

# ***WALKING WITH GOD***

*Notes from a Series of  
Sermons on  
1 John*

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# **WALKING WITH GOD**

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# 1. Walking in the Light

## *1 John 1.1-10*

The Apostle John gives us four specific reasons why he has written this letter to Christian believers:

1. That by its teaching they may experience fellowship and fullness of spiritual joy (*1 John 1.4*);
2. That by its warning they may guard themselves against sin (*1 John 2.1*);
3. That by its guidance they may resist the seductive teaching of the heretics (*1 John 2.26*);
4. That by its encouragement they may be strengthened and assured (*1 John 5.13*).

From this we know the overriding purpose of the letter has to do with living the Christian life – a spiritually wholesome experience by the enabling of the Holy Spirit, Who ensures spiritual life in Christ.

This letter is thought to have been written at a time when the churches were being attacked. Jewish believers were being thrown out of the synagogues; and Gentile believers suffered financially, removing themselves from the trading guilds that honoured idols. But the greatest opposition was coming from those denying the doctrine of the God-Man Christ Jesus.

In the epistle John highlights some of the characteristics being shown by these people teaching error:

- they deny the Son of God (*1 John 2.23*);
- they deny that Jesus Christ came in the flesh (*1 John 4.2*);
- they deny the Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One (*1 John 2.22*);
- they boast that they are without sin (*1 John 1.8*);

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- they boast that they have fellowship with God, but really walk in darkness (1 John 1.6);
- they boast that they know God, but are being disobedient (1 John 2.4);
- they boast that they love God, but hate their brothers and sisters (1 John 4.20; 2.9).

So here John begins his letter by laying down an essential foundation stone for living the Christian life. It is all to do with Jesus Christ, the Word of Life. A proper understanding of Him is the key to living the Christian life.

### **1 John 1.1:**

*‘That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life.’*

This is the Son of God, the eternal ‘I AM’, Who has been with the Father and the Spirit from the beginning.

*‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ John 1.1.*

He is most surely God and most surely Man. John is saying that we, the apostles, have heard and seen Him in the flesh and have also witnessed His divinity. The Apostle John is a key witness of the truth and reality of Jesus Christ. His evidence is reliable:

- a. He had **heard** His teaching, His authoritative voice in His miracles over creation and against evil;
- b. He had **seen** His perfect lifestyle, His demeanour, and had seen Him work wonders. As a Man he saw Him eat and sleep, but he had also seen His glory at the transfiguration;
- c. He had **looked upon** Him. This means to seriously take notice

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with your eyes, to gaze, to look earnestly; and

d. He had **handled** Him and could testify He had a real human body. John had enjoyed the pure, human love of Christ. John was the disciple who lay on Jesus' breast at supper; he had heard the natural heartbeat of Jesus.

But John also had in mind here the words and events at Calvary. He had stood at the foot of the cross and:

a. **heard** Jesus speaking to him personally from the cross (*John 19.25-27*);

b. **seen** with his own eyes the sufferings of the Saviour, and witnessed His perfect submission in suffering;

c. **looked upon** Him at that solemn time. John, the beloved of Jesus, was there still ready to hear his Master; and

d. **handled**. After His resurrection Christ told His disciples to handle Him and see it was really Him (*Luke 24.36-48*).

In the expression '*the Word of life*' is meant all the fullness of Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life, and the Eternal Life (see *1 John 1.2; 5.11, 20*). Christ, the Word made flesh, the Eternal Life, took a human body to redeem helpless sinners from eternal destruction and give them eternal life.

Here John is directing our attention first to Christ and His glorious attributes – the eternal Word of life. John is not saying Christ teaches *about* eternal life, but that He *is* Eternal Life, the Word of life.

### **1 John 1.2:**

*'(For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us).'*

When John speaks of Jesus Christ as the Eternal Life, he refers to all that He is and stands for. He is the Truth; the Word of God; the

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Saviour; the sovereign Lord; the Way. 'He is *'full of grace and truth'* (John 1.14).

True saving faith means believing and following Jesus Christ the Lord as the Word of Life, and as the Eternal Life. John's purpose at the outset is to clearly lay down the foundation of Jesus Christ, the glorious Lord. John then assures of two blessed fruits of this unique assured Christian faith in Jesus Christ the Lord: fellowship and joy.

### **1 John 1.3:**

*'That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.'*

**Fellowship:** Nothing in the world can compare with fellowship *'with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ'*. This fellowship is experienced through the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. It is a transforming fellowship which is secure, comforting, assuring, inspiring, strengthening and always loyal to us. How different from the world's experience. The most popular word for 2009 on Facebook was 'un-friend'! God never un-friends those He has saved!

### **1 John 1.4:**

*'And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.'*

**Joy:** John desires a joy in both mind and heart, a consistent joy inspired by the Holy Spirit in the Word through Christ. This kind of joy is the conscience at peace, with the comfort and assurance of being right with God. This is joy independent of prosperity or success; it is Christ-centred tranquillity in every condition. This is joy which actually deepens in testing times, leading to service and worship of God.

### **1 John 1.5:**

*'This then is the message which we have heard of him, and*

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*declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.'*

Actually the first recorded lesson John learned from Jesus Christ was that God is light. God is infinitely holy, pure, and full of majesty and glory. As the Light He is eternally and absolutely opposite to darkness. Therefore, as the Son of God, Christ could rightly claim to be the Light (*John 8.12*).

The first lesson Jesus Christ taught the disciples was not about them-selves but about God – ‘*God is light*’.

*My God, how wonderful Thou art,  
Thy majesty, how bright;  
How beautiful Thy mercy seat  
In depths of burning light!  
  
How wonderful, how beautiful,  
The sight of Thee must be;  
Thy endless wisdom, boundless power,  
And glorious purity!*

*Frederick W Faber (1814-1863)*

### **1 John 1.6:**

*‘If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.’*

John warns us about the problem, the tragedy, of walking in the darkness as a professing believer; claiming fellowship with God yet walking as an unbeliever. There can be no spiritual satisfaction without a tender and true conscience about His way of holiness.

Here is the real problem: hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is being one person on the Lord’s Day and another on week days; someone who has no struggle against sin, no sorrow over sin, and is careless; a person who persists wilfully in sin and does not deal with it. This kind of person

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cannot claim fellowship with God. It is rather like working on the underground and claiming we are developing a sun tan!

Our lifestyle *does* matter:

*'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me'*  
*Psalm 66.18.*

So John teaches us the first sign of spiritual life – a tender conscience about holiness because God is light.

### **1 John 1.7:**

*'But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.'*

Christ the Lord taught the disciples that first of all that they must come from darkness into God's marvellous light. God is light, revealing: life, both in Creation and spiritual life; truth; sin; and salvation. God's light shines brightest in Jesus Christ and His Word.

Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, knew that there is no spiritual joy unless we are walking in the light. Nor can there be spiritual fellowship with God unless we are walking in the light. So we are called, like the disciples, to humble obedience in following Christ the Lord, the true Light, the Light of life.

We are called to follow Christ in the way of truth, holiness, love, peace and godliness – to live in the light! Our first priority is to be walking in the light: there can be no true fellowship with God without it.

You may say, 'But I am so ashamed to walk in the light. I would rather secretly cover up my life.' Adam and Eve tried to hide from God, making fig leaf coverings (*Genesis 3.7*). But we should notice that God's better clothing for them was provided after confession.

To walk in the light means to become increasingly conscious of sin

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that would hinder our fellowship with God. As that sin is revealed we are not to run away again into the darkness. Rather we can come by faith in God's Son, Who gave His life that all our sins might be forgiven and removed. As we do so the barriers to fellowship are removed and we continue in relationship with God.

John reminds us that sin *does* matter. We dare not redefine it or pretend it doesn't exist if it demanded the price of the blood of the Son of God on the cross.

One of the paradoxes of the Christian life and growth in grace is a deepening conviction of sin. Yet this is indeed an evidence of the work of grace, that we are walking in the light and that the light is shining on our life.

When the sun shines directly on our hall wall at home, every imperfection in the plaster is shown up. Yet on a cloudy day the wall seems perfectly level. C S Lewis said: 'We believe the sun has risen not because we see it, but because of it we see everything else.'

Increasingly seeing our own actions, words and attitudes that we never knew we were guilty of can be so discouraging; we feel we are getting worse, not better. However, this growth has the glorious end purpose in that we might become clean deep down.

Our real danger is if we resist this cleansing process and say to God, 'I have had enough; if this is the Christian life, you can keep it!' Satan joins in and reminds us of our guilt, and discourages us into thinking that because of the way we feel we cannot even be a Christian.

*When Satan tempts me to despair  
And tells me of the guilt within,  
Upward I look and see Him there  
Who made an end of all my sin.  
Because the sinless Saviour died  
My sinful soul is counted free.*

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*For God the Just is satisfied*

*To look on Him and pardon me.*

*Charitie L Bancroft (1841-1923)*

So the advice John gives us is not to walk away or hide from the light but walk *in* the light! Why? Because *‘the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.’*

John encourages us to repent and come to Christ, the Truth, Who sets us free (*John 8.31-32, 36*). The way to forgiveness and fellowship is not by deception and denial, but by confession. This is the Gospel.

People who know they are sinners, and confess their sin, have no problem having fellowship with like-minded Christians. They are aware of their own weaknesses; they are consequently not judgmental.

If you are meeting someone at an airport or station, you head straight for your pre-arranged meeting place. The Cross is the favourite meeting place for true fellowship, a place where no one is better than anybody else: here is common ground. Christians are meeting on the ground called Grace!

Walking in the light means:

- knowing ourselves;
- confessing ourselves to be sinners;
- cleansing ourselves in repentance and faith in dependence on the precious blood of Jesus Christ;
- entering into meaningful fellowship on the true basis of grace, which then leads to the exercising of ourselves unto godliness;
- having a commitment to God’s way, walking in the light on the basis of grace, and not in the darkness.

