of that life in men and women may be recognized. John's own experience of that life entitles him to speak of it with assurance and communicate his assurance to others: this, he says, we have seen; to this we bear witness; this we make known to you."

Laurin: "As fellowship is the result of experience so joy is the result of fellowship. It is not said to have its source in riches although riches do afford no small measure of comfort and satisfaction. It is not said to have its source in pleasure although pleasure may bring diversion and recreation. Joy is mentioned in connection with Christ because it has its source in character. Joy is born, not bought. It is the cause of our happiness, not the effect of our pleasure."

TEXT: 1 JOHN 1:5-7

TITLE: THEME OF PART 1: THE TEST OF FELLOWSHIP

BIG IDEA:

THE TEST OF FELLOWSHIP IS WALKING IN THE LIGHT

I. (;5) THE CHARACTER OF GOD ESTABLISHES THE ABSOLUTE STANDARD OF LIGHT

A. The Gospel Message Focuses on the Character of God

1. The Divine Source of the gospel message

"And this is the message we have heard from Him"

Not invented by the apostles or heard from a questionable source; but comes from Christ Himself -- the very Savior that they had heard, seen and touched

2. The Human Proclamation of the gospel message

"and announce to you"

Critical that we handle the Word of God carefully and accurately; How blessed are we that someone proclaimed this message to us; we should be proclaimers to others (John 1:3-9); imperative that we don't alter the message

B. The Character of God is Absolute Light

1. Positive

"that God is light"

Throughout the OT light is a feature of God's self-manifestation rather than of his heavenly being; but this revelation (truth) has to be linked to holiness since the truth is both something to know and to do; the effect of the light is not just to make men to see, but to enable them to walk

Christ is the Light of the World (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46);

Christ perfectly reveals the Father (John 1:18; 14:9-11)

Stott: "It is His nature to reveal Himself, as it is the property of light to shine; and the revelation is of perfect purity and unutterable majesty."

2. Negative

"and in Him there is no darkness at all"

Light always involves the removal of darkness; since light is essential to all life; light and life are closely connected -- as are darkness and death

II. (:6-7) FELLOWSHIP DEMANDS THAT OUR WALK BE CONSISTENT WITH THE LIGHT

A. (:6) Walking in Darkness Invalidates Any Assurance of Fellowship

Remember the false teaching of the Gnostics who believed in dualism = separation of body and spirit; they were teaching that spiritual communion with God is independent of physical morality = your walk says nothing about your relationship with God

1. Failure to Be Real -- Hypocrisy (or Self-Deceit)

"If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness"

This would be walking in a sphere where the light of God is inoperative

2. Failure to Be True

a. In Word

"we lie"

b. In Deed

"and do not practice the truth." -- cf. practical emphasis of Book of James

If we verbalize that we are sharing in God's life but our lifestyle is characterized by the world's attitude of indifference to moral principles, then we are not what we profess to be and are not living according to the Word:

- no conviction of sin is present / no fear of God
- no God-oriented desire to obey and please God
- no orientation of life around Biblical absolutes

If we are living a lie, what type of assurance of salvation should we have?

B. (:7) Walking in the Light Assures Us of Visible Fellowship and Inward Cleansing

1. Conformity to the Standard

"but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light"

2. Fruit of Assurance

a. Visible Fellowship

"we have fellowship with one another"

b. Inward Cleansing

"and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."

Blood -- speaks of death conceived as a sacrifice for sin

Stott: "God does more than forgive. He erases the stain of sin."

Look at the cycle that John develops here:

- fellowship in the life leads to
- walking in the light which leads to
- fellowship with one another and cleansing from sin which leads to
- growing practical assurance of fellowship in the life which leads even more to
- walking in the light; etc.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do we know that the message we preach today is still the pure message of absolute truth from God -- rather than a fabricated compilation of man's imaginations?
- 2) Are we honest enough with God and ourselves to allow the light of God's Word and character to expose the darkness of sin within us?
- 3) When we put on a "Christian" front before others, do we understand that act of hypocrisy to be lying before a God who sees all?
- 4) What does it mean to you in your everyday life to "*walk in the light*"? How can we tell from this passage that John is not talking about a life of sinless perfection?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wuest: "After informing the saints that in order to have an intelligent fellowship with the Lord Jesus they must come to know Him through the portraits painted by the Holy Spirit in the Gospels, John warns them against two heresies which, if followed, would prevent such fellowship. They are included in the heresy called Antinomianism as held by the Nicolaitans. Antinomianism means literally '*against law*.' It is lawlessness. It is disregard for law on the part of the one who professes to be a Christian. That teaching followed out to its logical conclusion results in the two things John is combatting in verses five and six. The first is that there is evil in God. The second is that the person who lives in sin may still have fellowship with Him."

Vaughan: "There are at least three interpretations of '*light*.' First, there are those who understand it to refer to the *majesty, the splendor, and the glory of God*... The second interpretation takes light to be symbolic of the *moral perfection of God*... Others, pointing out that the primary idea in light is illumination, understand the figure to mean that God is self-revealing. They explain that as it is the nature of light to shine and to make visible (that is, to communicate itself), so it is the nature of God to reveal Himself, to make Himself known... There is an element of truth in each of these interpretations; perhaps they should be combined. The leading thought, however,

seems to be that of self-revelation. God has revealed Himself, and in this revelation we learn that He is a God of perfect purity and glorious majesty...

How one interprets life in the darkness depends upon how he interprets '*God is light.*' Darkness is the absolute opposite of that statement. If light primarily denotes purity, then living in darkness speaks of living an impure life. On the other hand, if light denotes God's self-revelation, then walking in darkness signifies disregard for or defiance of what He has revealed of Himself."

Boice: "John's definition of God as light is followed by a denial of three false claims in which the reader is probably right in hearing an echo of the erroneous teachings of the Gnostics. These men claimed to have entered into a higher fellowship with God than was known by most other Christians. They professed great things, but there was a flaw in their profession. They claimed to know God; but even as they made their claims they showed by their actions that they failed to take sin, which is opposed to the nature of God, seriously..."

The first false claim is a common one; namely, that a person can have fellowship with God at the same time that his life is characterized by unrighteousness... Here to '*walk in the darkness*' means to sin habitually, the contrast being, not a sinless life (for John teaches that everyone sins, v. 8), but a progressive growth in godliness. The present tense indicates a continual practice of that which is opposed to God..."

Barker: "Those who walk in the light are also those who have fellowship with one another. The author is combating the heresy that boasts of knowledge of and communion with God but neglects fellowship with other Christians."

TEXT: 1 JOHN 1:8-10

TITLE: TAKING SIN SERIOUSLY

BIG IDEA:

WALKING IN THE LIGHT MEANS TAKING SIN SERIOUSLY

I. (:8, 10) BY NOT DENYING SIN

- A. (:8) In Principle -- *"If we say that we have no sin (nature)"* -- Intrinsic Sin
self deception; divorced from the truth
"we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us"
- B. (:10) In Practice -- *"If we say that we have not sinned"* -- Manifested Sin
blasphemy; divorced from God's Word
"we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us"

II. (:9) BY CONFESSING SIN

- A. In Accordance With God's Perspective -- Def. of *"confess"*
"If we confess our sins"
Not talking about the need to confess to a human priest, but to our great High Priest in the heavenlies.
 - B. In Dependence Upon God's Character
 - 1. Faithful -- God keeps His Word
"He is faithful"
 - 2. Just -- God honors the Atonement
"and righteous"
 - C. In Reliance Upon God's Blessing
 - 1. Forgiveness of Known Sin
"to forgive us our sins"
 - 2. Cleansing from all Unrighteousness -- known or unknown
"and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"
- Ryrie:** "Forgiveness is absolution from sin's punishment, and cleansing is absolution from sin's pollution."

What is the relationship between repentance and confessing sin?

Prov. 28:13 *"He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion."*

Repentance = Confession + Forsaking -- these 2 should always go together

Confession = to say the same thing about our sins as God says

Legal background of the word: confessing a guilty plea in a court of law as you submit to the court's judgment

To say that there can be confession and repentance apart from spiritual submission to God makes God a condoner of sin. Much more than merely admitting that we did the wrong action -- we could do that boastfully -- cf. a terrorist setting off a bomb and then calling the local media to claim responsibility -- he is not really confessing to the crime -- there is no submission there -- no agreeing that what was done was wrong and despicable -- no desire to be cleansed and changed.

In the context of 1 John we are not talking about initial repentance -- not the initial confession of sin as a condition for salvation. Look at the Present tense of the verb -- coordinate with the Present tense of "*walking in the light*" -- if we are characterized by taking sin seriously in terms of confessing sin on an ongoing basis as the Holy Spirit convicts us in our Christian walk, that practice of confession marks us as a true believer and God is faithful (He keeps His Word) and righteous (He honors the atonement) to forgive us our sins (not just in a legal sense in terms of justification but in a practical sense in terms of not letting anything come between and interrupt our relationship) and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

This confession of sins (like John Bunyon in *Pilgrim's Progress* as he walks along the path towards heaven and needs to be recovered from the pitfalls of life) is a fruit of initial repentance and a proof of our fellowship with God whose standard of holiness provides the basis for our confession.

David in the Psalms spoke often about the opposite of confession of sin -- describing his spiritual torment when he tried to hide his sins or rationalize or explain away his behavior.

John is not talking about continually confessing the same sin -- that should not be our experience. When this is the case the Holy Spirit reminds us that our confession must be coupled with forsaking the sin -- burning the bridge on whatever habit of life is causing us problems. We need to work at putting to death the deeds of the flesh.

How seriously are we taking sin in our life? Do we remember that it is our sin that caused Christ to have to shed His blood on the cross to suffer in our place in order to provide us with forgiveness and cleansing? You can be sure that Christ recognizes and has experienced the seriousness of sin.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do these verses refute the position of some that Christians can attain to some type of plateau of sinless perfection in this life? Is John talking to professing Christians or acknowledged non-Christians here?
- 2) How can these verse help us not to sink into despair when we fall into sin or struggle against some temptation?
- 3) How important is truth to God? How does it help to define His character? How important is truth to us?
- 4) How much confidence do we have in God's forgiveness and cleansing in our own life? What is the extent of this forgiveness and cleansing? What are the conditions?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Boice: "In what sense is God *faithful*? In what sense is He *just*? ... God has promised to forgive sin when it is confessed to him... The answer to the question of the justice of God in forgiving sins is found in Romans 3:20-28, where Paul explains how it is that God is both '*just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus*' (v. 26, KJV). It is possible, he says, through Christ, who, being God and therefore having no sin of His own, was able and did die for us. God punished our sin in Christ. Jesus became the '*propitiation*' for our sins, meaning that by Him God's just wrath against our sin was satisfied. It is interesting in this context that the word '*propitiation*,' used by Paul in Romans, is used by John just three verses farther on as he enters more fully into a discussion of Christ's work."

Yoho: Re Importance of dealing correctly with sin --

"The Gnostics taught that all evil is in matter, for which man is not personally responsible. Moreover, they believed that their own true selves, their enlightened spirit, could not be contaminated by material. They claimed, therefore, to be sinless. All Gnostics knew that sin was not their problem -- only ignorance.

True, the Gnostics lived hundreds and hundreds of years ago, but what about today? Today men are claiming the exact same lie. Let's make a list:

- (1) **The Evolutionist:** 'What men call sin is nothing more than the residue of their animal ancestry. Besides, it's got to be good because it feels so natural.'
- (2) **The Pantheist:** 'Since everything is part of God; then what men call *sin* is part of God; therefore, *sin* is part of God and not sinful.'
- (3) **The Behaviorist:** 'There is no such thing as personal responsibility since a man becomes just what his environment makes him.'
- (4) **The Psychoanalyst:** 'Guilt is unhealthy.'

- (5) **The Sociologist:** 'Collectively we bear the blame for the ills of society.' (And if everyone is to blame in general, then no one is to blame in particular.)
- (6) **The Alcoholic:** 'I'm not a drunkard; I'm an alcoholic. It's not a sin, it's a disease.'
- (7) **The Christian Scientist (Cultist):** 'The concept of sin is only an illusion of mortal mind.'
- (8) **The Holiness Perfectionist:** 'I have reached sinless perfection and don't sin anymore. I just make mistakes.'
- (9) **The Relativist:** 'Since there are no absolute values, then by definition there can be no right or wrong.'

Surely, a primary part of the Protestant pulpit must include a sharp confrontation between the listeners and their sins. Christianity does not teach that guilt is unhealthy; rather, it insists that confession is healthy. Christianity first looks at sin right in the face and then socks it right in the jaw. Jesus Christ did not excuse sin; He expiated it. We must deal with the problem, not deny it. The Christian faith does not deny guilt -- it removes guilt."

Barker: "Whenever the principle of sin is denied as an ongoing reality, there follows a denial of responsibility for individual actions. Gossip, defiling of persons, hatred of the brethren, jealousy, and boasting become sanctioned as non-sins; walking in the light is denied; and the fellowship to which we are called is never permitted to exist."

Lenski: "To have God's Word '*in us*' is to have received it in the heart, to hold it in faith, to be governed by it and by all it says to us sinners. It is not in us when we close our hearts to it and believe, hold, follow something else."

Ryrie: Re "*confess*" -- "Literally, *say the same thing*... but is is not mere outward agreement; rather, it includes forsaking, for that is God's attitude for us concerning sin. The confession is to God."

TEXT: 1 JOHN 2:1-2

TITLE: CHRIST -- OUR ADVOCATE

BIG IDEA:

THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST ALLOWS US TO TAKE SIN SERIOUSLY WITHOUT DESPAIRING

I. (:1a) OUR GOAL IS TO COMPLETELY AVOID ALL SIN (TO TAKE SIN SERIOUSLY)

(this would involve perfectly acting upon John's instructions at the end of Chapter 1 = to take sin seriously. But no believer can measure up to this standard.)

A. Tone of Endearment

"My little children"

B. Goal of Avoiding Sin

"I am writing these things to you that you may not sin."

II. (:1b-2) OUR FAILURE CASTS US UPON THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST

A. Christ our Advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ the Righteous

1. Reality of Sin

"And if anyone sins"

God has made gracious provision for the reality of our frequent failures.

2. Recourse to Plead our Cause

"we have an Advocate with the Father"

Stott: (quoting Smith) "Our Advocate does not plead that we are innocent or adduce extenuating circumstances. He acknowledges our guilt and presents His vicarious work as the ground of our acquittal."

3. Right God-Man for the Job

"Jesus Christ the righteous"

Not one who has to resort to questionable devices to try to confuse the issue or dream up some technicality to steal an acquittal.

B. Christ our Propitiation

1. For our sins

"And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins"

Stott: "There can, therefore, be no question of men appeasing an angry deity by their gifts. The Christian propitiation is quite different, not only in the character of the divine

anger but in the means by which it is propitiated. It is an appeasement of the wrath of God by the love of God through the gift of God. The initiative is not taken by man, not even by Christ, but by God Himself in sheer unmerited love. His wrath is not averted by any external gift, but by His own self-giving to die the death of sinners. This is the means He has Himself contrived by which to turn His own wrath away (cf. Pss. lxxviii. 38, lxxxv. 2, 3, ciii. 8-10; Mi. vii. 18, 19)."

2. For the sins of the whole world

"and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."

Boice: "If John, as a Jew, is actually thinking of the propitiatory sacrifice as it was practiced in Israel, particularly on the Day of Atonement -- and, how could he not? -- then it may well be of himself and other Jews as opposed to Gentiles that he uses the word 'us' or 'we' in this phrase. The contrast would therefore be, not between Christians and the as-yet-unsaved world, but between those Jews for whom Christ died and those Gentiles for whom Christ died, both of whom now make up or eventually will make up the church. This use of the first person plural pronoun is not impossible in that John has used it in several different senses already.

According to this view, what John wishes to say is that Jesus fulfilled the pattern set by the Old Testament sacrifices but that He did so in such a way that now Gentiles as well as Jews are saved."

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does the nurturing care which a mother provides for her young children compare to the shepherding concern of John for those to whom he writes?
- 2) How does it help to have the son of the judge pleading our case and representing our cause as our Advocate?
- 3) How can we go on condemning ourselves and feeling the burden of the guilt of our sins when Christ has fully satisfied the demands of the law and fully paid the penalty for us?
- 4) What type of missionary zeal do we have to spread the message of propitiation to people of other lands?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: "John begins a new sentence in order to enlarge on the subject of sin in the Christian. He does this first negatively (*that ye sin not*) and then positively (*And if any*

man sin). It is important to hold these two statements in balance. It is possible to be both too lenient and too severe towards sin. Too great a lenience would seem almost to encourage sin in the Christian by stressing God's provision for the sinner. An exaggerated severity, on the other hand, would either deny the possibility of a Christian sinning or refuse him forgiveness and restoration if he falls. Both extreme positions are contradicted by John."

Candlish: "In any court in which I had a cause to maintain I would wish to have a righteous advocate. Not less than I would desire a righteous judge would I welcome a righteous advocate. I do not want an advocate who will flatter and cajole me. I do not want one to tell me smooth things and lead me on the ice; disguising or evading the weak points of my plea; putting a fair face on what will not stand close scrutiny, and touching tenderly what will not bear rough handling; getting up untenable lines of defense, and keeping me in good humour till disaster or ruin comes. Give me an advocate who will tell me the truth, and tell the truth on my behalf; one who will deal truly with me and for me, and fairly represent my case. Give me an advocate who, much as he may care for me, cares for honesty and honour, for law and justice, still more. Give me an advocate not afraid to vex or wound me for my safety, for my good. Whatever his name, let him be the honest, the upright, 'the righteous.'"

Kistemaker: Re the extent of the atonement -- "Scholars usually comment that the extent of Christ's death is universal but the intent is for believers. Or in different words, Christ's death is sufficient for the whole world but efficient for the elect. John Calvin, however, observes that although these comments are true, they do not pertain to this passage. The phrase *the whole world* relates not to every creature God has made, for then the fallen angels also would share in Christ's redemption. The word *whole* describes the world in its totality, not necessarily in its individuality."

Boice: "This is the principle of 1 John 2:1,2: forgiveness in advance for any sin that might come into our lives. This is God's promise, and it is given to us precisely that we might not sin. God is not shocked by human behavior, as we often are, for He sees it in advance, including the sins of Christians. Moreover, and in spite of this, He sent His Son to die for the sins of His people, so that there might be full forgiveness. Such love is unmeasurable. Such grace is beyond human comprehension. But God tells us of that love and grace in order that we might be won by it and determine, God giving us strength, that we will not fail Him."

Boice: quoting from Charles Wesley's hymn: Arise, My Soul, Arise --

Arise, my soul, arise; shake off thy guilty fears;
The bleeding Sacrifice in my behalf appears.
Before the throne my Surety stands;
My name is written on His hands.

He everlives above, for me to intercede;
His all-redeeming love, His precious blood to plead;

His blood atoned for all our race,
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

Five bleeding wounds He bears, received on Calvary;
They pour effectual prayers, they strongly plead for me.
"Forgive him, O forgive," they cry,
'Nor let the ransomed sinner die.'

The Father hears Him pray, his dear anointed One;
He cannot turn away the presence of His Son:
His Spirit answers to the blood,
And tells me I am born of God.

My God is reconciled, His pard'ning voice I hear;
He owns me for His child, I can no longer fear:
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And 'Father, Abba, Father!' cry.

TEXT: 1 JOHN 2:3-6

TITLE: KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS

BIG IDEA:
WALKING IN THE LIGHT MEANS OBEDIENCE

INTRODUCTION:

If we take sin seriously and avail ourselves of the ministry of Christ as our righteous Advocate and the propitiation for our sins so that we never need to despair despite our failures and shortcomings, we also will take obedience seriously. These two go together -- our view of sin and our perspective on obedience. Remember the Gnostics: sin was no big deal because their spiritual relationship was not affected by the deeds done in the body; therefore no real incentive towards obedience either.

Obedience = a simple practical test that we can apply to our verbal profession.

I. (:3-5) OBEDIENCE TO THE REVEALED WORD OF GOD INDICATES ONE IS WALKING IN THE LIGHT

A. (:3) The Issue is One of Assurance of Salvation

"And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments."

There are certainly degrees of knowing God; but the key issue for John is do we know Him in a saving sense or not. Certainly it is also a valid extension of this argument to challenge believers to grow in their knowledge ... but that is not the core point.

B. (:4) Disobedience indicates darkness regardless of the testimony

"The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;"

No religious experience is valid if it does not have moral consequences that promote holiness (cf. the Pharisees who wanted to substitute obedience to traditional externals for obedience to the moral law of God in one's heart). The same damning indictment that was pronounced in 1:8 against those who say they have no sin is here pronounced against those who falsely claim to know God. The two are related: if you can't recognize sin, it is because you don't know the God who is holy. Not taking God's commandments seriously is closely tied to not taking sin seriously.

Remember, John sets forth absolute tests -- he is not trying to define and categorize all of the exceptions and clarifications that come to our mind because we are not consistent in obeying Christ's commands.

- C. (:5) Obedience indicates the light of love dwelling in the believer
"but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him."

What is the test of mature love? Our actions ... not our feelings. As we obey God's commands, His purpose of showering His love upon us is accomplished. Let's be careful not to present a gospel that fails to have holiness as its goal. Let's not paint the Christian life as one where holiness is only an option. Holiness does not earn our salvation, but it does prove the genuineness of our relationship to God.

"perfected" = brought to its intended goal; our love for others should have a similar goal; the law of God is trying to take us to the place where we keep His commandments.

His Word is interchangeable with His Commands and with His Truth:

- *Word* = divine revelation; sum total of God's revealed will
- *Commands* = divine standard for our conduct; specific requirements
- *Truth* = objective reality

II. (:6) OBEDIENCE TO THE REVEALED WALK OF GOD IN CHRIST INDICATES ONE IS WALKING IN THE LIGHT

- A. Obedience to a divine standard is an obligation not an option for the believer
"the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk"

- B. Christ's walk is the standard for the believer
"in the same manner as He walked."

Not: how do most Christians that we know walk; or how do the believers in our church walk. Study the gospels and the life of Christ. That is why Christ challenged the disciples: *"Follow ME!"*

- His life of Prayer
- His life of Praise
- His life of Proclamation
- His life of Purity
- His life of Love = went about doing good

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Under what type of circumstances have you entertained some doubts as to whether you truly know God in a saving way? How could you use 1 John as a litmus test in such a situation? If you have never entertained any doubts do you think that this is healthy?

- 2) Why should we be leery of sitting under teachers whose spiritual walk does not measure up to the standard of Christlikeness? What type of knowledge of God are we truly seeking? Are we satisfied with only an intellectual approach to spiritual truth?
- 3) What is a sure way to spot phoniness and hypocrisy? Why was Christ so hard on the Pharisees? In what way would the Gnostics have claimed to know God?
- 4) What is there in the walk of Christ that you find most challenging and convicting as you compare your life to that of the Master?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Boice: "To walk as Christ walked is to live, not by rules, but by an example. It is to follow Him, to be His disciple. Such a discipleship is personal, active, and costly. It is personal because it cannot be passed off to another. Indeed, we are to find ourselves with Christ, as Peter did following the Resurrection... To walk as Christ walked is also active because the Lord Himself is active. To be inactive is to be left behind... Finally, it is costly as well, because the path that Jesus walked is the path to crucifixion. It leads to glory, but before that it leads to the cross. Such a path can be walked only by the one who has died to self and who has deliberately taken up the cross of Christ to follow Him."

Yoho: "When People look at you, to they see Jesus? Some years ago, a kindly gentleman was walking down a street in the inner city on a frosty winter's day. He noticed a poor lad shivering and hungry. He took the boy into an inviting doughnut shop. 'Mister, are you Jesus?' asked the happy boy. Dwight L. Moody has said that you and I are the only Bible some people will ever read."

Bruce: "We know how Christ conducted Himself; the glory which His disciples discerned in Him was *'full of grace and truth'*, and something of these qualities will be evident in anyone who truly *'abides'* in Him, which is another way of denoting the experience of truly *'knowing'* Him (verse 4). What is meant by abiding in Him is illustrated at greater length in the parable of the vine and the branches in John 15: 1-17; as it is the life of the vine in the branches that enables them to produce the fruit of the vine, so the life of Christ in His people will be manifested as their behaviour resembles His."

Laurin: "When one walks with Christ there will be both an effect, and an assurance. The effect will be that we will be pleasing to God. As Christ was well pleasing to the Father we will find His pleasure in following Christ. The assurance will be that we will be kept by God. The security of our life will be in the certainty of His Word as well as the purity of our walk."

Stedman: "Is that not what often happens when we start reading about sickness? We all have a bit of hypochondria in us, and perhaps it is true on the spiritual level as well. So when John is examining our spiritual lives, as a doctor would examine our physical lives, and points out the sicknesses of the soul, it is only natural that he would expect a reaction of spiritual hypochondria, in which some of us might feel we had some of these diseases, or even worse. He evidently feels there may be many who are saying to themselves, 'Am I really a Christian at all? Can I even claim a saving relationship with Christ?' If the Spirit has convicted us and we sense a lack, the question that is at the back of our mind may be, 'Perhaps my trouble is not merely a break in fellowship; perhaps I am experiencing a complete breakdown of faith.' Of course, as we saw in our series on spiritual warfare, the Tempter is very quick to suggest this very thing. He is alert to push us into such feelings, to arouse such fears within us, whenever we examine ourselves. So John stops to handle that very question.

