

We shall Overcome

by Ray C. Stedman

After many months of our study together in the First Epistle of John, we are drawing toward the close of this brief letter. In this section we come to the last theme which John discusses.

I have oftentimes pointed out that the chapter divisions in the King James Version (and subsequently all other versions) are quite often very poorly placed. Many times I have indicated that a chapter division ought to be ignored; that it does not represent a break in thought. But it occurred to me that perhaps it would be good to recognize a chapter division that belongs in its place. This is true of the fifth chapter. Here is a proper break in thought. Lest I seem to be against all chapter divisions, I want to make that point clear!

In this last chapter the apostle is discussing the fifth of the series of themes that he has taken up in this epistle. There was a time when I considered the Epistle of John to be almost impossible to outline, until I saw that John is discussing various themes which very intimately tie together. Then, to my amazement, I found that John is one of the most logical and orderly of the writers of Scripture and that this letter is a beautifully-orderly presentation, when once the key to it is discovered. John has brought before us,

- First, the theme of fellowship of Christ, maintaining fellowship; then
- Maintaining truth,
- Maintaining righteousness,
- Maintaining love; and, now, he concludes with the theme of
- Maintaining assurance, or confidence.

The relationship between these five themes is very important. It is instructive to note that the first of these links with the last, i.e., fellowship with Christ ends in assurance or confidence.

You will note that confidence is the kind of life that all men today are looking for. Which of us does not desire to be an adequate person, confident, self-assured, poised; able to cope with life? This is the image of humanity that is idealistically present in every human heart – we each want to be this kind of person, and this is exactly what Christianity is designed to produce!

To me, the glory of our Christian faith is never that it is religious, but that it is so gloriously secular. It is designed to produce life, to fit us for living, and thus to be the kind of person that God intended man to be when he made him in the beginning – confident, able, adequate.

Now the secret of that confidence is fellowship, thus joining these two themes together – the first and last. Fellowship is the sharing of the life of Jesus Christ. We shall see more of that as we go on in this passage. But this also explains the three intermediate themes that John discusses. This confident life will be manifest in a three-fold way: as truth, as righteousness, and as love. And there you have the exceedingly orderly division of the First Epistle of John.

These three form the test of authentic Christianity: truth, righteousness, and love. John says three specific times in this letter that, if you claim to know God, but yet walk in the darkness of disobedience, you are a liar. He does not hesitate to use this extremely direct term. You are a liar, he says.

1. If you claim to know God and yet you walk in disobedience, you lie and do not tell the truth.

There is an absence of righteousness in the life, and this puts the lie to all your claims to be a Christian.

2. In another place, Chapter 2, he says that to claim to possess the Father and yet deny the deity and incarnation of the Son is also to be a liar. There is an absence of truth in the life, and therefore it is not genuinely Christian. There cannot be a genuine Christian life and yet a denial of the deity and incarnation of the Son.
3. Thirdly, to claim to love God while you ignore or mistreat your brethren, is to lie. You are a liar if you say you love God and yet you do not love your brethren, Chapter 4, Verse 20. This is the absence of love. The presence of habitual sin, of a denial of Christ, doctrinally, and of selfish hatred despite a professed Christian experience, will expose all claims to Christianity as phony.

These three must all be present. This is the whole argument of the Epistle of John. They must all be present and in ever-increasing degree. Truth, love, and righteousness; these are the marks of authentic Christianity.

Now, in this last section which deals with assurance, the apostle brings all three of these together. In the passage we take now we shall find these intertwined together; one coherent fabric of life from God, which produces assurance and confidence and victory, and is manifest as righteousness, truth and love. That is Christianity. Anything less is phony.

Let us read the passage:

Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God, and every one who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? {1 Jn 5:1-5 RSV}

Notice, in Verse 1, that truth and love, John says, belong together. One produces the other. "Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God," or, literally, "Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten of God, and every one who loves the Father loves the child." Thus, he ties together these two great themes, belief in the truth, and love, and one is the result of the other.

In Verse 21 of Chapter 4, he has just been talking about loving our brother. This is a command from God, he says. "He who loves God shall love his brother also." Now he answers a question that is continually being asked, though not always expressed vocally. "What does it mean to love my brother?"

"Who is my brother, anyway?" The answer is in Chapter 5, Verse 1: "Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten of God." There is your brother. Such a one is part of the family. Thus, if you love the Father, you will love the other children of the Father anywhere you meet them. This is inevitable. If you, yourself, really share the life of the family of God, you will love the other members of the family.

What a condemnation this is of all denominational and sectarian spirit. I am afraid that oftentimes Christians feel they are responsible to love only those who belong to their particular group, whatever it may be. If we are Presbyterians, we love Presbyterians, but we do not like the Episcopalians or Methodists. All too frequently we run into this attitude. If I am Baptist, then I love all those who believe in immersion (all other Baptists) and that is quite an extensive group. Sometimes it is even more limited than that, and we may say, "I love only those who belong to my particular brand of Baptist churches." Or we may love only those who belong to the National Association of Evangelicals, and anyone who belongs to the National Council of Churches is automatically excluded.

But all this is a denial of what John is saying here. We are to love the members of the family, wherever they are. Our brother is he who shares the life of Jesus Christ, who is born of God, who believes that Jesus is the Christ. Now, of course, this is more than a mere creedal belief. As we are gathering here, there are thousands of other churches across this land, and around the world, where men and woman are standing up and

confessing Christ in the Apostolic Creed. They stand together and recite:

“I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; etc.”

Is everyone who says that a Christian? The answer is, of course not. John is not talking about a mere creedal confession. John's idea here is, every one who believes that Jesus is Lord (for the Lord, Christ, is the word for Messiah, the Lord, the divine Person who was to come into human history). Every one who believes that Jesus is his Lord, his supreme concern and authority in life, the One around whom his life is built, then that one is in the family. It does not make any difference whether he differs with you about the pre-tribulation rapture, or the method of baptism, or whatever else it may be, if he has the life of the Father and believes that Jesus is Lord, then he is a brother.

Now perhaps you ask, “Do you mean that Christians are to love only other Christians and no one else?” No, but that is where it is to begin. Love always begins within a family circle, does it not? We first love the members of our own family before we find it possible to love those outside. If love begins there, it will reach out finally to encompass the world as well. The love of a Christian is never limited merely to other “brothers,” those who share the life of the Lord Jesus, but it must at least begin there.

Now, Verses 2 and 3 link together love and righteousness. Here are these three tests: truth, love, and righteousness, appearing again, and in the center is love.

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. {1 Jn 5:2-3 RSV}

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.

What it really amounts to is that we do not love them enough to help them face the truth. Consequently, some of them may go on for days, weeks, even years doing things that offend others

and never understanding what their problem is, and we call that love! It is not love, it is hate, it is dislike. It is a refusal to face, and to help them face the truth. Only the truth delivers, only the truth sets free. If you can gently and graciously help another to see a fault, without yourself becoming self-righteous, priggish and condescending, then you know that you love that person with God's love. "By this we know that we love the children of God," if we are acting out of love for God and a concern for his commandments.

The wonderful thing is that when you do that, you discover the truth of Verse 3. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome [or grievous]." They are not difficult, though they seem to be at first. Who of us has not recoiled at having to talk to someone about an unpleasant subject? Who has not wished that someone else would do it, take on the responsibility? How easily we shove it off on another, if we can. Yet, if we do it, if we will really love another to the point of helping him face unpleasant truth, we will discover that the results are not burdensome but delightful. If done in the right way we find it easy and delightful, producing riches of friendship and blessing.

I must confess that some of my dearest friends now are those whom once I didn't like – until they told me the truth. When I faced up to it I discovered that my enmity to them arose, not out of anything in them, but something in me. They became my friends because they dared to tell me the truth. Also, some of my closest friends are those to whom, in love, I have gone and painfully, perhaps, with great difficulty at first laid open some wound that was festering and needed to be cleansed. It was not easy to do, but when it was all over and the pain had subsided and the inflammation was gone, there was born a warm and wonderful friendship that has deepened ever since. This is the activity of love. See how practical this apostle gets. If we love with God's love we will do so out of a concern for his commandments, for righteousness.