Simply put, walking in the light means God is revealing the truth

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about Himself and our own self to us. It is all about revelation, not cover up.

John now moves on to deal with an attitude of self-righteousness which shows we are not walking in the light.

### **1 John 1.8:**

*'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.'*

A man came to C H Spurgeon and claimed to be without sin. Spurgeon was intrigued with what the man said and invited him back to dinner. Spurgeon thought he would test out the claim and threw a glass of water over his guest, to which the 'perfect' man responded with a force of words certainly not out of the dictionary of the new man of grace. Spurgeon said, 'The old man within you is not dead: he had simply fainted and needed to be revived with a glass of water!'

John is devastating in his analysis of such an attitude of superiority: '*the truth is not in us*'; we are not saved! John warns us not to redefine our sin or pretend it doesn't exist. Neither should we think that we are holy enough without God. God's wrath demanded the price of the blood of the Son of God on the cross, His suffering and death. Here John teaches the paramount importance of considering sin seriously!

### **1 John 1.9:**

*'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'*

The way to total forgiveness and fellowship is not by deception and denial but by confession. God promises us that if we confess our sin and do not cover it up, He is faithful and just to forgive us. John has already stated that the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin.

When we consider the original meaning of verse 9, we find the

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promise refers to a continual action of cleansing. This is a continual experience in the Christian life. Every day we need to wash; every day we need to come to the cleansing fountain to wash away our sin. It is a continuing experience. God never gets tired of us, or says, 'Oh, not you again!'

Sometimes the devil tempts us that we cannot keep going back to God, that God is tired of us, that he has run out of patience. We can *never* come too often to God when we come in humble penitence and active faith.

We take sin seriously when we accept God's faithful definition of what we are by nature and His way of forgiveness through repenting of our sin and coming to Christ. By faith we receive His abundant pardon and reconciling love according to His sovereign grace.

### **1 John 1.10:**

*'If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.'*

John proceeds to address another type of problem – denial of the past, a refusal to repent of our sin. Again he is straight down the line with such an attitude: it makes Christ a liar and His Word is not in us!

## 2. WALKING IN OBEDIENCE AND LOVE

### *1 John 2.1-14*

#### **1 John 2.1-2:**

*‘My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.’*

Now John reveals one of the grand purposes of his letter: that you may walk in godliness. John writes in his authority as an apostle and very tenderly as a spiritual father: ‘*My little children*’. He writes with instruction: ‘*write I unto you, that ye sin not*’. What he means is, have a true and tender conscience towards holiness; always aim not to sin; strive against its power; walk in the light – this is God’s standard of holiness.

‘The reason I have written in such a way,’ John says, ‘is so that you may not sin.’ This is the standard, the objective, and the desire. While we can never reach a complete state of sinless perfection while here on Earth, this does not take away the perfect standard laid down by God. To live a life without sinning should always be our aim. John is both a perfectionist, in that he desires perfection, and a realist, in that he knows what saved sinners experience in their battle with indwelling sin.

What John is teaching us here is that confession of sin gives cleansing, but this cleansing will then bring about a desire for holiness, not a casual, presumptuous view of sin. The fact that we can obtain forgiveness should never lead to a light view of the gravity of sin.

*‘...these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin...’*

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The tension between these two phrases form the balance between too harsh and too lenient a view of sin. Christians *will* sin because they have not yet been made perfect. But John does not want the inevitability of sin in our life to be used as an *excuse* for sinning. The fact we cannot live lives perfectly does not mean we must lower the standard, because it is not our standard to lower; it is God Who has given the standard. (See *John 5.14; 8.11.*)

Think of the safety standards that must be put in place on an aircraft or a ship to protect the passengers and crew. Sometimes mistakes are made, but we would not want the standards to be lowered because of the inevitability of the rules sometimes being broken.

If we are a Christian we are a disciple of Jesus Christ and He is perfect. The example, the standard of Jesus Christ was perfect: a total and absolute fulfillment of His Father's will. Jesus is our Saviour and our righteousness, and we know He died upon the cross for our sins at great cost. Therefore out of love and gratitude we will live to please Him. This will mean taking sin seriously, not sinning lightly and having a mindset which does not live carelessly, trampling on the blood of Christ or wilfully abusing His grace.

The answer is not to move the goalposts, downgrading the seriousness of sin, to apply our own standards, but to recognise God's standards and to strive to live our life in His grace according to His standard.

It is rather like the way in which ice skaters are continually striving for perfection in their routine. The knowledge that each time there will be an imperfection does not stop them from striving for perfection.

We can enter into the assurance of the promise which follows if we are exercising ourselves unto godliness. How we arrive at and enter into that wonderful promise is important.

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But ‘if any man sin’ – John understands there’s no such thing as sinless perfection this side of glory – ‘we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.’ His perfect Person and ministry speak on behalf of needy sinners – ‘the propitiation for our sins’.

God provides from Himself in Christ the perfect atoning sacrifice, delivering us from His righteous wrath over sin in Christ Jesus. The offended God provides the way of atonement for sinners!

‘The sins of the whole world’. This does not mean for every person in the whole world, but atonement for sinners throughout the whole world who put their trust in Jesus Christ as Saviour. There is one way of atonement in Christ and it is above any culture or tradition. Throughout the world there is one call to holiness and one answer to the problem of sin – Jesus Christ the righteous.

Now we consider two more signs of the Christian life – walking in obedience and walking in love.

### **Walking in obedience: 1 John 2.3-6**

*‘And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.’*

This is how we will assuredly know that we really do know Him: if we obey His commands wholeheartedly. John teaches that obedience and love are the handmaids to assurance. Without them assurance is non-existent! The Puritan Thomas Brooks said: ‘No man merits assurance by obedience, yet God usually crowns obedience with assurance.’

The word ‘keep’ means to obey. It is a recurring theme both in *John’s Gospel* and this letter. John is not teaching that obeying is how you

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become a Christian, but that if you *are* a Christian you will walk in obedience. We learn here from John that grace does not abolish God's law as a standard of life for the Christian. Rather grace writes the law, as the law of love, in the heart according to the power of the Holy Spirit in Christ. The law can no longer condemn us for we are not under the law but under grace – but it remains a standard!

*My gracious Lord I own Thy right  
To every service I can pay,  
And call it my supreme delight  
To hear Thy dictates and obey.*

*What is my being but for Thee,  
Its sure support, its noblest end?  
Thy ever-smiling face to see,  
And serve the cause of such a friend.*

*Philip Doddridge (1702-1751)*

Calvin said: 'When God forgives us He changes our hearts – turns us to obedience by His Spirit.' This is one of the great purposes of our calling. Now by grace we follow our Lord willingly, desiring to obey His law, conforming our lives to it (1 John 5.3). Love now becomes the heart of the law in our understanding of it, and obedience to it. (See Mark 12.28-31; John 15.10.)

Notice how powerfully and forthrightly John condemns a spirit of antinomianism – faith without obedience – in verse 4. Grace in us motivates obedience which shows our deep appreciation of God's love to us in Christ – verse 5.

Spurgeon believed that: 'Gratitude is the mother of obedience.' Obedience is a measure of our gratitude, a hallmark of faith. Therefore the best measure of spiritual life is evidenced not in emotional ecstasies, but in obedience.

*'The love of God perfected'*, or maturing within, develops only in the

## *Walking in Obedience and Love: 1 John 2.1-14*

person who keeps on obeying. This is the evidence: *'Hereby know we that we are in him'*.

How are we assured we are in Him? In obedience! This obedience is directed by the commands of God and inspired by the example of Christ – verse 6.

*'Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing'* John 15.4-5.

Matthew Henry stated: *'The surest evidence of our love to Christ is obedience to the laws of Christ.'*

The walk of Christ was characterised by His:

- wholehearted submission and obedience to His Father's will;
- humility, and a pure and passionate desire to glorify His Father;
- love for the law as a rule of life;
- sacrificial love in giving Himself for the Church (*1 John 3.16*).

The walk of the Christian, as a representative of Christ, displays His example in dependence upon Him. Robert Murray M'Cheyne said: *'It is not great talents God blesses, so much as great likeness to Jesus.'* If we are in Christ, and Christ is in us as our *'hope of glory'*, then the world should see Christ in our walk.

*Lord, it belongs not to my care  
Whether I die or live;  
To love and serve Thee is my share,  
And this Thy grace must give.  
  
If life be long, I will be glad  
That I may long obey;*

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*If short, yet why should I be sad*

*To soar to endless day ?*

*Richard Baxter (1615-91)*

Walking in obedience has two essential characteristics: submission to God's commands and imitating Christ. Thomas Brooks thought that: 'The more the soul is conformed to Christ the more confident it will be of its interests in Christ.'

### **Walking in love: 1 John 2.7-11**

*'Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.'*

The Christian walk is not only known by holiness and obedience, but also by a love that nurtures fellowship. The command to love is as old as Truth itself. It is not a new commandment in the sense of its introduction – verse 7.

*'And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another' 2 John 5.*

The command is new in the sense of its exercise and application within the New Testament Church of Christ. The Light has now come into the world. A pure example of love in Christ has been shown to us – verse 8.

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*'A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another' John 13.34.*

Now a Christlike love has opportunities to act and flourish in the ministry of a New Testament local church. John teaches that love, not only to God but to the brethren, is an essential element of conversion.

*'We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death' 1 John 3.14.*

He then shows in verse 9 that darkness and hate are inseparable partners. Light will never shine in hatred. John teaches us that love and light are also inseparable partners – verse 10. Light will always shine with love. Abiding in the light means exercising love and remaining in fellowship with God.