Now that is exactly what John is saying here. Are you willing to obey him? Whatever he makes clear is his will, are you already pre-committed in your own heart to do? Well, you may have a lot of problems as a Christian, you may have a sense of weakness or lack in your life, but one thing is clear: If you are keeping his commandments, if you desire to obey him, then you know him. You can be sure that you know him; that is what John declares."

Peck: "It's also important for me to clarify that John is not talking about perfect obedience here. John's already told us that the no matter how spiritually mature we become, we'll still struggle with sin in our lives...that's as sure as death and taxes. If we claim that our struggle against sin has ceased, that we're obedient to all of God's commands, we're deceiving ourselves, and we probably just need to ask our spouse or our children and they'll set us straight. What this test is describing is an overall direction of life, a lifestyle that's characterized by obedience to God's commands, not perfect obedience in every detail of life. If you're here today and your lifestyle isn't characterized by obedience to God's commands, if you're not making forward progress in the spiritual life, John would challenge you to evaluate whether or not you really know God through Jesus Christ."

TEXT: 1 JOHN 2:7-11

TITLE: OLD BUT NEW ... FAMILIAR BUT FRESH

BIG IDEA:
WALKING IN THE LIGHT MEANS LOVE

I. (:7-8) THE COMMANDMENT OF LOVE SHOULD BE FAMILIAR AND YET FRESH

- A. (:7) It should be familiar because it is consistent with God's revelation from the beginning
"Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard."

Or does this refer to the beginning of their Christian experience ?? - **Stedman**

They had God's revelation in the OT; they had the message of the gospel since the day they were first exposed to the truth; they did not need to have new revelation from the Gnostics to supercede or enhance this message.

What is the "old commandment"? walking as Christ walked -- especially in the area of sacrificial love

- B. (:8) It should be fresh because of its perfection in Christ and its progressive development in our own lives
"On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining."

Beware of Tradition ... it can kill you. Familiarity often does breed contempt

Candlish: "For though doctrinal Christianity is always old, experimental Christianity is always new. The gospel preached to us is old; but the gospel realised in us is always new. Christ set forth before our eyes is always old; but Christ in us the hope of glory -- Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith -- Christ becoming more and more, through the Spirit's teaching, part and parcel of our whole inner man -- This Christ is always new."

The NT frequently uses "new" with its more qualitative sense in order to speak of the fundamentally new character of the advent of Christ rather than in a time sense; denotes that which is new in its own way.

II. (:9-11) LOVE OR HATE EXPOSES YOUR SPIRITUAL STATE

A. (:9) Hatred means darkness regardless of your profession (:9)

"The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now."

The claim to be *"in the light"* is a simple claim to be a Christian. We shouldn't be gullible and assume that all professors of faith are genuine partakers of Christ.

Hatred is spiritually identified with murder (1 John 3:15; Matt 5:21, 22).

B. (:10) Love means light with the benefit of assurance (:10)

"The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him."

He has nothing in him that is likely to ensnare him or to cause him to stumble. When we are walking around our house when it is well lit, we are able to see and avoid any obstructions which might otherwise trip us up. So if we live in love we won't fall over obstacles like pride, envy, jealousy, revenge. It is when self-seeking governs men that life becomes so entangled.

C. (:11) Hatred means total darkness in every respect

"But the one who hates his brother":

1. state of life -- *"is in the darkness"*

Vaughan: "darkness is the moral and spiritual atmosphere of his life"

2. course of life -- *"and walks in the darkness"*

3. direction and destiny --

"and does not know where he is going"

4. fatal handicap --

"because the darkness has blinded his eyes"

Vaughan: "Like the mole, like the ponies used in coal mines, like the fish of Mammoth Cave, dwellers in darkness eventually lose the ability to appreciate light."

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) People often claim that only the God of the NT is a God of Love. Where do you see the command to love in the Old Testament?

2) Does the world see the light of God's love shining through us? Why do those who live in darkness have a difficult time seeing the light?

3) What type of rationalizations do Christians come up with to try to justify hating a brother or mistreating him? How does this black and white approach of John help us to keep our focus in this area of loving our brother?

4) Are we walking with the confidence and the purposefulness and the direction of those who are blessed with dwelling in the realm of light?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: Points out 3 different ways that the commandment "Love one another" is new:

- 1) new in emphasis -- this commandment "stands at the top of the list"
- 2) new in example (Christ: His life, teachings and death)
- 3) new in experience

Bruce: "John characteristically sees life in terms of black and white; intermediate greys have no existence for him. So there is no middle course between love and hatred, and by hatred he does not necessarily mean positive animosity but mere lack of love. Lack of love (including that form of it which postpones an act of charity to a more convenient season) can blind a man's spiritual vision as effectively as the prejudice arising from hatred does, so that he is tripped up by all kinds of moral obstacles that lie in life's way, and is disabled from forming ethical decisions which are crystal-clear to his brother whose love of heart and hand maintains him in fellowship with God, in whose light he sees light."

Yoho: Re obeying the command to love -- "Everytime we put into practice what we possess, we possess more. You might know about something for years, but it will only become yours when you practice it yourself. And each time you practice it, it feels newer and better."

Clark: "What is the *darkness that is passing away*? ... Shadows and darkness therefore indicate, not merely Pharisaism, but also the incomplete knowledge of the pious. With the new revelation, initiated by Christ, and proclaimed by the apostles, the darkness was passing away and the truth now shines forth."

Boice: "The idea of stumbling may be applied in either of two ways. First, it may be applied to others in the sense that the one loving his brother not only walks in the light himself but also is free of having caused others to offend. This is the general meaning of the word in the rest of the New Testament. On the other hand, it can also apply to the individual himself in the sense that, if he loves, he walks in the light and therefore does not himself stumble. The context almost demands this second explanation, for the

point of the verses is not what happens to others but rather the effect of love and hate on the individual himself."

Kistemaker: "Darkness has a blinding effect on the eyes. When eyes are kept idle for sustained periods of time, blindness inevitably results. When a person is in spiritual darkness, life becomes meaningless and goals are without purpose. The tragedy is that walking in darkness need not take place, for God's true light is available to everyone (John 1:9)."

Stedman: "What does he mean here by hate? -- *'He who hates his brother.'* The dictionary tells us that hate is 'a feeling of extreme hostility or extreme dislike of another.' That suffices as far as the definition is concerned. We know well the feeling, this dislike, this aversion to someone, a sense of extreme hostility toward another. Ah, yes, but it can be expressed in two different ways. It can be active, in that we indulge in malicious talk or injurious actions toward another. We can strike them, or beat them, or throw our garbage over their fence, or mistreat them in some way. We can attack them, we can slander them behind their back. All these are active expressions of hate, and perhaps most of us think of hate only in this sense. But hate can also be expressed passively and still be hate. It can be expressed by indifference, by coldness, by isolation, by exclusion, unconcern for another. Someone has well said that indifference is the cruelest form of hate. You only need to read the Gospel records to see how true that is. What hurt our Lord most was not the active enmity of those who were trying to accomplish his death, but the coldness and indifference of those who once followed him yet turned aside from him and idly stood by as he was put to death."

TEXT: 1 JOHN 2:12-14

TITLE: ENCOURAGEMENT FOR ALL AGES / ALL LEVELS OF MATURITY

BIG IDEA:

ASIDE: ALL BELIEVERS NEED ENCOURAGEMENT AS THEY APPLY THESE TESTS OF FELLOWSHIP

INTRODUCTION:

Really only 2 groups being addressed here since "little children" refers to all believers. John then addresses in more detail both the more mature (*fathers*) and the ones in the most active growth stage (*young men*).

John had been exhorting and warning his readers with tests of walking in the light. The mood shifts here to one of encouragement and confidence. Reassuring his readers that he is not questioning the validity of their faith, He reminds us that the purpose of these tests of fellowship is to give us an increasing assurance of our own salvation.

I. THE FUNDAMENTAL BLESSINGS OF SALVATION SHOULD ENCOURAGE ALL BELIEVERS -- *little children*

A. Current Emphasis: The Joy of Forgiveness of Sins

"I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.

B. Prior Emphasis: The Privilege of Knowing the Father

"I have written to you, children, because you know the Father.

II. THE PROVEN EXPERIENCE OF TRUSTING THE UNCHANGING GOD SHOULD ENCOURAGE THE MATURE BELIEVERS -- *fathers*

A. Current Emphasis:

"I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning."

B. Prior Emphasis:

"I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning."

Those with the maturity should be able to offer a largeness of view; a calm, untroubled depth of conviction; a clear-eyed judgment upon life which youth cannot have.

III. SPIRITUAL VICTORY IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT SHOULD ENCOURAGE THE YOUNGER BELIEVERS -- *young men*

A. Current Emphasis: The Victory of spiritual strength

"I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one."

B. Prior Emphasis: The Victory of spiritual strength

"I have written to you, young men"

1. The Assurance of spiritual strength

"because you are strong"

2. The Secret of spiritual strength

"and the word of God abides in you"

3. The Outcome of spiritual strength

"and you have overcome the evil one"

The Christian life is not just enjoying the forgiveness of sins and fellowship with God, but fighting the enemy. Thus while the privilege of age is knowledge, the task of youth is conflict; it is in youth that the critical life-changing decisions are made.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How is the assurance of forgiveness of sins fundamental to our ability to grow in our Christian life? Why do people who have been Christians for many years still struggle with a sense of guilt and lack of acceptance?

2) What type of mature believers have been a good example to you as they communicate the love, joy and peace of a life lived in fellowship with their Lord?

3) Are we fully engaged in the struggle for spirituality or are we content to sit on the sidelines? Do we have a sense of the strength of the Lord within us? Do we know experientially how to strengthen ourselves in the Lord and in the power of His might?

4) How are we actively pursuing interaction with the *Word of God* so that it truly *abides* in us"

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: "John does not mean to give his readers the impression that he thinks they are in darkness or that he doubts the reality of their Christian faith. It is the false teachers whom he regards as spurious, not the loyal members of the Church. So he digresses to tell them his view of their Christian standing. His purpose in writing is as much to confirm the right assurance of the genuine Christian as to rob the counterfeit of his false

assurance."

Wuest: Re vs. 13 -- "*Ye have known*" is *egnokate*, the verb *ginosko* referring to experiential knowledge, knowledge gained by experience, and it is in the perfect tense. These fathers were the older men, mature in the Christian life, having lived in fellowship with the Lord Jesus for many years, and thus having gained much personal knowledge of Him by experience. The perfect tense shows that this knowledge was a well-rounded matured knowledge, the results of which were a permanent possession of these men grown old in the Christian life."

Boice: "John tells of the results that come from the fact that the young men have been strong; namely, they *'have overcome the evil one.'* This is his point of emphasis, for the words are repeated twice, in each case in the last and emphatic position. Victory! This is what is called for. Consequently, believers must learn that the forgiveness of sins and the knowledge of God which they have enjoyed from the initial moments of their conversion are not the sum total of Christianity. Rather they must seek to grow strong so that they may take their proper and needed place in the Christian warfare.

Vaughan: "To speak of the Word as *'abiding in'* the readers is to suggest that it was a living force permanently active within them. The TEV renders it, 'the word of God lives in you'; Norlie, 'God's Word is treasured in your hearts'; Phillips, 'you have a hold on God's truth.' Ramsay writes: 'The man whose mind is stored with right principles and true conviction is clad in triple steel.'"

Yoho: "There is nothing, perhaps, so attractive in all the world as an aged Christian leader transformed by grace, nourished upon knowledge, mellowed through experience, chastened amidst sufferings, seasoned in responsibilities -- and young at heart. Young people just love to be around older folks who are that way. You, fathers, are needed by us young people."

Stedman: "These young men have learned this. They have learned how to walk in the Spirit. They have learned to avoid the perils which John mentions earlier in this letter, the peril of ignoring light, of denying the possibility of sin, and of rationalizing their wrong-doing, giving it more appealing names. They have learned to walk in fellowship, walking in the Spirit. Yet they are not mature. They are spiritual, but they are not mature. They lack yet the full range of Christian experience. There is great confusion in Christian circles at this point. There is a difference between spirituality and maturity. Maturity is the final goal. It is what the Spirit of God is aiming at, for you to be a grownup, mature, experienced Christian. Spirituality is the process by which you get there. Maturity is produced by time spent in fellowship, in spiritual relationship, to the Son of God. That is why you can live for years as a Christian and never mature, for the years are not spent in fellowship but in walking outside this relationship of fellowship with the Son of God."

TEXT: 1 JOHN 2:15-17

TITLE: SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD

BIG IDEA:

WALKING IN THE LIGHT MEANS SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD

I. (:15a) TOTAL SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD IS COMMANDED

A. The Nature of the Separation -- "*Do not love*"

an obligation, not an option for the believer

There must be a tremendous danger here since John goes to such lengths to warn his readers.

Wuest: "Here, *agapao* is used merely in its classical meaning, that of a love called out of one's heart by the preciousness of the object loved. The word as used here refers to a fondness, an affection, non-ethical in its content, for an object because of its value. It is a love of approbation, of esteem. Demas is said to have loved this present age. He found it precious and thus came to love it."

Vaughan: Re what it means to love the world -- "It is to court the world's favor, follow its customs, adopt its ideals, covet its prizes, and seek its fellowship. Loving the world in this sense means setting one's affection on evil and is tantamount to deserting God."

B. The Extent of the Separation -- Total

1. From the world system -- "*the world*"

2. From the particular worldly things (detailed below)
"*nor the things in the world*"

Burdick: "...not primarily material items, although these may be involved. As the next verse explains, John has in mind men's attitudes -- including attitudes toward material things -- rather than the material objects themselves."

II. (:15b-17) AN EXAMINATION OF THE WORLD PROVES THAT LOVE FOR THE WORLD AND LOVE FOR GOD ARE MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE

A. Love for the world exposes a void of divine love (:15b)

"*if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*"

B. 3 Proofs from an examination of the world

1. Because of the Nature of the things of the world

"For all that is in the world":

- a. Unbridled Appetites -- "*the lust of the flesh*"

Burdick: "the passionate desire of the flesh for immediate self-satisfaction"

Piper: "And the passion for pleasure is described in two ways because there are two large classes of pleasure -- physical and aesthetic. There is the lust of the flesh -- bodily pleasures, and the lust of the eyes -- aesthetic and intellectual pleasures.

- b. Covetousness -- "*and the lust of the eyes*"

Vaughan: "speaks of the unlawful craving for that which entices our eyes. Ramsay interprets it of heathen entertainment -- 'all delight in immoral scenes, spectacles, plays' ..."

- c. Pride / Selfish Ambition -- "*and the boastful pride of life*"

2. Because of the Source of the things of the world

"is not from the Father, but is from the world."

Morgan: "The tastes and habits of the world are the sinful results of a depraved nature, and are therefore entirely contrary to the will of God.

3. Because of the Destiny of the world -- no eternal value

- a. Fleeting

"And the world is passing away, and also its lusts"

Vaughan: "... human society in its hostility to God has in it the seeds of death, and its final dissolution is certain. Because of this '*the world*' can give no permanent satisfaction. As an object of desire and affection it is evanescent, vain, and disappointing. To build one's life around it is therefore not only sinful, it is also foolish. It is to bind oneself to a doomed and dying order."

- b. vs. Abiding

the contrast is that obedience which is the evidence of divine love and which abides forever

"but the one who does the will of God abides forever"

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do a concordance study of the word "*world*" in John's writings. What do you find out?

2) Compare the "*lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life*" to the areas of temptation faced by Adam and Eve as well as by Christ in their confrontations with Satan. What parallels do you see? What scriptures did Christ use to combat these areas of temptation?

3) What do you consider precious that God considers worthless? Are you willing to change your value system?

4) How does the emphasis on doing the will of God call for active faith and obedience rather than just an internal mindset?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Boice: "The first part of John's long parenthesis, verses 12-17, was written to reassure his readers, for John did not want them to think that he was questioning their salvation. Rather, he has written to them because their sins have been forgiven and because they do know the Father. If they miss this truth, they have misunderstood him. On the other hand, John does not want them to think that what he has written regarding the tests of life has no relevance for Christians, for this would be a misunderstanding too. Thus, he now goes on to show how what he has said should be applied to their lives. They are not to doubt their salvation, but rather, being assured of it, are to press on in those areas which give evidence of their transformation and which indeed bring the greatest measure of personal blessing. What is the Christian to do? Quite simply, he is to refuse to love the world and its values and instead love God and the will of God."

Ryrie: "The world (Greek, *cosmos*) is that organized system headed by Satan which leaves God out and is a rival to Him."

Wuest: "*Kosmos* refers to an ordered system. Here it is the ordered system of which Satan is the head, his fallen angels and demons are his emissaries, and the unsaved of the human race are his subjects, together with those purposes, pursuits, pleasures, practices, and places where God is not wanted. Much in this world-system is religious, cultured, refined, and intellectual. But it is anti-God and anti-Christ."

Hinckley: "*Kosmos* is a key word in John's writings. Its root meaning is 'ornament' (as in 1 Peter 3:3), and it gives us our word 'cosmetic.' It also has the sense of 'order,' the opposite of chaos. From there it came to be used for the universe, the greatest ordered ornament. The most important part of the universe for humans is this earth, so it, too, came to be called 'the world.' It was natural, then, to think of the world as the majority of people. In particular the human world order -- social, economic, political, and religious systems -- was called the *kosmos*. But the majority of people have always been caught up in their world systems and resistant to God. They rejected and finally crucified Christ. So, John and the other New Testament writers often use *kosmos* to

name the world of those 'hostile to Christ and all that He stand for.' In this sense, the world is corrupted by sin, so it is evil, dangerous, futile, temporary. Satan dominates the world (John 12:31, 1 John 5:19), that is, the world of people who are not yet born of God and freed from darkness. The world of sinful men has become an evil world system controlled by the evil one. That which God created to be a lovely and ordered ornament became an ugly and strife-torn world order because men rejected God and fell under the control of evil. This is the sense of 'world' in 1 John 2:15-17."

Westcott: "There can be but one supreme object of moral devotion. All secondary objects will be referred to this. The love of the finite as an absolute object necessarily excludes the love of the Creator (the Father). Comp. Rom. i. 25; James iv. 4."

Vaughan: "The Greek for '*the pride of life*' may be translated 'the vain-glory of life (ASV), 'the proud display of life' (Moffatt), or 'the proud pretensions of life (Williams). Perhaps it means something like pride in, or a pompous display of, material wealth and worldly advantages. It implies an arrogant spirit of self-sufficiency and a vain sense of security, both of which are based upon a false estimate of the stability and value of worldly things."

Stedman: "Our Lord divided the issues of life into two words. He says there are two things, and only two things, you can do with your life. 'He that is with me gathers, but he that is against me scatters,' {cf, Matt 12:30}.

Now which are you doing?

Are you gathering, or scattering?

Are you uniting and reconciling, or are you dividing and breaking up and severing?

All the issues of life funnel down into those two things. This is also where John puts it. If you are living for the world, loving its glory, seeking its fame, counting important the things it can give, clinging to these desperately, letting your emotions get wrapped up in them, you are scattering, you are breaking up, you are dividing. But if you are walking with Christ, if the things that he loves are most important to you, if a cup of cold water given in his name is of far more value than another dollar in the bank, if time is spent in comforting or encouraging some lonely person is to you a far greater treasure than a killing in the stock market, then you are building, you are gathering, you are building that which will endure, which will last forever, you are laying up treasures in heaven."

TEXT: 1 JOHN 2:18-28

TITLE: ABIDING IN THE TRUTH

BIG IDEA:

WALKING IN THE LIGHT MEANS ABIDING IN THE TRUTH

I. (:18-19) ABIDING IN THE TRUTH REQUIRES RECOGNITION OF THOSE FORCES THAT OPPOSE THE TRUTH

A. (:18) We are living in the age of antichrist -- of apostasy and final

opposition to Christ

"Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour."

Anti-christ = one opposed to Christ; cf the gnostic false teachers who are a type of the ultimate Anti-Christ who is yet to appear

Contrast between the world which is passing away and the one doing the will of God who abides into eternity

Ryrie: "Thus, an anti-christ is one who opposes Christ under the guise of Christ. Such are empowered by super-human Satanic forces; they may be part of the Christian assembly outwardly; and they teach false doctrine (2:19; II Jn 7). The presence of antichrists in the world proves that it is a last hour. Since they were present in John's day and have been present throughout church history, the 'last hour' must be the entire period between the first and second advents of Christ."

This should impart some sense of urgency/ responsibility to our walk with Christ.

B. (:19) Departure from the truth unmasks antichrists

"They went out from us; but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us."

1. no inward fellowship of life -- not truly saved

2. doctrinal departure

3. visible departure from the body of true believers

abiding (continuing in the visible fellowship) is one sign of genuine life; not changing churches or denominations -- but renouncing the fundamentals of the faith and leaving the communion of the saints

4. active attempts to deceive the true believers and lead them astray

Shows that the writers of the NT addressed churches as groups of professing believers, while recognizing that all were not genuinely saved. This explains a lot of the severe warnings and problem passages.

Play on words:

"*went out from us*" -- separation

"*were not really of us*" -- source, origin -- pointing back to the common possession of the new nature that marks the family members of God and those who possess eternal life

Stedman: "Notice that the fourth mark of an antichrist is that he will finally break away from the New Testament Christianity. All such invariably do. And when they do they will insist that they are the true mainstream of Christian truth and that we are living in the backwaters of Christian doctrine. John puts this very plainly, does he not? '*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.*' That is the mark of genuineness -- continuity in the truth, continuance in true faith. What does he mean by us? Surely not Christendom in general. He means, of course, as he makes clear in the context of this whole letter, those who love the Word of God and who possess the Spirit of God, those who seek to obey the Word in the power of the Spirit. This is the emphasis he has been making all along. Those who share the life of Christ, by the Word of God, in the power of the Spirit of God. Heretics will invariably cut themselves off from these people."

II. (:20-23) ALL CHRISTIANS HAVE TWO SUFFICIENT RESOURCES FOR ABIDING IN THE TRUTH

A. (:20) All Christians have the indwelling Holy Spirit

"But you have an anointing from the Holy One and you all know."

Since the anointing is actually the person of the Holy Spirit Himself, this construction is unusual. Is God the Father or Christ in view here?

"*Anointing*" = word for "Christ" in the Greek -- 2 Cor. 1:21-22; speaking to all Christians here ... not just a special group of elite who are the "abiding type" of Christian; another proof that the concept of abiding applies to all believers

Is the belief of those who have not seen and yet have believed inferior in point of certitude to that of the original witnesses? John assures them that they are in no such position of inferiority. They have the testimony and the teaching of the Spirit.

B. (:21-23) All Christians know the truth that is adequate for abiding

God's revelation = the Apostolic Word about Christ

Textual problem:

KJV -- "you know all things"

NIV -- "you all know" = my preference

1. (:21) All Christians Can Discern Fundamental Truth From Error

"I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but

because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth."

This ability to rightly discern truth does not belong to a privileged few. The more sensitive we are to the Holy Spirit, the clearer will be our insight. We are not at the mercy of the false teachers with regard to the fundamentals of the faith.

Stedman: "One of the glorious things about God's secret purpose, i.e., the restoring of the life of God to the spirit of man, is that it also re-establishes standards of absolute values and makes possible moral judgments."

2. (:22) Denying or Confessing Christ is the touchstone of truth
"Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son."
3. (:23) This Confession of Christ is fundamental to a relationship with God
"Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also."

Both of these two resources are essential:

- Without the Spirit, the knowledge of the Word becomes dead intellectualism
- Without the Word, the emphasis on the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives can result in some damaging emotional excesses where zeal runs wild

III. (:24-28) THESE TWO RESOURCES ENCOURAGE ABIDING IN CHRIST UNTIL WE REACH THE GOAL

A. (:24-25) Hold On to The Apostolic Word About Christ

1. (:24) The Key to Abiding
"As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father."
Note the emphatic emphasis on "you" -- as opposed to the liars mentioned above.

Stedman: "Now, John is urging toward this. He is saying let the Word grip you. Let it confront you intellectually first, that is always the gateway through which God makes his appeal to man. Understand what God is saying. Meditate on these passages until you see the truth, you know what God is saying. Read them again and again and let them burn into you, muse and meditate upon them until they grip you. Then as you find you understand the truth you will discover that it has done something to your emotions. It has moved and gotten hold of you, you are captivated by it, you are held by it, you are compelled by it. When that happens, that moving of your emotions, then respond to it: submit

yourself, obey it. This is what the Scripture calls acting or living by faith; obeying the truth made known to the mind, gripping the emotions, and thus moving the will. That is the Word of God abiding in you, possessing you."

Stott: "Christians should always be conservative in their theology. To have 'itching ears,' ever running after new teachers, listening to anybody and never arriving at a knowledge of the truth, is a characteristic of the perilous times which shall come in the last days (2 Tim. 3:1, 7; 4:3). Christian theology is anchored not only to certain historical events, culminating in the saving career of Jesus, but to the authoritative apostolic witness to these events."

2. (:25) The Promise of Eternal Life

"And this is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life."

B. (:26-27) Exercise the Discernment Provided by the Indwelling Holy Spirit

1. (:26) Warning Regarding False Teachers

"These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you."

2. (:27) Assurance Regarding Access to Discernment

"And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him."

Wuest: "This does not set aside the usefulness and necessity of God-appointed and equipped teachers in the Church (Eph. 4:11, ... Acts 13:1), but merely means that the saints are not at the mercy of these Gnostic teachers or at the mercy of any teachers, for that matter. No teacher, even a God-appointed one, is the only and ultimate source of the saint's instruction. He has the Holy Spirit and the Word."