There you have the blending of the three marks of authentic Christianity: belief in the truth, an obedience to God's Word, and a manifestation of love. Those are the signs. These prove that anyone who possesses them has been born of God.

Verses 4 and 5 then give us the results that will naturally follow:

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? {1 Jn 5:4-5 RSV}

There you have the whole picture set in focus. When we seek to show love to others, to obey the Word, and to proclaim these doctrinal truths of the Scripture s, there is sometimes a tendency for us to feel that our success as Christians is a result of our faithful efforts. We get an Elijah complex: "We're the only ones left who are true to God." We tend to regard others as being unfaithful in varying degrees. But when we feel like that, we are never so wrong as then. For John now declares that through these activities to overcome the world, it never is a result of our efforts. Effort is involved, but the results do not come from that. Victory is a sign that we have the Lord himself within us. Our efforts are but a sign of the presence of the life of God, the Lord Jesus himself. Without that, everything else would be futile. It is not we who overcome the world, but it is he in us. All that we contribute is simply the fact that we believe in his life at work in us. Thus, our faith in him overcomes the world.

Now, when you consider what is involved in this term the world, what it is we are up against, you can see what John means. Think of the moral pressures that we face in the world today, the outlook and standards of the godless society that are surrounding us, ambient on every side, pressing in upon us, constantly intruding upon our consciousness with tremendous pressure to make us to conform to these attitudes and standards of life. Think of the temptation to cheat and to lie, to get ahead at all costs, to be dishonest, to overreach; not only in filling out our income tax but in every aspect of business. You men know that it takes power to be honest in business. To be surrounded by the low moral standards which exist in many businesses today, to be under constant temptation to take advantage of people, to maneuver, manipulate, ride roughshod over other people's rights, and yet do right; it takes power to live in

that kind of society. You who live in it know that it does.

These are the pressures that come upon us from the world:

- The pressure to sexual looseness which is especially evident among the young and the unmarried. Pressure to feed the fire, to satisfy the urge, to give in, to give up, to go the whole way, though it may be wrong and deadly. The pressures around us are tremendous these days, seemingly overpowering at times.
- There is the pressure to harbor wrong ideas, to react against others the way the world reacts, to strike back, to fight back, and give as good as you get, to be resentful and jealous, to be ambitious and cruel.
- There are pressures to follow some of the attractive heresies that are about us in these theologically loose days, which offer popularity and social acceptance.

Do you not feel all this? The world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – all this is of the world.

Well, how do you overcome it? How can you manifest the life of Jesus Christ in the midst of that kind of pressure? How can you go on, moment by moment, day after day, year after year, living a life that is absolutely contrary to that, based on totally different standards, totally different objectives, totally different evaluations; how do you do it? And to endure not only for ten years, but twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty years, against that kind of moral pressure. How do you do it? How do you overcome the world? How do you keep steady; how do you keep unmoved in the midst of this? Not only to keep unmoved but actually move out and win others to your side?

Well, John says it is “by faith,” that is all. Not by the faith that you once exercised twenty years ago when you first became a Christian, but by faith in the life of Jesus *present in you now*. By faith in him at work in you, moment by moment, in the midst of the pressure, countering it with the pressure of his own life.

Remember that story in Exodus 17 when Israel was moving out of Egypt and they came into the

desert and the Amalekites came against them and fought with them at Rephidim? The battle waged hot. All the forces of Israel were engaged in combat with this ruthless enemy which was forever standing to thwart their pathway, trying to keep them from reaching the goal of God – the land of promise. We read that Israel and Amalek fought together and the battle went against Israel until Moses went on the mountainside and took his rod (which was always the symbol of dependence upon the power of God, the supernatural might of God), and lifting it up toward the heavens he found that Israel began to prevail against the Amalekites. Their fighting was then of value, it accomplished something. Moses stood with his arm and rod extended and as long as he could hold the rod up the battle went for Israel and they prevailed against Amalek. But Moses’ arm grew tired and gradually he let it come down. As the rod fell the tide of battle turned. Amalek began to conquer, despite all the fighting of Israel. Moses gathered enough strength to lift his arm again and the tide of battle turned. It became very apparent that the issue of the battle did not lie with the fighting of Israel but in the symbol of dependence on the power of an invisible God. It was this that turned the tide. Remember that at last Aaron and Hur came and stood on each side of Moses and held his arms up, and thus the battle was won.

Now that is a picture of the battle that you and I are engaged in. How do you win? Well, the issue does not lie in your fighting.

- You do need to fight.
- You do need to pray, and read the Scriptures, and study, and know God’s Word.
- You need to apply it in every situation.
- You need to put on the whole armor of God when the enemy comes against you like a roaring lion, sweeping all before him.
- You do need to stand.

But none of this is of any avail unless you are recognizing that it is the life of God within you that makes the difference, it is he who wins. It is he who overcomes.

Your dependence is on his activity in you. When you do that, it is a different story.

I once heard of a captain of a ship who was describing what it was like to go through a storm. He described the ship in the midst of mountainous seas, the waves mounting on every side, and the wind blowing hard with the pitiless rain coming down. The ship seems a helpless victim of the storm, caught up in the power of these mighty elements that are raging on every side. Its doom seems sure. But he said, "I stand there on the bridge of the ship and I grasp the railing. I can feel the throb, throbbing of the engines deep down inside the hull. The storm, the wind, and the waves seem to be saying to the ship, 'You cannot come, you cannot come.' But I hear the answering throb of the engines saying, 'Yes, we shall, yes, we shall, yes, we shall.' And so we do."

That is the way the battle is won. That is the way we overcome the world.

- If we give in,
- If we reflect the same attitudes as the world,
- If our actions are the same as those of worldlings, we have succumbed to the world, we are victims of it.

We have succumbed to the wiles of the devil. We have lost our testimony, and all possible power to witness. But if our dependence is on the life of the Son of God, moment by moment, his life is in us then, "this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith." Who is it that overcomes the

world but he who continues to believe that Jesus is the Son of God? The Son of God, the Strong One, the One who could say to his disciples, "be of good cheer; I have overcome the world," {John 16:33b KJV}.

God grant that our faith may be strong in him.

Prayer:

Our Father, these words both thrill us and chill us. We sense the sound of the trumpet, the call to battle against the subtle and devious forces of a worldly age. We know that these forces are designed to throttle us, to choke us, to render us incomplete, unable to live, filled with tensions, pressures, neuroses, fears and uncertainties, as is the world around us. But this is never your desire for us, Father. You have made full and ample provision that we might overcome the world. Not only here in this place where it is easy to do so, but out there where we are working and living, where we are up against the pressures, powers, pull and twist of society. Lord, there is where we are to overcome. Grant that here in this congregation there may be hundreds who will take renewed faith in your power and move out to meet a world in a venture of faith that makes every day a thrilling adventure where they discover again the power of a living Christ to meet the pressures of a dying world. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Why do we Believe?

by Ray C. Stedman

We are approaching the close of this little letter of the Apostle John, whose task was the calling back of the church to foundational things. He is John the Mender, who, when the Lord Jesus called him to the ministry, was found mending his nets. He concludes this letter with certain final notes of positive conviction. The last few verses repeat again and again the little phrase, we know. It is that note of positive assurance that is always a key mark of true Christianity, quite in contrast to the spirit of the age in which we live. Christians are to be dogmatic about certain fundamental things because they have found him who is the truth. We know certain things and we are to say them forthrightly, unabashedly, without any sense of shame and hesitation.

Now we do not know everything, and if we give the impression we do we are distorting the faith. But there are things we know – certain essential facts of faith.

In the early days of Mt. Hermon there came out from the East a well-known Bible teacher named Dr. Joseph Conrad. He rather startled the audience at Mt. Hermon in one of the summer conferences by saying something like this: "Dear friends, I want you to know at the very beginning of my ministry with you that I am not dogmatic about the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ. I am not dogmatic about the bodily resurrection of Christ, nor am I at all dogmatic about the substitutionary atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ." At this point an unbelieving gasp went up from that conservative audience. But then, marshaling all his forces with great intensity, he said, "No, I am not dogmatic; I am bulldogmatic!"