*'Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness' 1 Thessalonians 5.5.*

The opposite is the case with hatred. We cannot see where we are going and end up in confusion – verse 11. Hatred indicates deadness and coldness with no love or light, despite what a person might profess outwardly. Hatred is shown in contention, faultfinding, gossip, hostility, aloofness, prickliness, jealousy, and an unforgiving spirit. A person paralysed with bitterness and resentment in a spirit of hatred cannot benefit or be assured spiritually. John's description of being in darkness is a solemn warning about the spiritual state brought about by such a condition of hate.

Love is known by its kindness, consideration, generosity, and compassion. It is more than sentiment or emotion: Christian love is about caring for one another. Several times this theme is brought out in the New Testament: wash one another's feet; prefer one another; be of the same mind one to another; do not judge one another; receive one another; confess your faults to one another; admonish one another;

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edify one another; bear one another's burdens; use hospitality one to another.

Love equals care: it can be described as wanting the highest good for one another.

John has been dealing with a very challenging issue. Now with a pastoral heart he inserts an encouragement.

### **Be encouraged: 1 John 2.12-14**

*'I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.'*

In verse 12 John uses the term '*little children*' in an affectionate manner to communicate with all Christian believers. Following this, three particular groups of believers are addressed.

Firstly, there are the fathers, referring to mature believers who have been in the way for many years. Secondly, there are the young men who are brought to spiritual maturity, doing battle with sin and Satan. Thirdly, there are the little children. The term in verse 13 actually refers to new believers. It is not the same Greek word for children used as an affectionate term for all believers as in verse 12.

Christian believers: be encouraged because of your *status* – verse 12. To all believers John declares: '*your sins are forgiven you*', in its complete meaning. How can John say this? He can say this because of the all-prevailing and precious name of Jesus Christ: '*for his name's sake*'; because of His Person, character and work; and because of

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Who He is, Jesus Christ the Lord (*Acts 4.7-10; 1 Corinthians 6.11*).

Forgiven! That is the secure, sure, privileged status of a Christian believer: justified by faith in Jesus Christ. It is not because they feel sure about *themselves* but because they feel sure about *Christ!* Even though we must do battle daily with sin, our status in Christ remains assured. We are *'complete in him'*.

Mature believers: be encouraged because of your *experience* – verses 13-14. Through experience you have proved Jesus Christ, the Eternal One, to be a faithful Saviour and Lord. Here we are reminded that real Christianity is doctrine alive in Christ: the Way, the Truth, and the Life. John reminds them twice to impress upon them the importance of knowing Christ by personal experience. This was the great desire of the Apostle Paul, to know more of Christ.

*'That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection'*  
*Philippians 3.10.*

How then do we know Jesus Christ by experience? This knowledge of Christ is gained by taking up our cross and following Him as our Lord. This is the key to experience: experience through prayer, the Word, through service, godliness and through worship. Walk in the Spirit.

Younger believers: be encouraged as you *grow* in doing battle with sin and Satan – verses 13-14. When a person is converted Satan is dethroned; that person is no longer under the dominion of Satan. The victory is certain: they have overcome Satan through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But there are still battles to be fought in the Christian life before we enter into the reward of the victory. The old nature, the flesh, remains as an unwelcome guest. The new nature is constantly opposed by the flesh. So in this sense we are also called to be overcomers constantly in the Christian life. John repeats the statement, reminding us that

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strength to overcome is not about being in the prime of life but rather owing to their being immersed in the Word of God.

Little children: be encouraged because of your *heavenly Father* – verse 13. One of the important first steps for a new convert is to realise their new relationship with God the Father. A new convert has been given as much authority to address God as their Father as a mature believer. However young you are spiritually you have been adopted into the family of God. We come to the Father through Jesus Christ. He brings us to the Father as His redeemed children.

*‘Behold I and the children which God hath given me’ Hebrews 2.13.*

### **Conclusion**

So far we have considered living the Christian life as walking in the light, walking in obedience, and walking in love, and John tells us to be encouraged as we do so.

# 3. WALKING IN THE TRUTH

## *1 John 2.15-29*

Having considered three characteristics of the Christian walk – walking in the Light, walking in obedience, and walking in love – we continue this theme. John teaches a fourth characteristic of the Christian life: walking in the truth.

Walking in the truth positively governs our attitudes and actions with respect to the world and heresy. The truth is that wonderful, pure wisdom we find recorded in God’s Word, centred in Christ Jesus the Lord. The truth applied to our minds, our conscience and our heart positively affects how we speak, act, think and discern. Knowing the truth, Jesus Christ says, sets us free (*John 8.32*). It enables us to put all things into their true perspective. Our response to the world and antichrists can only be strong as we believe, embrace and imbibe the truth.

### **A truth attitude to the world: 1 John 2.15**

*‘Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.’*

The word ‘world’ used here refers to attitudes and actions in rebellion against Almighty God. ‘The world’:

- describes the attitude of an unbelieving, pagan society whose evil influences and forces are hostile to God;
- is the spirit of the age, rebelling against God: the world in which we live is drawing us away from God;
- refers to Satan’s system for opposing the work of Christ here on Earth.

John reminds us:

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*'And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness' 1 John 5.19.*

He solemnly warns us: love for this world order (the spirit of the age) and love for the Father are incompatible. One cannot love both. To love the world is to be devoid of love for the Father. John leaves no middle ground!

Who or what do we really love? That which comes from the world, or that which comes from the Father? Jesus said:

*'No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon' Matthew 6.24.*

### **A truth assessment of the world: 1 John 2.16**

*'For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.'*

*'The lust of the flesh'* is to be under the control of the sensual desires of the fallen human nature; any sort of selfish or greedy cravings to satisfy one's physical desires in rebellion against God's order. God gives us richly creative blessings to enjoy. The lust of the flesh is when we want these gifts out of His order.

*'The lust of the eyes'*. John directs our attention to the chief bridge between the flesh and the outside world. He is warning about the desire to see things only for the sake of sinful pleasure, coveting through the eyes.

The spirit of the age says: 'I see it,' 'I want it' and 'I'll have it.' Note the testimony of Achan in *Book of Joshua*:

*'And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and*

## *Walking in The Truth: 1 John 2.15-29*

*two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them' Joshua 7.20-21.*

The lust of the world today is what visual advertising depends upon for success: we are captivated by outward show. Today materialism is powered by the lust of the eye. We see it, we want it, and we borrow on a credit card to get it.

'*The lust of the eyes*' also refers here to a life affected by images and pictures. In John's day the Greeks and Romans, as in our society today, lived for entertainment and activities that excited the eyes.

David recognised his danger lay here:

*'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way' Psalm 119.37.*

Things have not changed very much! Today television is the great medium feeding the 'lust of the eyes.' Subjects must be presented in a suggestive, lively, amusing or stimulating manner. It is a matter of image over substance.

'*The pride of life*'. Here John directs our attention to an unholy pride in what one is and what one has; the love of luxury, not moderation. The meaning in the original is to boast of one's lifestyle, gifts and accomplishments; to boast of one's possessions, considering oneself superior to others because of one's social financial status. It is to dress, to speak and to act in a way which brings and seeks attention. For example, I recently saw a man walking along wearing 'posh' shades, and a black T-shirt with bright yellow lettering bearing the words, 'It's all about me'!

It is to exaggerate your own gifts and always be turning the conversation around to yourself; to behave in a way of self-importance; to look good; and to grasp after admiration.

We can be sure that these three characteristics of the world view in verse 16 do not emanate from God the Father. They emanate from

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a sinful human nature under the influence of Satan. When a shocking evil event takes place, society and the media debate the question ‘Why?’ of such behaviour.

For example, recently a man just out of prison committed a dreadful crime. Immediately the question was asked: Why such behaviour? What makes people so evil? Is the root problem simply a social one or is the root problem a sinful heart? This is simply the reality of total depravity.

*‘For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders’ Mark 7.21.*

John says here, beware of what is motivating your attitude and your actions! (See *James 1.13-22.*) Consider the source: the attitude of the world is not from the Father and is therefore evil.

John’s teaching is based upon the Fall of man in the Garden of Eden. This problem is nearly as old as time itself:

*‘And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat’ Genesis 3.6.*

### **1 John 2.17**

*‘And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.’*

Here we come to an unavoidable, inescapable reality, which is known to each one of us. People who live in rebellion against God with unfulfilled desires are focusing on a world which is passing away. It has a ‘passing away’ stamp upon it! In fact, this stamp is on every activity this world has to offer. Fashion changes, culture changes, technology changes, society changes. There is only one thing certain about the world: it continually changes, and it will finally end.

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The Word of God abides forever. *'He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'* This is building for eternity!

*'And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved'* Matthew 24.12-13.

Are you building for eternity? Are you preparing for eternity?

*'Redeeming the time, because the days are evil'* Ephesians 5.16.

I read of a man who has spent the last eighteen years visiting seventeen thousand pubs tasting beer, all on public transport. This is true dedication to the world!

To build for eternity is to repent of your sin, put your trust in Christ, and take up your cross and follow Him. It is to serve Him, to live for God's glory in a sacrificial manner with your eye of faith on your eternal inheritance in Christ.

John has taught that there are strict boundaries between the sphere of the world and the sphere of the Church. We cannot have a foot in both camps. We cannot love the world and love God the Father, though we often think we can. Love for the world in a believer diminishes love for God. They cannot dwell together in the same heart.

John has been warning the Church about conflict between light and darkness, love and hatred, obedience to God and following the world. John has taught that to live out the Christian life in the Christian way we must walk in the light, in obedience, in love and in truth. We must make a Truth attitude assessment of the world.

Now John focuses on a Truth assessment of theological error.

### **A truth assessment of the heretical antichrist: 1 John 2.18-19, 22-23**

*'Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists;*

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*whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us... Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.'*

John teaches here to stand firm in the truth against the onslaught of error aimed at destroying the Church.