C. (:28) Persevere Until We Reach the Goal

1. Perseverance is Required of All Believers

"And now, little children"

2. Abiding in Christ is the Essence of Perseverance

"abide in Him"

3. The Finish Line = The Second Coming

"so that when He appears"

"at His coming"

Ryrie: Re *Parousia* -- "The only occurrence of the word in John's writings. Often it is used in connection with judgment which accompanies his return (Mt 24:3, 27, 37; I Cor 15:23; I Thess 2:19; 3:13; 5:23; Jas 5:7, 8)."

4. Confidence or Shame are the Only Two Grades on the Final Report Card

a. Confidence

"we may have confidence"

Vaughan: "'*Confidence*' translates a word whose primary meaning is 'freedom of speech,' unreservedness of utterance.' It was the appropriate word to use of the entire freedom with which intimate friends unburdened their hearts to one another. At least one ancient writer used it of the attitude of children to their father in contrast with the attitude of a slave to his master. Used by John nine times in his gospel and four times in this epistle (here, 3:21; 4:17; and 5:14), it connotes, in this context, unreserved confidence, boldness, and courage. It vividly depicts the joyous abandon and the glad fearlessness of those who have an assured conscience."

b. Shame

"and not shrink away from Him in shame"

Most commentators take this as a sense of loss that believers will experience at the Judgment Seat of Christ; but the context seems to indicate rather that this is the shame of false professors of faith having their lack of genuine righteousness exposed.

Stott: "For a description of the shrinking of unbelievers from the presence of the divine Judge see Matthew xxii. 12 and Revelation vi. 15-17."

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Study the concept of *anointing* in the Old Testament. What types of individuals were anointed with oil? What did the oil symbolize? (cf. Ex. 29:1-9; 1 Sam. 10:1; 2 Kings 11:12)
- 2) How does the subjective discernment provided by the indwelling Holy Spirit work in harmony with the objective truth of the written Word of God to alert us to error and guide us into the truth? Why do we need pastors and teachers at all?
- 3) What types of denial of Jesus as the Christ do we see around us today? What religions or cults make a disconnect between the deity of Christ and that of God the Father? What types of attacks against the doctrine of the Trinity do we see today?
- 4) What are we doing each day to encourage the abiding in us of the Word of the

apostolic teaching, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the personal presence of Jesus Christ?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ryrie: "The background of this denial (that Jesus is the Christ) is Gnosticism, not Judaism... the Gnostic heresy against which John is here writing was that Christ came upon Jesus at his baptism and departed before his death.... Gnosticism considered Christ and Jesus as two distinct entities."

Boice: "There are the (two) means by which every Christian should achieve victory over error in life: the Word of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Both are necessary. Without the Spirit, knowledge of the Word becomes but a bitter orthodoxy. Without the Word, the experience of the Spirit can lead to the most unjustified and damaging of excesses. The only safeguard against either and therefore the only sure defense against heresy is to have abiding within us both the Word from which we learn and the Holy Spirit who teaches it to us."

Stedman: "Thus the whole program of creation was intended to be the Father, taking of the fullness that was in him, and, through the eternal Spirit, imparting it to the Son; who in turn takes of the fullness that he has received, and, through the eternal Spirit, imparts it unto man and the whole creation to the end that the fullness may be reflected back in visible manifestation to the Father, and so the whole created world would glorify God. There will come a day when, as Paul tells us in First Corinthians 15, 'all things have been put in subjection to the Son,' {cf, 1 Cor 15:28}. Then he to whom all things have been subjected, will, in turn, subject himself to him who put all things under him, (the Father) 'that God [the three-fold God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit] may be everything to every one,' {1 Cor 15:28b RSV}. That is God's design for the universe.

Thus, you see, when a man denies the testimony of the Spirit that Jesus is the Christ, (i.e., the eternal Son become flesh to die and to rise again in order that God may live once again in man) he also shuts himself off from the possibility of knowing God as Father and he cannot experience the love of God. This is why the devil attacks so vehemently this truth that Jesus is the Christ. Through a denial of this he can get at that secret, that basic thing, that relationship that God desires for his people, the glory of knowing the Father."

Piper: "So John is not saying that the anointing of the Spirit enables us to know the truth of Christ by giving additional information beyond what they heard from the beginning. On the contrary John is intent on telling them they have enough revelation in what they heard from the beginning. He does not want to set them off in pursuit of something new. Remember 2:7, "Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment which you had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard." In other words John makes effort to avoid the saying that what

the church needs is new revelation. It does not. It needs to let the original apostolic teaching about Christ abide in them.

2 John 9 warns about the danger of progressiveness and newness in the doctrine of Christ: *'Any one who goes ahead [progresses] and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son.'* So the opposite of abiding in what you have heard from the beginning is to 'go ahead' to new revelations and secret knowledge offered by Mohammed and Charles Russel and Joseph Smith and Mary Baker Eddy and Jim Jones and Sun Moon and an ever larger stream of antichrists in this last hour of deception.

The Holy Spirit does not expand the apostolic teaching of Christ. On the contrary, the word tests the Spirit. 1 John 4:2 says, *'By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus has come in the flesh is of God.'* The Spirit agrees with the apostolic doctrine or it is not the Spirit of God. This is why we reject the teaching of Mr. Moon. Not because we can boast of different revelations from the Spirit, but because his claim does not square with the faith once for all delivered to the saints in the teaching of the apostles.

So the work of the Holy Spirit is not to take us beyond the teaching of the apostles. It is to help us accept and abide in that teaching. It helps us grow in our understanding of that teaching. It strengthens our power to practice that teaching. It increases our confidence in the truth of that teaching. But it does not change the teaching. It does not expand on the teaching."

Stott: Re vs. 19 -- "Light is shed by this verse upon two important doctrines: the perseverance of the saints and the nature of the Church. *'He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved'* (Mk. xiii. 13), not because salvation is the reward of endurance, but because endurance is the hall-mark of the saved. If the false teachers had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us. This is stated as a principle. Those who are of us stay with us. Future and final perseverance is the ultimate test of a past participation in Christ. (cf. Heb. iii. 14). 'Those who fall away', on the other hand, 'have never been thoroughly imbued with the knowledge of Christ but only had a slight and passing taste of it' (Calvin).

This verse also gives biblical warrant for some distinction between the visible and the invisible Church. Granted that God intends His Church to be visibly manifest in local worshipping, witnessing fellowships, this does not mean that all the professing baptized, communicant members of the Church are necessarily members of Christ. Only the Lord knows 'them that are his' (2 Tim. ii. 19). Perhaps most visible church members are also members of the invisible Church, the mystical body of Christ, but some are not. They are with us yet not of us. They share our earthly company but not our heavenly birth. Only on the final day of separation will the wheat and the tares be completely revealed. Meanwhile, some are made manifest in their true colours by their defection."

Peck: "John's friends knew that an antichrist figure would come shortly before the close

of this final hour. Now antichrist simply means 'against Christ' and broadly it describes anyone who opposes Jesus Christ and what he stands for. The Bible teaches that at some point in the future a person will arise who embodies this opposition to Christ. Paul calls him the 'man of lawlessness' in the book of 2 Thessalonians, and this figure will 'oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God' (2 Thess 2:4). This person will embody every hostility toward Christ that's ever been expressed in all of the world's history, all in one person. Throughout history there've been many people who've been precursors to this final antichrist figure who's yet to come: The Roman Emperor Nero, Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, in our own time Saddam Hussein...yet none of these people proved to be the final coming antichrist. . . .

Here we learn our first important lesson about spiritual betrayal. **WHEN WE FACE SPIRITUAL BETRAYAL WE NEED TO REMIND OURSELVES THAT IT IS A SIGN OF THE TIMES WE LIVE IN.**

Spiritual betrayal is not something novel or new, but it's part and parcel with life in the last hour, life between Christ's first and second comings. John is trying to soften the sting by reminding his friends that they live in a time when these things happen. . . .

WHEN WE FACE SPIRITUAL BETRAYAL, WE NEED TO REALIZE THAT GOD HAS GIVEN US THE RESOURCES WE NEED TO AVOID IT OURSELVES.

Specifically we're going to find two resources John mentions, two tools in our tool box that God has given us to avoid spiritual betrayal derailing our spiritual journey.

- God's Truth
- Anointing

This second resource is the gift of **GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT**. Now some have taken John's words here to mean that Christians who are truly spiritual don't need any teachers in their lives. That would seem odd since John is teaching them with his letter and the New Testament speaks often of our need for spiritual teachers. But in the Christian journey a teacher isn't going to add anything new to what God has already said in his Bible. These false teachers, these former church members claimed that they had special knowledge from God, that in order to truly experience God you had to be under their teaching. John is saying that we don't need that sort of thing...

John is concerned that other people's spiritual betrayal will get his friends off track in their own spiritual life. That word 'lead astray' literally means 'to cause someone to wander off the right path.' The spiritual journey he's talking about has lots of forks in the road, lots of rabbit trails people tend to wander off on their own.

So here we find the heart of John's concern. **WHEN WE FACE SPIRITUAL BETRAYAL WE NEED TO EVALUATE THE DIRECTION OF OUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY. "**

TEXT: 1 JOHN 2:28 - 3:1

TITLE: *THEME OF SECTION 2 -- TEST OF SONSHIP*

BIG IDEA:
THE TEST OF SONSHIP IS PRACTICISING RIGHTEOUSNESS

INTRODUCTION:

Where do you place the dividing line between section 1 and 2? Such a subtle transition that both vs. 28 and 29 belong to both sections. However, we can see the change. The antithesis between light and darkness is replaced by that between love and hate. The opposition between the world and God becomes the opposition between the world and God's children. The idea of having fellowship with God is transformed into that of being sons of God. Walking in the light is now spoken of as doing righteousness -- even though many of the same specifics (such as love for the brethren) are included in both sections.

I. (:28) PERSEVERANCE IN FELLOWSHIP RESULTS IN CONFIDENCE OF SONSHIP

A. The Sphere of our Fellowship must Continue to be in Christ

"And now, little children, abide in Him"

Stedman: "What for? Why do you need power? Do you think of it in terms of miracles, dazzling displays, and wonderful deeds that you could do to capture the attention of others? Is that why you want power? Look at Colossians Chapter 1, Verse 11. Paul prays for power for believers, 'May you be strengthened with all power [tremendous, isn't it?], according to his glorious might [isn't that exciting! For what?], for all endurance and patience with joy,' {Col 1:11 RSV}. Endurance! That means putting up with the conditions in which you live. And patience -- waiting quietly for something to happen. And joy, in the midst of it all. That takes power, does it not? You cannot do that without power. It is impossible to live like that in the midst of the conditions in which you live, if you do not have the power of God. You know it, do you not? It takes far more power than any of us can possibly produce in ourselves. It takes God's power. The word of the cross, the principle of the denial of self and self-interest, is the power of God, to us who are being saved."

B. The Return of Christ will mean either Confidence or Shame

"so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming."

(See notes on previous message)

"*parousia*" -- the personal presence of one now absent, the visible appearing of one now unseen; often used in connection with the many positive blessings that believers will experience at the time of Christ's return:

- 1 Cor. 15:23 -- those who are Christ's at His coming will be made alive -- speaking of the order of the resurrections of which Christ is the first fruit

- 1 Thess. 2:19 -- faithful disciples are Paul's joy and crown in the presence of the Lord Jesus at His coming

- 1 Thess. 3:13 -- the Lord will establish our hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints

- 1 Thess. 5:23 -- Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ

- James 5:7-8 -- As hard-working, patient farmers we wait for the harvest that will be ours at the coming of the Lord who already is at hand

Speaks of the undismayed confidence of faith; the feeling of freedom and joyfulness and openness in the presence of another; nothing to hide; Instead of the responsibility being on us to manufacture this confidence and bring it with us to our eternal meeting with Christ, this is boldness that we receive from Christ as a result of abiding (persevering in the faith; remaining a true believer). We receive this confidence as part of the culmination of our salvation.

Not talking here about the possibility of believers feeling shame at the judgment seat of Christ because of inconsistent living. Those who only claim fellowship with God will be covered with shame and will shrink away from Him when he appears all-glorious, the final Judge, with a verdict that damns them (Lenski) -- Dan. 12:2; Mark 8:38; Rev. 6:15-17. By remaining in Christ we escape the wrath of God. (Now a valid application (not interpretation) would be that we should want to remain as close as possible in intimate fellowship with Christ.)

II. (:29) THE CHARACTER OF GOD DETERMINES THE CHARACTER OF SONSHIP

A. The Character of God is Righteous

"If you know that He is righteous"

God is righteous in all His ways: in His laws, His promises, His judgments, His discipline, His timing, etc. The unsaved are quick to excuse their unbelief with the accusation that the God of the Scriptures is unfair -- but ultimately every knee will bow and every tongue will confess the righteousness of God and of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. We are too quick as believers to call God unfair in His dealings with us -- far better that we appreciate His discipline and acknowledge our own shortcomings than to blaspheme the character of God.

B. Those who Pursue Righteousness have been born of God

"you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him."

Wuest: Re translation -- "If you know absolutely that He is righteous, you know experientially that every one who habitually does this aforementioned righteousness (which God is), out from Him has been born, with the present result that that one is a born one."

The child exhibits the parent's character because he shares the parent's nature.

III. (3:1) THE LOVE OF GOD ESTABLISHED THE CONDITION OF SONSHIP

A. The Wonder of God's Love -- *"See how great a love"*

"Behold" -- the word always implies astonishment; beyond just rational explanation

B. The Focus of God's Love

1. Directed towards us

"the Father has bestowed upon us"

2. For the purpose of establishing us as sons

"that we should be called children of God; and such we are"

But just like the glory of Christ was hid from the world, and the light shone in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not, so our sonship is real, but not yet apparent.

C. The Antithesis of God's Love = the hatred of the world

"For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him."

Don't grieve because you are not important in the eyes of the world. The world is proud of what it knows; but it fails to know those things that are most important. The world has no conception of what we are as those who are born from God and thus God's actual children. The deepest reason for this ignorance is the fact that the world does not have any conception of the Father; these things are mysteries to the natural man.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) Does the thought of the Lord's imminent return motivate us to live in a way that pleases Him? Do we have confidence in our prayer life right now? Are we locked onto

the path of righteousness?

2) What type of individuals are those whom John warns about shrinking away from Christ when He returns? What other verses speak to this same theme and group of people?

3) Do we take time to meditate and just marvel at the very extraordinary love the Father has showered upon us? How special is our love for other people? Would they describe it as marvelous?

4) Should we be surprised when the world is antagonistic against our identification with Christ? How did the world treat our Master?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Plummer: "S. John's divisions are seldom made with a broad line across the text (see on iii. 10 and 24). The parts dovetail into one another and intermingle in a way that at times looks like confusion. Wherever we may place the dividing line we find similar thoughts on each side of it. Such is the case here. If we place the line between vv. 27, 28 we have the idea of abiding in Christ (vv. 24, 27, 28) on both sides of it. If we place it between vv. 28, 29, we have the idea of Divine righteousness and holiness (i. 9; ii. 1, 12, 20, 29) prominent in both divisions. If we make the division coincide with the chapters, we have the leading ideas of boldness towards Christ and God (v. 28; iii. 2, 21; iv. 17; v. 14), of Christ's return to judgement (v. 28; iii. 2; iv. 17), of doing righteousness (v. 29, iii. 7-10), and of Divine sonship (v. 29; iii. 1, 2, etc.), on both sides of the division. It seems quite clear therefore that both these verses (28, 29) belong to both portions of the Epistle, and that v. 29 at any rate is more closely connected with what follows than with what precedes.

The close connexion between the parts must not lead us to suppose that there is no division here at all. The transition is gentle and gradual, but when it is over we find ourselves on new ground. The antithesis between light and darkness is replaced by that between love and hate. The opposition between the world and God becomes the opposition between the world and God's children. The idea of having fellowship with God is transformed into that of being sons of God. Walking in the light is spoken of as doing righteousness. And not only do previous thoughts, if they reappear, assume a new form, but new thoughts also are introduced: The Second Advent, the boldness of the faithful Christian, the filial relation between believers and God. Although there may be uncertainty as to where the new division should begin, there is none as to the fact of there being one."

Stedman: "Righteousness is God behaving. It is whatever God does. God, obviously, is the standard for all human behavior, or for the behavior of any creature in the universe. God is always consistent with himself, i.e., he always acts like God. He cannot act in

any other way. Therefore, whatever he does is righteous. That is the standard, so that righteousness is God behaving as God. Now read that verse like that. *'If you know how God behaves, then you will know that whoever behaves like God is born of him.'* That is what John is saying. They will bear the family mark. Whoever behaves like God is obviously born of God, for it takes God's life to behave like God. That is the simplicity of it."

Lenski: "God is righteous; righteousness is one of his energetic attributes. He is righteous in all his ways: in his laws, his promises, his verdicts, or a single act of his. In their blindness men may call him unjust, but they will be compelled to see and will then have to say that he did justly, righteously. John could say that everyone that is born from him, every child of his, is also righteous; but he reverses this and says much more. Our being righteous proves that we are born from him, and our doing the righteousness is the perceptible evidence of our birth. By it we can judge in regard to the mysterious and the intangible fact that a spiritual birth has occurred in us."

Westcott: Re vs. 29 -- "Great difficulty has been felt in determining whether the pronoun refers to 'God' or to 'Christ.' There can be no doubt that Christ is the subject in v. 28 (*Abide in Him ... at His presence*). It is therefore most natural to suppose that He is the subject in this verse also, unless the context makes such an interpretation impossible... But it is argued on the other side that the Christian cannot be said 'to be born of Christ.'...The true solution of the difficulty seems to be that when St John thinks of God in relation to men he never thinks of Him apart from Christ (comp. c. v. 20). And again he never thinks of Christ in His human nature without adding the thought of His divine nature. Thus a rapid transition is possible from the one aspect of the Lord's divine-human Person to the other. Here the passage is from 'Christ' to 'God.'"

TEXT: 1 JOHN 3:2-10

TITLE: CHILDREN OF WHOM? FRUIT REVEALS ROOTS

BIG IDEA:

OUR LIFESTYLE REVEALS OUR FAMILY IDENTITY

I. (:2-3) OUR PRESENT CONDUCT SHOULD BE ELEVATED BY OUR FAMILY IDENTITY

A. (:2a) Our Present Inclusion in God's Family

"Beloved, now we are children of God"

B. (:2b) Our Future Expectation of Ultimate Conformity to Christ

"and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is."

1. New Birth Imparted to Us New Nature

2. Growth in Christlikeness during This Life

3. Consummation of Moral Perfection at the Second Coming

C. (:3) Our Striving for Moral Perfection

"And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

We strive for growth in purity; Christ is completely pure intrinsically.

II. (:4-7) ALL MEN WILL LIVE IN ONE OF TWO LIFESTYLES

A. (:4) A Lifestyle of Lawlessness

"Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness"

B. (:5-6) Aside: Christ Has Conquered Sin

1. (:5) The Relationship of Christ to Sin

a. His Mission

"And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins"

b. His Character

"and in Him there is no sin"

Therefore, those who are in union with Him cannot be practicing sin.

2. (:6) The Relationship of Believers to Sin

a. Practicing Sin is Incompatible with Abiding in Christ

"No one who abides in Him sins"

b. Practicing Sin is Incompatible with Knowing God

"no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him"

C. (:7) A Lifestyle of Righteousness

"Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous."

Stedman: "He says that the secret of doing right is to possess and experience within yourself the life of the Righteous One. There is only One who is righteous, or who ever has been righteous, the Lord Jesus himself. His life must be lived again in you in order for you to be righteous. There is no other basis. No flabby substitutes, no sleazy imitations, no cocky parodies, no grim copies, no slimy counterfeit, will be accepted. There is only one basis for righteousness and that is to reproduce, in the plan and purpose of God and by means of the Holy Spirit, the life of the Son of God in you. Nothing else than that is righteousness."

II. (:8-10) OUR LIFESTYLE REVEALS THE SOURCE OF OUR SPIRITUAL BEING

A. Sinners = The Source of the Devil / children of the devil

"The one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning."

B. Aside: Christ Has Conquered the Devil

"The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil."

Wiersbe: "'Destroy' does not mean 'annihilate.' Satan is certainly still at work today! 'Destroy,' here, means 'to render inoperative, to rob of power.' Satan has not been annihilated, but his power has been reduced and his weapons have been impaired. He is still a mighty foe, but he is no match for the power of God."

C. Righteous = The Source of God / children of God

"No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

D. (:10) Summary: Your Deeds Reveal Your Seed

"By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother."

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) In what does this likeness to Christ, this conformity to His character consist? How would you describe it? How have you seen yourself grow in your likeness to Christ?

2) What does John mean in vs. 9 about "*His seed*" remaining in believers? What seed is he talking about? What are the options?

3) How did Christ *take away sins* and *conquer the works of the devil*? What is Christ doing right now to help us in our battle against sin and Satan?

4) Why does John add the aspect of *brotherly love* to his emphasis on practicing righteousness in vs. 10?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Peck: "Yet even now we don't always feel like God's children, we don't always show a family resemblance to our Father. Did you hear about the time Charlie Chaplin entering a Charlie Chaplin look-alike contest? He only came in third place. We don't always look like God's children, our culture certainly doesn't recognize us as God's children. So John reminds us again of the final destination, that when Christ comes again we'll be transformed fully into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Our truest self is obscured, hidden beneath the surface of our failures and doubts. Hiding who we really are is our struggle with viewing ourselves inaccurately, as we tend to define ourselves by how physically attractive we are, by how much money we make, by the size of our office. Beneath our doubts about anyone really loving us, far below our failures resides our truest self, a son or daughter of God, called into God's family by God the Father himself through our faith in Jesus Christ.

If you've come to faith in Jesus Christ, this is who you really are. Even more fundamental than your identity as a spouse or a parent, as a worker or a student, as a church member or an American citizen is our identity as God's sons and daughters. For the Christian this is our truest self.

Yet how often do we tend to forget this reality? How often do you and I define our worth and value by our looks or our performance, by our service or our ministry? Focusing on the final destination, looking beyond the horizon to Christ's Second coming helps us remember who we really are, so we can view ourselves accurately in the spiritual journey....

How does focusing on this final destination help us in our spiritual journey? Not by setting dates for the rapture, or making predictions about a new world order, or by trying to pin the tail on the antichrist. Focusing on the second coming of Christ helps us continue confidently, view accurately, conduct rightly, and overcome victoriously. This is how looking beyond the horizon can help us, this is how the second coming of Jesus Christ is relevant to our lives today, regardless of whether he comes again next week or in another 1,000 years. So as we're steadily moving forward in the spiritual journey,

and we look up to God the father and ask him, 'Are we there yet?' he doesn't chide us or tell us to be quiet.

He reminds us that yes there is a destination, and yes we are closer now than we've ever been before. That destination should help us live today, to empower us, to motivate us, to cause us to grow into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ who love God with our whole hearts and to who love other people sacrificially."

Boyer: "John shows four ways that sin is incompatible with one who is a child of God. Or, to put it in another way, there are four reasons why a child of God cannot live continually in sin.

(1) Sin is contrary to the law of God. Sin is against God and it is unthinkable that His child should be His enemy.

(2) Sin is contrary to the mission of Christ. Christ came to get rid of sin, not to perpetuate it. To continue in it is to thwart His purpose in coming.

(3) Sin is contrary to our union with Christ. If we are *'in Him'*, and there is no sin in Him, then there should be no sin in us.

(4) Sin is contrary to our birth-relationship. If by virtue of a new birth we have received the very nature of God abiding in us, we cannot go on living a life outwardly which is contrary to what we actually are inwardly."

Wiersbe: "Sin is basically a matter of the will. For us to assert our will against God's will is rebellion, and rebellion is the root of sin. It is not simply that sin reveals itself in lawless behavior, but that the very essence of sin is lawlessness. No matter what his outward action may be, a sinner's inward attitude is one of rebellion."

Boice: "The sin which a Christian cannot commit is lasting or habitual. Here the interpreter is assisted by the tenses of the Greek verbs, all of which are present tense. If John had used an aorist tense as he does, for instance, in 2:1, he would have been referring to a specific sin committed at some particular point... In this passage, however, John uses the present tense three times to indicate, not a particular sin once committed, but rather a continuance in sin over an indefinite period.... In Greek John is simply saying that although a Christian may sin, and in fact often does sin, it is nevertheless impossible for him to go on persisting in sin indefinitely. Were this not so, righteousness could not be considered a true test of whether or not one is truly a child of God."

Bruce: Re vs. 10 -- "In summing up the criteria which distinguish the two spiritual families one from the other, John adds love of one's brother to the practice of righteousness as a mark of the child of God, and the absence of such love, with the practice of unrighteousness, as a disqualification for membership in God's family. Righteousness by itself, while infinitely preferable to unrighteousness, might appear to be coldly judicial, but the addition of brotherly love (cf. 2. 9 f.) imparts a transforming warmth to John's exposition. For him, righteousness and love are inseparable; since they are inseparable in the character of God and in His revelation in Christ, so they must be inseparable in the lives of His people."

Stott: "John now proceeds to the second part of his elaboration of the moral test, and this time he links righteousness with Christ's past appearing. His argument for the indispensable necessity of holy living is drawn now, not from the expectation of the Lord's second coming, when we shall see Him and become like Him, but from the purpose of His first coming which was to remove sins and to destroy the works of the devil. The argument is repeated, each time with a different emphasis.