There is something of that note of intensity conveyed to us by the closing notes of John's letter. "I am bulldogmatic," he seems to be saying, "about certain fundamental issues."

Now as you know, the spirit of our age is that nothing is certain, everything is tentative. We are told we cannot know anything for sure. Unfortunately that spirit has permeated the Christian church, and we find men standing in pulpits and declaring such nonsense all over our land and the world, in the name of Jesus Christ. According to Philip Wylie, we Americans are rapidly becoming a "nothing" people, "a generation of zeros," because we do not believe anything. We do not think anything can be believed. This is the fundamental philosophy of the age in which we live.

Yet strangely enough, with this most unreasoning inconsistency, the very same people who teach this kind of philosophy, oftentimes turn around and accuse Christians of exercising what they call "blind faith," i.e., faith without any basis in fact. They charge us with accepting the Scriptures by an act of will. That we simply choose to believe them without any reasonable evidence for it. They say to us, rather condescendingly at times, "I would love to believe like you do, but I simply cannot." By that they imply that they cannot so divorce their will from their reason and act so unreasonably as to believe a thing without any basis in fact.

I hope you recognize that all of this argument is so much eyewash. The whole genius of the Christian faith is that it rests upon facts. These facts are the acts of God in history, the incontrovertible movements of God which cannot be explained away or dismissed by a mere wave of the hand. They are imbedded in the record of the human race. A careful survey of these acts of God in history actually serves to compel belief; so that it is not belief that is unreasonable, it is unbelief. One must struggle and exert painful effort in order to convince oneself that these facts are not true. Thus John, as he comes now to the close of this

letter, quickly surveys for us the evidence for our faith. He declares why it is that we believe what we believe, using, for the sake of brevity, certain very eloquent symbols.

This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth. There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree. {1 Jn 5:6-8 RSV}

Those who use the King James Version will note that there is a verse apparently omitted from the Revised Standard Version text, Verse No. 7. Most of you already know that this verse is properly omitted because it has no manuscript support earlier than the 15th century A. D. The King James translators did not have access to the number of manuscripts that are available today and therefore did not recognize this. But it is universally agreed today among Bible scholars that the statement concerning three witnesses in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, is not a genuine part of the Scriptures and so is omitted from the RSV text. The RSV, you will note, takes part of Verse 6 and makes it Verse 7 so that the numbering carries right through.

Now as John declares in this text, there are three witnesses. Two of them are external and historical, and one of them is internal and personal; but all three are intricately related together, forming a marvelous fabric of testimony that is powerful in the extreme. Proverbs says a three-fold cord is not quickly broken, and here are three mighty testimonies to the fundamental facts upon which Christian faith rests. But faith is not a set of facts. Faith is acting upon the facts which you believe. It is necessary to interject that element of activity before belief becomes faith. Faith, however, rests upon facts, and here are the three facts.

There are those, first of all, symbolized by the water and the blood. You will note that these mark events which lay at the beginning and end of our Lord's public ministry on earth: the water of baptism at the beginning, the blood of the cross at the end. Christ, himself, is the centering ground of Christian faith. This is always true. It is Jesus Christ himself who is the supreme fact upon which Christian faith rests. But two unique qualities

mark his life, symbolized here by the water and the blood.

The water, of course, refers to that event at the Jordan River when our Lord went down to be baptized by John the Baptist. After he came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit came upon him in the form of a dove and a voice from heaven declared, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," {Matt 3:17, Mark 1:11}. That event thus declared the sinlessness of his life.

The water of baptism was the water of cleansing. For the sin-defiled members of the human race it was necessary as a symbolic representation of what God did when a sinner returned to his Lord. There must be a cleansing, a forgiveness of sin. But the Lord Jesus did not personally require such a cleansing, and it was this that gave pause to John the Baptist when he saw the Lord coming toward him. He said, "Are you coming to be baptized of me? Why, I ought to be baptized of you," {cf, Matt 3:14}. And you remember Jesus said to him, "Allow it to be so, for thus it behooves us to fulfill all righteousness" {cf, Matt 3:15}, i.e., "Go ahead anyway, because I am taking the place of man, as representative man, and as representative man I am assuming the burden of guilt and sin for the whole race. Therefore, I need to be baptized." Yet the Father's voice made very clear that there was not one stain, one spot in himself, to mar the record. Water, therefore, was the sign of a perfect humanity. Here was one who all his life had done that which pleased the Father and who had never once stepped outside the bounds of the Father's will. During his public ministry again and again he held up his stainless record before his enemies, challenging them to find any fault in it. "Which of you," he says, "convince me of sin?" {cf, John 8:46}. It is this unblemished, spotless record that is testimony of a life that came from God. How else can you explain the person of the Lord Jesus Christ if he be not from God, God manifest in the flesh? This is part of the proof of our faith, this sinless life.

"Ah, yes," says the liberal, "I am willing to accept that. I believe that he came as the perfect example for us to imitate. If we simply follow the life of Jesus and imitate his example, we too will live the kind of life that is pleasing to God." But notice that John, in symbol, denies that. He says, "He came not with water only, but with water and blood." A sinless life is insufficient for faith. It

does not really help us. To look at the spotless, stainless life of the Son of God is the most condemning thing I know. It shames me, it discourages me. I could never approach that kind of living, and I do not know anyone else who can. No, faith requires something else. It requires an atoning death, it requires blood. To the Hebrew mind this is most eloquent, speaking of life poured out, forfeited life. It is life that no longer has the right to live, blood poured out as a sacrifice.

Yet again, it was not for himself. He was put to death, but not for his own sins, but for the sins of the world. The death of Jesus only makes sense as we see that it was for others. As the prophet Isaiah predicted,

He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. {cf, Isa 53:5 KJV}

It was even as those passersby threw in his face as he hung upon the cross. In unconscious irony they cried out, "He saved others; himself he could not save," {cf, Matt 27:42}. How true it was. His life was for others, he laid down his life on our behalf.

It is this, John says, that is the ground of faith. How else can you explain the fact that the Gospels give the greatest part of their account to the record of the death of Jesus? Though his words captured the attention of men, for crowds followed him everywhere to hear him, and though those words still startle and amaze men as they read them today, yet the focus of the gospel is not upon the teachings of Jesus but upon the death of Jesus. That last memorable week, with all its significant events, occupies the greatest part of each of the Gospels. The attention of heaven and earth seems to be focused upon the mighty event when the Son of God hung upon a bloody cross on a hill outside Jerusalem. The sun became black with darkness for those many hours.

This becomes an essential ingredient of the good news that Christians declare. Paul said, "He [Christ] died for our sins," {1 Cor 15:3}. That is the point of it, *for our sins*. If we do not add that, the death of Christ is a pointless experience. There is no adequate explanation for the cross, apart from this. Thus, the sinless life of Jesus and his death on

behalf of others can only be explained in terms of God entering human history to do a most remarkable thing on behalf of men. They are sturdy facts upon which faith can rest.

But beyond these two historical evidences, John says, there lies yet a third: that mysterious, subjective, yet powerfully compelling evidence of the witness of the Spirit within. By this he means that when the story of the sinless life and the cross is told, whether it be told simply or with eloquence, wherever the story is told the Spirit of God works in the hearts of many to make it extremely personal. Such listeners suddenly see themselves as involved in the incidents, as caught up in the mighty sweep of these events and becoming part and parcel of them. The whole meaning of it becomes personalized for them so it is no longer, "Christ died for the world," but "Christ died for me." That is the witness of the Holy Spirit.

John Newton, who wrote so many of our hymns, was, for many years of his life a reckless, dissolute reprobate, living the wildest sort of life, until he became, at last, a slave even to slaves. With his health ruined, he was on a voyage back to England from Africa when, in the midst of a storm, God spoke to his heart and he found the Christ he had long rejected. He became one of the outstanding spokesmen of the gospel of his day, and he put his own testimony in these simple words.

In evil long I took delight
Unawed by shame or fear
Until a new object met my sight
And stopped my wild career.

I saw One hanging on a tree
In agony and blood
Who fixed his languid eyes on me
As near His cross I stood.

Sure, never till my latest breath
Will I forget that look
It seemed to charge me with His death
Though not a word He spoke.