### **The antichrist**

While the warning is applicable to all believers, here John is giving an especial warning to young believers. 'The last time' is referring to the period of time between the first and second coming of Jesus Christ. Elsewhere it is referred to as 'the last days' or 'the last times'.

*'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds' Hebrews 1.1-2.*

What is meant by 'antichrist'? It is a term used in the Bible only by John, and describes three things.

a. A spirit in the world which opposes or denies Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God – verse 22;

b. False teachers who characterise and promote this false doctrine are themselves antichrist. They are the 'instead of Christ' or an adversary of Christ, literally 'against Christ'.

*'For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect' Matthew 24.24.*

## *Walking in The Truth: 1 John 2.15-29*

c. Antichrist movements rebelling in this world against Christ and His Church. They unite in a common cause. One of the characteristics of these days is the continual stream of antichrists which trouble the Church. This will be one of the greatest signs of the very last days, the anti-Christ and anti-Church movement.

*‘And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved’ 2 Thessalonians 2.8-10.*

The true Church, which sees the error and rejects it for Christ’s sake, will suffer great persecution. John deals with two particular characteristics of the way in which the antichrists operated.

1. They denied that Jesus of Nazareth was really the Christ, the Son of God – verses 22-23. This is one of the great tests of false religion: what do they teach about Jesus Christ?

These people refused to believe that God took upon Himself human flesh as Christ, the Son of God, the Way. Instead, according to church historians, these deceivers were claiming incredible spiritual experiences. These Gnostics in John’s day placed their emphasis upon mysticism similar to today’s New Age thinking. While denying Jesus Christ they claimed they could rise up to God through a transcendent spiritual experience – see *1 John 4.2-3*.

But John teaches that the truth of Jesus Christ as both God and Man is vital to our understanding of access to God. We cannot ‘float’ up to God in a mystical manner without Christ. Heaven’s doors are barred and bolted without Him. We need a Saviour who took upon Himself a body like ours, otherwise He is not fully representative of man. As

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both God and Man He went to the cross as our Redeemer. He alone now represents us before the Father.

The great problem with rejecting Christ extends to the fact that in doing so we reject God the Father. If we do that, there is no way for us to approach God.

2. These antichrists not only denied Christ as the Son of God in the flesh, and their own need of Him: they then attempted to deceive others from within the Church. They liked people to join their 'heresy club'.

This is one of the characteristics of antichrists even today. They often target existing believers, especially the vulnerable. They set up camp as deceivers, infiltrating within the Church, and sow the seeds of error and confusion.

John reminds us here of the danger of deception from within the Church, especially warning new converts.

Eventually these people got up and left in bitterness and, as John describes, '*went out from us*' – verse 19. They went out from the Church because they realised they could not influence true believers towards their error. There was no union between them.

The tragedy of this is in their witness; they had probably made a profession at the outset, had been baptised and joined the Church. But they never really obeyed from the heart. These people were not backslidden: they were apostates. They hated Christ! It was the difference between light and darkness, truth and error, life and death. They were incompatible; there could be no fellowship.

### **Resisting the antichrist**

John gives us three safeguards for our help and instruction whereby we can resist these antichrists:

- a. Believers have an unction from God: *1 John 2.20-21, 27-28***

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*‘But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him. And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.’*

Intellectual belief in and of itself is not enough to resist the anti-christ: the antichrist is resisted with the aid of the Holy Spirit of God. All believers have received the anointing of the Holy Spirit which guided them into truth. John affirms the importance of the Christian’s anointing in the Holy Spirit.

He is not speaking about a special unction here, but an unction which is common to all true born-again believers. The question for believers is not: Have we the unction of the Holy Spirit? The real question we might ask in this context is: Are we being guided by, and being responsive to, this unction?

Each member of the Church who has been truly converted has the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within them. As you listen to the teaching, are you discerning between truth and error in dependence upon the truth? True believers have something like a warning bell in them which activates when something doesn’t sound right. It is rather like music which is out of tune. Spiritually, as regards truth, the believer’s warning bell activates in the mind: something doesn’t sound right! Their soul is sensitive under the influence of the Holy Spirit. It is taught in truth through the Word of God.

A true believer walking with the Lord is sensitive to truth and error and will not want to grieve the Holy Spirit. In this way the Holy Spirit

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of Truth indwelling the believer is a kind of divine lie detector! It can discern false teachers.

Here in this context the true believers who remained in the Church fellowship were those who saw the error. They realised what was being taught by the heretics was a lie because of the unction of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The Holy Spirit leads us into Christ-centred truth. Because of this our discernment is governed by truth – see verse 21. Those who deny Jesus His rightful place as Christ the Son of God also deny God the Father in the process.

### **b. Believers are established in Gospel truth: 1 John 2.24-27**

*‘Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life. These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.’*

When John says you do not need anyone to teach you, he is not invalidating the teaching office in the Church. He is simply reminding believers they have a solemn responsibility to discern between truth and error.

*‘These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so’ Acts 17.11.*

The Bereans were noble discerners!

So what is the test of a true unction of the Holy Spirit? The test is not a special so-called transcendent spiritual experience but rather

## *Walking in The Truth: 1 John 2.15-29*

what the Spirit teaches us in His Word. The deceivers were claiming incredible out-of-body experiences, similar to today's Charismatic excesses. They were claiming special illumination, while at the same time denying Jesus Christ as both God and Man. These so-called spiritual experiences were leading them away from the fundamental truths, from the Gospel, whereas the ordinary believers, with the anointing of Holy Spirit, spotted the problem. They would have nothing to do with this lie! The secret was their anointing.

John says: *'Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning'*. This is referring to the truth.

As an illustration, when you are photocopying something it is very important to copy from the original. If you don't, the standard of the copies becomes weaker and weaker.

Christians aim to believe and teach what the apostles believed and taught – Christ being the Chief Cornerstone. Our strength is to abide in the original core Christian message, which is recorded for us here in the New Testament.

*'And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone' Ephesians 2.20.*

That Gospel truth in Christ, which you have heard from the beginning is better. As the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy:

*'Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us' 2 Timothy 1.13-14.*

As far as the message of Christianity is concerned, it cannot be updated to make it 'relevant'. Its relevance counts for all generations to the end of the world. Basically, this is Word and Spirit teaching us to stay close to the Bible, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit. They

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are the best of friends, working in perfect harmony together. Your anointing is for the sake of the truth! The effect of letting the truth abide in us will be that we will abide in Christ.

### **c. Believers have Christ's righteousness: 1 John 2.28-29**

*'And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.'*

Abiding in Jesus Christ is walking in God's way:

*'Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him' John 14.23.*

*'That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ' Ephesians 3.17-19.*

Abiding in the righteousness of Jesus Christ gives confidence to the Christian.

*Why should I fear the darkest hour,  
Or tremble at the tempter's power?  
Jesus vouchsafes to be my Tower.*

*Though sin would fill me with distress,  
The throne of grace I dare address,  
For Jesus is my Righteousness.*

*John Newton (1725-1807)*

Abiding in Him means we will practice righteousness in our lives. This is the true fruit and evidence of spiritual life. We may practise righteousness by exercising faith in Christ; by prayer and devotion to

## *Walking in The Truth: 1 John 2.15-29*

His Word; by meditating on Him; by worship; by serving and following Him; all by the Holy Spirit. We do not keep ourselves, but are kept by the power of God. By grace as we abide in Christ we experience blessing. At His second coming, if we are abiding in Him He comes as our Friend and Shepherd. It will be our joy to see Him.

We must focus on abiding in Christ because that will mean spiritual growth in our life and personal testimony. Outside Christ any confidence is presumption. Our confidence is in Christ; in Him we have assurance for life and for when we meet our Maker. We will not know perfect righteousness until we arrive in Heaven, but we can practise it while here upon Earth in preparation for our heavenly home.

### **Conclusion**

- Walking in the truth positively governs our attitudes and actions, especially with respect to the world and to heresy.
- Knowing the truth, Jesus Christ says, sets us free. It enables us to put all things into their true perspective.
- Our response to the world and the antichrists can only be strong if we believe, embrace and imbibe the truth.

So far we have considered four aspects of the Christian pathway: walking in the light, in obedience, in love and in the truth. This pattern follows on through John's letter. A one-sentence summary of the Christian life as taught by John could be:

‘Walking by the light in obedience that is motivated by love, based upon the truth in God's way.’



## 4. WALKING AS A CHILD OF GOD

### *1 John 3.1-9*

We will now consider aspects of walking in God's way as a privileged child of God. In verses 28-29 of chapter 2 we saw that abiding in Christ means we will practise righteousness. This is the first way in which we walk as a child of God. Chapter 3 gives us the child of God's response to being called into His family. The true test of Christianity is not: Have I obeyed a certain set of rules in a way which makes me acceptable to God? Keeping rules can never *make* a person a Christian – that is legalism. But a Christian will live out God's rules as a *response* to God's perfect love in saving them from hell through Christ Jesus. The real questions to ask are: Am I walking in a way which is motivated by love to Him and what He has done? Do I live in a way which pleases God? Am I sensitive to what God loves and what God hates?

#### **As Christian believers, remember what we are: 1 John 3.1**

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

'Behold': Stop and think about the precious quality of God's love. John calls our attention to the uniqueness and power of God's love. 'What manner of love': contemplate the sort of love the Father has for us. Believers do sin against God's law and the love of our Father in Heaven. When we realise this we are sensitive to sin and are encouraged to more holiness in our lives.

We are children of God! Think on this love, the quality and type of His love. We have been adopted into God's family as His children because of love. God knows our background and our problem of sin,

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but in His love, knowing the future, He adopted us into His family and patiently loves and shapes us. What love!

The world does not understand this. Persecution only comes to those who abide in Christ. Satan attacks believers in order to attack Christ.