	Verses 4-7	Verses 8-10
The Introductory Phrase:	<i>whosoever committeth sin</i> (4)	<i>He that committeth sin</i> (8)
The Theme	The nature of sin is lawlessness (4)	The origin of sin is the devil (8)
The Purpose of Christ's Appearing	<i>he was manifested to take away our sins</i> (5)	<i>the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil</i> (8)
The logical conclusion	'No one who abides in him sins' (6, RSV)	'No one born of God commits sin' (9, RSV)

To continue in sin is thus shown to be completely opposed to the whole purpose of Christ's first appearing, which is twice mentioned (5, 8), just as His second appearing has been mentioned twice in the previous section (ii. 28, iii. 2)."

Stedman: "Now, if law in its widest sense is simply an expression of realism, the nature of reality, then lawlessness is to behave as though there were no such laws. It is to behave unrealistically. Lawlessness is to become a law unto yourself, to make up your own rules for life and to disregard those that already exist. That is basically lawlessness. It therefore is to shut your eyes to reality. to ignore the truth, to act as though fantasy were reality..."

What are these activities of lawlessness? Essentially they are threefold: hatred, darkness, and death.

Hatred, the violation of love;
Darkness, the extinguishing of light; and
Death, the destruction of life."

Piper: "We're on the second question of the message. The first was: What did the Son of God come to destroy? Answer: the works of the devil, namely sin, or lawlessness or rebellion. He came to give us victory over sin in our lives. The second question was, How did Christ destroy the works of the devil? We saw two answers. First, he did it by

appearing at Christmas as the Son of God, living, dying for our sins and rising again. Second, he did it through the new birth. 1 John 3:9 says that when we are born of God we cannot sin. But we saw that this does not mean sinless perfection in this life; it means that God works a change in us so that we can't be content to go on sinning...

The way we participate in this victory is by trusting in the promises of God to work all things together for our good."

TEXT: 1 JOHN 3:10b-13

TITLE: *LOVING THE BRETHREN*

BIG IDEA:

TRANSITION: A LIFESTYLE OF PRACTICING RIGHTEOUSNESS INVOLVES LOVING THE BRETHREN

I. (:10b) FAILURE TO LOVE MARKS YOU AS A CHILD OF THE DEVIL

"anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother."

Westcott: "This clause is not a mere explanation of that which precedes but the expression of it in its highest Christian form."

II. (:11) GOD'S STANDARD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS HAS ALWAYS BEEN LOVE

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

III. (:12) NEGATIVE EXAMPLE = FAILURE OF CAIN TO LOVE ABEL

A. Cain's Hatred Exposed His Satanic Source

"Not as Cain, who was of the evil one"

Where are you coming from"

Whose family are you in?

Both Cain and Abel came from the same set of physical parents and same environment; yet they turned out radically different.

B. Cain's Hatred Found its Ultimate Expression = Murdered His Brother

"and slew his brother"

Murder would be terrible enough; but to murder your brother ...

Ryrie: Re *Slew* -- "Originally the Greek word (used here and in Rev 5:6,9,12; 6:4,9; 13:3,8; 18:24 only) meant 'to cut the throat,' and later it meant 'to slay with violence.'" (Brings back memories of the O. J. Simpson murder case)

C. Cain's Hatred was Motivated by Evil Ambition (Envy)

"And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous."

IV. (:13) EXPECT HATRED (NOT LOVE) FROM THE WORLD

"Do not marvel brethren, if the world hates you."

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the connection between *righteousness* and *love*? Why does John intertwine these two themes?
- 2) Who is the "*one another*" that we are commanded to love? Is the emphasis on loving our neighbor (saved or unsaved) or primarily loving our brethren in the Lord?
- 3) Did Cain have any awareness that he "*was of the evil one*"? Did his conscience convict him that he was guilty of envy towards Abel? How did God address him back in Genesis 4? What opportunity did Cain have to repent before he stepped over the line of committing murder?
- 4) How has the world demonstrated its hatred of you?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ryrie: "The heart that is full of hate is potentially capable of murder (cf. Matt. 5:21-22)."

Bruce: "The world, orientated against God, is, as John has indicated already (I John 2. 15-17), inherently inimical to the cause of God. Manifestations of its hostility, therefore, should not take the children of God by surprise. The warfare between the two sides continues, although the decisive victory has been won; this gives the children of God confidence that they can overcome the world by faith in Him who has already overcome it (I John 4. 4; 5. 4 f.; cf. John 16. 33)."

Morgan: "From this passage [in Gen. 4], united with the remarks of the Apostle in the text, we may fully understand the mind of Cain. It was envy that first moved him to the unparalleled iniquity. His offering was rejected, while Abel's was accepted. He was mortified by the distinction, and would be avenged. It is very instructive to mark the progress of his mind under the influence of his envious feelings. The first notice is, 'he was wroth.' He met the unexpected disappointment with a burst of anger. It is then added, 'his countenance fell.' That fit of passion fell down into a sullen melancholy, musing by turns on the injustice of God, and fraud of his brother, as no doubt he considered them. But his gloomy apprehensions were not unchecked. God remonstrated with him, probably by the whispers of his own conscience, or it may have been audibly and visibly. He was called upon to give a reason for his malevolent

feelings. A faithful remonstrance was addressed to him, 'If thou doest will shalt thou not be accepted?' At the same time he was faithfully warned, 'if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door,' which seems to mean, that it lay there ready to entrap and destroy him, as an enemy that waited for his halting. Even the special enormity that began to assume some shape in his mind, seems to have been set before him to deter him against indulging the dark forebodings that cast their deadly shade over his spirit. 'Unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.' But it was in vain. He allowed the wicked one to harass and harden his soul more and more. An opportunity offered to carry his design into execution. 'Cain talked with Abel his brother, and they were in the field.' We may well suppose he addressed him in terms of bitter accusation. His fierce recriminations were uttered in the silence of the solitary field.' That very silence whispered, now is the seasonable time to be avenged for all the dishonour God has done thee in the preference of this hated brother. No eye shall see it. No ear shall hear it, no tongue shall tell it. So 'he rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.'

What an instructive history! It is the progress of envy till it ended in fratricide. It began with anger, preceded in morose dissatisfaction, overcame the remonstrances of conscience, withstood the most solemn warnings, was goaded on to hatred and revenge, and seizing the favourable opportunity, terminated in murder."

Piper: "The wording of vs 11 is striking. It is a very close parallel (almost word for word) with I John 1:5. There the message which John's readers had heard was a doctrinal one, the theological foundation for their faith that rests in the character of God *'This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all'* (1:5). Now in our verse today (3:11) the message they had heard from the beginning was equally foundational, but now not in the realm of doctrine, but of ethics. *'For this is the message which you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.'* The doctrinal foundation that God is light and the moral, ethical foundation of love for one another are both at the heart of the apostolic gospel. The gospel is incomplete unless it includes both doctrine and ethics. Doctrine is of the essence of the gospel--doctrine about the character of God; about human sin; about the mediator, Jesus Christ, who is the God-man; about his life, death and resurrection to forgive the sins of his people and give them eternal life; about the need for personal response of faith to appropriate the work of Christ into one's own life. But it is equally true that the essence of the gospel includes the moral imperatives of repentance and of a new life of love lived under the Lordship of Christ and empowered by his Spirit. And any gospel you believe, any gospel you proclaim that does not include both doctrine and ethics is only half a gospel tragically incomplete, radically distorted, hopelessly deficient. Both doctrine and ethics are at the heart of the gospel because they are so inextricably linked. The character of God, who as light is wholly righteous, true and loving demands and empowers moral responses on the part of his children. Supremely these moral responses are to be ones of love. Our love for one another is demanded by the character of God but it is also empowered by the brightness of the God who is light and love, with whom there is no small print. Only when we see and believe and cherish the brightness of God will we be free to entrust ourselves and our futures into his hands. And then and only then will we be free to forget about ourselves in order to genuinely love someone else. Biblically speaking doctrine

and ethics always go together. And in both cases, both in doctrine and in ethics, our need is not for something new. That's what the false teachers in John's day were trumpeting. They were the ones with the new revelations. They were the ones with the latest ideas. They were the ones who were modern, progressive "with-it". They were infatuated with newness. But according to John that isn't what we need at all. What we need, which is what his readers needed, is to go back to what we have heard from the beginning. John's command in 2:24 applies to us in terms of ethics as well as doctrine *'Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you.'*"

Stedman: Re Love -- "The Bible never claims that Christians have a monopoly on love. But it does claim that love of the highest quality, love in its true aspect, begins to flow only in a Christian experience; that there is a difference between the love of a Christian and the love of a non-Christian, and it is a difference which is described in this very letter as the difference between death and life. We shall see, in Verse 14, that John says we know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love, and he who does not love remains in death.

Well, what is this difference?

We must, of course, recognize that all love is from God. God is love, John tells us. Love pours from God into human hearts like sunshine and rain, upon the just and the unjust alike. No human being would love if he were not in some relationship, in some contact, with the God who is love. All love comes from God; the love of parents for children, the love of friends for friends, the love of sweethearts for each other -- all is a gift of God to the human race, like sunshine and rain, food, shelter and raiment, and all the other things that make life beautiful, happy and wholesome. But something happens to the love of God; this pure, unspotted love which comes from God's heart upon mankind.

As the love of God comes into the twisted, distorted heart of fallen mankind, it becomes twisted and distorted, deflected from its true goal, and in fallen man it becomes love directed only toward himself. This is what happens to love before Christianity comes. It is self-centered love.

There is nothing wrong with love itself; it is the direction it takes, the object upon which it focuses, which distorts it. Love comes from God, true; but love in the fallen heart is always twisted and distorted and centered upon self. Therefore, the love we show as non-Christians is really a love of ourselves. We love our children because they are extensions of us. We love our father or mother because our life is related to theirs. We love our relatives (presumably) because they are ours. We love our dog, our cat, our horse. We love the friends who please us, we love those who help us. If you observe human life you will see how true this is. Love is always directed to those who do something to or for, or receive from us. Therefore, what we really love is the projection of ourselves in others. Thus, human love is self-centered."

Stedman: Re Hate -- "Now, what is the answer to this? What is the way to control

hatred? Well, for the world in general, it is very clear, is it not? There can be no answer, there can be no effective control of this force, apart from the regenerating work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the cross of Calvary. It takes the power of God to break the power of hate, and only God can do it. That is why there is no ultimate hope for the control of wars and strife and anarchy and trouble, apart from an acceptance on the part of individuals everywhere of the redeeming grace of God. That is why we Christians are quite right when we tell people they can never solve their world problems at the peace tables, or the conference tables, and negotiate an ultimate control of warfare. That can never happen. This force is ingrained too deeply into human life to submit to that kind of superficial treatment.

But what about with Christians? How do you handle this problem of hatred? What do you do about it? Do you resort to the folly of trying to suppress it, push it down, repress it, hide it, cover it over, bite your lip, don't say anything, but go away with your heart burning, seething, miserable, unhappy? You are still under the control of the evil one and, sooner or later, he will take you farther than you want to go. The only control is what we find all through the Scriptures, and what you find here in the Epistle of John. Judge this thing. Deal with it as God sees it. Call it what it is -- hatred -- originating from the devil, a devilish thing at work in your life and heart. Then confess it, agree with God about it, tell him so. Of course, you will receive, then, the answering power of love from the Son of God who dwells in your heart. The fount of the Holy Spirit is ever ready to pour out, in place of hatred, words of love and appreciation, approval, and acceptance. There is no other answer."

TEXT: 1 JOHN 3:14-23

TITLE: SAFE LOVE

BIG IDEA:

LOVE FOR THE BRETHREN PRODUCES SECURITY

I. (:14-15) LOVE FOR THE BRETHREN PROVES OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

A. (:14a) Loving Indicates Life

"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren."

Piper: "Positively: loving another person in deed and in truth is concrete, visible evidence that we are of the truth. This evidence reassures our heart before God that we do in fact know him. Negatively: when we consistently fail to love our brother or sister, any assurance that we had that we were right with God, is called into question."

B. (:14b-15) Hating Indicates Death

1. Statement of Fact

"He who does not love abides in death."

2. Illustration to Prove the Point

"Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."

II. (:16-18) LOVE FOR THE BRETHREN WILL BE LIKE CHRIST'S LOVE FOR US

A. (:16) Our Pattern in Loving -- Christ's love for us

"We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Boice: "What is it that gives the love of God as seen at the cross its special character? Primarily it is the element of self-sacrifice on behalf of those who are totally undeserving and even undesirous of the sacrifice."

B. (:17) Our Heart to Love -- Concrete Test

"But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

C. (:18) Our Challenge to Love -- Only Reality Proves our Sincerity

"Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."

III. (:19-23) OUR LOVE FOR THE BRETHREN PRODUCES SECURITY AND SERENITY OF SOUL

A. (:19-21) Confidence in God's Presence

1. (:19) Assurance of Salvation -- Practical Love

"We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him."

We see the life and power of God working through our lives as we minister practical love to others. This reassures our hearts that we are children of God.

2. (:20) Victory Over Condemnation

"in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things."

Boice: "Whatever our hearts may say, God knows us better than even we ourselves do and, nevertheless, has acquitted us. Therefore, we should reassure ourselves by His judgment, which alone is trustworthy, and refuse to trust our own."

Stedman: "... the problem of an accusing heart, i.e., a condemning conscience. What do you do as a Christian when your heart condemns you? As we saw, the usual result of a condemning conscience is a tendency to ignore God, to keep in the shadows and to distrust his love, to criticize his people and in many ways to manifest the fact that we have lost contact with the God who indwells us. The answer, as we saw in First John 3:19, was to reassure our hearts by a deed of self-giving love: 'Little children, let us not love in word or speech,' says John, 'but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us,' {1 Jn 3:18-19 RSV}.

We are to give ourselves to someone who is in need or help another in his problem, repay good for evil, or give back kind words instead of caustic, sharp ones. The result, John says, will be a sense of reassurance. If we are really in Christ, rivers of love and peace will begin to flow out from our hearts again, and it will be impossible to remain condemned"

Stott: "Our conscience is by no means infallible; its condemnation may often be unjust. We can, therefore, appeal from our conscience to God who is greater and more knowledgeable. Indeed, He knows all things, including our secret motives and deepest resolves, and, it is implied, will be more merciful towards us than our own heart. His omniscience should relieve, not terrify, us (cf. Ps. ciii. 14; Jn. xxi. 17). So it is knowledge which alone can quieten the condemning heart, our own knowledge of our sincere love for others and supremely God's knowledge of our thoughts and motives. Stronger than any chemical tranquilizer is trust in our all-knowing God."

3. (:21) Confidence Before God

"Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God."

B. (:22-23) Confidence in Prayer

1. (:22) Promise of Answered Prayer

a. Grandiose Scope of the Promise

"and whatever we ask we receive from Him"

b. General Conditions for Fulfillment = Obedience

1) *"because we keep His commandments"*

2) *"and do the things that are pleasing in His sight."*

2. (:23) Definition of Obedience

"And this is His commandment"

a. Faith -- *"that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ"*

b. Love -- *"and love one another, just as He commanded us"*

Stott: "There is a significant difference in the tense of the two verbs, *believe* and *love*, faith in Christ being here regarded as a decisive act ..., and love for the brethren as a continuous attitude. Both are tests of a true Christian."

Stedman: "What John is saying is, the condition by which prayer is answered, and answered abundantly, is that we make repeated decisive acts of fulfilling the demands of love toward another, depending upon the power of Jesus Christ within us to perform it. That is '*believing on the name of the Son of God*,' counting on his authority, on his power."

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How can we tell the difference between *genuine love* produced by the life of Christ within us through the Holy Spirit, and counterfeit love?

2) Can you think of an instance where you had insight into the material needs of another believer, had the resources to meet that need and failed to respond but turned your back? How should you respond if the cause for the material need is some type of laziness or lack of responsibility? Can you even rightly evaluate whether that is the case?

3) How will *love* and *faith* feed off one another? What is the connection?

4) What type of confidence are you experiencing in God's presence? What type of answers to prayer? Are we living a life that is pleasing to God and keeping His commandments?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stedman: "Part of the reason why so many are finding Christianity to be boring and mediocre and often sterile is because they are not experiencing this kind of Christian living. Many young people have almost lost all hope that Christianity can ever do or be what its glowing terms describe. The reason is that they have not entered into this kind of relationship, where each day, every day, they experience the glorious adventure of seeing a living God at work, answering prayer and giving to them things that they ask. But in this passage we have a beautiful picture of the normal life of a Christian. It is all centered in prayer, because prayer is the most characteristic and the most fundamental relationship that a Christian can experience. Prayer is the expression of dependence on a loving God, and the whole Christian life, as we have learned in many other passages, is to be characterized by a continuous attitude and spirit of prayer. 'Pray without ceasing' {1 Th 5:17 KJV}, says the Apostle Paul. This is what exciting Christian living demands."

Boice: "How does a Christian deal with doubt? Although there are many causes for it, there is only one answer. It is: by knowledge. The Christian must simply take himself in hand and confront himself with what he knows to be true concerning God and God's work in his life. In other words, faith (which is the opposite of doubt), being based on knowledge, must be fed by it. This is the point that John develops at the close of this third chapter."

Piper: "Now I would like to suggest to you 3 reasons why Jesus' death on the cross should serve as the supreme example of love for us. First of all, it involved the greatest possible sacrifice. Christ gave up his very life for us. Love takes so much joy in another person's welfare that it is willing, eager, delighted to sacrifice one's own personal well-being for the good of the other person. Now a person's life is his most precious possession. To rob him of it, which is murder, is the greatest possible sin you could ever commit against him. By the same token, to give one's own life for the sake of another's is the greatest possible expression of love for him. You remember what Jesus said in John 15:13: 'Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' It is a sharp contrast that John paints for us. Cain's hatred issued forth in murder. Jesus' love issued forth in self-sacrifice, even to the point of giving up his very life for us.

Secondly, and more importantly, Christ's death on the cross is the supreme example of love in that it meets our needs in a way that nothing else ever could. It is not only the greatest possible sacrifice, it also does the greatest possible good for us. The key words

in vs 16 are 'he laid down his life for us'. You see, self-sacrifice in and of itself is not intrinsically valuable. Self-sacrifice becomes love only to the extent that it is positively related to human need. Only in so far as self-sacrifice works for the good of another does it have any value in the eyes of God. I think that is what Paul was getting at in I Cor 13:3 'If I give away all that I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned [there's self-sacrifice to be sure] but have not love [that is the self-sacrifice is not directed to meeting the needs of anyone else], I gain nothing.' But Christ's love for us is exceedingly positive. (True love always is). It moved him to lay down his life for us. Again there is a sharp contrast. In Gen 4:8 we read Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. In I John 3:16 we read '[Jesus Christ] laid down his life for us.' And in those prepositions, the 'against' of Gen 4:8 as compared to the 'for' of I John 3:16, we find the difference between love and hate, between life and death. The death of Jesus Christ is the supreme example of love because it meets our deepest needs--it brings us peace with God, forgiveness, a clear conscience, hope for the future, power to love in the present, etc., etc. It does the greatest possible good for us.

But not only does Jesus' death embody love because it was the greatest possible sacrifice done for the greatest possible good. It was also done for the greatest possible motive. According to John 12:28 Jesus went to the cross in order to glorify the name of his heavenly father. And the writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus endured the cross 'for the joy set before him' (Heb 12:2). These 2 inextricably linked goals--the glory of God and our own delight and joy in it--are to be the supreme motive for any act of love. They were for Jesus and they are to be for us.

Combining these 3 elements, then, we can come up with this definition of Christian love. Christian love is finding one's own joy in actively working for the job of another, even at the self-sacrificial cost of one's own private pleasure, all for the glory of God. And that is the kind of love we are to possess as Christians and the kind of love we are to exercise."

Stott: Summary -- "Hatred characterizes the world, whose prototype is Cain. It originates in the devil, issues in murder and is evidence of spiritual death. Love characterizes the Church, whose prototype is Christ. It originates in God, issues in self-sacrifice, and is evidence of eternal life."

Hinckley: Re confidence in 3:21 -- "This was a high privilege in the Greek world. It originally meant the right of a full citizen of a democracy to speak in the citizens' assembly. Later it came to mean freedom to speak with frankness and courage. Thus, in 2:28 and 3:21, *confidence* is the right to speak frankly and boldly to Christ at His second coming and to God even now in prayer."

Peck: "All of us go through times of doubt in the spiritual journey, seasons where it seems like we don't really know God like we thought we did. It's a normal part of the spiritual journey for us to struggle with doubts about our faith, doubts about whether we're truly following Jesus Christ or not. If you've struggled with those kinds of doubts, that's probably a pretty good indication that you are following Jesus, because

people who don't follow Jesus Christ really aren't all that concerned about it.

These seasons of doubt cause our hearts to condemn us, our feelings accuse us of not being Christians, of being failures, of not measuring up, especially when we hear sermons like today's call to walk with each other in love. God's invitation to love so radically impacts us and we realize how far short we fall, and often our hearts become anxious and even condemning, and we wonder if we truly know Christ the way we thought we did. So John wants us to put that struggle in proper perspective, that it's not whether our feelings are at rest or whether our feelings condemn us that determines whether or not we're on this spiritual journey, but it's whether God has received us through our faith in Jesus Christ.

You see, God is greater than our feelings, he is bigger than our emotions of doubt or assurance, and what God thinks carries more weight than what I'm feeling at the moment. So how do we set our hearts at ease? By remembering that our assurance doesn't rely on our emotions but on God and then by pressing forward to obey God's commands. John sums up God's commands in the words 'believe' and 'love.' The order is vitally important, that we first trust our lives to Jesus Christ, we place our faith in him to forgive our sins and to bring us into a relationship with God built on grace. Then once we do that, we launch on a spiritual journey of loving other followers of Christ, to walk together on this journey we're on. Believing comes first, then belonging. We first establish a personal relationship with God through belief in Jesus Christ, and then we find ourselves on this journey the bible calls church, of walking this journey together."

TEXT: 1 JOHN 3:23-24

TITLE: *THEME OF SECTION 3: THE TEST OF ABIDING*

BIG IDEA:

THE TEST OF ABIDING IS FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST AND LOVE FOR THE BRETHREN BY THE INDWELLING HOLY SPIRIT

INTRODUCTION:

(Most of this involves review of previous material and making some interconnections between major themes that are woven throughout the epistle.)

Don't lose the connection back to the power of prayer and the promise of answered prayer from verse 22.

I. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TEST OF SONSHIP AND THE TEST OF ABIDING

"And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him."

Obedience is a key theme in all of the sections.

The relationship of the believer to the Law of God:

Apparently there are some commands of God that we need to still obey today in this age of grace! The law of God still has relevance for us. Surely any expression of the eternal moral will of God must still be conduct that pleases God. The Sermon on the Mount takes the Ten Commandments and shows us Christ's interpretation of the original intent of the Law -- that it deals with heart attitudes even more fundamentally than with external conduct. The standard is perfection.

Conversion doesn't make me throw off the law of God to do as I please. Instead God writes His law in our hearts in the context of His grace as the law of Christ and gives us His Holy Spirit to enable us to obey -- and He gives us the desire to obey. Thus the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us as we walk by His Spirit.

What the law can't do is justify anyone or sanctify anyone -- but the problem is our sin, not the goodness of God's law. Law is not a hindrance or an enemy to faith and to love. Instead the law helps us by convicting us of sin and driving us to Christ who bore the curse of the law for us so that we could be dead to sin but alive to righteousness. We need the objective law of Christ to provide guidance for our expression of love. Otherwise we are left to our own subjective impressions of what is right and wrong. On this basis of a false type of love that is divorced from God's standards, people are able to justify all types of ungodliness.

II. EXPLANATION OF THE CONCEPT OF ABIDING -- CF. JOHN 15

(See Appendix and message notes from Gil Rugh)

Stott: "The concept of a mutual abiding, mentioned here in this Epistle for the first time, we in Him and He in us, is derived ultimately from our Lord's allegory of the vine and the branches (Jn. xv. 1 ff.)."

III. FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST -- ITS DEVELOPMENT TO THIS POINT IN 1 JOHN

"And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ"

There has been a lot of emphasis on Truth ... but this is the first mention of faith. Now this will be a major theme for the rest of the epistle.

IV. LOVE FOR THE BRETHREN -- ITS DEVELOPMENT TO THIS POINT IN 1 JOHN

"and love one another, just as He commanded us"

Stott: "Reciprocal love has already been mentioned as a commandment in ii. 7, 8 (cf. 2 Jn. 6) but here for the first time faith and love are brought together (cf. Gal. v. 6). Both are the will of God, and both are commanded by Him."

Love in a practical sense for the brethren is the evidence of genuine faith. It seems to be the critical area in each of the 3 major sections of the Epistle.

Gal. 5:6 *"the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love"*

V. INDWELLING HOLY SPIRIT -- ITS EMPHASIS IN THIS THIRD SECTION

"And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us."

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How common is it for a son to forsake his family; to renounce his family identity and have nothing to do with his mother and father any more? Should abiding be the rule and apostasy be the exception in the same sense? How does this picture become cloudy when the apostasy takes the much more subtle form of counterfeiting the truth rather than openly rejecting it?
- 2) If belief is defined as a "*commandment*" where obedience is involved, how do we maintain a distinction between faith and works?
- 3) Study John 15 and the concept of the vine and the branches from the OT. See the appendix material on the concept of abiding. What principles can we learn from this analogy of Christ being the vine?
- 4) At what point are we given the Spirit? Do we need to seek for the Father to give us the Spirit in some type of special baptismal sense of power and enablement as a "second

blessing" experience?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stedman: "What John is saying is, the condition by which prayer is answered, and answered abundantly, is that we make repeated decisive acts of fulfilling the demands of love toward another, depending upon the power of Jesus Christ within us to perform it. That is '*believing on the name of the Son of God*,' counting on his authority, on his power. Notice there are two things in that. There is decision and direction. Taking them in reverse order, there is the direction toward which prayer always moves, love for another. That is the context of prayer, the limits of prayer. That defines what is meant by the term, '*whatever we ask*.' Whatever we need to fulfill this demand to love one another we can have. We are not to ask for things outside that, but if you really set yourself to love another then you can have whatever you need to fulfill it. '*Whatever you ask*,' whatever your need may be. That is the direction.