My conscience owned and felt my guilt
And plunged me in despair
I saw my sins His blood had spilt
And served to nail Him there.

A second look He gave
Which said, "I freely all forgive.
My blood was for thy ransom paid
I died that thou may'st live."

That is it, you see. That is the witness of the Spirit, that personalizing of the work of the cross that makes it come home to the individual in power. When the word of pardon is believed, the Spirit also gives a wonderful sense of forgiveness, a lifting of the burden of guilt, the sense of washing away of sins, and the peace of God is spoken to a guilty heart.

This is perhaps the greatest need of humanity in our day. Billy Graham said that when he was in London one of the heads of a mental hospital said to him, "Half of our patients could be immediately dismissed if they could obtain somehow the assurance of forgiveness." Forgiveness is the work of the Spirit. "His Spirit," Paul writes to the Romans, "bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God," {cf, Rom 8:16}. That is an internal, personal, present confirmation of the one great fact declared by the sinless life (the water), and the atoning death (the blood), of the Lord Jesus Christ. These three mighty witnesses agree in one. What do they agree to? That, "he who knew no sin [that is his sinless life] was made sin for you [that is his blood], in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in him [that is the testimony of the Spirit]," {cf, 2 Cor 5:21}. There you have the gospel, resting, you can see, upon these inescapable, historical events.

Therefore, far from faith being unreasonable, it is actually unbelief that is so, as John goes on now to argue in Verses 9 and 10.

If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has borne witness to his Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. He who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne to his Son. {1 Jn 5:9-10 RSV}

One of the commonest experiences of life is to act upon the word or testimony of another person, oftentimes even that of a stranger. We will do sometimes the most amazing things in response to

the simple declaration of a person we have never met before.

Last April I had the privilege of leading a group of pilgrims to the Holy Land. We were innocents abroad, indeed. Most of us had never before been there, including the leader, and we did not know what we would run into. But we had been given assurance, by means of a letter from a person in New York, whom I had not met, that someone would meet us at every place we landed and would help us to get through customs and take us through all the intricacies of entering a foreign land, booking hotels, etc. On the strength of that letter some twenty-five of us committed ourselves to the tender mercies of a stranger, and discovered that it all proved true. Everywhere we went, someone showed up to help us. We did not know whether to look for male or female or anything about how they would look, but the word of man proved true, and on the basis of it we committed ourselves to a considerably risky venture.

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!"

John moves at last to the heart of the whole matter in Verses 11-13:

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not 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. {1 Jn 5:11-13 RSV}

What is he saying?

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.

Dr. H. A. Ironside used to tell of a man who had great doubts about whether or not he was a Christian. He had been troubled by certain theorists who said that God only elected certain individuals to be saved; if you were not of the elect there was no chance for you. The perfectly proper Biblical truth of election had been distorted to extreme proportions, and he felt that there was no way that he could know whether or not he was among the elect. One day he went home after hearing a sermon on the verse, "As many as received him, to them he gave power to become the sons of God. He that believes on the Son has eternal life," {cf, John 1:12, 3:36}. He got down on his knees and said, "Now, Father, I want to settle this question. Show me whether I have eternal life, or not." And opening his Bible, his eyes fell on these verses, "He who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne to his Son." He said in his prayer, "Father, I don't want to make you a liar and it says here that if I don't believe the testimony that you give about the son I'm making you a liar. Now I don't want to do that. What is the testimony?" And he read the next part, "This is the testimony," and he stopped right there. He was so overwrought that he put his thumb over the rest of the verse and said, "Lord, it says here that if I

don't believe the testimony that you gave concerning your Son, I'm making you a liar, and I don't want to make you a liar. I believe that I've got what that testimony is right under my thumb here, and I'm going to take my thumb off and read it, and Lord, help me to believe it, because I don't want to make you a liar." With great trepidation he raised his thumb and read, "... that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." All of a sudden it came home to him. John makes it so clear, "He who has received the Son has the life; and he who has not received the Son has not the life." No matter what else he may have, no matter how religious he may be, if he has not received the Son he does not have life. He entered into peace and became a preacher of this great truth.

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.

So, John concludes,

I write this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, [in order] that you may know that you have eternal life. {1 Jn 5:13 RSV}

The purpose of this letter is to move us from doubt to certainty – "that we may know that we have eternal life."

What about you?

As we come to the Lord's Table, the very symbols speak to us of the great historical facts upon which our faith rests. But there is no value in the elements, there is nothing that will give you help by eating this bread or drinking this wine. They do nothing. They're but symbols. Have you received the Son? That is the question.

Why do we Believe?

He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life. {1 Jn 5:12 RSV}

Prayer:

In these quiet moments, as we conclude the service, our Father, we pray that each one here may ask himself the question: “Do I have the Son?” For the whole issue of life is in that one question. The only way that we can receive the great gift that human nature lacks, the lost secret of our humanity, the only means by which our human lives can ever make sense, is by

receiving the Son of God. “He that has the Son has life; he that does not have the Son of God does not have life.” Grant us now that in this moment, anyone who has not received the Son of God will respond to his wonderful invitation, “Behold! I stand at the door and knock; if any one hear my voice and open the door I will come in and will sup with him, and he with me.” May many quietly, silently, now open the door of their hearts saying, “Father, send the Lord Jesus; Lord Jesus, come into my life and be my Lord.” We ask in his name, Amen.

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Praying Boldly

by Ray C. Stedman

It certainly is not an accident that John closes his letter with an emphasis upon the subject of prayer. He has been writing about the life of Christ – the only life that can truly be called a Christian life. That life is characterized by truth, love and righteousness, and prayer is the perfect expression of all three of these:

- Love is prayer's motive,
- Truth is its expression, and
- Righteousness its goal.

There is a deep-seated instinct for prayer buried within each human being. Given enough stress, given the right circumstances, it will come out. That is why it is said, "There are no atheists in fox holes." Under the pressure of danger there is a deep-seated desire in man to cry out to God for help. I remember hearing of a sea captain who described the violence of a storm by saying, "God heard from plenty of strangers that night."

Perhaps there is no aspect of Christian faith that is so puzzling to many as that of unanswered prayer. Almost all the problems in prayer are a result of ignorance of the nature of prayer. Prayer is a mysterious thing to many, and, because they do not understand it, they make experiments in the realm of prayer. But these sometimes do not turn out, and many have lost faith in prayer because, not having a proper understanding of the nature and purpose of prayer, their prayers have gone unanswered. They conclude that prayer is a failure, and God himself is a failure.

I wonder what would happen if you or I were called upon to operate the tremendously powerful instrument behind Stanford called the linear accelerator, this mighty nucleus smasher, the most powerful instrument of its kind in the world? I have never been in the control room of this particular instrument, but I have been in the control

room of its predecessor, a much smaller instrument and I watched its operation. It seems to be a very simple matter: All one does is to sit there and press buttons. It all looks simple enough. But I have enough knowledge of the power of that mighty instrument and what could happen if it were misused to not care to take the chance of operating it myself. If you or I were called upon to operate it, what havoc we would create in very short order by our ignorance of the power and potential of that great machine. Yet it looks so deceptively simple.

This is the way it is in prayer.

Prayer is a simple thing. It does not appear very difficult or complex and it is available to the simplest of people. Even children can pray, and pray very successfully, very effectively. Yet the understanding of the nature of prayer is infinitely complex and requires some considerable knowledge before prayers are answered regularly. In this closing section of his letter John gives us certain basic, general principles about prayer, then he follows them with a specific illustration.

We have first the general principles in Verses 14 and 15:

And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him. {1 Jn 5:14-15 RSV}

As we have suggested, for many Christians prayer is a venture, an experiment. There is nothing very certain about it. We often pray because we do not know what else to do. Who of us has not at one time or another said, "Well, things have gotten so bad there's nothing else to do but pray," as though that were the final and last resort. But you do not see that attitude in the

Apostle John. What is his reaction to this matter of prayer? “This is the confidence which we have in him,” he says, “that if we ask anything according to his will, we know he hears us.” There is a great and ringing note of certainty there. Prayer is not an experiment, prayer is a certainty with John, a sure thing. He knows it works, and he knows how it works. That confidence is expressed by the word he chooses, *boldness*. “This is the boldness which we have in him; we know that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”

Now you cannot read the New Testament without realizing that God delights in bold praying, and in bold people. Read the Epistle to the Hebrews and see how many times that word appears. “Seeing then that we have a great high priest ... Jesus the Son of God ... [who] was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin, let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need,” {cf, Heb 4:14-16}. And again, “we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way...” {Heb 10:19 KJV}. This is what ought to characterize prayer. It should be bold, confident, certain.