God's love to us is everlasting, secure, unchangeable, forgiving, adopting, compassionate and pure. An appreciation of this will bring about a desire to honour Him in our lives.

### **As children of God, remember what we will be: 1 John 3.2**

*'Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.'*

'We shall be like him'. God's ultimate aim is to make us perfect, like His beloved Son.

*'...may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ' Ephesians 4.15.*

As His children we should take after Him, and people should see in us more and more likeness to Christ. Finally, when we appear with Him in glory, we will be perfectly Christ-like.

*'For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself' Philippians 3.20-21.*

### **As children of God, remember what we should be now: 1 John 3.3**

*'And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.'*

Because of this hope we will want our life to be purified. This is the purpose of John's teaching here. He says, 'Stop. Behold what love, what

## *Walking as a Child of God: 1 John 3.1-9*

favour, what hope is yours!’ How much of our activity is a response to His love? How we understand our relationship with God affects the way we live. Our hope in Christ links with holiness in Him. It is a continual exercise. Look to Him; contemplate the glorious work of God’s grace in your life. See what He has done and what you will be. Focussing on Him will help us to see error or what is counterfeit in our life. This will then lead to purifying our tastes, our desires and our life. We will desire to be Christ-like.

As children of God we should be serious in resisting sin, the great enemy. This passage is one of the most challenging in all Scripture!

### **Remember how sin is defined: 1 John 3.4**

*‘Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.’*

Sin is defined here as ‘lawlessness’, meaning rebellion against the commandments of God. It is an attitude of mind that rejects God’s Lordship over our life, an internal rebellion. This attitude of rebellion is the essence of sin. Sin is *doing* what the almighty, all-seeing, all-holy God has told us not to do in His Word. It is also *not doing* what He has told us to do in His Word. Sin includes acts of commission and omission. We need to grasp this definition of sin to enable us to understand the remaining part of the passage.

### **Remember that sin is defeated only by Christ: 1 John 3.5**

*‘And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.’*

John points us to Christ. He is the sinless One Who came into this world for the specific purpose of taking away our sin, its guilt and its dominion over our life. He alone delivers us from the consequences of sin – an eternity in hell. He has died to save us, and in saving us has called us to follow Him in a life of righteousness.

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Therefore we must worship Him, and in our worship our faith must include the highest estimation of Christ as a Person. He is sinless, and as such He has the authority, the power and the merit to take away our sin. Sin is defeated only in Christ the Holy One. He is the Saviour in the complete and absolute sense. Brethren, we must have the highest views of Christ and trust in Him alone to take away our sin. In taking sin away He also gets the victory over the devil by destroying his works.

### **Remember that sinning is no longer the normal pattern for a Christian: 1 John 3.6-9**

*'Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.'*

These verses can raise searching questions for us in living out the Christian life. Sadly we sin each day, even as Christians. We do get things wrong, and we do make mistakes. Sadly we are not always practising righteousness. Yet it says in this passage that whoever sins has neither seen nor known God! It says whoever has been born of God does not and cannot sin because he has been born of God. What are we to make of this in the light of John's earlier teaching?

*'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness'*  
1 John 1.8-9.

## *Walking as a Child of God: 1 John 3.1-9*

There are some principles to consider in this statement of truth made by John which will help us.

### **a. Principle 1**

*'Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not' v6a*

John teaches us that our life of holiness depends on us *abiding in Christ*. 'Abiding in Christ' means being delivered from the bondage of sin through His death on the cross. Although troubled by the flesh and the old nature, sin no longer has dominion over us. We must have a living, vital relationship with Christ. We are to follow and know Him. Do we walk with Him, and love Him? Children of God no longer have a desire to follow the devil. When they do sin they are sorry for it; it grieves them and they soon repent. They feel hurt by sin, but sin is constantly defeated in Christ. If we try to obey without Christ, we will fail. Walking with Christ is the secret to godliness.

### **b. Principle 2**

*'Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him' v6b.*

One of the evidences we have been truly saved is that *we will not habitually or wilfully sin* against the light of God's Word. We will be troubled about sin in our life, taking it very seriously. When we sin we will confess our sin to God, and sincerely repent of it, being tenderhearted about sin. We will not abuse God's grace by trampling on the precious blood of Christ. We will not treat sin lightly, as being of little consequence. Sin is no longer a way of life; it does not remain unrepented of and is of great concern to us.

### **c. Principle 3**

*'Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous' v7.*

We will be *on our guard for false teachers*. Counterfeit Christians were trying to convince believers that a person could be saved and

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still practise sin habitually and treat it lightly; you could be saved and then live as you liked because you were saved by grace. In other words, the more you sin, the more God's grace is magnified!

Paul says, '*God forbid!*' This is an abuse of grace. A saved person has a God-given desire in their innermost being to be righteous, to be a doer of God's will and way, to walk in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

### **d. Principle 4**

*'He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil' v8.*

Realise that *sin is a foreign influence to the Christian*, for its source is the devil. Sin is of the devil and always has been. Jesus Christ has ensured the devil is not only defeated, but that his works are destroyed eternally for believers. In time this means the devil's power and dominion over a saved person as ruler of their life has been destroyed. He is no longer the commander of their life; he has been replaced by Christ, and in Him is victory.

When we sin, always remember it is of the flesh, the old nature, not the new God-given nature. John does not deny that Christians do sin, but he does deny that a true Christian sins wilfully and carelessly as they actively abide in Christ by faith. Sinning then is no longer the normal pattern of life, although we still have to battle with it. The new nature rejects sin and opposes it, so the new person in Christ is governed by Him as Lord. Paul writes of this reality:

*'For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me*

## *Walking as a Child of God: 1 John 3.1-9*

*from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin' Romans 7.22-25.*

### **e. Principle 5**

*'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God' v9.*

John teaches a profound truth: there is *a clear divide between the new and old nature*. We do not sin when we are wholly under the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit in Christ. Sin takes place when we respond to our old nature, the flesh, and spoil what is good. Never attribute sin to the new nature given to us by God. The new nature always influences us to what is right, true and righteous. The new nature is good and pure, being of God and from God. We are partakers of the divine nature, the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. Christ's seed remains in us. When we live according to the new nature, abiding by faith in Christ, we do live righteously.

This is a little taste of Heaven on Earth, for in Heaven this truth is fully realised, where it will be always impossible to sin. Remember in Heaven our old nature, the flesh that we battle with here on Earth, is gone for ever.

When we consider the ramifications of this verse we can also see the beauty of justification by faith. In Christ we are presented perfect before God the Father. It is impossible to be acceptable to Him or be in His presence with any taint of sin whatsoever. Born of God, having a God-given new nature, we are viewed in the righteousness of Christ.

Let us pray for an increasing hatred of sin and an increasing experience of abiding in Christ. Then we will be increasingly prepared for life in Heaven where it will be true for all eternity, *'he cannot sin'*.



## 5. WALKING IN LOVE

### *1 John 3.10-17*

#### **1 John 3.10-11**

*'In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.'*

John makes a clear distinction again between a child of God and a child of the devil. If we are a child of God, then we must behave like one. The evidence, John says, will be a righteous life, defined by a life lived out in unselfish and sacrificial love. We do not *become* a child of God by practising righteousness, but rather the active living out of a life of righteousness motivated by love *shows* we are a child of God. There should be no place for an attitude of hate in the child of God.

We can see John making this stark comparison between two ways of life: one motivated by the devil, producing hatred, and the other motivated by God, producing love. When hatred creeps into our relationships we can be sure of one thing: it does not emanate from God! Therefore it comes from the devil, and we need to see it as such.

**Remember that hatred is the evidence of a child of the devil:**

#### ***1 John 3.12***

John does not mince his words. He leaves us in no doubt about the issue:

*'Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.'*

The first example we are given in the Word of God of the terrible consequences of hatred in a human being is found in *Genesis 4*. It is this example that John uses to give us a definition of hatred.

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Remember how sin was defined by John as ‘lawlessness,’ or transgression of the law (*1 John 3.4*). This was first manifest in the Fall of man in the Garden of Eden as Adam and Eve rebelled against God. This rebellion then showed its ugly fruits in their firstborn son, named Cain. Why did Cain murder his brother Abel? John says it was because Abel was a righteous man who was living a righteous life. His sacrifice was made in faith and was acceptable to God, whereas Cain’s sacrifice, given in proud carelessness, was unacceptable to God. Out of jealous hatred Cain then killed Abel, because his brother’s sacrifice was acceptable to God and his own was rejected. Cain became the first in a long line of murderers killing God’s servants. Such hatred is evidence of the devil’s influence.

### **Remember that righteousness motivated the Lord: *1 John 3.13***

*‘Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.’*

The result for the Lord was persecution. This is another evidence of a child of God. Righteousness motivated by love will mean rejection by the world; this is nothing strange. As Cain hated Abel because of his righteous deeds, so the world will hate you because of yours. Do not be surprised; just make sure the reason you are suffering is because of righteousness.

In the context, the believers were suffering because they were no longer taking part in the pagan feasts. They were no longer part of the idol-worshipping trade guilds; no longer part of the way of the world. Their separation caused people to think; it disturbed their consciences; it made them feel uncomfortable, and consequently they hated Christians. In John’s day the Christians were the butt of tavern jokes, the scapegoats for all problems. All around the world today Christian brothers and sisters are being persecuted, imprisoned and even martyred.

Now one of the problems with love is that, while most people

## *Walking in Love: 1 John 3.10-17*

acknowledge this is what is needed in the world, very few people define what they mean by love. Here John defines what is meant by Christian love.

**Remember that Christian love is an evidence of conversion:**

### ***1 John 3.14-15***

*‘We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.’*

John is making particular reference to love between fellow believers.