The decision is the action you take to accomplish this, counting on Jesus Christ to come through and make it possible. God never moves your will to make a decision. You must do that. But when you decide to do what he tells you to do in his demand to love another, he then comes through with the power to make it possible."

Boice: "In mentioning the Holy Spirit we might think that John is here introducing a new and subjective criterion by which the Christian may assure his heart before God, much as Paul seems to do in Romans 8:15, 16. But this is not the case, for it is not as a subjective witness that the Spirit is mentioned. Here **Stott** concludes wisely, 'The Spirit whose presence is the test of Christ's abiding in us, manifests himself objectively in our life and conduct. It is he who inspires us to confess Jesus as the Christ come in the flesh, as John immediately proceeds to show (iv. 1ff.; cf. ii. 20, 27). It is also he who empowers us to live righteously and to love the brethren (cf. iv. 13; Gal. v. 16, 22). So if we would assure our hearts when they accuse and condemn us, we must look for evidence of the Spirit's working, and particularly whether he is enabling us to believe in Christ, to obey God's commandments and to love the brethren; for the condition of abiding is this comprehensive obedience (24a), and the evidence of abiding is the gift of the Spirit (24b).'"

Rensberger: "Although the possession of the Spirit and mutual abiding with God are interior events, they are validated by means that are not individualistic or esoteric but thoroughly public: confession of faith and love for one another."

Burdick: "The command is to '*believe on the name*,' by which we understand John to mean that we are to believe all that the name signifies--divine sonship and real humanity combined in one Person, '*his Son Jesus Christ*.' To this confession of faith no Gnostic could subscribe."

TEXT: 1 JOHN 4:1-6

TITLE: *THE FOUNDATION OF TRUTH*

BIG IDEA:

**TRUTH IS THE BASIS FOR FAITH AND LOVE --
SPIRITUAL TEACHING MUST BE EXAMINED TO IDENTIFY ITS SOURCE**

INTRODUCTION:

There is a great tendency today to elevate love about doctrine (truth). But what is the connection and the relative importance?

I. (:1) CHRISTIANS ARE COMMANDED TO EXERCISE DISCERNMENT

A. Commandment stated negatively -- Don't be gullible

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit"

Love does not mean compromising the truth.

All believers are responsible for exercising discernment ... not just the elders.
Cf. *Competent to Counsel* -- stresses our responsibility and competence to help one another in our struggle against sin. We all have the anointing within us.

Often simple folk are overly impressed with apparent supernatural phenomena -- such as prophecy and tongues. John's readers may have been tending to accept uncritically all teaching which claimed to be given under divine inspiration. You cannot always equate the supernatural with the divine.

B. Commandment stated positively -- Test the spirits

1. the nature of the test -- *"but test"*

True faith examines its object before placing its confidence in it.

Don't examine with a suspicious attitude, looking to find fault; but put doctrine to the test with a view to proving what is trustworthy (i.e. don't treat the teacher as a heretic until he proves to be one.)

2. the subjects of the test -- *"the spirits"*

3. the goal of the test -- *"to see whether they are from God"*

4. the need for the test -- *"because many false prophets have gone out into the world"*

cf. OT examples -- 1 Kings 22 -- 400 prophets on Ahab's payroll; they had all the comforts and the respect of the people vs. lonely Micaiah

II. (:2-3) THE TOUCHSTONE FOR ORTHODOXY IS A TRUE CONFESSION OF JESUS CHRIST

The Scriptures never ask us to look into the heart of a man and judge his motives; here we are looking at his public teaching.

- A. (:2) The Spirit from God Confesses Jesus as the Christ Come in the flesh
"By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God"

Note: John is speaking of tests to differentiate spiritual life vs. death -- he is not necessarily saying that other doctrines should be minimized; he is not laying down a foundation for what is essential for organizational unity within a local church or denomination; he is also not saying to accept everything else a teacher says without any question as long as the teacher is solid on this fundamental.

Specific confessions that square with the Scriptures will be important to meet the specific errors of the day -- where the battle is being fought, that is where we need to speak clearly.

- B. (:3) The spirit not from God does not confess Jesus as the Christ come in the flesh
"and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world."

III. (:4) GOD'S CHILDREN HAVE VICTORY OVER FALSE TEACHERS BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

"You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."

Truth reigns supreme! The opposition of antichrists in the person of false teachers is not strong enough to defeat the indwelling Holy Spirit.

John again assures his readers that he is confident of their abiding in the truth.

He makes reference again to the Greatness of God as the source of our security.

IV. (:5-6) THE SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL TEACHING DETERMINES THE AUDIENCE

- A. (:5) The World Responds to False Teaching
"They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them."

B. (:6a) God's Children Respond to God's Spokesmen

"We are from God; he who knows God listens to us;"

the "we" of vs. 6 refers to the apostles and their teaching; not the same as the "you" of vs. 4 = all believers;

The focal point of their doctrine = the person of Christ as Messiah, as perfect man, as God incarnate, as resurrected and coming again

C. (:6b) Therefore, the character of the audience distinguishes between the Spirit of Truth and the spirit of error

"he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error."

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does this exhortation to *"Test the spirits"* from the elderly apostle John harmonize with the prohibition against "judging" made by Christ in Matt. 7:1 -- *"Do not judge, lest you be judged"*? (cf. Matt. 7:15)
- 2) Who would you characterize in today's culture as a false prophet and why?
- 3) Why do you think that so many people from an evangelical background fall prey to some type of religious cult?
- 4) In what sense can John attribute victory and "overcoming" to his readers when the false teachers were obviously still around and still a very potent threat?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: "But how can it be known that *we are of God* and are teaching the truth? John answers, in effect, that you can tell that our message is God's message because God's people listen to it and receive it. These statements sound the height of arrogance. So they would be if uttered by an individual Christian. No private believer could presume to say: 'whoever knows God agrees with me; only those who are not of God disagree with me.' But this is what John says. The fact is that he is not speaking in his own name, nor even in the name of the Church, but as one of the apostles, who were conscious of the special authority bestowed upon them by Jesus Christ. He is carrying a stage further the argument of the first three verses. There the test of doctrine was whether it acknowledged the divine-human Person of Jesus Christ; here the test is whether it is accepted by Christians and rejected by non-Christians. There is a certain affinity between God's Word and God's people. Jesus had taught that His sheep hear

His voice (Jn. x. 4, 5, 8, 16, 26, 27), that everyone who is of the truth listens to His witness to the truth (Jn. xviii. 37), and that *'he who is of God hears the words of God'* (Jn. viii. 47, RSV). In the same way John asserts that since we are of God (6) and ye are of God (4), you listen to us. There is a correspondence between message and hearers. The Spirit who is in you (4) enables you to discern His own voice speaking through us (2). So you can recognize God's Word because God's people listen to it, just as you can recognize God's people because they listen to God's Word. Those who do not listen to apostolic teaching, but prefer to absorb the teaching of the world, not only pass judgment on themselves but thereby also on the message to which they do give attention."

Bruce: "In Deuteronomy two tests are laid down to determine whether a prophet is truly a spokesman of God or not: (I) *'if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously, you need not be afraid of him'* (Deut. 18. 22); (ii) even if the word which the prophet speaks comes true, yet if he tries to lead his hearers astray to serve other gods, he is a false prophet (Deut. 13. 1-5).

The presence of true prophets in the church of New Testament days stimulated the activity of others who claimed to be prophets but whose claims were unfounded -- or, if they did speak by inspiration, showed by the content of their utterances that the spirit that spoke through them was not the Spirit of God. In either case they were false prophets: men who falsely claimed to speak by inspiration or men who were inspired by a spirit of falsehood. To test the prophets then was in effect to test the spirits by whose impulsion they spoke. John indeed envisages but two spirits -- the Spirit of God and the spirit of Antichrist."

Pentacost: Speaking to the need to be even more vigilant today -- "In the apostle's day the Word had to be communicated person to person. With the many means of communication today we can invite all kinds of false teachers into our homes without being in the presence of another person."

Piper: "So the great lesson that lies just beneath the surface in this text is that none of us will listen to the message of Christ unless the mighty Holy Spirit overcomes our resistance and gives us ears to hear (Acts 16:14 Deuteronomy 29:4). And none of us will confess from the heart that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh unless the mighty Holy Spirit humbles us to accept the authority of Jesus implied in that confession (cf. I Cor. 12:3). John's great assumption, lying just beneath verses 2 and 6 is that hearing the gospel with openness and confessing Christ with loyalty is the work and the gift of the Holy Spirit. If this listening and this confessing could be explained in any other way, they would not be a sure sign of the Spirit's presence and power. But they are a sign of his power. For John knows that no one hears and no one confesses apart from the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit....

The Christians to which John is writing have conquered the false prophets. They have conquered them in that they have not been swept away by their deception (2:14, 26). The prophets have attacked with their defective views of Christ, and the Christians have stood firm. They have not yielded. They have conquered. They have remained

orthodox and loyal to the Son of God incarnate in the man Jesus Christ.

How? How did they conquer? The foe was not merely human. Satan himself, the god of this age empowered the false prophets, and he is extraordinarily subtle and deceptive. How did they conquer? Not by their native intelligence, not by their own strength. They are but 'little children.' John says they conquered because he who was in them is greater than he was in the world. In other words they conquered by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So the great assumption of verses 2 and 6 is made explicit: The Holy Spirit is more powerful than the satanic forces of deception and blindness. And every believer owes his orthodoxy to the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. If we stand with Christ, listening receptively and confessing loyally, it is because the Holy Spirit is greater than all other forces in the world and has made us to conquer the blindness and hardness of our own hearts and the deception of the enemy."

Stedman: "Now, there you have the fundamental questions that we must ask every group, or any teacher of religion today: Do you acknowledge the entrance into history of the Son of God as Jesus of Nazareth, the man who labored and loved and died and rose again from the dead? Do you acknowledge the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ? -- that he who was with God from the beginning, and was God, became man and lived among us? Do you acknowledge that? That question ought to be asked of every religious teacher, everywhere. Then do you follow him? Do you live by this? Are you committed to him -- is he your Lord, your strength, and everything you need?"

Peck: " WE WILL GET AND KEEP OUR BEARINGS IN THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY BY DEVELOPING DOCTRINAL DISCERNMENT.

How do you determine whether a spiritual experience, a religious leader or a group is really from God? How do you know God's Spirit is at work in your worship experience or in your private devotional life? Some make that determination on how it makes them feel, if they feel closer to God then it must be from God. Others make that determination based on how credible the person sounds or how honest the person looks...

The only sure way to sift through spiritual claims is to evaluate them on the basis of doctrinal truth. Doctrinal truth is the constant, it doesn't move or change, so we can get our bearings by comparing where we are with those critical doctrinal truths...

... we find the second action we can do to get our bearings. WE WILL GET AND KEEP OUR BEARINGS IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE BY CONFIDENTLY APPLYING SPIRITUAL VICTORY.

Sometimes it's hard to live as an overcomer in this spiritual journey of following Jesus Christ. It's discouraging to see people we care about lured into false belief systems. Sometimes we feel like we're not making any progress, that we're the only one's seeking to live in faithfulness to Jesus Christ, and at those times God wants to remind us that we're overcomers not because of how popular or unpopular our message is but

because we've been brought into a love relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Our lighthouse to get our bearings isn't how big our church is or how popular our message is, but it's the fact that we serve a big God, a God who's more powerful and greater than any force in the world. That friends is our lighthouse in the storm, that's the constant that can help us get our bearings spiritually."

TEXT: 1 JOHN 4:7-12

TITLE: GOD IS LOVE

BIG IDEA:

**THREE ARGUMENTS FOR LOVING THE BRETHREN
(BASED ON THE TRINITY) -- cf. Boice**

INTRODUCTION:

Problems with assurance are not solved so much by introspection (e.g. Am I one of God's elect?) as by Faith (trusting in the promises of God) + Love (practical loving actions towards one another). (See Appendix on Two Tracks of Assurance.)

Each argument focuses on one person of the Godhead.

**I. (:7-8) ARGUMENT BASED ON GOD THE FATHER --
BASED ON GOD'S ETERNAL NATURE --
LOVE IS CONSISTENT WITH HIS NATURE AND OUR NEW NATURE**

A. (:7) Positively

1. The Command to Love the Brethren

"Brethren, let us love one another"

Stott: "John practices what he preaches. In urging them to love each other, he first assures them of his own love for them."

2. The Source of Love = God

"for love is from God" = The Sole Source

3. The Defining Family Relationship = We have been Given God's Nature with respect to this Ability to Love

"and every one who loves is born of God and knows God."

B. (:8) Negatively

"The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

**II. ARGUMENT BASED ON GOD THE SON
(:9-11) BASED ON GOD'S HISTORICAL GIFT --
LOVE IS CONSISTENT WITH HIS EXAMPLE AND WITH OUR
EXPERIENCE**

A. (:9) The Manifestation of God's Love = the Sending of His Son to Give Us Life

1. The Sacrifice of Love

"By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only

begotten Son into the world"

- God gave the best He could give = His Son
- God gave all that He had = His only unique Son
- God sent His Son into the front lines of battle = the world

Stott: "While the origin of love is in the being of God, the manifestation of love is in the coming of Christ."

2. The Purpose of Love

"so that we might live through Him"

B. (:10) The Initiator and Essence of Love

"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Boice: "The initiative lies entirely with God; before there was any possibility of our exercising such love, He first manifested it."

(See Appendix on Propitiation)

B. (:11) Our Response to God's Example

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

III. ARGUMENT BASED ON GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

(:12) LOVING THE BRETHREN ASSURES US THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS WORKING IN OUR LIVES

"No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us."

We can't see God. How can we tell He is present and active in our lives?

Our loving one another is the sign that He (whose nature is love) is abiding in us, and it is also the means by which His love has been fulfilled in us and is reaching its goal in us.

Our loving others is not the condition for God coming to abide in us; but it is the evidence, the manifestation, of that indwelling divine presence. Loving one another accomplishes the same goals with respect to Assurance as supposedly would be accomplished by being able to see God face to face.

Stedman: " God's love reaches its ultimate and final conclusion when it becomes visible in us. It is an abortive thing, incomplete, and, therefore, unreachable, incomprehensible, until it finds its manifestation in a living human being, in flesh and blood, incarnate again in you and me."

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do a word study of "*manifested*" in 1 John. (cf. 1:2; 2:10; 2:28) What is John referring to in each case? What is the significance of the concept?
- 2) If we have been given God's nature so that it is natural for the new man to love as God loves, why does John spend so much time exhorting us to do what should be so natural? How could we but do otherwise? Why tell a person to do something that he can't help but do? (Piper has some good comments here -- "God intends to fulfill His promises through the use of His commands... This is the very genius of Biblical ethics. Become what you are. Do what God is at work in you to do.")
- 3) How do you reflect the character qualities of your earthly mother and father? What about their strengths and their weaknesses?
- 4) Why does John make the connection in vs. 11 to our response being to love "*one another*" rather than exhorting us to love God in return?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stott: "The refrain of this paragraph is the reflexive 'love one another.' It occurs 3 times -- as an exhortation (v. 7), as a statement of duty (v. 11), and as a hypothesis (v. 12). It is because God is love in Himself (v. 8, 16), has loved us in Christ (v. 10, 11) and continues to love in and through us (v. 12, 13), that we must love each other."

Law: "The ineffable mystery of love reveals itself in this, that God has loved us, who are so unworthy of His love and so repulsive to all the sensibilities of His moral nature."

Lenski: "When we keep loving one another, this goal has been reached by God's love; our loving one another is the evidence that God's goal has been attained in us. This is the evidence that we can see; the stronger our love, the clearer and the stronger is the evidence."

Bruce: "The love of God displayed in His people is the strongest apologetic that God has in the world."

Piper: " I think we will love each other and those outside with a distinct, supernatural love when we taste the fellowship of the trinity; that is, when we love the suffering Son of God with the very love of his Father. When that happens we will be so stunned by the glory of his suffering, that it will be our crown and treasure to suffer with him to bring life to the world."

Stedman: " The nature of this love is inherent in the very statement John makes. "Love one another," he says. Thereby it is indicated that love is not to be only for those who are pleasant to us, or who are nice, congenial, clever people. We are not to love because people are lovable, but because each is another. Every one is a person, capable of a unique relationship to God, and therefore not a thing to be dealt with impersonally, or to be opposed or accepted as it suits our purpose, but a living, breathing, searching creation of God, just like us. That is why we are to love one another, without regard to what that person is like. This defines what love is meant when the Bible talks about love. True love is an interest in and a concern for another person, just because he is a person, and for no other reason. It does not matter whether he is rich or poor, black or white, old or young, male or female, Republican or Democrat; it makes absolutely no difference. He or she is a person."

TEXT: 1 JOHN 4:13-16

TITLE: HOW CAN I BE SURE?

BIG IDEA:
THE HOLY SPIRIT PRODUCES THE ASSURANCE OF ABIDING

INTRODUCTION:

How do I know that someone is physically dead or alive? Is he thinking, moving, feeling, smelling, speaking, listening, breathing -- is he acting in accordance with his nature?

Problem: When someone is in a coma -- they are breathing, but that is about it -- you have no assurance of life until you see some other familiar signs.

I know that I have the life of God within because I have been given the Holy Spirit and He shows!

I. (:13) PROPOSITION STATED

- A. Introductory formula -- "*By this*"
Refers to what follows
- B. Concept of Mutual Abiding -- "*we know that we abide in Him and He in us*"
No place here for skepticism or agnosticism -- "we know"
Sameness of life and nature; cf John 15 -- Vine and branches
(See Appendix for study on concept of Abiding)
- C. Products of the Holy Spirit -- "*because He has given us of His Spirit*"
Perfect tense = permanent gift; we remain the recipients of the Spirit.
Again, we see that God takes the initiative.
Involves the new nature, the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit as well.

II. (:14) THE HOLY SPIRIT INSPIRED THE TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLES (WHICH IS THE BASIS FOR FAITH AND LOVE)

- A. The testimony of the apostles is based on historical fact
"*And we have beheld and bear witness*"
Points back to 1:1-4; this is significant since we cannot see the full glory of God; but with their own eyes the apostles saw the Son working out His mission as the Savior of the world
- B. The significance of that historical fact was revealed by the Holy Spirit
Many other people were exposed to the same testimony and some of the same historical facts; but they had a completely different response.

- C. The substance of their testimony = the signifiacnce of the fact
"The Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world"
- The Deity of Jesus Christ
- The Love of God

The Roman emperor was presented as the "savior of the world;" cf. John 4:42

III. (:15-16) THE HOLY SPIRIT PRODUCES THE FAITH AND LOVE WHICH PROVIDE THE ASSURANCE OF ABIDING

- A. (:15) A true confession of the Deity of Jesus Provides the Assurance of Abiding
"Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God."
The Holy Spirit inspires every true confession of faith. The apostolic testimony is necessary, but it does not compel assent. It is by the Spirit of God that men confess. cf. Matt. 16:16-17
- B. (:16a) God's love motivates our faith and love
1. motivates faith because He has demonstrated love
"And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us."
2. motivates love because His eternal nature is love
"God is love"
- C. (:16b) Genuine love Provides the Assurance of Abiding
"and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What type of attraction does your heart have for the truths of the Word of God? Do you get excited as the Holy Spirit reveals more of the Father and the Son to you? How does this help feed your assurance of faith?
- 2) Do you have a heart for loving the brethren in practical ways and do you follow through with actions? Are you able to love even those that are different than you and ones to whom you are not naturally attracted? How does this help feed your assurance of faith?
- 3) How would you make the argument that the concept of abiding mentioned in these verses refers to all Christians rather than just to an elite subset of believers who have

some type of more intimate connection with the Father? (See appendix on concept of Abiding for help.)

4) Why do you think so much emphasis is placed on the Holy Spirit in this section? Do we give the proper emphasis to the Holy Spirit in our Christian experience or have we overreacted due to some of the charismatic excesses?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wuest: Re "*of His Spirit*" -- "Paul's words in I Corinthians 12:4-11 are of help here. John in using *ek*, '*out of*,' does not mean to infer that the individual saint receives only part of the Holy Spirit, for a person cannot be divided and parcelled out in parts. Each saint receives the Holy Spirit Himself in His entirety. John is here referring to that which the saint experiences of the indwelling Holy Spirit, namely, the operation of the spiritual gifts. No saint is given all of them. The individual saint who is the recipient of these spiritual gifts of the Spirit receives certain ones (*ek*) out of the total number. But the presence of these gifts in him, shown by their outworking in his life, is also an evidence of the presence of the Spirit in him, and this latter, a proof of the fact that God dwells in that saint and that saint dwells in God."

Bruce: "John has just said that if we love one another, God abides in us (verse 12); now he says that God abides in us if we '*confess that Jesus is the Son of God*,' He seems to be conscious of no tension at all between Christian love and Christian truth. The love of God was manifested in the giving up of His Son; if Jesus is not the Son of God and if His death does not atone for the sins of men, then there is no Christian message and Christian love and truth fall together, as they stand together if that message is true. If none can acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God apart from the enlightenment and empowering of the Spirit, it is equally true that the mutual coinherence of God and His children is the Spirit's work, as is also the outflowing of the love of God through them to others. Mutual indwelling, perfect love and confession of the truth are bound up in one another; God has joined them together and they may not be put asunder."

Marshall: "It is important to recognize that the grounds of Christian assurance and the tests of the reality of Christian experience are multiple: one cannot say that simply because a person professes true belief, or loves his fellow men, or claims to have charismatic experiences, he is a true Christian: it is the combination of these features in a harmonious unity that makes up true Christianity."

Stott: "Of these three tests of the indwelling of God, the last two are developments of the first. It is by the Spirit that we come to confess the deity of Jesus (cf. iv. 1-3 and 1 Cor. xii. 3), and by the same Spirit that we are enabled to love (verses 12, 13; cf. iii. 23, 24). The natural man can neither believe nor love. In his fallen and unredeemed state he is both blind and selfish. It is only by the grace of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth and whose first-fruit is love (Gal. v. 22), that man ever comes to believe in

Christ and love others. Emphasis on the Holy Spirit is, in fact, 'the predominant idea of this section' (Ebrard)."

Hoke: "Not only does love inspire us, but love transforms us. As I said before, it is impossible to be encountered by the love of God and left unchanged. We have all felt the power of human love and have been impacted by it. Our lives have been altered by even simple acts of love and kindness. Think of the transforming power of God's love."

TEXT: 1 JOHN 4:17 - 5:4

TITLE: HOW CAN I BE SURE? LOVE THE BRETHREN!

BIG IDEA:

LOVE FOR THE BRETHREN PRODUCES ASSURANCE

I. (:17-18) LOVE FACES JUDGMENT DAY WITH CONFIDENCE

A. (:17) Confidence Results from Christlikeness

"By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world."

Love is "perfected" in terms of accomplishing the purpose God has for His love as expressed through us towards others.

Like Him with respect to agape love; just as He "IS" (not "WAS") -- a present comparison that remains valid

B. (:18) Christlike Love Knows No Fear of Judgment

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love."

Law: "Judgment is not the assigning of character to men from without; it is the revelation of character from within."

Doesn't cast out fear of all types, but fear of God's judgment.

Alford: "Because fear, by anticipating punishment, has it even now; bears about a foretaste of it, and so partakes of it."

II. (4:19 - 5:3) LOVE FOR THE BRETHREN EVIDENCES LOVE FOR GOD

A. (:19) Our Ability to love depends on the divine initiative

"We love, because He first loved us."

B. (:20-21) Any Claim to love God can be tested by practical love for the brethren

"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also."

C. (5:1) Those who love God will also love God's children

"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him."

D. (:5:2-4a) Love for the brethren means love for God means obedience to God's commands

"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world."

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How have you found that love and fear are mutually exclusive in your own experience? Where have you seen love cast out fear?
- 2) How would you counsel Christians who profess faith in Christ and seem to be pursuing a path of holiness and love and yet claim to still fear the day of judgment? Does this reference to a day of judgment refer to whether a Christian will gain or lose rewards or does it refer to whether someone will go to heaven or hell or both?
- 3) What are some other verses that seem to imply that the "order of salvation" is first faith and then the new birth? Why this type of tension in the Scriptures?
- 4) What responsibilities do you have today that you consider burdensome? Are these things that you are confident that God wants you to be doing? How can you experience the lightness of yoke and rest that Jesus speaks of in Matt.11:30?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Piper: "Up until now in this book of 1 John the question has been: How can we know for sure that we love God or believe God or are born of God. And the answer has always come back that you can know how it is with you and God by whether you love your brothers and sisters on earth. Love to man has been the test of love to God.

But here in 5:2 is a brand new question. It's so different we are prone to think we must have read it wrong. It seems backward from everything we've seen so far. "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God." Surely he meant to say the reverse, didn't he: 'By this we know that we love God, when we love the children of God.' But that is not what he says. He says that the test of whether we really love people is whether we love God.

Now this seems very circular. On the one hand in 4:20 he says, '*If any one says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar.*' In other words, love to man is the proof of our

love to God. But on the other hand he says in 5:2, 'By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God.' In other words, love to God is the proof of our love to man.