This kind of certainty arises from the knowledge of two fundamental principles of prayer, which John gives us here: the certainty of hearing, and the certainty of having. Notice these. “If we ask anything according to his will, we know that he hears us.” Perhaps the major reason for most of the unanswered prayers of the world is they are not according to God’s will, and therefore they are not heard. John makes it explicitly clear that a prayer that is according to God’s will is always heard. Thus, at one stroke he demolishes all those concepts of prayer which imply that prayer is a means of getting God to do our will. Prayer is never that.

There are many people who regard prayer as some kind of mysterious device by which human beings get God to do what we want him to do, a kind of Aladdin’s Lamp which, if we rub it in the right way, will cause the great Genie of heaven to appear and give us our requests. God becomes a kind of heavenly bellboy rushing to our aid when we push the button of prayer. It is this concept which has resulted in some of the frightful perversions of prayer.

For instance, there are the faith healers whom you can see on television today, who make

arrogant, blasphemous demands upon a patient and longsuffering God, commanding him to do things which they insist are their right to ask, though it is very evident that God is regarded as a junior partner in their business relationship. But that is not prayer and never was prayer. Prayer is a means of obtaining the will of God, and is limited always by the will and purpose of God. If we pray outside the purpose there is no assurance at all that our prayers are heard, and certainly not that they will be granted.

Sometimes our prayers are not according to the will of God because our motives are wrong. Sometimes we pray, as James says, “amiss, in order to consume it upon our own lusts,” {Jas 4:3b KJV}. We want what we want, not what God wants.

Some time ago I ran across a wedding prayer that illustrates how subtly this can be done. This is a girl praying on her wedding day.

“Dear God. I can hardly believe that this is my wedding day. I know I haven’t been able to spend much time with You lately, with all the rush of getting ready for today, and I’m sorry. I guess, too, that I feel a little guilty when I try to pray about all this, since Larry still isn’t a Christian. But oh, Father, I love him so much, what else can I do? I just couldn’t give him up. Oh, You must save him, some way, somehow.

You know how much I’ve prayed for him, and the way we’ve discussed the gospel together. I’ve tried not to appear too religious, I know, but that’s because I didn’t want to scare him off. Yet he isn’t antagonistic and I can’t understand why he hasn’t responded. Oh, if he only we’re a Christian.

Dear Father, please bless our marriage. I don’t want to disobey You, but I do love him and I want to be his wife, so please be with us and please don’t spoil my wedding day.”

That sounds like a sincere, earnest prayer, does it not? But if it is stripped of its fine, pious language, what it is really saying is something like this:

“Dear Father, I don’t want to disobey You, but I must have my own way at all costs. For I love what You do not love, and I want what You do not want. So please be a good God and deny Yourself, and move off Your throne,

and let me take over. If You don't like this, then all I ask is that You bite Your lip and say or do nothing that will spoil my plans, and let me enjoy myself."

That is what that prayer is really saying. Prayer that lies outside the will of God is an insult to God. As the Psalmist has said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me," {Psa 66:18 KJV}. Prayer must be according to God's will, John says, in the direction God is going, with a view to obtaining the purposes he intends. As Romans tells us, the Spirit of God helps us in our infirmities by prompting our desires, by creating deep urges within us, unutterable yearnings, hungerings after more of the real life that satisfies, not only for ourselves, but for others. Thus, the Spirit is our Helper that we might pray according to his will.

Now "according to his will" includes a tremendous lot. Much of the will of God is already revealed to us.

As a boy in Montana, about the only reading matter we had in the long winter months was a Sears and Roebuck catalog. It was a limited reading selection but what a tremendous amount of things were included. It took us weeks to go through only one section of it. We could order anything we had the money to pay for, but it would have been utterly futile to have sent in an order for something that was not in the catalog. There was plenty we could order, but it was useless to ask for something they did not have. And so it is with prayer.

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}.

God plays no favorites and has no special pets. He has intimates, but anyone can be his intimate who desires to be, and moves along the program he has outlined. He has intimates to whom he gives much more than others, but he has no favorites, and no limitations as to who can enter into these things. Anyone can who will, but the secret of prayer, as John suggests here, is to take, to believe that God has granted everything we ask within his will. The secret is to take. "You have it," John says. "We know that we have obtained the request made of him."

Now he is not trying to kid himself or to pretend that God has given him something that it is all right there and if he will just open his eyes there it will be. There is no kind of psychological gimmick here. What he is saying is that when we pray, and the request is made in the will of God, then the answer is absolutely sure and it is only a question of God's timing as to when it appears. It is up to God when that answer will come, but the

request has been granted and therefore we can give thanks. We can take from him and thank him for that which has been given, expecting it to appear in God's time. Remember that Jesus warned, "The times and the seasons are not for you to know," {cf, Acts 1:7}. Time is the only uncertain aspect about prayer. There are often delays in God's fulfillment of answers. This matter he reserves to himself. But as to the ultimate giving of the things requested, there is no uncertainty whatsoever.

Jesus made clear that God is not like a reluctant neighbor who needs to be wheedled, cajoled and enticed to give something. He gives eagerly, gladly, willingly. As Jesus said, "Ask, and it shall be given; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you," {Matt 7:7, Luke 11:9 KJV}.

Many prayer meetings are often pools of unbelief. Listen to the prayers in these meetings and so many times they are uttered in a wheedling, begging tone of voice, as though the petitioner felt he had to get God's arm and twist it a bit and persuade him reluctantly to come through. But this is not prayer, not biblical prayer. God is never like that, says Jesus. "What father of you, if your son comes and asks for fish, will give him a serpent, or for bread, will give him a stone?" {cf, Luke 11:11}. You would not do that, and God is much better than you. If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father respond to your needs in prayer? That is the true basis of prayer.

John concludes with this because prayer is the simplest expression of our life in Jesus Christ manifest in a practical way. We are to be constantly praying, constantly making demands upon God on this basis, knowing that he hears us and grants it, and all we need say is, "Thank you, Lord." Notice, carefully in reading the Gospels, that is what the Lord Jesus is always doing. Everywhere he goes it is simply, "Thank you, Father. Thank you for this, thank you for that. I know that you have heard me, I know that you have done this. Thank you." His life was one of continual giving of thanks, and that is what we are expected to do: "giving thanks in all things, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you," {cf, 1 Th 5:18}.

Now John comes to the specific illustration of this, in a passage that troubles many, Verses 16 and 17:

If any one sees his brother committing what is not a mortal sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin which is mortal. I do not say that one is to pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal. {1 Jn 5:16-17 RSV}

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.

Now let us come to the moot question, what is this sin unto death? There are three major explanations that exist of this passage and particularly of this phrase, "the sin unto death."

1. The first view regards it as some specific sin which is so terrible as to be unforgivable, as suicide, murder, idolatry, even adultery. This view (which has been held by many through the Christian centuries) early gave rise to the Catholic distinctions between mortal and venial sins. This is, perhaps, why the RSV translates this "sin which is mortal" and "sin which is not mortal." There is absolutely no question but what that translation is wrong. It should never be translated "mortal sin" for it has nothing to do with the question of salvation. There is no warrant in Scripture whatsoever for distinguishing between mortal and venial sins; i.e., sins which can be forgiven (venial), and those sins which can never be forgiven (mortal). Scripture makes no such distinctions. As a matter of fact, this sin is not any one specific sin. The Greek makes very clear here

that this is simply sin in general. It is not a sin which is unto death; it is simply sin which is unto death. Any specific sin can become sin unto death. Therefore, it is not a specific kind of sin that is in view and that interpretation simply cannot stand.