*‘A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another’*  
*John 13.34-35.*

If I am a Christian, I love God’s children. When purchasing a new car it is possible to order optional extras. Love is not an optional extra – it is standard equipment for the Christian. Showing hatred instead of love is saying, ‘I want you out of my life.’ Jesus says that God sees hatred as murder. Hatred is evil; it should not be allowed to govern our lives or our attitude towards people. The only thing we *should* hate is sin:

*‘The fear of the Lord is to hate evil’ Proverbs 8.13.*

We can see then why John uses this example as a voice to speak against the evil of hatred. He shocks and shakes the Christian community into addressing the danger of it. The spirit of Cain has no place in the Church or in the life of a Christian.

**Remember that sacrifice is at the heart of Christian love:**

### ***1 John 3.16***

*‘Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his*

## ***Walking With God***

*life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.'*

The Lord Jesus Christ made the ultimate sacrifice in laying down His life for His people. He set the perfect example and, while we cannot in the same way lay down our lives as a saviour, there are many ways in which we can follow the example of the Saviour in sacrificial love. We should lay down our lives voluntarily and willingly without begrudging to help, serve and provide for others; we must put the interest of others before ourselves; and we can give our time and resources for the care of others. It means giving up our so-called rights in place of another. Love is a personal commitment to give oneself to foster the highest good and wellbeing of others. It could mean paying the ultimate price and giving our life on behalf of another. It means loving through Christ whoever.

### **Remember that action is the evidence of love: 1 John 3.17**

*'But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?'*

John says that generosity to those in need is an essential element of the Christian life. Christian compassion is mercy with action. A Christian is transformed by God into a loving and giving person.

### **Conclusion**

John has identified the difference between a child of the devil and a child of God – hate and love. Let us truly hate hatred and reject it as the influence of the devil. Let us come to the foot of the cross and view by faith our Saviour, and learn the nature of sacrificial love.

## 6. WALKING TO PLEASE GOD

### *1 John 3.17-24*

There is a clear pattern of teaching that the Apostle John follows, inspired by the Holy Spirit. So far it could be summarised thus:

‘Walking in the light, with an obedience motivated by love that is based upon the truth, in God’s way as His child, with an understanding of the nature of His love to us in Christ.’

At the heart of this passage we are exhorted to do those things that are pleasing in God’s sight. As we walk to please God we find conviction, challenge, confidence and comfort.

**The assessment of our love: do we see and shut our eyes, or do we see and share? *1 John 3.17***

*‘But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?’*

Here we are reminded of the vital responsibility to provide of our God-given substance to those in need. This responsibility extends, under the banner of God’s common grace, to mankind in general. So in a disaster, such as a typhoon, we have a responsibility, if able, to donate to relieve the suffering of the victims: their need is obvious.

In this media-communication age we are given so many more opportunities to respond to real needs. But if our neighbour needs help and we have the ability, we should respond graciously as we see the need. There may be needs among work colleagues, customers, children, or our friends and relatives which we see. In this more personal way of giving and helping, a door may open to witness for the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, there is a particular priority to be alert and ready to provide for the needs of the Lord’s people.

## ***Walking With God***

*‘As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith’ Galatians 6.10.*

We see this principle being worked out in the testimony of the New Testament Church from the beginning:

*‘And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need’ Acts 2.44-45.*

*‘For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem’ Romans 15.26.*

Now here is the challenge John brings before us, which is a measure of the love of God in us: do we see and shut out – or do we see and share? Every time we are alerted to a genuine need in God’s providence our love to God is tested. How are we going to respond? How best can we help? How best can we honour God in this need?

This teaching reminds us of the responsibility of stewardship. It is not sinful to be wealthy if God has ordained such a pathway in our life. It *is* sinful to be both wealthy and selfish, to shut up our heart of compassion when we have the means to help. This is an inescapable test given to us by God: in other words, the measure of our love to God is determined by our generosity to those in need. Our Lord’s parable of the Good Samaritan in *Luke 10* gives us valuable teaching on this important point.

**Assurance by love: our words and our works in harmony together:**

### ***1 John 3.18-19***

*‘My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.’*

John is not saying here that our words have no part in our ministry

## *Walking to Please God: 1 John 3.17-24*

of love. What he is saying is that if our words are not accompanied by works, this is hypocrisy. It is to use the tongue in such a way as to take the name of the Lord in vain in our witness:

*'If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?' James 2.15-16.*

There are three principles of active love for us to remember here: in word – sincerity; in deed – action; and in truth – integrity. John brings us to the blessing of a good conscience before the Lord in exercising these three principles. This requires effort and sacrifice, the giving of ourselves and our substance on behalf of others in sincerity and truth.

Now such a lifestyle brings about assurance before the Lord. Assurance here is not seen to be gained through constant introspection and subjective feelings, but through active love being at work. This is the outward evidence that we know the truth and the truth has set us free; we are free to serve.

Here is one of God's great teachings for the Christian and a route to consistent constant assurance. We gain assurance and deeper knowledge of the truth as we love and serve sacrificially. It helps our prayer life, our fellowship with the Lord, our freedom to grow, and gives the answer of a good conscience.

*'Now the end of the commandment is charity [love] out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned'*  
*1 Timothy 1.5.*

**Confidence by love: no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus: 1 John 3.20-21**

*'For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart,*

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*and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.'*

As we consider these great truths we undoubtedly have to confess at times we are unworthy servants. The *Epistle of John* has a precious motive to assure us, but it does so without compromise. Often as we read this letter we may feel our heart *does* condemn us as we are not what we should be. John leads us to truths that we are challenged by; yet at the same time, viewed rightly, we can be comforted by them.

So here John reminds us of two fundamental facts about God and us: firstly that God is greater than our heart; and secondly that God knows all things about us. Both these truths should bring about a reverence and godly fear in our life. God knows not only about the weakness and failures known by ourselves when under conviction; He knows absolutely everything about every departure from His way. He knows all things about us. This is a sobering reality that should humble us and help us realise how awesome is the God we serve!

However, there is a comforting side to the truth that God knows all things – He is greater than our hearts. God knows our love, our faith, our desire, our works, our repentance and our standing in Christ.

Remember the restoration of Peter.

*'So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.*

*'He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest*

### ***Walking to Please God: 1 John 3.17-24***

*all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep' John 21.15-17.*

Here is the point: left to ourselves we *do* come under condemnation; but we *do not* when we trust only in Jesus Christ, and serve Him and grow in Him, and are viewed and accepted in Him.

*'For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but 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' Hebrews 4.15-16.*

Such truths do not leave us in lethargy but, applied by the Spirit, they encourage us to love in word, deed and truth. We are guided into an assurance that is based on the truth about ourselves and the truth about God. We can serve honestly and sincerely in dependence, out of love to God and in love to others. In Christ, as we obey Him and follow Him, we can have confidence toward God. These verses are a reminder that faith *without* works is dead, but faith evidenced *by* works brings assurance in the heart and confidence toward God.

### **The reward of living according to the way of God: 1 John 3.22**

*'And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.'*

Here we are taught that there is a direct link between answered prayer and obedience to God's way. When we are walking in God's way our needs and desires accord with God's plan for our life; we can be sure that God will answer us in accordance with His perfect time and way. We may not understand God's timing, or God's permissive will, but we do understand that God is good and hears and answers prayer. We receive of Him as we walk in His way according to God's love.

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Relevant references on this point are:

*'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me'*  
*Psalm 66.18*

*'If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you...If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love...Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you'* John 15.7, 10, 15.

*'Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law'* Romans 13.8-10.

*'Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered'*  
*1 Peter 3.7.*

One great secret to answered prayer is obedience and the secret of obedience is love.

### **The fellowship of faith and love: 1 John 3.23-24**

*'And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.'*

## *Walking to Please God: 1 John 3.17-24*

In verse 23 we are taught fundamental principles on walking in a way of obedience that pleases God. We have already learned that loving in word, deed and truth, obeying God's way, pleases Him. But now in verse 23 John magnifies God's commandments by reminding us of these two essentials to obedience: he emphasises the heart of God's way for us. These are, if you like, the two golden strands to the Christian walk that please God. They are faith and love.

Scriptures we might turn to on this point are: *Ephesians 1.15; Colossians 1.4; 1 Thessalonians 1.3; 3.6; 5.8; 2 Thessalonians 1.3; 1 Timothy 6.11; 2 Timothy 2.22; Titus 3.15; Philemon 5.*

It is this lifestyle of faith and loving obedience that brings us into fellowship with Christ and to dwell in Him. These are the two main pillars of a Spirit-filled lifestyle: believing and loving, faith and love.

Paul describes it to the Galatians as a *'faith which worketh by love'* (*Galatians 5.6*). Faith toward God and love toward man are two sides of the same coin. Abiding in Christ and He in us is a key experience for a believer to have confidence toward God.

*'I am the true vine...Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me' John 15.1,4.*

### **Conclusion**

Remember: understanding the love of God to sinners in Christ motivates us to walk in a way pleasing to Him.



## 7. WALKING WITH SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

### *1 John 4.1-6*

We are considering various aspects of the walk of a Christian as taught us by the Apostle John. John is pastorally concerned to train up believers in the way in which they should walk in a world opposed to Christianity. He wants to ensure believers understand both their blessings and their responsibilities. He wants them to know and to experience spiritual fulfilment, while at the same time being faithful in the way. So there are times when he challenges, corrects, instructs, exhorts, and advises but also times when he comforts and assures. John is a pastor who teaches consistency in the Christian walk with a balanced approach to pastoral care.

Here we consider the teaching of John as regards the need of walking with spiritual discernment. The issue is the danger of false teaching and the need to discern and reject it. *'Because many false prophets are gone out into the world'* – dispersed throughout the world.

#### **Warning: 1 John 4.1-2**

*'Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.'*

At the outset notice how we have a warning given in such a kind pastoral manner – *'Beloved'*!