This seems to destroy our assurance on both counts. If loving man provides the assurance that you are really loving God, and loving God provides the assurance that you are really loving man, then where does assurance start? Where can we find a sure foothold to begin with? How can I use my love for God as a test of my love for man when the question asked me in that test is: Do you love man. All I can say is: That's what I am trying to find out!

Maybe if we read on there will be a solution. Verses 2-3 say, 'By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.'

Since verse 2 says that love for God is the test of our love for people, John tells us something about the test. He says in verse 3 that love for God means keeping his commandments and not experiencing them as burdensome. 'This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.'

Well, if this is the test to see if we are really loving our brothers and sisters, then it doesn't sound so circular after all. It would go something like this: 'By this we know that we love the children of God, when we keep God's commandments and don't experience them as burdensome.' In other words the test of the genuineness of your love to the children of God is whether you let the commandments of God govern your relation to them and whether these commandments are burdensome to you."

Stedman: "Here another sticky question that is often raised is answered for us. Someone says, 'How can I know that I truly love my brother? Sometimes there are differences of opinion between us, sometimes we do not agree. There are times when I must do things that seem to offend my brother, and I don't always please him. Does this mean that I don't love him? If there are sometimes disagreements between us, does this mean that I don't love him?'

The answer is in Verse 2: 'By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.' When our actions toward our brother arise, not out of our personal feelings toward him, but out of our love for God and our desire to obey his Word; in other words, when love is expressed by righteousness, then we can be confident that it is really love. Not long ago a Christian girl said to me, 'My boyfriend is a Christian, but he wants me to tell a lie for him. He says that if I really love him, I'll tell the lie to protect him. Now, should I do this? If I don't do it, he'll be angry with me and he'll say that I don't love him.' I said to her, 'Well, tell him this. Tell him you love him enough to refuse to lie for him and thus encourage his tendency to falsification. It is wrong and harmful, destructive to his life, and tell him you love him enough to tell him the truth about his lying.'

That is what John is referring to here. Sometimes love must do the unpleasant thing. If it is an unpleasant thing that is being done because it is prompted by love to God and obedience to his commandments, well then, it is love, even though it makes someone angry, or upsets them temporarily. Do not be disturbed by that reaction. Love sometimes must be cruel to be kind.

Here is the wretchedness of what we ordinarily call 'white lies.' I have come in my own thinking to regard white lies as the blackest of all. They are the most dangerous, they are the most deadly, they often do more harm than the outright lie. What is a white lie? It is a way of pleasing yourself by avoiding displeasing another person. You tell them a little fib about how they look, or act toward you with unpleasantness. Thus, we avoid making others angry with us by using white lies. But if you think that through, you will see that what we are really doing is loving ourselves more than them. We do not want to be hurt by their reaction, so we avoid telling them the truth."

Stott: "Love for God does not only express itself in a confident attitude towards Him, devoid of fear, but in a loving concern for our fellow Christians (cf. iii. 14). The perfect love that casts out fear, casts out hatred also... To claim to know God and have fellowship with God while we walk in the darkness of disobedience is to lie (i. 6, ii. 4). To claim to possess the Father while denying the deity of the Son is to lie (ii. 22, 23). To claim to love God while hating the brethren is to lie also. These are the three black lies of the Epistle, moral, doctrinal and social. However loudly we may affirm ourselves to be Christian, our habitual sin, denial of Christ and selfish hatred expose us as the liars we are. Only holiness, faith and love can prove the truth of our claim to know, possess and love God... The real link between the three tests is seen to be the new birth. Faith, love and obedience are the natural growth which follows a birth from above, just as in iv. 13-16 faith and love were shown to be evidences of the mutual indwelling of God and His people."

Boice: "The idea of spiritual birth or being 'born of God' ties these verses together, for the concept occurs in verses 1 and 4, and it is from this that the realities involved in the three tests are developed. In John's understanding, the potential child of God is first made alive by God as a result of which he comes to believe on Christ, pursue righteousness, and love the brethren.

Which comes first, faith or life? The question is often asked in discussions of the differences between Calvinistic and Arminian theology, for it expresses the question of whether men choose God by deciding to believe on Christ or whether God first chooses men by making them alive in Christ, as a result of which they believe.... We believe and, in fact, do everything else of a spiritual nature precisely because we have first been made alive. If this were not the order, then the tests of life would have no value as indicators that an individual is truly God's child."

Clark: "This commentary has emphasized its notion of love as obedience because of the very widespread contemporary notion that love is an emotion, and that emphasis on law is legalism. This deterioration within the relatively conservative churches is probably

the result of the popularity of Freudian psychology. The earlier emphasis on volition has evaporated. Let the reader estimate the proportion of sermons on volition to those on emotion, and he will likely come up with a small fraction. Instead of a theocentric religion, egocentricity is common. Experience replaces Scripture and truth drowns in irrationality.

Now God's intelligible commands may be difficult. No one keeps them perfectly. But they are not oppressive. Laxity and lawlessness give an initial impression of freedom. Heroin produces highs. But it results in hellish lows. The commands of God are for our good. His yoke is easy and his burden is light."

TEXT: 1 JOHN 5:1-5

TITLE: HOW CAN I BE SURE? THE VICTORY OF FAITH!

BIG IDEA:

**THE VICTORY OF FAITH PROVES A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD --
TRUE BELIEVERS WILL DEMONSTRATE A NEW NATURE**

(See notes from previous message; some overlap in terms of verses covered.)

**I. (:1) OUR LOVING RELATIONSHIP TO THE BRETHREN
DEMONSTRATES OUR NEW NATURE**

A. Connection Between Faith and Love = the New Birth

"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God;"

Which comes first: faith or the new birth? Complex issue of the order of salvation.

B. Evidence of Our New Nature

C. Connection Between Love for God and Love for the Brethren

"and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him."

**II. (:2-5) OUR FAITHFULNESS TO GOD'S COMMAND TO LOVE
DEMONSTRATES OUR NEW NATURE**

A. Connection Between Love and Obedience

"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome."

Love makes the commandments light; cf. Ps. 19 -- God's Word is refreshing; we want His guidance and His standards. Contrast the enslaving, burdensome commands of the Pharisees. The problem comes when we prefer our will (= the way of the world) to God's will; what was intended for our good now seems cruel and restrictive.

B. Evidence of our New Nature

"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world"

Why mention the world here? Because the opposite of loving the brethren and of godliness is worldliness (cf. 2:15-17) = pride, hatred, unforgiving spirit, lying, ambition, lust, selfishness, jealousy, greed, fear, boasting.

That which is victorious over the world is that which has its origins in God; apart from the reality of new life implanted by God, no victory is possible.

C. Connection Between Faith and Victory = the New Birth

"and this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

Plummer: "Our creed is our spear and shield."

Peck: "Victory doesn't rest on a political party or candidate, it doesn't rest on the opinion polls, it doesn't rest on how big our church is. It rests on God's Son, Jesus, the one who conquered death. Our circumstances may seem to contradict that victory. But like John's friends, we need to be reminded to go back to our faith, to trust in God for the spiritual victory. When we go back to our faith we see that this bond of trust with Jesus enables us to see our circumstances for what they really are. You see, this faith isn't pie in the sky wishful thinking, but it's a sturdy and unshakable confidence placed in the risen son of God who conquered death. We get out from the weight of discouragement by remembering that, so we can once again trust in God for his spiritual victory."

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Trace the emphasis on the *new birth* throughout this sort epistle. Is it more important for John that we remember WHEN we were born again or that we can identify the CHARACTERISTICS of the new birth in our life right now? How might this impact the type of testimony we relate to others?
- 2) Why will Christians inevitably demonstrate their *love* for God the Father by loving their fellow brethren?
- 3) Do you view yourself as an "*overcomer of the world*"? Why or why not?
- 4) What type *faith* is John making reference to here?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ryrie: "The Gnostics denied that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ. John makes faith in this truth an essential test of being begotten of God."

Wuest: Re "*burdensome*" -- "The word speaks of that which is burdensome, severe, stern, violent, cruel, unsparing. Love for God makes the keeping of His commandments a delight rather than a burden."

Peck: "You see, John knows that disobedience to God's commands is a far more crushing weight than obedience is. Christians often talk about the cost of discipleship, how following Jesus Christ does indeed cost us. But people rarely talk about the cost of non-discipleship, that a Christian who chooses a path of disobedience to God chooses a much more painful and difficult path, because the weight of disobedience is a crushing weight. Dallas Willard writes, 'To depart from righteousness is to choose a life of crushing burdens, failures, and disappointments, a life caught in the toils of endless problems that are never really solved' (The Spirit of the Disciplines 2)."

Wuest: Re "*Overcometh*" in vs 5 -- "The verb implies a battle. Here the forces of the world-system of evil, the flesh (totally depraved nature), the devil, and the pernicious age-system ... with which the saint is surrounded, are all engaged in a battle against the saint, carrying on an incessant warfare, the purpose of which is to ruin his Christian life and testimony. The verb is in the present tense, 'is constantly overcoming the world.' It is a habit of life with the saint to gain victory over the world. To go down in defeat is the exception, not the rule."

Bruce: Ties the concept of overcoming to Christ's declaration in John 16:33 -- "By their faith in Jesus as the Son of God they are so united with Him that His victory becomes theirs; they conquer by His power... When '*the deceiver of the whole world*' launches his final and deadliest attack against them, they win the victory over him with the same weapons as their Master used: '*they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death*' (Rev. 12. 11). This victory over the world and every other hostile force was common Christian experience in the apostolic age."

Boice: "The third principle of victory is faithfulness, which is, indeed, always involved in the idea of '*faith*' as the Bible defines it. It is not just a past overcoming that John is thinking of therefore [one of the occurrences of this word is in the aorist tense], but also a present overcoming [the other two occurrences are present] through a continuing and persevering faith in Jesus Christ. This is the same sense in which the word is used in Christ's messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation, where the phrase '*to him who overcomes*' occurs seven times. There, as in John, it is not a superior class of Christians that is involved, nor those who do some great work as the world might evaluate it. It is rather those who remain faithful to the truth concerning Jesus as the Christ and who continue to serve Him.

This the Christians to whom John is writing have done through their faithfulness in view of the Gnostic threat, and this all who truly know the Lord will do also. Indeed, in the broadest view the faithfulness is not theirs, but rather his who has brought them to spiritual life and who, as a result, has also led them to faith in Christ, a pursuit of righteousness, and love for other Christians."

TEXT: 1 JOHN 5:6-10

TITLE: FAITH IS THE ANSWER

BIG IDEA:

OUR FAITH AND OUR ASSURANCE REST UPON THE HISTORICAL VALIDITY OF THE WITNESSES WHICH GOD HAS PROVIDED

I. (:6) FAITH IN GOD'S WITNESS OF THE INCARNATION

A. (:6a) Baptism of Jesus

- "This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ;"*
- divine proclamation of Christ as Son of God
 - the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for His ministry
 - the beginning of His public ministry

B. (:6b) Crucifixion of Jesus

- "not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood."*
- Completion of His Mission -- *"It is finished"*
 - Paid the full penalty for our sins

His Baptism and Death mark the two bookends of His earthly ministry. The Holy Spirit through the inspired testimony of the apostles continues to bear witness to the person and ministry of Christ.

Boice: "If this is the meaning of these words, then two circumstances arising out of the context support it. First, John is obviously stressing the historical groundings of the faith in this passage. And if that is so, then an emphasis upon the earthly ministry of Christ bounded in one sense and on one side by His baptism and on the other by His death is understandable. Moreover, at each of these God intervened in a miraculous way to bear a testimony to Him: by a voice at the baptism (*'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased,'* Matt. 3:17), and by various miracles at the time of the Crucifixion. The second supporting circumstance is that throughout the letter John has been opposing the Gnostics, who, significantly enough, are known to have taught that the historical Jesus was not the Christ but rather only a man on whom the Christ descended at the baptism but who was deserted by Him before His crucifixion. If this is in view, then John would be emphasizing that there is only one Jesus, the Christ, who was then present on earth not only in and through the baptism but in and through the Crucifixion as well."

II. (:7-10) FAITH IN GOD'S WITNESS BY HIS SPIRIT

A. (:7) Dominant Witness

- "And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth."*
- The record in the Scriptures (from the Spirit) speaking of the life and death and

resurrection of Christ -- especially focusing on His baptism and crucifixion.

Lenski: "The ultimate One bearing testimony, from whom all the apostles also derive their testimony, on whom their own faith also rests, is the Holy Spirit, none less."

B. (:8-10) Impressive Witness

1. (:8) Impressive Agreement of 3 Witnesses

"For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement."

2. (:9) Impressive Character of the Witness

"If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for the witness of God is this, that He has borne witness concerning His Son."

3. (:10) Blasphemy of Rejecting the Witness (which is self-authenticating)

"The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son."

Boice: "If a person does believe God, he has an internal assurance that what he has believed is trustworthy. This is the work of God's Spirit, the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*, as the Reformers termed it. It is in addition to the assurance provided on other grounds. On the other hand, if a person does not believe God, he makes Him out to be a liar; for in this way he eloquently testifies to his belief that God cannot be trusted. Here the heinous nature of unbelief is evident, for, as Stott writes, 'Unbelief is not a misfortune to be pitied; it is a sin to be deplored. Its sinfulness lies in the fact that it contradicts the word of the one true God and thus attributes falsehood to him.'"

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What are some other possibilities for the interpretation of "*by water and blood*"? What might the connection be to the water and blood that flowed out of the side of Jesus when he was pierced on the cross? What might the connection be to the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper? What might the connection be to the Word of God? How do you make a decision among many possible interpretations?

2) With regard to *the witness of the Spirit*, is the emphasis on the Spirit communicating internally with our spirit or on the Spirit speaking through the inspired Word of God or ...? In what way does the Spirit of God contribute to our assurance of salvation?

3) What is the significance of three harmonious witnesses? How powerful would such testimony be in a court of law? How important is the credibility of the witnesses? How

does John establish the credibility of these witnesses? What type of conflicting testimony might be given by the false teachers?

4) Have we ever accused non-believers of in essence calling God a liar? Why not? Do you think such an approach would be appropriate?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Boice: "John does three things in this passage. First, he marshalls three witnesses to Jesus in which the testimony of the Father is found. Second, he contrasts the testimony of men with God's testimony, stressing that God's testimony is to be believed and trusted. Third, he sums up God's testimony and joins it to a final statement of his purpose in writing the letter."

Wuest: "Paul in Romans 8:16 tells us that the Holy Spirit bears testimony in connection with our human spirits as energized by the Holy Spirit that we are children of God. That is, our human spirit, energized by the Holy Spirit, gives us the consciousness that we as believers are children of God."

Findlay: "'Life' appears everywhere in St John as a gift, not an acquisition. Faith accordingly is a grace rather than a virtue; it is a yielding to God's power, rather than the exerting of our own. It is not so much that we apprehend Christ; He apprehends us, -- our souls are laid hold of and possessed by the truth concerning Him. Our part is but to receive God's bounty pressed upon us in Christ; it is merely to consent to the strong purpose of His love, to allow Him (as St Paul puts it) to '*work in us to will and to work, on behalf of His good pleasure*' (Phil. 2:13). As this operation proceeds and the truth concerning Christ takes practical possession of our nature, the conviction that we have eternal life in Him becomes increasingly settled and firm. **Rothe** aptly says upon this passage: 'Faith is not a mere witness on the man's part to the Object of his faith; it is a witness which the man receives from that Object . . . In its first beginnings faith is, no doubt, mainly the acceptance of testimony from without; but the element of trust involved in this acceptance includes the beginning of an inner experience of that which is believed. This trust arises from the attraction which the Object of our faith has exercised upon us; it rests on the consciousness of a vital connexion between ourselves and that Object. In the measure in which we accept the Divine witness, our inner susceptibility to its working increases, and thus there is formed in us a certainty of faith which rises unassailable above all scepticism.'

The language of St John in this last chapter of his Epistle breathes the force of spiritual conviction raised to its highest potency. For him perfect love has now cast out fear, and perfect faith has banished every shadow of doubt. '*Believing on the name of the Son of God,*' he '*knows that he has eternal life*' (ver. 13). With him the transcendental has become the experimental, and no breach is left any more between them."

Stott: "The results of belief and disbelief are starkly contrasted. The believer hath the witness in himself, or *'in his own heart'* (NEB). That is, he is given a yet deeper assurance by the inward witness of the Spirit that he was right to trust in Christ, a striking example of the spiritual principle that *'to everyone who has will more be given'* (Mt. xxv. 29; Lk. xix. 26, RSV; cf. Mk. iv. 25). Testimony is thus both the cause and the consequence of belief, and belief is a stepping-stone between God's first and further testimony. The unbeliever, on the other hand, who *'has not believed'* (RSV, the perfect tense indicating a past 'crisis of choice'--Westcott), forfeits the possibility of receiving any further testimony from God because he has rejected the first and in so doing hath made him a liar. Unbelief is not a misfortune to be pitied; it is a sin to be deplored. Its sinfulness lies in the fact that it contradicts the word of the one true God and thus attributes falsehood to Him. Another example of *'making God a liar'* is to be found in i. 10."

Stedman: "Now, is not God more dependable than man? That is John's argument. If you will take the word of a stranger and act on it, can you not believe the Word of God, especially when he has caused the testimony to be written down by the eyewitnesses of these events? In addition, when faith is exercised on the basis of that objective testimony, there is given a confirmation of the Spirit within which makes it wholly believable. Can you not exercise faith on that basis?"

'Well,' John says, 'if you refuse to do that, then you are treating God as though he were a liar.' You insult God if you do not believe the record he has given.

Suppose someone should come up to you and you would make to them some statement of fact, and they would say to you, 'Well, you know, I'm trying to believe you.' How would you regard that? Would you not take that as an insult? Would you not feel that they were definitely questioning your integrity, your character? If they say, 'I wish I could believe what you say,' would you not say, 'What do you mean? Why can't you believe what I say? Do you think I'm a liar?' How much greater cause has God to say that to us when he has given us the record, indelibly engraved in history, and confirmed by the witness of the Spirit within? Yet men have the temerity to say to him, 'Oh, I'm trying to believe. I wish I could believe. Oh, that I could convince myself that this is true!'"

TEXT: 1 JOHN 5:11-13

TITLE: NO CHRIST . . . NO LIFE

BIG IDEA:

OUR NEW NATURE IS THE ASSURANCE OF THE POSSESSION OF THE SON HIMSELF -- THUS ETERNAL LIFE

I. (:11) ETERNAL LIFE IS IN THE SON

"And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son."

Do we have a personal relationship with God the Son?
We should have assurance of our eternal life.

II. (:12) POSSESSION OF ETERNAL LIFE IS DETERMINED BY OUR RESPONSE TO THE SON

"He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life."

Do we have a personal relationship with God the Son?
We should have assurance of our eternal life.

III. (:13) THEME OF EPISTLE: GOD WANTS ALL BELIEVERS IN HIS SON TO HAVE ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE

"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life."

Do we have a personal relationship with God the Son?
We should have assurance of our eternal life.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What is the greatest gift we have ever given to someone else? How did we feel when they opened up the present or rejoiced over the gift? How does God feel about His gift of eternal life to us? What expressions in this epistle point to this "gift" aspect of our salvation?

2) Do we sometimes overcomplicate the gospel message when we present God's gracious offer of salvation to others? How does this passage help us maintain the

simplicity of the gospel?

3) What does this passage contribute to the hypothetical smokescreen objection of: "What about the heathen in Africa who have never heard the gospel? God wouldn't send them to hell without a chance would He?"

4) Contrast the theme of this Epistle with the theme of John's Gospel. What parallels and differences do you see?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stedman: "Here is the testimony, he says. The whole point of the matter is that God has given to man the thing he lacks, eternal life. Not life in quantity, although it does include that -- it is endless life -- but primarily life in quality. Life abundant, life exciting. Life that is adventurous, full, meaningful, relevant, all these much-abused terms that are so widely used today. Life that is lived to the fullest, that is God's gift to man. He who has the Son has life, because the Son is life. That is the whole point of this letter..."

This is the testimony. God has given us something, and it is wrapped up in a person, the Son of God. If you have received the Son, you have his life -- manifested, of course, by the things John has been talking about in this letter: righteousness, truth, and love. If you have not received the Son of God, no matter how earnest you are, no matter how devoted you have been, no matter how religiously intent you have been, seeking to do everything you could think of to please God, if you do not have the Son, you do not have life. That is the issue, is it not? Either you have him, or you do not have him; either you know Jesus Christ, or you do not know him. There is no middle ground, it is one or the other."

Hoke: Re vs. 13 -- "The whole reason John has been writing is so we may know that we have eternal life. Notice that John did not say that he was writing so that we may hope we have eternal life. He said that he was writing so that we could know so. In other words, we can know with absolute certainty that we have eternal life. It is not a hope so endeavor. It is a know so certainty."

Stott: "Three important truths are taught in these verses about eternal life. First, it is not a prize which we have earned, but an undeserved gift. Secondly, it is found in Christ, so that, in order to give us life, God both gave and gives us His Son. Thirdly, this gift of life in Christ is a present possession. True, it is further described as eternal, *aionios*, which means literally 'belonging to the age', i.e. the age to come. But since the age to come has broken into this present age, the life of the age to come, namely 'eternal life', can be received and enjoyed here and now."

Stott: Re vs. 13 -- "The Gospel was written for unbelievers, that they might read the

testimony of God to His Son, believe in the Son to whom the testimony pointed, and thus receive life through faith. The Epistle, on the other hand, was written for believers. John's desire for them is not that they may believe and receive, but that having believed, they may know that they have received, and therefore continue to have (present), eternal life. That ye may know (*eidete*) means, both in word and tense, not that they may gradually grow in assurance, but that they may possess here and now a present certainty of the life they have received in Christ. They had been unsettled by the false teachers and become unsure of their spiritual state. Throughout the Epistle John has been giving them criteria (doctrinal, moral, social) by which to test themselves and others. His purpose is to establish their assurance. *'This letter is to assure you that you have eternal life'* (NEB).

Putting together the purposes of Gospel and Epistle, John's purpose is in four stages, that his readers should hear, hearing should believe, believing should live, and living should know. His emphasis is important because it is common today to decry any claim to assurance of salvation, to dismiss it as presumptuous, and to affirm that no certainty is possible on this side of death. But certainty and humility do not exclude one another. If God's revealed purpose is not only that we should hear, believe and live, but also that we should know, presumptuousness lies in doubting His word, not in trusting it."

Findlay: "St John recognizes the difference, which every pastor knows who is exercised in the care of Christian souls, between faith and the assurance of faith... The whole letter is written to deepen the sense of security in the hearts of faithful Christian men, to promote the inward peace and firm confidence toward God which are essential to vigorous growth and sustained activity in the spiritual life. Such assurance belongs of right to all those *'who believe on the name of the Son of God.'* But they do not all possess it. Writing to the intent his readers *'may know that they have eternal life,'* he supposed that some of them, though they have eternal life in virtue of their faith, do not certainly know this: they are not sure of their salvation; they fail to realize their possessions in Christ, and entertain some needless misgiving or unworthy fear; they have a true faith, but not *'the full assurance of faith.'* Theirs is a restless, disquieted faith, shadowed with doubt and disturbed by alarms, sensitive to the atmosphere of the unbelieving world around them. The case of doubting Thomas amongst the Apostles, in whom St John shows a peculiar interest in his Gospel, illustrates the turn of mind.

The condition the Apostle indicates is one familiar now as then; there is no better tonic for it than St John administers in the Epistle. Sanguine and buoyant natures mistake this hesitant disposition; they are always sure of themselves (Whether right or wrong), and know exactly what they believe and intend. But St John has felt the flagging pulse of believers whose faith once beat high and strong; he has marked the downcast face and troubled look of men daunted by persecution or browbeaten by loud argument; he knows that some of his readers, in spite of themselves, are bewildered in the mazes of theosophy and the flashing sword-play of dialectic. We should be mistaken to suppose that the souls of the martyrs never quaked, that the confessors of Jesus in the first ages were always clear in their convictions and courageous in their testimony, and their reasonings at all times as simple and sure as those that in some classic instance have been transmitted to us. *'Out of weakness they were made strong,'* and they *'waxed valiant in the fight'* on which they entered oftentimes with fearful

hearts. Those who prove the bravest might confess to moods of despondency and moments when panic seized them; their worst battle had been with their own cowardice. The firmest believers may have been on occasion forgetful of things they well knew, and tempted to abandon positions of which, in their right minds, they were perfectly assured. Such dangers were incessant amidst the turmoil and stress of the Church's warfare in the Apostolic times. How needful that it should hear, sounding on from one generation to another, the mighty cry of Jesus out of the midst of the struggle, *'Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world!'*"

TEXT: 1 JOHN 5:14-17

TITLE: QUALIFIED CONFIDENCE IN PRAYER

BIG IDEA:

THE ASSURANCE OF A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD BRINGS QUALIFIED CONFIDENCE THAT GOD WILL ANSWER OUR PRAYERS

INTRODUCTION:

- Importance of Prayer
- Why doesn't God always answer our prayers?

I. (:14-15) THE EXTENT AND LIMITATION OF OUR CONFIDENCE THAT GOD WILL ANSWER OUR PRAYERS

A. (:14) The Limitation of Our Confidence

"And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."