2. There is a second view which links this with the words of Jesus concerning the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Remember that on one occasion he warned that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can never be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. The death which is mentioned in this passage in First John is taken to mean spiritual death and is then associated with the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This is, of course, a description of what we generally call apostasy; i.e., an apostate is someone who has made a profession of faith in Christ but begins to drift away and ultimately comes to the place where he actually blasphemes the name of the Lord Jesus and the things of Christian faith, denying them and turning his back upon them to go into a completely apostate state. Hebrews 6 and Hebrews 10 and other passages make clear that such an apostate is in a terrible situation. He has committed blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, the flagrant rejection of the testimony of the Holy Spirit to Jesus Christ, and that is unpardonable.

But it is equally clear that kind of sin can never be committed by a genuine born-again Christian. It is only committed by those who have made a profession of faith but have never entered into new birth in Jesus Christ. But the word here is “if any one sees his brother committing what is not a sin unto death,” and the word, brother, is reserved for other Christians. It is so defined in Chapter 5, Verse 1, of this very letter. John says that “every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God, and every one who loves the Father loves the child.” That is, such a one is my brother; he, like me, is a member of the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, it seems likely that the sin unto death mentioned here is limited to Christians, and cannot refer to apostates.

3. That brings us to the third view, which I believe is the correct one, which views death here as physical death: “If any one sees his brother committing what is not a sin unto [physical] death, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not unto [physical] death. There is sin which is unto [physical] death.” There is sin which a Christian can commit which will result in God taking him home in physical death. John goes on to say, “I do not say that one is to pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not unto [physical] death.”

Now there are certain examples of this “sin unto death” given in Scripture which, if one studies them through carefully, will reveal the element that turns ordinary sin into sin which is unto death. “All wrongdoing is sin,” says John. All unrighteousness is sin, let us not misunderstand that, but there is sin which has a certain element about it, a certain characteristic which will result in physical death, physical judgment. Let us look at some of the instances of this in Scripture.

- Moses, for instance, committed a sin unto death when he was commanded of God to speak to the rock in the wilderness and water would come forth to meet the needs of the children of Israel {cf, Num 20:8}. Previously he had been commanded to strike a rock and the water would come out, and when he did the water did come out. But on a second occasion he was told to speak to the rock. This change was important because the rock was a type of Christ and to strike it was a picture of the judgment of the cross. Now the cross is the way by which the refreshing water of grace first comes into our life as Christians, but after we have become Christians we are not to strike the rock (crucify Christ again) but to speak to it. We are to simply ask of him and out of the Rock will come flowing the rivers of living water we need. But Moses broke the significance of that type when in his anger, he struck the rock twice. Though God, in grace, allowed the water to come flowing out, he said to him, “Because you have disobeyed me and not sanctified me in the eyes of the people, you will not be allowed to lead these people into the land of promise,” {cf, Num 20:12}. Later on,

when they came to the borders of the land, Moses said to God in effect, “Lord, allow me to go on in. Forgive this, and let me go on in” {cf, Deut 3:24-25}, and the Lord said to him, “Speak no more to me about this matter” {cf, Deut 3:26}, i.e., do not pray about this (just as John said, “I do not say you should pray about that”), “but get up to the mountain and I will let you see the land, but that is as far as you can go,” {cf, Deut 3:27}. Moses had committed a sin unto death. In his case it did not occur right away, but it occurred prematurely and before his work was really completed.

- A little further on in the book of Joshua you find that Achan commits a sin unto death. As the children of Israel crossed the Jordan and surrounded Jericho they were told that when the city became theirs they were not to touch anything in it, they were not to take any of the possessions of the inhabitants of the city, or to covet anything, for it was all cursed of God. But when the walls came tumbling down and they came into the city, one man among them, Achan, saw a beautiful garment and a wedge of gold, and he coveted these and buried them in the dirt beneath his tent. For this judgment came upon Israel. In their next battle they met with utter and complete defeat. Searching out the camp, in obedience to the Word of God, Joshua found that it was Achan who did this. He was brought out with his whole family, and by command of God they were put to death. That was a sin unto death.
- In the New Testament, in the fifth chapter of Acts, Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, pretended to a devotion that they did not really possess, and wanting a reputation in the eyes of other Christians, they lied about the money they received for certain land. As a result, they were immediately put to death by God when their lie became evident. They were taken out, one by one, and buried. They, too, had committed a sin unto death.
- Also remember what the Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians about their conduct, saying, “Some of you are drunken, some are selfish, pushing your way in and eating before others,

showing no concern for others, and above all not discerning the meaning of this table, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this cause, many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep” {cf, 1 Cor 11:28-30}, i.e., have died. Now what does this mean? It meant that certain ones had committed sin which was unto death.

But note that in all these examples it was not the same sin, by any means. It was simply sin which results in the judgment of physical death. What then, is the element that turns ordinary sin into this kind of sin? I think if you look at these examples together you will see what it is. It is the element of wanton, presumptuous action in the face of clear knowledge that it is wrong. It is willfulness, a willful presumption to pursue something when you know God has said it is wrong. This is sin unto death, and the result is physical judgment.

Now it does not always come suddenly. It did with Ananias and Sapphira, it did with Achan, but it did not with Moses, and it did not with the Corinthians. With them it came in stages: first it was weakness, then sickness, and finally death. Perhaps much of the physical weakness that is apparent among Christians today may arise from this very cause. Not all physical weakness comes from this, not all premature deaths arise from this, but some very likely do. It is persistence in a determined course of action when you know that God has said it is wrong, that creates sin unto death.

Now let us look again at what John has said. “If any one sees his brother committing sin which is not unto death,” i.e., sin which arises largely out of ignorance, sin where someone is simply doing something which they may have a vague idea is wrong, but they have no understanding of the implications of it, no awareness of how bad it is. This is the kind of sin we older people often see manifest among the younger. Young Christians often stumble into things they are not aware of, they do not understand what they are getting into, they do not realize the danger. Then, if you see your brother committing that kind of a sin, ask of God, and God will give life for those whose sin is not unto death. God will withhold the judgment of physical weakness and grant opportunity for the renewal of life.

You can see that in the Old Testament in the case of King Hezekiah. Remember that in a very unwise moment he allowed the King of Babylon to send visitors into his palace to investigate all that was going on, and to see the riches of the palace. The prophet Isaiah warned Hezekiah that these men only wanted to see how much money he had and whether it was worth sending an army to take it or not. He said, "You have sold yourself into the hands of the Babylonians." As a result of that, King Hezekiah received a sentence of death from God. God told him to prepare himself, to get everything ready because he was going to die. Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed, beseeching the Lord. As a result of that prayer of confession and repentance, God stopped the prophet Isaiah as he was going out the door, having delivered the sentence of death and said, "Go back to the King. I have granted him fifteen more years of life," {cf, Isa 38:5}. As a sign that it would happen, the sun dial in the garden went backward ten degrees. That is an example of God granting life for those who do not commit a sin which is unto death. Repentance reverses the judgment. Those who willfully determine to go on in a way that is wrong commit sin which is unto death, and when they do God says do not pray for that.

Paul, writing to Titus, says something very similar. In the closing part of that little letter he says, "As for a man who is factious, after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is perverted and sinful; he is self-condemned," {Titus 3:10-11 RSV}. Here is a brother determined to go on his way. Therefore, there is no need to pray for him. There is nothing you can do but let God's judgment wake him up. Perhaps God in grace will deal patiently with him, give him a time of sickness or weakness, and that will bring him to his senses. But if not, God will take him home.

Dr. H. A. Ironside used to illustrate this as follows: Sometimes you see children playing outside, and when quarreling breaks out the mother says, "If you don't behave yourself, you will have to come in the house." Her child says, "Don't worry, mother, I'll be good." But a little while later quarreling breaks out again, and the mother comes out and says, "Now that's enough. You've got to come in. I can't trust you outside anymore." The child begs his mother to let him stay out some more. "Oh, mother, I'll be good. I promise I will." But she says, "No, I gave you a chance. Now come on inside. I can't trust you out there any more."

That is what God sometimes says to us. Do we realize, Christian friends, that God's whole reputation is at stake in our behavior? Everything we do and say is reflecting the character and the being of God to the world around. No wonder he watches us so assiduously. No wonder he judges us so precipitously at times. If there be a willful determination to disgrace him in the eyes of others, as Moses did, God will say, "All right, that's enough. I can't trust you out there anymore. Come on home." And home we go.