Secondly, notice the essential foundation upon which the warning has been given. It comes directly after a clear statement concerning the indwelling of Christ by the Holy Spirit in the believer. This statement may raise a question in our minds: How do we know that

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Christ abides in us? The answer is chiefly because of the witness of the Holy Spirit within us.

This is not simply an affirmation of Jesus Christ within our hearts and minds, but a submission to Him as Lord. It means we truly believe in Jesus Christ and trust in Him, submit to His Lordship and follow Him as Lord. It means that, as a fruit of our faith in Him and obedience to Him, our walk is characterised by love.

Now only with the Christ-centred influence and enabling of the Holy Spirit can we stand firm against heresy. So to help us further in our passage, John spells out another specific aspect of the witness of the Holy Spirit. In addition to what we considered previously – the witness of faith, love and obedience – here also is confession. It has to do with an essential doctrine; what we truly and sincerely believe about Jesus Christ. It is the witness and confession within us by the Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh into this world. It is the grand work of the Holy Spirit of God through His Word to lead us into all truth about Jesus Christ.

Jesus said:

*'Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you' John 16.13-14.*

This doctrine of Jesus Christ manifested in the flesh is a most wonderful and essential truth to believe in. It is a doctrine which the Holy Spirit impresses on each true believer, for the Holy Spirit has been personally engaged in bringing this truth to reality. It was the Holy Spirit:

- that enabled the conception of Jesus Christ in the womb of Mary;
- Who overshadowed His body to ensure its perfect sinless state;

## *Walking with Spiritual Discernment: 1 John 4.1-6*

- Who, throughout the time of Jesus Christ here on Earth, ministered to Him to sustain Him.

Jesus Christ in the flesh, and the Holy Spirit within Him ministering and strengthening Him, is important to us. For as Jesus Christ, in His perfect human nature with a soul, was enabled by the Holy Spirit so we, as human beings converted to Christ, are likewise ministered to and enabled by the Holy Spirit.

To confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh means also to enter into His experience in measure. It is much more than simply an affirmation of faith; it is a confession that involves personal experience.

- He humbled Himself – so must we;
- He served others – so must we;
- He suffered – so must we;
- He was persecuted – so must we be;
- He was tempted and resisted temptation – so must we;
- He submitted willingly to the will of His Father – so must we submit our lives unto God.

To confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is to believe in God's way of salvation alone. For Jesus Christ 'coming in the flesh' means He took upon Himself a body like ours on our behalf. He lived here on Earth as a perfect Man to fulfil God's holy law on our behalf. He died on Calvary's cross as a perfect Man, having taken upon Himself our guilt voluntarily on our behalf to bear our condemnation; to make atonement for our sins; to be our Substitute, the Lamb of God. He died on Calvary's cross as the One who knew no sin, becoming sin to bear the punishment of our sin.

To confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is also to believe in the resurrection. His wonderful resurrection in the flesh to a glorified body is also absolutely significant. Forasmuch as He humbled

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Himself to take on a body like our own to redeem us, He also is now in Heaven dwelling within His glorified human body as both God and Man. Herein is our hope of a glorious resurrection for ourselves, wherein we will be given glorified bodies. Job believed this even in the Old Testament:

*'Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me' Job 19.23-27.*

Why spend so much time on these truths? It is vitally important, as Holy Spirit-taught believers, that we have the highest views of Jesus Christ in the flesh. These are the truths the Holy Spirit teaches us about Jesus Christ having personal involvement in us, since it is the great work of the Holy Spirit to testify about Christ and exalt Him.

The Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ becomes the touchstone of truth or error: what is being preached and said about Jesus Christ is the issue that forms the key to sound doctrine. Jesus Christ coming in the flesh and all that this means is the focus of the attack of antichrist, so John lovingly and solemnly warns us as believers to beware and use our spiritual discernment to stand. He does not want those under his care to be gullible Christians, accepting anything and everything. It is very easy in our Christian lives to be impressionable. There is a lot going on around us under the guise of Christianity which is very impressive.

### **Direction: 1 John 4.1-3**

*'Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into*

## ***Walking with Spiritual Discernment: 1 John 4.1-6***

*the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.'*

Do not believe everything you hear without testing as to whether it accords with God's Word. Here on Earth there are many false prophets around the world creating problems and hindering. They are deceivers, self-centred, without grace, parading themselves as prophet-preachers. They claim to have special revelation, dreams, a word from the Lord, and yet preach another Jesus.

How do you discern them? Apply the test of Jesus Christ coming in the flesh to their teaching. What are they really saying about Christ, if anything? How deep do they go in their theology about Him?

I met a minister once that told me he didn't 'do theology' – he just loved Jesus. That might sound sweet and reasonable, but at the same time he denied the very Person he claimed to love! When we discussed Christ as our Creator, this man didn't believe in the biblical account of Creation, or the bodily resurrection of Christ.

There is in this world a spirit of antichrist. Here is not meant one specific person but an evil spirit. Only accept the teaching that biblically exalts Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh and what that means. Firmly reject any teaching that undermines the doctrine of Jesus Christ coming in the flesh. Use your God-given spiritual discernment to resist the antichrist and understand the seriousness of error. Beware when teachers, in whatever context, only refer to the Lord our Saviour as 'Jesus' and not Jesus Christ the Lord!

Notice how John always writes of 'Jesus Christ'. He is the Anointed One. Refer back to *1 John 2.20-25*. Remember our salvation depends

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on this doctrine; remember our hope of eternal life in glory depends upon it.

This is just a taster of the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. How important it is that we discern, that the teaching we receive likewise exalts Jesus Christ in the flesh. This is a test of whether or not the Holy Spirit is in, with, and blessing the ministry of the preacher.

### **Encouragement: 1 John 4.4**

*'Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.'*

Here again we see evidence of John's balanced ministry and teaching. This is great encouragement and assurance for all those who trust in Jesus Christ as the God-Man: *'Ye are of God, little children'*. You are His children; you do not belong to the world but to God. You are chosen by God; called by God; saved by God; kept by God; strengthened by God; guided by God; instructed by God; and adopted by God. You are of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

As a Christian believer you have Christ abiding in you by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is greater than any other spirit in the world. Christ in Heaven is the conqueror of Satan in the world: *'greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world'*.

### **Explanation: 1 John 4.5**

*'They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.'*

Here John is explaining about those who infiltrate and hinder the Church with false doctrine and practice. We are to discern their approach and teaching and use our spiritual discernment to assess it. One test is: How does the world, the unsaved unbeliever, respond to their teaching? If the message finds a ready acceptance in

### *Walking with Spiritual Discernment: 1 John 4.1-6*

an unbelieving world we should beware. The Gospel initially is not designed to make a sinner comfortable but uncomfortable, that they may find their comfort in Christ.

We need to beware when the cutting element of the Gospel message is blunted and watered down and the lordship and holiness of Jesus Christ is rarely mentioned. Beware when Jesus becomes just a good example and a man to follow, but without sacrifice and commitment; one to admire, to have as a good friend.

An example of this attitude is the woman who had a flippant, 'matey' relationship with God. She said she often 'gave Him a piece of her mind' whilst doing her ironing.

The question is not what does the *world* think, but what does *God* think about the Gospel we are preaching? The false prophets are of the world; they adjust their message and practice to attract the world. Beware, because they use the framework and facilities of the Church to proclaim false doctrine. They use worldly methods and worldly illustrations to create messages pleasing to the old nature. Salvation is taught as simply 'choosing Jesus for yourself', with no repentance and by natural faith. They teach that you can have Jesus and the world, Jesus and self, Jesus without doctrine. *'Believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they are of God'*, or out of tune with God's Word.

Some years ago, musicians noted that errand boys in Westminster all whistled out of tune as they went about their work. It was talked about and suggested that it was because the bells of Westminster were slightly out of tune. Something had gone wrong with the chimes and they were discordant. The boys did not know there was anything wrong with the peals, and quite unconsciously copied their pitch.

Donald Grey Barnhouse said: 'God has given us His Word which is the absolute pitch of life and living. If we learn to sing by it, we shall easily detect the false in all of the music of the world.'

## *Walking With God*

### **Assurance: 1 John 4.6**

*'We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.'*

Again John tells true believers they are of God to assure them. They are on the right side, however unpopular, despised, attacked, scorned and rejected they may be.

In this world there is always a remnant of the Lord's people, those who know God and hear the truth, who receive the truth and rejoice in the doctrine of Jesus Christ coming in the flesh, and all this really means.

Those who reject this wonderful, essential doctrine and yet parade as prophet-preachers are not of God, and we should not pretend they are. They will not receive the true Gospel of God or hear those who stand for it; they think they know better. So we should use our God-given spiritual discernment and understand they are of the world. Here is a touchstone between truth and error centred in Jesus Christ coming in the flesh.

*'Beloved, believe not every spirit' in a mistaken understanding of love among Christians, 'but try [test] the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.'*

### **Conclusion**

I realise this section could be viewed as somewhat negative, but we need to follow the pattern of John's inspired teaching. We need to realise our responsibility to discern and be testers of the truth, to use discernment between truth and error in the preaching.

Remember, what could be more positive than the statement that we overcome *'because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world'*? This means for us doctrine alive in our souls, being *'strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man'* (Ephesians 3.16);

### ***Walking with Spiritual Discernment: 1 John 4.1-6***

Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, '*Christ in you, the hope of glory*' (*Colossians 1.27*). In Him we are overcomers. In this relationship we can face the spirit of antichrist and conquer it and discern between truth and error. This is walking with spiritual discernment.



# 8. WALKING ACCORDING TO THE LOVE OF GOD

## *1 John 4.7-13*

Love is of absolute importance in our witness and behaviour because God is love. Three times in this passage of Scripture John encourages us to love one another as unto the Lord. He supports these admonitions by providing three foundational truths about God and His love.