This word "*boldness*" or "*confidence*" has been used previously in the Epistle:

- in conjunction with judgment -- 2:28; 4:17
- in conjunction with prayer -- here and 3:21,22

Wuest: "'Ask' is *aiteo*, 'to ask for something to be given.' It is in the middle voice in which the person acting in the verb does so in his own interest. It is in the present subjunctive, which speaks of continuous action. Thus, the total idea is, 'if we keep on asking for something for ourselves.'"

Hoke: " John tells us that we can have confidence when we pray. Who wouldn't like to have confidence in prayer? I suppose that the reason why we do not pray more boldly is because we lack this confidence in prayer. But we can have confidence. We can have confidence if we understand the basis upon which God answers prayer."

Ryrie: "The limitation is gracious because His will is always best for His children."

B. (:15) The Extent of Our Confidence

"And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him."

Prayer involves petition. It is not just some abstract cry of pain to some unknown being. We should expect a hearing and we should expect God to answer.

Stedman: "the certainty of hearing and the certainty of having"

II. (:16-17) THE EXTENT AND LIMITATION OF OUR INTERCESSION FOR THE SINS OF OTHERS

A. (:16a) The Limitation of Our Intercession

"If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death"

B. (:16b) The Extent of Our Intercession

"he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death."

C. (:16c-17) The Classification of Sins

1. *"There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this."*

2. *"All unrighteousness is sin"*

Just because John has singled out a *"sin unto death"* let's not minimize the fact that all unrighteousness is sin.

Plummer: "The condition of Divine sonship is incompatible, not merely with sin unto death, but with sin of any description."

3. *"and there is a sin not leading to death."*

Two major interpretations:

1) sin unto death refers to a genuine believer who is judged by God with physical death on account of persistence in some type of willful sin
cf. I Cor. 5;

Problem: the death spoken of would have to be physical death; the rest of the context of the epistle talking about spiritual life and death distinctions

2) sin unto death refers to the apostasy of a professing believer (who was never genuinely saved) -- like the false teachers in this context in 1 John;

Problem: individual called a *"brother"* -- but he would be claiming to be a brother and would appear so to us

Other people suggest:

- Catholic interpretation: difference between mortal and lesser sins
- blasphemy against the Holy Spirit; the unpardonable sin

Stedman: "Now do not let curiosity over this mortal sin (or rather, much better, 'the sin unto death'), keep you from seeing the relationship of these verses to what he has just said. These two verses are an illustration of a request that is in the will of God, as contrasted with one that is not in the will of God. That is what he has just been talking about, urging us to pray only concerning that which is the will of God. He then gives us these two illustrations, one which is in the will of God, one which is not. The 'sin which is not unto death' is the kind which permits a concerned brother to ask God for deliverance from that sin for an erring brother and the will of God is to grant that request. The 'sin which is unto death' is the kind to which God has already determined upon a certain response and no prayer is going to change his mind. Therefore, it is useless to pray. That is why John gives this illustration."

Findlay: "The Apostle has made here the exception to the gracious rule '*Ask and it shall be given you,*' which truth requires, -- an exception which probably his own deep experience of life of prayer had compelled him to admit. But he gives us no criterion of the sin that is beyond forgiveness; he leaves it wrapped in the mysteries which surround the thrones of eternal judgement."

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What would be some examples in our own prayer life of requests made to God that were not in accordance with His will?
- 2) What are some specific answers to our prayers that God has used to greatly encourage our family?
- 3) How does the world seek to minimize sin by using all types of other more palatable labels to describe various aspects of unrighteousness?
- 4) Are we sensitive to ways in which our brother might be committing sin? Do we commit ourselves to intercede to God on his behalf or do we resort to gossip among other Christians? What type of compassion do we show directed towards his recovery?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Hoke: " But we must not allow the debate over what is the exact nature of these sins to deflect us from the real point John is making here. The point is that we should be engaged in prayer for one another. We should be involved in intercessory prayer. We are interconnected in the church of Jesus Christ. We are one body. We are interrelated in such a way that one life impacts another. What you do makes a difference to someone else. What they do makes a difference to you. And so, we must never see ourselves as independent agents. We must see ourselves as dependent upon each other. That is why we need to pray for one another. That is why, when we see someone struggling with sin, we need to pray that God would grant forgiveness. That is the real point John is making here. This is a practical illustration of the need to put prayer into practice by praying for one another."

Stedman: " Within the will of God there are tremendous things, vast numbers of gifts, that he has provided for his own. The will of God includes all that we need. All that we really want is available to us and to our loved ones and friends within the will of God. There is nothing we need to pray for outside of it. Outside are only things that harm, injure and destroy us."

Perhaps we do not know exactly whether a request is the will of God for us or not, and the examples of Scripture make clear that it is not wrong to ask even for these things. But we must then always add, as Jesus himself added in the Garden of Gethsemane, 'nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done' {Luke 22:42 KJV}, for prayer is designed only to obtain that which is within the will of God. Thus, John says, that if you know that what you are asking for is within the will of God, if you have found a promise of God in Scripture, or, in seeking the mind of God there has come a deep and settled conviction in your heart from the Spirit of God that something is the will of God, then, knowing that this is the will of God you ask for it, you know that he hears. God always hears every prayer that is voiced within the boundaries of his will. This is the first certainty that forms the basis of prayer -- we know we are heard.

Jesus could say, "I thank you, Father, that you always hear me" {cf, John 11:42}, because everything he did lay within the boundaries of the will of God.

That brings us then to the second certainty of prayer, the certainty of having: 'If we know that he hears us,' John says, 'then we know that we have obtained the request that we made of him.' Think of that! If we know it is according to his will, then we know it is heard, and if we know it is heard, we know that we have it. God has already granted the request. In other words, God never says 'No,' except to that which lies outside his will. As Paul says to the Corinthians, 'All the promises of God in him [Christ] are yea, and Amen,' {cf, 2 Cor 1:20}. There are no negatives, it is all 'yea and Amen.' Is that not a wonderful thing? Do you dare to believe that? 'No good thing will he withhold from him who walks uprightly,' {cf, Psa 84:11}."

Wuest: Re "*according to His will*" -- "does not mean that we should first ascertain His will and then pray, but that we should pray with the proviso, express or implicit, 'If it be thy will.' Matthew 26:39 is the model prayer."

Boice: Re 4 possible interpretations of the "*sin unto death*" --

- 1) The first view is that John is referring to some particularly heinous sin, which God, so we are told, will not pardon...
- 2) A second view, supported in part by the concerns of this letter, is that John is thinking of what we would call apostasy...
- 3) A third view is that John is speaking of that '*blasphemy against the Spirit*,' about which Jesus warned His disciples. (Matt. 12) ...
- 4) The fact that none of the other explanations is entirely satisfactory leads one to wonder whether John may not be speaking just of physical death inflicted on a Christian by God as a result of a Christian's persisting in some deliberate sin. Certainly there are examples of such judgments. Ananias and Sapphira are two (Acts 5:1-11). A number of references in 1 Corinthians suggest others (5:5; 11:30). In speaking of the ministry

of intercession John may therefore be saying that in some cases God will not turn back a physical judgment upon one of His disobedient children, no matter how much another Christian prays. So he does not say that prayer must be made in such a situation, although, we note, he does not forbid it.

TEXT: 1 JOHN 5:18-21

TITLE: *SOLID CONVICTIONS REGARDING SPIRITUAL VICTORY*

BIG IDEA:

THE ASSURANCE OF A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD BRINGS 3 SOLID CONVICTIONS REGARDING SPIRITUAL VICTORY

INTRODUCTION:

Key phrase: *"We know"*

Stedman: " Perhaps the most striking thing about the close of First John is the threefold occurrence of the phrase we know in the last three verses. Verses 18, 19, and 20 of the fifth chapter all begin with those words, we know. That is a phrase that has a bite to it in these days when we are told that we cannot know anything for sure. There is a quiet ring of assurance about it; especially when you discover that the apostle uses a word in the original Greek which refers not to knowledge gained by experience, but to an inward learning process. It is precisely that kind of knowledge to which the Apostle Paul refers in First Corinthians 2 when he speaks of a hidden wisdom from God which is not available to the world in general but which is imparted to those who are taught by the Spirit of God. That is the kind of knowledge John is talking about here."

I. (:18) THE SOLID CONVICTION OF THE PERSEVERANCE AND PRESERVATION OF THE SAINTS

A. The Perseverance of the Saints

"We know that no one who is born of God sins"

Conversion involves a changed life. There will be occasional sin; but not persistent, habitual sin as the pattern of one's life. The inward new nature imparted by God will show itself in the form of righteousness.

B. The Preservation of the Saints

"but He who was born of God keeps him and the evil one does not touch him."

Reference is to Christ as the one who keeps believers from the bondage of Satan.

Stedman: John says that the stronger One has now come and the bonds of the strong man have been broken and he can never repossess the Christian. That is an encouraging word, is it not? The enemy can frighten us, as he often does. He can harass us, he can threaten us, he can make us believe that we are in his power and that we have to do certain things that are wrong. He can create desires and passions within us that are so strong that we think we must yield to them. But that is a lie, because he is a liar. We do not have to yield to them. He can lure us, he can deceive us, as we have seen, he can even temporarily derail us, and make us fall, but the great declaration of this Scripture is, the devil can never make you sin! Once you know Jesus Christ, the devil can never

again make you sin. There is never any excuse for giving in because it is all bluster on his part, all a bluff. He is trying to make you believe that you must sin, but you do not have to."

II. (:19) THE SOLID CONVICTION OF OUR GODLY FAMILY IDENTITY

A. We are in God's Camp

"We know that we are of God"

B. The World is in Satan's Camp

"and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one"

Gal. 1:4; Eph. 5:16; Col. 1:13; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; John 12:31; 14:30; Heb. 2:14 (**Piper**)

III. (:20) THE SOLID CONVICTION OF SPIRALING GROWTH IN OUR ASSURANCE OF A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

A. Historical Certainties

"And we know that the Son of God has come"

Findlay: *"The world lieth in the Evil One":* so it was, beyond question, in the Apostle's day, under the empire of Tiberius, of Nero, and Domitian; and such is the case to a very large extent at this modern date. *'But (de) the Son of God is come!'* Against all the evils and miseries of the time, against the crimes and ruin of the ages as against our personal guilt and impotence, there is that one fact to set; but it is sufficient. He has come to *'destroy the works of the Devil,'* to *'root out every plant which our heavenly Father had not planted';* and Christ is doing this, through the hands of His servants, upon a wider scale and with more fruitful and visible results than ever before. He will not fail nor be discouraged until the work of uprooting and replanting is complete."

B. Spiritual Understanding

"and has given us understanding"

C. Personal Relationship

"in order that we might know Him who is true"

D. Union with Christ

"and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ"

E. Growing Assurance of a Relationship with God and Eternal Life

"This is the true God and eternal life."

Boice: *"True"* refers to that which is authentic as opposed to that which is false, the ultimate reality as opposed to that which is merely its shadow. In John's day the Gnostic teachers had made much of their supposed knowledge of God, but it is John's contention that apart from the work of the Christ of history, who reveals God, such

knowledge is not knowledge at all. At least it is not knowledge of the real God. Only through the real Son of God is the real God known."

(:21) CLOSING WARNING: GUARD AGAINST IDOLATRY

"Little children, guard yourselves from idols."

Peck: "The problem of idols is essentially a problem of faithfulness. When we come to know Christ personally we enter into a relationship of faithfulness, where he promises to stay with us, walk with us, forgive our sins, and where we promise to walk with him, obey him, and trust him. When we embrace an idol--a god substitute--we are unfaithful to that promise, like a spouse who breaks a marriage vow. The main idols Christians struggle with in our culture today are the idols of materialism, success, adventure, leisure, and comfort."

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) In what sense does God the Son keep His own and protect us from the clutches of the evil one? What other NT verses speak to this concept?
- 2) What are some of the implications of the fact stated in vs. 19 that true believers "*are of God*"? cf. vs. 20 -- "*we are in Him who is true*"?
- 3) How does our confidence in the Second Coming of the Son of God stand on the shoulders of our understanding of the historical details and veracity of His First Coming?
- 4) Why does John introduce the subject of idolatry as part of his concluding exhortation? Doesn't this sound rather abrupt and out of place? What is the connection to the subject matter of the epistle? Should we be thinking more in terms of material idols or of false concepts of God that are opposed to the truth? How does idolatry impact our ability to walk in righteousness?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Peck: "This person who's entered into the spiritual journey is now kept safe by God, protected from slipping back into the way they lived before. Because of this unceasing, constant protection, the evil one can't 'harm' or literally 'touch' the true child of God. Sure we can be harassed and tempted, but once we've been born of God, God puts a 'hands off' sign on our lives that not even Satan himself can disobey. The most he can do is harass us, gaining access into our lives only by our own invitation through our own disobedience, but he can't grab us against our will or tear us away from the God

who protects us. This constant protection and "hands off" sign on our lives gives us space to grow, and that's really what John is talking about here, the growth focused life. The spiritual journey is a life of constant progress into spiritual maturity. We will never reach a point in our spiritual journey when we arrive and no longer need to press forward to grow."

Findlay: "Those who know anything practically about the Christian religion, know that it means holiness in sinful men, that it makes for goodness and righteousness and truth in every possible way, that the Gospel assimilates us to its Author just so far as we obey it. And with the moral history of the world behind us, we know that no other force has wrought for the cleansing and uplifting of our common nature like this. No other agency or system that can be named, has produced the high and thorough goodness, the love to God and man, the purity of heart, the generosity, the humbleness and patience, the moral energy and courage, which *'our faith'* can summon into court on its behalf. Under no other order of life have these excellences been forthcoming in anything to compare with the quantity and quality in which they have been found amongst the disciples of Jesus Christ. Its host of saints, of all lands and times, are the testimonial of the Gospel, -- its credentials *'written not with ink'* nor *'on tables of stone,'* but *'on hearts of flesh'* and *'by the Spirit of the living God'* (2 Cor. 3:1-3). This is the evidence which Christ Himself proposed to give of the truth of His doctrine; by it He invites the world to judge concerning His claims. The verdict will be awaited in confidence by those who have the earnest of it in themselves."

Stedman: "Notice how many times the word, *'true'* occurs: *'to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true... This is the true God and eternal life.'* The word true is actually *'reality.'* Here is reality. Here is the great rock upon which everything rests. Our faith does not rest upon men's guesses, not upon those erudite explorations of human knowledge called philosophy; not on clever ideas, or on untested theories. It rests solidly upon the great events of God's actions in history. It rests on facts.

There is an historical process here. *'The Son of God came,'* John says, we saw him, we felt him, we lived with him. We can testify in every possible way that the Son of God came in the historical process of time. Further, the practical result of that is, *'he gave us a new understanding.'* We began to see life as it really is. He stripped it of its veils, took away its illusions, dispelled the mists and vagueness which cause men to grope through life like blind men. He clarified life, he gave us an understanding, he told us what was true. The glorious privilege that follows is, *'we are in him who is true.'* We not only know him, we live in him. We are part of his life. We share his thinking, we have the mind of Christ."

Boice: "According to John's book, and indeed to the entire Word of God, anything that detracts from Christ is idolatrous, for He is the true God, the true revelation of the Father, the true atonement for sin, the true bread, the true vine. He is the beginning and end of all true religion. Consequently, to know Him is to know the true God and eternal life."

Marshall: "If mankind is divided into these two camps, how is it possible for a person to find his way from one to the other? How could the church ever come into existence in a world that lies under the control of Satan? John's third great declaration gives the answer. God's Son -- none other than Jesus -- has come into the world. He has brought us understanding of the truth so that we may know the One who is true, namely God. It is interesting that here the task of Jesus is clearly presented as that of bringing knowledge through which we can be saved. Such a conception of the work of Jesus could be misunderstood in terms of Gnosticism, the ancient religion which claimed that salvation comes through knowledge of the truths brought by the Revealer. But the knowledge of which John speaks is different from that offered by Gnosticism. Throughout this Epistle he has insisted on the real incarnation of the Son of God, whereas the Gnostics would only allow that the Son of God *seemed* to be united with Jesus. Moreover, John has insisted on the death of Jesus to make an atoning sacrifice for our sins, whereas the Gnostics understood man's need in terms of ignorance rather than of sin, and hence saw no need for atonement. Finally, John insists on the need for belief in Jesus, whereas faith was in effect replaced by knowledge in Gnostic types of religion. Despite these differences from Gnosticism, however, it remains true that Christianity is a religion based on revelation. It is this important element which is expressed here. Of himself man cannot find the way to God and eternal life; he needs a revelation from God himself. So God has sent his Son to reveal the truth."

Stott: "Not only do we know Him; we are also *in him*. Unlike the world who are '*in the evil one*', we are in God, sharing His very life, as well as '*of God*' (19), having derived our spiritual being from Him. Moreover, we are *in his Son Jesus Christ*... It is by being in his Son Jesus Christ that we are in him that is true. In this way the first two sentences of verse 20 teach the necessity of the mediation of Jesus for both the knowledge of God and communion with God. We know Him that is true only because the Son of God is come and has given us understanding; we are in Him that is true only because we are in His Son Jesus Christ. We cannot be in the Father without being in the Son, nor in the Son without being in the Father (cf. ii. 22, 23 and e.g. 1 Thes. i. 1). Our Lord is here at the end of the Epistle significantly given His full title as He was at the beginning (i. 3). He is *Jesus* the man, *Christ* the Messiah, God's eternal *Son*."

APPENDIX: NT WORD STUDY OF FELLOWSHIP

I. NT Usage

classified under the English translation (per *Young's Concordance*)

1) "communication"

Philemon 6 *"that the **communication** of thy faith"*

- a) fellowship is important enough to be a matter of prayer
- b) fellowship may be in the realm of faith
- c) we desire fellowship to be effective
- d) fellowship can be enhanced through knowledge

2) "communion" -- 4 references

1 Cor. 10:16 *"Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a **sharing** in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a **sharing** in the body of Christ?"*

- a) speaking of fellowship with Christ -- especially in His death
- b) The Lord's Supper (communion) is a time of fellowship

2 Cor. 6:14 *"Do not be bound together with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness? Or what **fellowship** has light with darkness?"*

- a) a synonym for fellowship is partnership; bound together; harmony
- b) fellowship speaks of the relation between two things and of having something in common
- c) the opposite of fellowship would be two things that are mutually exclusive
- d) believers should enjoy fellowship together

2 Cor. 13:14 *"the **fellowship** of the Holy Spirit be with you all"*

- a) fellowship is promoted by the Holy Spirit
- b) a special relationship and communion with the Holy Spirit should be the universal experience of all believers

3) "distribution"

2 Cor. 9:13 *"for the liberality of your **contribution** to them and to all"*

- a) fellowship is here expressed by a sharing of funds with others
- b) there can be different degrees of this sharing
- c) obedience to your confession of faith is demonstrated by such giving
- d) the end result of such fellowship is glory to God

4) "fellowship" -- 12 refs.

Acts 2:42 *"and they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to **fellowship** and to the breaking of bread and to prayer"*

- a) fellowship is one of the fundamentals of Christian life and growth
- b) this fellowship could involve partnership in ministry opportunities; providing for one another's physical needs; encouraging one another spiritually; etc.

1 Cor. 1:9 *"God is faithful, through whom you were called into **fellowship** with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord"*

- a) involves fellowship with God through Christ
- b) God took the initiative to call me into this fellowship

2 Cor. 8:4 *"begging us with much entreaty for the favour of **participation** in the support of the saints"*

- a) used here again in the context of giving
- b) a privilege that we should be begging to participate in

Gal. 2:9 *"James, Peter, and John gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of **fellowship**"*

- a) involves a sharing in the work of the gospel -- backing them, encouraging them, supporting them

Ephes. 3:9 *"and to bring to light what is the **administration** of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things"*

- a) involves God's work in accordance with His overall plan

Phil. 1:5 *"in view of your **participation** in the gospel from the first day until now"*

- a) fellowship should be a continual practice -- includes initial and ongoing faith
- b) included their financial support of Paul

Phil. 2:1 *"if there is any **fellowship** of the Spirit"*

- a) apart from the fellowship of the Spirit unity and humility would not be realized as Christians
- b) the results of fellowship are given in vs. 2: *"being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose"*
- c) fellowship is produced by the Holy Spirit

Phil. 3:10 *"that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the **fellowship** of His sufferings, being conformed to His death"*

- a) being a partaker of Christ's sufferings, being involved in them; taking up our cross daily and identifying with Christ
- b) such suffering for Christ (fellowship) should bring about joy

1 John 1:3 *"that you also may have **fellowship** with us and indeed our **fellowship** is with the Father and with the Son"*

1 John 1:6 *"If we say that we have **fellowship** with Him and walk in darkness we lie and do not practice the truth"*

1 John 1:7 *"but if we walk in the light as He himself is in the light, we have **fellowship** with one another and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin"*

II. Greek Reference Books:

1) Arndt and Gingrich Greek Lexicon

- a) association, communion, fellowship, close relationship; hence a favorite expression for the marital relationship as the most intimate between human beings; a sharing in the life of another person
- b) generosity, fellow-feeling, altruism
- c) gift, contribution -- sign of fellowship; proof of brotherly unity
- d) participation, sharing

2) Unger's Bible Dictionary

you need like purposes and feelings in order to have fellowship

3) Colin Brown -- *Dictionary of NT Theology*

- a) in the Greek and Hellenistic world *koinonia* was a term which meant the evident, unbroken fellowship between the gods and men; but the word was not used in the LXX in this way
- b) it also denoted the close union and brotherly bond between men
- c) in the LXX this word group occurs almost exclusively in the later writings (Eccl., Prov., Wis.) to translate Hebrew root *habar* (= unite, join together)
- d) the unanimity and unity brought about by the Spirit

4) Dr. James Boyer -- Grace Seminary

an abstract noun, denotes participation, sharing; emphasis may be on either giving or receiving

- a) the share one has in anything; the state of being a participant in anything (Phil. 3:10)
- b) the act of sharing; often in the sense of contributing to physical needs (2 Cor. 8:4)

Fellowship refers to joint participation in a common life with God and fellow Christians. "To have fellowship" = to being saved. The popular usage that fellowship is "enjoying one's company" or "feeling comfortable with someone" is never suggested by the Greek word. The basic thrust of the word is to point to a common possession.

5) *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia*

Fellowship exists when there is community. This was an essential strength of the early Christians. Although a minority movement, they shared the strength of belonging to each other and to God.

APPENDIX: CONCEPT OF REPENTANCE

CONTEXT IN 1 JOHN:

How can we have assurance of Eternal Life? One way is by walking in the Light = the Test of Fellowship. How do we walk in the Light? One way = to take sin seriously. How do we take sin seriously? One way is to make it our practice to continue to confess our sins on an ongoing basis as the Holy Spirit convicts us.

What is the relationship between this confession of sin and Repentance?

SIGNIFICANCE:

We need to study the doctrine of Repentance since many contemporary Christian evangelists have watered down the concept so much that the Christians of early America would never recognize it. Your view of repentance lies at the heart of the whole controversy over the issue that has been called "Lordship Salvation." What is involved in your initial spiritual commitment in receiving the gospel message of salvation? In fact what is the essence itself of this gospel message?

Hodges' book *The Gospel Under Siege* takes the position that if you don't adopt his view you fall under the condemnation of Galatians chapter 1 of preaching a perverted gospel. They're fighting words. But we don't want to fight. We want to understand. Your view of repentance as well as your view of 1 John will determine where you stand on this issue. The two subjects -- Lordship Salvation and 1 John -- are directly tied together ... and the concept of repentance lies at the crux of the problem.

THE IMPORTANCE OF REPENTANCE

There are only 2 conditions set forth in the Scriptures for salvation:

- 1) Repentance = turning from sin (by changing your mind about sin in a decisive way that indicates commitment or willingness to change your actions)
- 2) Faith = turning towards God by trusting Christ

These are really two flip sides of the same coin. Where you find genuine faith you will always find genuine repentance; where you find genuine repentance you will always find genuine faith. When the Scriptures speak of only one condition (i.e. faith), the other flip side is not being denied but assumed.

Acts 16:30-31 -- "*What must I do to be saved?*" Answer: "*Believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.*" -- This does not mean that repentance is unnecessary, but rather that it is assumed since the whole conversion process is being lumped under the umbrella of the concept of faith and the key word "*Believe.*" The apostle Peter would have rejected a gospel message that promises: "No need to repent ... just believe!"

We use this concept of a part representing the whole all the time: cf. speaking of

regeneration, justification, adoption, etc. -- these are all specific works of God occurring simultaneously at the moment God saves us. They are not precisely interchangeable since they have a different point of emphasis and perspective ... but any of these words could be used by itself as a synonym to speak of the entire work of salvation.

Dr. Charles Ryrie's position is very simple: stated in his book *Balancing the Christian Life* -- "The concept of repentance which brings eternal life is a change of mind about Jesus Christ." Before you didn't think Christ was God, but you changed your mind and recognize him now as God. This view of repentance has no sinward orientation. It doesn't involve repenting from sin. Ryrie takes this position because he does not believe that conversion necessarily leads to a changed life -- rather it leads to the potential for a changed life. Therefore, if someone has continued on in their sins for 10 years after their profession of faith, Ryrie would not ask them to question their assurance of salvation based on their failure to meet the test of "Taking Sin Seriously" found in 1 John. Instead he would counsel them on how they need to dedicate their lives to Christ, commit themselves to His Lordship and grow as Christians so they don't miss out on future rewards. For him the only question is one of rewards, not ultimate eternal destiny.

Let's see how much importance the Bible places on this issue of repentance (source of much of the following material = Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*)

1) It certainly was a key note in the message of the OT prophets.