Well, there it is, there is prayer. What a power prayer is!

If we see a brother committing a sin which is not unto death, out of ignorance, confusion, or weakness, then let us pray for him. God will give him life and straighten out the difficulty.

Prayer:

Our Father, thank you for the instruction of your Word. Grant to us the faith that we may be obedient to it and obey it not only in praying for others, but in avoiding these willful, presumptuous disobeyings of thy Word ourselves. We ask in Christ's name. Amen.

Christian Certainty

by Ray C. 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.

This knowledge is the secret of Christian poise and the unshakable patience which Christians ought to be manifesting in any situation, a secret hidden reservoir of knowledge. That is one of the great things about Christianity. Christians know secrets that other people do not know. Because they know them, they can act differently in a situation than others. They can react differently to what happens to them. It is this kind of knowledge that John refers to here.

I remember reading that one of the colleagues of England's great Christian prime minister, William Gladstone, once said of him, "I don't mind that Gladstone always seems to have an ace up his sleeve; what makes me angry is his maddening assurance that it was the Almighty who put it there." Is this not often the reaction of many toward Christians? It is because Christians are relying upon a secret hidden wisdom, imparted by the Spirit of God.

John says that true Christianity creates three great certainties, and with these three certainties he closes this little letter.

The first of these is in Verse 18:

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

"We know that any one born of God does not sin..." There is the certainty of righteousness. This is a dogmatic declaration on the part of the apostle that, if you are a Christian, you will come to a place where you cannot continue in sin. He is not talking about sinlessness. If he were, who of us could possibly measure up? But he is not speaking of that. It is not sinlessness that is in view. The tense here (as we have seen previously in John) is the present continuous tense. What he means is, "We know that any one born of God cannot continue on in sin." He simply cannot. That means that if there is a Christian profession there must be an accompanying change in the life. There is a basic change in the attitude toward wrongdoing. If that change is not there, then the person is only deceiving himself and others about being a Christian. That is what John is declaring. There may be occasional failure in practice, as there is in each of our lives from time to time, but there cannot be a continual, habitual practicing of sin. There must be a deep desire within to be changed which keeps this individual always pushing out against the inhibiting forces and habits of sin. This desire is the proof of the new birth.

Billy Graham was quite right in saying in a recent article, "Conversion is a revolution in the life of the individual." If you are converted, you have changed your whole direction; you have turned around 180° and you are going another direction than you were before. Otherwise, it is not a conversion at all because that is fundamentally what the word conversion means, "to change completely."

Someone this week described to me a woman whom they watched come right up to the very point of making this change. She was attracted to the Christian truth, was fascinated by what the Bible taught, and wanted to know more about all these things, but, as this person said to me, “She did not want them to make any change in her life.” She came right up to the point of change, but she would not change. Therefore, any profession on her part was not an actual, genuine transaction with God, but was a mere empty profession. Conversion means change.

The apostle tells us why this is true. The reason a Christian cannot go on living in sin, doing what he knows to be wrong, is because “He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.” The Revised Standard Version is quite right in capitalizing this word, “He,” “He who was born of God.” This does not refer to the Christian himself, although he is called one born of God in the previous phrase. This refers to the Lord Jesus himself. Previously in John we saw that any one born of God cannot sin because “His [God’s] seed remains in him,” {cf, 1 Jn 3:9 KJV}. The Lord Jesus Christ is dwelling in that person’s heart and life, and, thus, he cannot go on in sin. The One who was born of God, the holy Son of God, is dwelling in him, living in him, and keeping him. The love of Christ has an unbreakable hold on that person’s life. He may struggle, he may temporarily fall, he may resist the changes that the Spirit of God is attempting to make, but he cannot continually do so. He will be “kept by the power of God” {cf, Jude 1:24, 1 Pet 1:5}, as the Apostle Jude puts it. The One who is dwelling in him will bring him into circumstances and pressures that will make him realize what he is doing, and the mess he is making, and make him hunger to go on and be free. Otherwise he is not a Christian.

And the result is, as John says, the evil one can never repossess him. The evil one, of course, is the devil. 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.

This is what John tells us, and thus he makes the point that indifferent disobedience to Christ, a Christian going blithely on living the same way he lived before he claimed to become a Christian, is a sign the person has never been born again. You cannot be born again without there coming a change, and a desire for obedience is born in the heart. Is that not clear?

I heard Rev. Ben Haden at Mt. Hermon put it very precisely. “Obedience,” he said, “is the name of the game.” That is exactly right. You cannot be a Christian without being obedient to the Lord. “If you love me,” Jesus said, “you will keep my commandments,” {cf, John 14:15}. Obedience is the name of the game.

The Apostle Paul also put it very plainly. He said, “God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Let every one who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity,’” {2 Tim 2:19 RSV}. We often quote only the first part of it saying, “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’” We say, “Well, I know he’s not behaving like a Christian and hasn’t for years. There’s not a change ever since he said he came to know Christ, but ‘The Lord knows those who are his.’” No, that is only part of it. “And, let every one who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.” That is the visible mark – anything less than that is phoney.

You young people do not want someone to tell you about the Christian life, and make it sound as if it demands nothing of you, makes no change in you, and produces no real difference in your experience. You want to hear the truth. And the truth is that if you are not changed, if you are not living obediently, if you do not have a desire to depart from the things that are wrong, you have never been born again.

Now look at the certainty of relationship in Verse 19.

We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one.
{1 Jn 5:19 RSV}

There is the certainty of relationship that any Christian can declare. “We know that we are of God.”

“Well,” someone says, “what smug presumption. Imagine! That’s the trouble with you Christians. You think you’re so much better than everybody else. You think you’re so superior!” No, not superior; just separated! Not better; just blessed – with a blessing that is open to anyone who wants to receive it. This is what makes Christians talk this way. “We know,” John says, “that we are of God;” that a fundamental separation has occurred between us and the world system to which we once belonged; that we now are “of God,” we are walking in his direction, we are going on with him. The world, on the other hand, “lies in the power of the evil one.” The whole world is going in a different direction.

You can see how this touches at every point our relation to the busy, complex world in which we live. We live in this world. We were born in it, we grew up in it. But now that we have become Christians, we no longer can be like it. A fundamental separation has occurred. We are no longer in the same relationship. We now see that the world lies in the power of the evil one.

How many Scriptures declare this! Remember in Ephesians 2 Paul says, “You all once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air. You were once darkness in mind and alienated from God,” {cf, Eph 2:2}. This is the truth about the world. It is satanically controlled. Jesus called Satan, “The ruler of this world.”

Now, you will recognize that this is what is called in Scripture, “the offense of the cross,” {Gal 5:11 KJV}. The world does not like to be told this. As long as you leave this truth out of the Christian proclamation, the world will welcome it and say, “it is wonderful.” Worldlings love to hear the great and glorious declarations of the Christian gospel concerning God’s love for man and his desire to make him into his image. Men love this. There is no offense to that aspect of the gospel. When they hear that God loves this world, came into it, and gave himself in order that he might take human

nature and mold it, fulfill it, bring it to perfection, and the experience of the full possibilities of its powers, they love that. But what they do not want to hear is the additional word that, apart from coming to know Jesus Christ, they are all in the grip of and under the control of certain unseen powers of darkness. If you leave this unsaid you will be popular. But if you tell the truth – that every individual is confronted with only two choices – either he is of God, or he is of the devil, either he is led by the Spirit of God, or he is in the control of the devil, bound by satanic forces, and following satanic philosophies. When you say that, you will discover that faces begin to grow cold and hard around you, and there is resistance to the gospel. People say, “I was attracted to it at first, but, the more I look into it, the less I like it. I think I’ll go my own way.” And they refuse to believe that what they fondly imagine is their “own” way is only the way of the devil.

Yet, who can really doubt this statement when they look around them? The marks of the evil one are everywhere. If we believe what Jesus said about him, that he is a murderer and a liar, do you not see the signs of murder and lying everywhere? Think of the violence, the terrifying tension that have been gripping our cities these past weeks, and that seethe constantly below the surface. Our cities are nothing but seething pools of human misery, ready to erupt in a moment into riot, violence, and death in the streets. Think of the hate, the horror, and the bitterness that is rampant in human life today: in family circles, breaking up families and separating between husbands and wives, mothers and fathers and children. Think of the brutal wars and the even more brutal weapons of nuclear death that are hiding in the closets of the world today; all the product of man’s cleverness and evil ingenuity. You can see the mark of the murderer everywhere: in the Near East, in the Far East, and in Viet Nam; in the awful burning and mutilating of the bodies of fine young men, children and women. Who does not gag at this terrible destruction of human life? It is all the work of a murderer, Jesus said. See how he holds the world in his grasp? The history of the human race is one unending story of brutality, violence, murder, war and death.

That murderous passion is manifest in other ways as well. Think of the smog that chokes our cities, the filth that pollutes the waters, and the waste that destroys the beauty of the countryside so

that slowly but surely, this world is being turned into one vast garbage pile, threatening human existence. The leaders of our nations are now wondering what to do about this, and how to arrest this inevitable decay. Think of the deceit that is everywhere in public life – the lying, the cheating, the twisting and distorting of truth, in homes and classrooms, in the Congress and our courts, and the highest offices of the land. We are faced with the spectacle of men who have been elected to office and trusted to perform their public duties honestly, who openly, flagrantly, blatantly misuse funds and mistreat their powers, and then defend themselves in so doing.

Think of the deceit that is prevalent in the thinking of people even in the every-day activities of life. A teenage boy and girl are in the back seat of a car. They have been led to believe that if they love each other, anything they do is all right. Anything is acceptable in the moral realm if they only really love each other. In the passion of the moment they feel as all couples do in these circumstances – no one ever loved like they love, no one is so misunderstood by others as they are, no one ever needed each other more than they do. In the deceitfulness of that feeling, that passion, so completely subjective, they go on to give themselves to one another. Soon the inevitable results begin to appear in their lives. They begin to reap results in the hurt and damage they have thoughtlessly done to the lives of others. They must face the terrible injury they have done to others whom they profess to love, all because of their selfish overruling of the laws of God. And they reap results in their own personalities.

As the Apostle Paul put it, they “receive in their own personalities the due penalty of their error,” {cf, Rom 1:27 RSV}.

Why does this happen? It is the work of the liar, the deceiver, the one who makes things look beautiful and good when they are really sordid and vapid. Life is full of this, is it not? Is not this statement of John’s, seen in the light of the Scriptures, the truest statement about human life you have ever read? “The whole world lies in the power of the evil one,” and that power cannot be broken by merely telling people the pickle they are in.

A number of decades ago there lived a prominent Christian lawyer named Philip Mauro. He wrote a book called, *Man’s Day*, in which he

carefully described, from the point of view of the Scriptures, the civilization of this modern day. Among other things, he said these words:

“Among the strong delusions of these times there is none stronger than that Man’s Day is a day of glorious achievement, successive triumphs, and continuous progress and that by the forces operating in it mankind is eventually to be brought to the condition of universal blessedness and contentment.”

Notice, he calls this all a delusion. Then he went on to say,

“The writer knows full well that those who are under the influence of this delusion cannot be freed from it by arguments, however cogent; or by statistics showing the appalling increase of crime, accidents, suicides, and insanity; or by the open and flagrant manifestations of corruption, lawlessness, and profligacy. To all these appeals they resolutely close their ears and eyes, not willing to recognize the real drift and certain end of what is called civilization.”

Well, then, what can bring them out of it, since you cannot argue them out of it?

Christian friends, do you not see that the only answer is the Christian message, the proclamation that a Stronger One has come who binds the Strong Man and sets his goods free? There is nothing else. There cannot be anything else.

How this highlights the revolutionary character of the Christian message. Here is a message which can actually set men free from the delusions of a world which lies helpless and hopeless, lulled to sleep, deceived by the wicked one, the evil one. But, by God’s grace, we Christians can say, “We are of God.” It is not superiority that says that, it is gratitude.

Do you ever stop to give grateful thanks that God has taken you out of the power of Satan and brought you under the power of God?

That is the position we are in. How grateful we should be for it.

Now, look at the last certainty here, the certainty of reality:

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is

true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. {1 Jn 5:20-21 RSV}

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.

What tremendous privileges! I wonder if it ever remotely dawns on any of us who are Christians, just what it means to be a Christian. How far we have come, how much we have, how tremendous are these great, unshakable, fundamental, foundational truths on which we rest our faith. The glory of Christ’s love and his comfort, the warmth of his presence and his peace in our hearts. “This,” John says, “is the true God.” We are in his Son Jesus Christ; therefore, we are in him.” This is the true God and, therefore, eternal life – abundant and continual life.

No wonder he closes with this final warning. “Little children, guard yourselves from idols.” Do not go off to something else. Do not give your attention, your interest, your time, or your energy, and your money; it is what you live for, what you get excited about, what enthuses you. That is your god. Now what is it with you? Is it Jesus Christ, or is it something else?

This last spring, as you know, my family and I were privileged to be in various parts of the ancient world where we visited many temples, temples dedicated to idols. Though these temples had fallen into ruins, in every place a certain god had been enthroned in the temple and worshipped there. Apollo, Venus, Bacchus, Zeus – you have seen these temples. It suddenly struck me, after returning home, that though these temples have been abandoned, yet the worship of the god has not ceased. We still have the same gods. We have changed the names, but the gods, the idols, are exactly the same.

There is the worship of Narcissus, the god who fell in love with himself. Is this not perhaps the supreme god of mankind, the worship of self, the worship of man, the exaltation of man? The idea that we constantly hear set forth is that man is so tremendous, so smart, so brilliant, so clever; he can do so many things. Yet we deny the continual evidence of our senses that the world is crumbling to pieces around us. Is it not amazing, how we worship man? The manifestations of it find expression in such devilish things as Nazism and Bolshevism, the worship of race or country. I am appalled at the number of Christians who worship the United States, who identify Americanism with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and worship it. We have the worship of Bacchus, the god of pleasure, the god of wine, women and song; the worship of Venus, the goddess of love, enthroned in Hollywood and all that Hollywood stands for; Apollo, the god of physical beauty; Minerva, the goddess of science. Everywhere we have enthroned science.

Now, John writes and says, these things will destroy you, they will rob you of what God has for you. “Little children, watch that you do not drift off into the worship that the world around you is constantly engaged in. Do not let these things become important in your life, for God has set you free that you might live as God intended man to live.” No wonder his word comes, “Little children, guard yourselves from idols.”

What makes you enthusiastic?

To what do you give your money?

What are you saving up for now?

What is it that you regard as supremely important?

It is with this question that John closes this book, and we close our studies now.

We come to the celebration of the Lord's table, which is a reminder, designed by God himself, that calls us to an understanding again of the great fundamental truths of the Christian faith. There has been a fundamental separation between us and the world. If we partake of these elements of bread and wine together, we are saying that we died with Christ and are risen with him. We can no longer go on with the world and its ways. There must be a change. We can mix with them, and love worldly people. We must be friends with them, and not separate ourselves from them. That is wrong, terribly wrong. But we cannot think like they do. We cannot evaluate things as they do any longer. We cannot follow the same urges, or seek the same goals. We cannot accept the same standards. There is a difference: "we are of God." We have been separated from the power of darkness.

Prayer:

Our Father, as we have been reviewing these mighty things that are true of our

faith, we have felt something of the greatness of the gospel, this great good news that has come into human history, that Christ has come to set us free, to be no longer slaves of a vicious, dark, and murderous power, but free to obey a living, loving Lord who brings us ever into blessing, fruitfulness, joy, peace and glory. In this moment, Lord, if any here have seen themselves by the eye of the Spirit as still in the grip of this satanic darkness, we pray that right now, in the simple way that you have provided, by inviting the Lord Jesus to come into their life and by committing their lives and their will to him to be obedient to him as Lord, they may pass from death unto life, as we have. We ask that you will achieve this in the lives of many, even as we are praying now. Then bring us to this table to worship thee in Spirit and in truth. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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