2 Kings 17:18 *"Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah, through all His prophets and every seer, saying, 'Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments, My statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you through my servants the prophets.' However, they did not listen, but stiffened their neck like their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God. And they rejected His statutes and His covenant which He made with their fathers, and His warnings with which He warned them ... So the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; none was left except the tribe of Judah."*

2) Not just an OT doctrine, but the key note of the preaching John the Baptist --
Matt. 3:2 *"Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

3) Emphasized by Christ in preaching to crowds of unsaved people --
Matt. 4:17 *"From that time (the beginning of His public ministry) Jesus began to preach, and say 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"*

4) The disciples who were sent out to preach the message of Christ characterized their presentation as a call to repentance --
Mark 6:12 *"And they went out and preached that men should repent."*

5) Peter on the Day of Pentecost --
Acts 2:38 *"Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."*

Peter sums up their initial response to the gospel in the one word "Repent" even though both conditions of repentance and faith are involved. Then he calls upon them to follow up that commitment with water baptism as the initial step of obedience and as the first fruit of repentance that gives evidence that their spiritual commitment was genuine. This is a very important verse. We don't believe that water baptism is a condition for salvation -- that view is labelled baptismal regeneration. However, let's not go too far to the other extreme and minimize the significance of water baptism. The NT presents it as extremely significant. Why? Because it is vitally important as an indication that you have received new life from God. Baptism is a fruit of repentance and faith. The fruit does not come before salvation ... so it would be wrong to make it a condition for salvation. But if there is no fruit after salvation, there can be no grounds for assurance of salvation on Track #2 (see other Appendix on Two Tracks of Assurance).

Acts 3:19 *"Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."*

6) Paul preached repentance -- not just a message for the OT; not just a message for the Jews:

Acts 20:21 *"solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Acts 26:20 he kept preaching the same message to the Jews at Jerusalem and throughout all of Judea and then the Gentiles as well -- What was that message: *"that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance"* -- this verse has all 3 key elements:

- a) Repent -- turn from sin
- b) Faith -- turn to God
- c) Perform good works -- not as a condition of salvation, but as an evidence (a fruit) of their salvation

These good works that are appropriate to repentance are the same as the changed life that John talks about in his epistle. You see this is the question that bothers Ryrie's camp: Does a person have to quit cursing in order to be saved? Is that what you mean by repentance? Do you have to turn away from that specific sin? Repentance involves changing your mind about that cursing so that you recognize it as sin, you hate it as God hates it, and you are committing yourself to God to save you from both the practice of that sin in this life and the penalty of that sin for all of eternity. However, the actual deed of not just stopping our cursing, but replacing that manifestation of the old man with the appropriate kind words of the new man will take place as a fruit or outworking of your repentance and will vary across a wide spectrum of inconsistent to consistent obedience.

7) There can be no question that God calls upon His evangelists to preach a message that is heavy on the side of repentance --

Acts 17:30 *"God is NOW declaring to men that all everywhere should repent."* You

can't take any type of hyper-dispensational approach that might argue that repentance is not for this age and this time.

I would argue that if you examine the gospel presentations of our day, the subject of repentance seems to be glossed over if it is even touched on at all.

Ryrie would say that he agrees that repentance is important, but that the meaning of repentance is simply to now recognize Christ as God.

II. THE MEANING OF REPENTANCE

"a sincere and thorough changing of the mind and disposition in regard to sin, involving a sense of personal guilt and helplessness, apprehension of God's mercy, a strong desire to escape to be saved from sin, that leads to a voluntary abandonment of it."

3 Aspects:

I. Intellectual Element

a change in your thinking with respect to sin, God, and self

We are replacing our frame of reference as the absolute authority and standard for right and wrong and for our conduct for the frame of reference of God -- of our Lord Jesus Christ -- that is what receiving Christ as Lord and Savior means to me -- a new frame of reference -- a new orientation -- not complete and absolute obedience in every aspect of our lives -- we don't even achieve that as mature believers

II. Emotional Element

a change of feeling -- sorrow for sin and a desire for pardon and forgiveness so that we will feel cleansed from the guilt and stain and pollution of our sins -- but before you can feel cleansed, you need to feel guilty -- that is one value of the preaching of the law -- of God's standards for right and wrong

III. Volitional Element

this involves a reorientation of our will along the lines of the reorientation of our thinking so that our repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change in conduct

SUMMARY:

Men are universally commanded to repent just as they are commanded to exercise faith in Christ, regardless of the individual's ability or inability to obey that command. For although repentance is a volitional act on the part of man (just as faith is), it is also an enablement by God's grace and the working of His Holy Spirit in our hearts (Acts 5:31 and 11:18). No one will end up fulfilling these conditions for salvation unless the Father draws him (John 6:44).

Now you can better evaluate the opposing position of men like Zane Hodges and Charles Ryrie -- cf. this quote from Ryrie's book *Major Bible Themes*:

"Scripture is violated and the whole doctrine of grace confused when salvation is made to depend on anything other than believing. The divine message is not believe and pray, believe and confess sin, believe and (publicly) confess Christ, believe and be baptized, believe and repent, or believe and make restitution. These six added subjects are mentioned in Scripture, and there they have their full intended meaning; but if they were as essential to salvation as believing they would never be omitted from any passage wherein the way to be saved is stated."

What he really should say is that the fruit of repentance is not a condition for salvation like faith is. But just as genuine faith is a condition for salvation and will produce works, so the flip side of the same coin-- genuine repentance --is also a condition for salvation and will also produce corresponding good fruit.

APPENDIX: CONCEPT OF ABIDING -- MESSAGE BY GIL RUGH -- JOHN 15:1-8

INTRODUCTION:

This is a much misunderstood passage; only Hebrews 6 gives more problems.

TIME:

The evening preceding Christ's betrayal; the disciples have left the upper room and are on the way to Gethsemane (cf. 14:31 -- "*Arise, let us go from here*"). Christ is preparing His disciples for His departure and what it will be like after He is gone.

SIMPLE ANALOGY: 2 kinds of branches

- 1) those bearing fruit = abiding in Christ = believers
- 2) those not bearing fruit = not abiding in Christ = not believers

John 15 does NOT teach:

- believers can lose their salvation
- that there are 2 kinds or levels of Christians:
 - good Christians who abide and bear fruit
 - carnal Christians who do not abide and do not bear fruit

OT BACKGROUND:

Why did Jesus use **the analogy of the vine**? cf. the OT background that Israel is the vine of God -- but it is always viewed as a degenerate vine that failed to accomplish God's purposes and did not bear fruit = characterized as worthless

Therefore, Jesus says, "*I am the true vine*" = all that God intended His vine to be

Psalms 80:8-16 the vine failed to produce what God wanted

Isaiah 5:1-7 the expected fruit was justice and righteousness (related to character not soul winning)

Jeremiah 2:21

Ezekiel 15 -- The vine's wood is not good for anything. If the vine does not produce fruit (its intended purpose) it is worthless. People don't cut down vines to build houses; not even good for burning for getting the heat.

Hosea 10:1 -- Israel is a degenerate vine; not producing fruit to God; Israel used her prosperity for degenerate purposes; Israel had not produced the character of God as a result of the work of God.

COMMENTARY:

In John 15, everyone is seen in relation to Christ, the **true vine**.

The Issue = Producing Fruit

There is no such thing as a "fruitless Christian" in the Bible.

I. Main Problem: interpretation of "in Me" in vs. 2

Does this require that John is speaking only of believers? No ... this expression is used that way in the Pauline epistles where "in Christ" takes on special significance (cf. Ephesians) -- but in the Gospels this expression means "in the visible kingdom" -- so that you can be in the professing, external kingdom even though you don't truly belong to Christ.

- Matt. 8:11-12 -- speaking of Jews who have an external relationship but no true relationship to the king
- Matt. 13:24-30, 41-43 -- both wheat and tares viewed as in the kingdom ... but not really part of it (Matt. 13:47-50)

Conclusion: "in Me" in John 15:2 only indicates professing a relationship with Christ

II. Definition of "Fruit" in the NT

This is the testimony or evidence that you are a child of God

- Matt. 3:8, 10, 12; 7:13-20 "you will know them by their fruits"
- "every good tree bears good fruit"

Therefore, no such thing as a fruitless Christian

- vs. 19 -- the destiny of the unbeliever is typically fire
- vs. 21-23 -- they practice lawlessness

- Rom. 7:4 -- You are not saved by producing good fruit -- you must start with a live tree. God's intention is to produce His character in and through us.

Then what is this fruit?

- Ephes. 5:9 -- goodness, righteousness, truth

"Fruit" is used 66 times; only 1 reference to souls being saved

- Gal. 5:22-23 -- lists the fruit of the Holy Spirit very specifically; all character related

III. Context in John 15

John 15 is not saying that every Christian is bearing as much fruit as he should; But the Key Issue = Is the character of God evidently being produced in your life?

"Pruning" has the Goal of making a person more productive

Ultimate Goal = much fruit

Application: What do we tolerate or indulge in that cuts back our fruit production? Pruning is necessary -- cf. Heb. 12:10-11. All discipline is immediately unpleasant. We rejoice because of the result of the discipline. We cannot tolerate things that we call "neutral". We must ask instead: "Does this practice positively contribute to fruit

bearing?" In hard times we can say "Lord, I know this is unpleasant, but I know I need this to be more fruitful."

Judas was the unfruitful branch that was taken away. He fooled the disciples, but could not fool Christ.

Context is 13:10-11, and especially vs. 30 -- Judas, the unfruitful branch, goes out from the company of the disciples. His unfaithfulness is demonstrated in vs. 38. This apostasy radically differs from the temporary lapses by Peter in denying Christ 3 times. Peter's experience should not be viewed as the paradigm for not abiding in Christ. Peter was still vitally connected to the vine with the life of God within him ... despite this inconsistency.

Cf. 15:3 -- "*You are already clean*" -- the group of disciples addressed by Christ here no longer includes Judas who had left previously. What this group needs is pruning to bear more fruit.

IV. Word Study of Abiding / Concept of Mutuality

John uses this word more than any other NT writer

42 times	Gospel of John
22 times	1 John
3 times	2 John
1 time	Revelation

Def: "to dwell, remain, live" -- there is a mutuality to the concept of abiding

Wrong views of Abiding

- 1) You can stop abiding and lose your salvation
- 2) There are 2 kinds of Christians
 - Abiding Christians who demonstrate consistent obedience
 - Non abiding Christians who demonstrate little or no fruit

Right View: Every Christian abides in Christ **all** of the time!

(By way of application, there may be a pastoral need to exhort believers to increase the level of their intimacy with Christ ... but that is not the interpretation of this concept of abiding.)

The right view becomes clear when the concept of **Mutuality** is studied and understood:

- John 6 -- the context is partaking of Christ (vs. 56) -- If you believe in Christ, you abide in Christ and He abides in you; you cannot disassociate these 2 aspects

- 1 John 3:22-24 -- the one who believes and loves abides; this must refer to every Christian; this is the evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit in your life; to cease abiding you would have to cease to have the Holy Spirit (4:12, 15; 2 John 9).

If I cease to abide in Christ I am not just a carnal Christian, but the Holy Spirit would have to cease abiding in me.

The life flows from the vine into the branches and guarantees fruit production. This fruit production is not the same for every believer. Apart from Christ, nothing of the genuine true godly character develops and the ultimate result = Worthless.

V. The Branches Not Abiding

cf. verse 6 -- what about these branches that do not abide?

This is not a parallel passage to 1 Cor. 3. There it is the fruit (the works) that are thrown away and eventually consumed by fire; but here it is the person himself.

Fire consistently in the Scriptures is the end of the unbeliever.

"they (the angels) gather them and they are burned."

Jesus is talking about those that profess to have a relationship with Him, but in actuality do not.

Heb. 6 -- drawing the same kind of distinction between those who really belong to Christ and those who do not

vs. 7-8 = they end up being burned

Heb. 10:26-27 -- the value of the sacrifice of Christ never runs out for the believer; talking about persisting in the sin of unbelief

"the fury of the fire which will consume the adversaries"

quoting Isaiah 26 -- the message of the OT is the same in this regard

Rev. 20:15; 21:8 -- immoral persons are going to Hell -- talking about people who are externally connected with Christians

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Quote from **John Piper**:

Our text says (4:13) that he wants us to be sure that we abide in God and God abides in us. "By this we know that we abide in him and he in us." What does this mean?

There are some today who teach that our abiding in God and God's abiding in us simply refers to an advanced stage of intimacy between God and the mature Christian. They say that you can still be a Christian and yet not abide in God and not have God abiding in you. They say that what John wants to give assurance of is not that you are truly born again but that you are walking in intimacy with the Father.

Here's a quote from one popular evangelical teacher:

The unsaved world does not know God...and the believer who harbors hatred toward another believer is stepping into a comparable sphere of spiritual darkness and death. This by no means calls his salvation into question, but it firmly negates every claim to intimacy with the Father and the Son. In the final analysis, it is this intimacy that the epistle of 1 John is all about (1:3,4), (Zane Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, 1981, p.65)

The motive behind this interpretation is the desire to keep the assurance of salvation separate from the spiritual and moral condition of the believer's heart and life. In other words this teacher wants to be able to give people assurance of salvation even if, to use his words, they are "harboring hatred toward another believer." And he does this by saying that when John gives the test of love, he is testing Christian maturity not salvation.

He says that if we equate "abiding" with "being a Christian," "the message of John's letter is hopelessly obscured. The theological deductions that arise as a result are fundamentally and irreconcilably hostile to the simple Biblical Gospel and to the offer of assurance of salvation based on the testimony and promise of God alone" (p. 66).

In other words, if you think that verse 13 of our text this morning has to do with salvation when it speaks of "abiding in God and God abiding in us," then (he says) your view is hostile to the Gospel. Because for this teacher the Gospel is the good news that you can be saved by a kind of intellectual faith that may not change your heart attitudes or make you into a loving person.

The reason I spell this out in some detail is that this is an amazingly widespread view, coming as it does from one of the (former?) bastions of evangelical orthodoxy (Dallas Seminary). But it is a view of 1 John that as far as I know has no significant precedent in the history of interpretation. It is a tremendously important issue. You must decide whether you think the issue in 1 John (and particularly in this text) is the assurance of salvation or the assurance of Christian maturity and intimacy.

What does John mean by abiding in God and God abiding in us? Is it an intimate second stage of Christianity or is it just plain being a Christian? Jesus said in John 15:6, "If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned." Abiding in Christ does not refer to a second level of maturity. It refers to whether you are in the vine or in the fire.

Or closer to home, consider verse 15 in our text. "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God." Are we really supposed to understand from this that the way you attain to intimacy with God is by confessing that Jesus is the Son of God? Surely not. When John says here that the evidence of abiding in God is that we confess that Jesus is the Son of God, he means that the confession is the evidence that you are saved. Confessing Jesus as the Son of God is basic Christianity, not advanced Christianity. When John says, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God," -- he does not mean that whoever signs

up for the softball team hits a homerun. He means that whoever signs up for the softball team is on the softball team. Abiding in God is being on the team, whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God is saved.

Here's another piece of evidence. Confessing that Jesus is the Son of God is the same as believing in the name of the Son of God. But look at what 5:13 says the issue is. It is not the issue of intimacy with the Father. It is the issue of eternal life. "I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life." 3:15 says that if you confess Jesus as the Son of God, you have God abiding in you. 5:13 says that if you believe on the name of the Son of God you have eternal life. Therefore what John means when he speaks of abiding in God and God abiding in us is the possession of eternal life not the advanced stages of intimacy with God.

If you abide in the vine you have life and bear fruit. If you do not abide in the vine, you are gathered with the other withered branches and thrown into the fire. The issue is salvation, not maturity. (Compare also 1 John 3:14 and John 5:24.)

So let's look at our text now and see what the tests or signs of abiding God are. Let's start with 4:12 because it is so closely related to verse 13. What we will see is that there are references to abiding in God and he in us in verses 12, 13, 15, and 16. Let's walk through it.

"No man has ever seen God; (and so the problem: how can you be sure of a relationship with a God you can't see? Answer:) if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us." We can be sure of our relationship with him because the love we have for each other is the very presence of God in us. God abides in us. And since God is love, his presence in us is the perfecting or completing of his love in our love for each other.

Verse 13 repeats this same truth with slightly different words: "By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit." The love that you have for the children of God is a manifestation of the Spirit of God within you. The Spirit does not merely manufacture love like IBM manufactures computers or like an old man in Tarkpoima weaves a straw hat. The Spirit bears the fruit of love. Fruit is one with the tree. The Spirit is the love of God.

Verses 14-15 seem like a break in the flow of thought. So let's skip them for the moment and go to verse 16: "We know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." So here we are back where we started. The experience of abiding in God, that is the experience of salvation, is manifested and preserved through abiding in love. Which is the same thing verse 12 said: "If we love one another God abides in us."

So the main point of these verses so far is that there is an aroma about God that can't be concealed. It's the aroma of love. When he comes into your life, the aroma comes into

your life. The aroma is the sign of God's saving presence, and if you smell it you know he is there. You have assurance. If you don't smell it, then you lose assurance and you cry out to God to cause his love to abound in your heart.

(completion of quote from Piper)

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APPENDIX: CONCEPT OF PROPITIATION

PAGAN IDEA:

God flies off the handle in some type of uncontrolled, spontaneous rage at man's failures. To try to solve this relationship problem, man scrapes together some type of offering to try to appease the wrath of his god. The pagan concept reflects very crude ideas of wrath, sacrifice, and appeasement.

I. WE MUST FIRST UNDERSTAND GOD'S WRATH

Why? Because wrath and propitiation (= the satisfying or placating of wrath) go together. The reason why a propitiation is necessary is that sin arouses the wrath of God. God's response to sin is predictable = wrath; but not arbitrary and uncontrolled wrath that is unpredictable (like the discipline of some inconsistent parents), but rather very predictable. God always acts in accord with His nature = Holy. His reaction to sin is always wrath -- you can count on that. Therefore, God is the one who needs to be propitiated; His righteous wrath must be satisfied.

II. GOD IS ALSO THE ONE WHO MAKES THE PROPITIATION

In pagan religions you always see man at work trying to persuade God to ease off, to lighten up. 1 John 4:10 shows that for the Christian, all the work has been accomplished by God Himself. God does not love us because Christ died for us; Christ died for us because God loved us. God's sacrifice of love accomplished the propitiation for our sins so that God can now deal with us in blessing instead of condemnation.

III. GOD IS ALSO THE PROPITIATORY SACRIFICE

In giving His Son, He gave Himself = the ultimate sacrifice; not some perishable animal or material sacrifice like gold or silver; something far more precious. This sacrifice is effective; it works; it is sufficient. It is by the substitutionary death of Christ that sin is overcome and wrath is turned away and satisfied, so that God can look on man without displeasure and still say "This is my beloved son in whom I am well-pleased" and man can look on God without fear of punishment.

IV. PROPITIATION DISPLAYS THE DEPTHS OF THE LOVE OF GOD

APPENDIX: BOOK REVIEW OF THE GOSPEL UNDER SIEGE
-- JOHNNY V. MILLER

Book Review of *The Gospel Under Siege* by Johnny V. Miller, with the assistance of William Larkin and Paul D. Wright from Columbia Bible College and Graduate School of Bible and Missions, Columbia, SC that was published in *Trinity Journal*, Spring 1983, Volume 4 NS, NO. 1.

* * * * *

If eternal life is not the product of faith plus good works, then the only alternative is that it comes from a faith which does not produce good works. This is apparently the only alternative that Zane Hodges presents in *The Gospel Under Siege*.

Hodges, the chairman of the New Testament Department at Dallas Theological Seminary, makes an important statement on the relationship of saving faith and works. His contention is clear: there is no necessary relationship at all between faith and works, either before or after salvation. If one believes that good works are the necessary outgrowth of salvation, then he also believes that one receives eternal life on the basis of good works, claims Hodges.

This contention stems from Hodges' desire to clarify the basis for assurance of salvation. As he sees it, if works are the necessary result of salvation, then one cannot be sure he is saved until he is producing good works. And if one must persevere in good works to know he is saved, then he can never know for sure in this life whether he is saved. So, if anyone is ever to have assurance in this life that he is truly a child of God, he must base it on the nature of the Gospel offer, uncoupled from any necessary Gospel effects. Or to put it another way, salvation does not necessarily produce any degree of sanctification.

Hodges is not arguing for a life of lawlessness on the part of Christians; neither his own life nor his teaching would countenance ungodly living. Instead he is seeking to combat an extreme position on assurance -- "You'll probably have to wait until the end of your life before you can be sure if you are a true Christian." He wants to show that assurance is possible the moment one believes. But he goes to another extreme and tries to prove much more than is necessary to win his case. And in our opinion he misstates the position of those who are not of the Reformed extreme he caricaturizes in his prologue, and yet who still see a necessary cause-effect relationship between salvation and sanctification taught in Scripture.

Hodges equates three positions on the relation of faith and works which are to him equally erroneous:

1. "Unless you are baptized according to Biblical custom, you cannot be saved."
2. "Unless you persevere in good works, you cannot be saved."
3. "Unless you yield your life to the Lordship of Christ, you cannot be saved."

Now either Hodges is deliberately using the word *cannot* with different connotations in these three statements, or else he does not understand the different content in the three views. The first statement may in fact represent a position which adds a work to faith as a condition of salvation. But the second statement represents a subjective evaluation

by someone from the Reformed position who reflects upon the fruitless life of a professing Christian--the same as saying you have not been saved. And the third statement reflects on the very content of the Gospel itself--what is necessary to believe in order to be saved

But when Hodges gives his own statement of the Gospel, it is very vague, almost without content. He appeals to Rev 22:17 ("*And whoever desires, let him take of the water of life freely*") and John 5:24 ("*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life*"). He treats John 5:24 virtually as if it were all that Jesus had to say on the subject of soteriology, and does not attempt to identify what "word" the hearers were to respond to, or what the content of their belief was to be. And he treats the Lord's visit with the woman at the well as the sole paradigm of all Gospel encounters, but does not deal at all with the apostle Paul's post-calvary preaching of the atonement and his demand that all men everywhere should repent.

A further problem in the way Hodges deals with the Gospel is that he considers salvation only from man's side. He never attempts to distinguish professions of faith from true saving faith; in fact, one gets the impression that he sees no distinction. And he never considers the work of the Holy Spirit in calling men to salvation, in convicting them of their sinfulness and need of a Savior, or of making a man a new creation upon regeneration. Those who see a necessary connection between saving faith and good works appeal to the divine elements which are part of the salvation process as the source of the subsequent fruits of salvation.

The real heart of Hodges' work is his exegetical attempt to show that certain key passages which are normally interpreted to prove a necessary relationship between faith and works do not, in fact, show that at all. He masterfully exegetes many of the problem passages that seem to make salvation itself depend upon conditions other than true faith, and for that the book is to be commended. But it seems that the author's argument that there is never any necessary relationship between faith and works snags at three major points: (1) James 2:18-19, (2) 1 John 3:6, 9 and (3) Matt 7:15-23.

...

In place of the "old" view that genuine salvation produces fruit in a person's life, Hodges enunciates a new principle: "Morality is not the *grounds* for assurance, but the *fruit* of it" (emphasis his, p. 49). Good works in a Christian's life are the product of a subjective phenomenon--assurance-- not the necessary result of spiritual transformation. It would be well to repeat that the author of *The Gospel Under Siege* is not arguing for a lawless life. He instead wants to clarify the Gospel, and divorce it from works. But is that a necessary divorce? We believe not; in fact, just the opposite is true--it is a necessary wedding. For one thing, Jesus Himself taught that there is profession of life without possession of life--the crucial distinction is obedience to the Father's will (Matt. 7:21). In that same context the Lord said a good tree cannot produce bad fruit (Matt. 7:18), and that consistently bad fruit evidences a false prophet. If there is no good fruit, Jesus seems to be saying, then an individual is a false prophet.

Further, a change of life was seen as a necessary evidence of salvation throughout the New Testament. John the Baptist refused to baptize the Pharisees because their lives

did not evidence repentance (Matt 3:8). The Lord Jesus preached repentance, (Matt 3:17) which the Jews most certainly understood in their spiritual tradition as a turning from sin to God (*shub*). The apostle Paul preached repentance, a repentance that resulted in changed lives and appropriate deeds (Acts 26:20). And the apostles saw that this repentance which produced changed lives was not a work of the flesh, but was itself a gift of God, the evidence of God's grace in the lives of the redeemed (Acts 11:18).

The Bible does not present the repentance that leads to changed lives as a work of man, but a work of God. Therefore it is not necessary to categorize the good works which result from salvation as the work of men; they also are the work of God, although obviously not done apart from the redeemed man. Hodges has presented only two options: Either faith without any works saves, or else it is faith plus works which saves. These options are neither logically nor biblically contradictory. In fact, it is the classical presentation of a straw-man which collapses at a sneeze. To say that saving faith is a faith which produces evidence is not saying that the evidence saves. If someone gave this writer \$1,000,000, there'd be evidence somewhere--my bank account, my giving, my lifestyle--but the evidence could not be said to be prerequisite to the gift.

On what grounds should a person be given assurance of his salvation? On the basis of genuine saving faith, of course, the kind of saving faith that results in new life. And if a person makes a profession of faith and never shows any evidence of spiritual life thereafter, does one continue to assure him that on the basis of a hasty prayer, or a contentless profession, or an emotional walk down an aisle, that he has indeed passed from death to life? Does one ignore the remorseless acts of immorality, the practical blasphemies, the godless existence? The question at issue is not faith plus works, but rather what kind of "faith" is it that one is proclaiming that does not (or may not) work at all?

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