Firstly we will deal with these three foundational truths and then return to the general exhortation to love.

### **1. Love is of God: 1 John 4.7-8**

*‘Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.’*

The thrust of John’s argument for believers to love one another centres around the truth that God is love. This is the power that lies behind the following verses exhorting us to love one another:

- Love is of God v7;
- God is love v8;
- The love of God was manifested v9;
- He loved us v10;
- God so loved us v11.

It has been said that John deals with the doctrine ‘God is love’ by taking it as jewel, lifting it up and admiring it. As a jewel reflects off the sun, each expression flashes out some new ray of heavenly light on God’s love.

When John affirms that love is of God it helps us to understand

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that He is the source of love, as much as He is the source of light – see *1 John 1.5*. John is not identifying a quality which God *possesses*; he is making a statement about the *essence* of God's being. It is not simply that God loves, but that He *is* love.

So John then says, by way of inspired emphasis, '*God is love*', a most profound statement which sits alongside '*God is light*' and '*God is Spirit*'. '*God is love*' means much more than 'God loves'. Such a definition would stand alongside statements such as 'God judges', 'God creates', or 'God rules'. The truth 'God loves' simply states one of God's activities.

But here John states something even more profound: Love is of God – God is love! It describes an integral part of God's essence, His nature. God cannot exist without loving because love can never be absent from His being: '*Love is of God*'. This is one of the reasons the Word of God can speak of God loving us with an everlasting love.

However, we must remember love is not the only aspect to the essence of God, for God is light and Spirit. All the activities of God on behalf of His Church are according to His love, light and His Spirit.

God's love is a holy love and therefore never operates contrary to His righteousness or violates His holy law. God is love and God is light: God is holy and therefore God's love is pure. All that He does for His people is an expression of His love. In love He chooses, creates, calls, converts, corrects, comforts, chastens, supplies, sanctifies, guides, answers and crowns – all in love.

It has been rightly said that love does not define God but rather God defines love. Love is of God; love is the very essence of God; it is part of His very being.

### **2. God loved us: *1 John 4.9-11***

*In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might*

## *Walking According to the Love of God: 1 John 4.7-13*

*live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.'*

John reminds believers of the personal nature of God's love to them in Christ. So we have *'the love of God towards us'*, *'He loved us'*, and *'God so loved us'*. God's love to us in Christ Jesus is John's second reason for loving one another.

How can we be sure that God is love and the love of God is towards us? We know that God is love and the greatness of His love by the sending of His only begotten Son into the world. The word 'manifested' here means disclosed, brought to light, made visible, or brought into the public domain. The sending of God's Son into the world was the means whereby God demonstrated His perfect love: He sent His only begotten Son, eternally proceeding from the Father, the eternal I AM, the Son of God.

John wishes to amplify the wonder of this precious gift of love. When the Lord was here on Earth on two occasions God the Father spoke from Heaven regarding His Son:

- a. After the baptism of Jesus Christ:

*'And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'* Mark 1.11.

- b. After the transfiguration of Jesus Christ:

*'And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him'* Mark 9.7.

Both times God the Father refers to the Lord as His 'beloved Son'; He was Someone most precious to Him, given as a gift to needy sinners that they might live through Him. One commentator put it this way: 'No greater gift of God is conceivable because no greater gift was possible.'

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'*That we might live through him*' means that we should not perish but have everlasting life, that we might come to have everlasting life in Him. The sinner's most desperate need is for life: because we are dead in trespasses and sins, Christ had to die and rise again for us, that we sinners through Him might have eternal life.

But then John goes deeper into the truth by reminding us that we did not initiate this love. In fact, it was when we were His *enemies* that Christ died for us. God did not look from eternity into time and see a people who would love Him first and then respond to that love. No; He looked into time and knew, as God, that man would fall into sin and rebel against His holy law. He looked into time and saw the hatred of sinners towards Himself, their pride, idolatry and corruption.

We, who by nature were insensible to spiritual life, truth and love, were unworthy and unholy, fallen in sin. Yet in pure, holy and compassionate love, God preordained that He would send His only begotten Son to save. Love in its deepest essence is not seen in our love to God but in His love to us.

*He saw me ruined in the fall,  
Yet loved me notwithstanding all;  
He saved me from my lost estate—  
His lovingkindness, O how great!*

*Samuel Medley (1738-99)*

The great mystery which angels desire to look into is the manifestation that God is love in the gift of His Son.

But now John goes even deeper into the truth that love is of God and God is love, shown by sending His Son. Look! here is love, John emphasizes: He actually sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

We have already seen in John's letter how Jesus Christ was

### *Walking According to the Love of God: 1 John 4.7-13*

manifested to take away our sins and to destroy the works of the devil. Here we are reminded by John how this amazing work and victory was accomplished. God's love is demonstrated in the costly sacrifice of His only beloved Son humbling Himself unto death. His love to us is not assured by prosperity, wealth, health, or success, but by the gift of His only begotten Son.

The word 'propitiation' means the nature of God required the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for us to be saved. God's righteous nature required a sacrifice and God's pure love provided a righteous sacrifice. Jesus Christ is the peacemaker between God and man according to the purpose and provision of God.

Here is the heart of God – love. In the *Book of Isaiah* we read something very profound:

*'Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand' Isaiah 53.10.*

He knew that through the perfect merit and suffering of His Son His Church would be redeemed in full. His Son would return to Heaven in triumph and be seated as God and Man at the Father's right hand. It *pleased* the Father to give His Son and make His Son an offering, knowing the outcome, all for God's love's sake.

The Apostle Paul, when contemplating the wonderful truth of the love of God, prays:

*'For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with*

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*all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen' Ephesians 3.14-21.*

I know of no better expression or desire in prayer than this, centred on the love of God in Christ.

### **3. God dwells in us to love: 1 John 4.12-13**

*'No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.'*

God's purpose of love is not only manifest by sending His only begotten Son and giving His only begotten Son as a propitiation sacrifice for needy sinners, it is also manifest by coming to dwell within us. All this has become a living reality and experience through the gift of His only begotten Son. We read:

*'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace' John 1.14-16.*

How can we receive of His fullness? How may Christ dwell in us? Because the Holy Spirit has been sent to this world by Christ to lead us to Him; to teach us of Him; to convict us of our sin and our need of Him; to convert us to Him; to give us new birth spiritually in Him; to give spiritual life in Him; to give us eternal life in Him; to give faith,

### *Walking According to the Love of God: 1 John 4.7-13*

grace and truth in Him; and to receive of the fullness of God in Him.

Do you not know, believers, that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit? *'God dwelleth in us.'* God does not dwell in angels but amazingly He does dwell in sinners saved by His love and grace in Christ. How do we know that we dwell in Him, and He in us? By His Holy Spirit!

God's love is proved at the Cross and perfected in the believer. Amazing truths are given to us here by John.

\* \* \* \* \*

Having given us three ways in which the love of God is manifested, John now exhorts us to love as a sign of a true believer knowing and loving God first:

*'Beloved, let us love one another' v7;*

*'Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another'*  
*v11.*

Here love to believers is an evidence that we are partakers of the divine nature. Such love demonstrates we are born of God, that we know God. This means much more than knowing *about* God in an intellectual manner. It means to have a personal relationship with God as His born-again child, having God as your heavenly Father.

Sadly, *'he that loveth not knoweth not God'* (v 8). Certainly many unsaved people love their families and even sacrifice for them, and no doubt some have an intellectual understanding of God. What then do they lack in their love? How can it be said they do not love because they do not know God? What is wrong, what do they lack?

The person that does not have the unique love of God in measure in their life has never entered into a personal relationship with God in Christ. They cannot love God and His people in spiritual union and fellowship.

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Christian love is unique; it has an added spiritual dimension that natural love does not possess. Christians are called to love following the example of Christ: to love sacrificially, unselfishly, graciously, prayerfully, humbly, wholesomely, for the glory of God. It is a love with a concern for the soul. Christian love is a unique blessing and exercise.

It would be helpful at this point just to make mention of the biblical definition of the love of God used here. The Greek word used here is 'agape', which is the most common word used for love in the New Testament. Another word used is 'phileo' but this word for love is not so especially unique to the Christian faith as 'agape'. Now while a version of the word – 'agapeo' – was used by classical writers, this word meant simply 'to esteem'. The Greek word 'agape' is described as being born of revealed religion and is not used by any other writer. It is specifically a biblical word used to define God's love and, as a fruit, Christian love.

Christian love is a special kind of love. As a gift of God it emanates from the new nature and is spiritual. A child of God has been born of God and therefore he is a partaker of God's divine nature. The love mentioned here is what is described as being Christian love, a gift from God working in us. It is the outworking fruit of the new God-given nature within us which seeks to worship and serve God.

Warren Wiersbe, in his commentary on *1 John*, cites the example of a navigator.

'A navigator depends on a compass to help him determine his course. But why a compass? Because it shows him his directions. And why does a compass point north? Because it is so constituted that it responds to the magnetic field that is part of the earth's make-up. The compass is responsive to the nature of the earth.

'So with Christian love. The nature of God is love. And a person

### *Walking According to the Love of God: 1 John 4.7-13*

who knows God and has been born of God will respond to God's nature. As a compass naturally points north, a believer will naturally practise love because love is the nature of God. A believer's love for his brethren as God is love is proof of his fellowship and son-ship.'

It is recorded by the Church father Jerome that when the Apostle John became so infirm that he could not preach he used to be carried to church and content himself with the exhortation, 'Little children, love one another.' When his hearers wearied of it and asked him why he urged this duty continually, he replied, 'Because it is the Lord's command, and if only this be done, it is enough.'

Here is another step towards assurance given to us by John in verse 13. Love is the great test of knowing God. As God is love, so a child of God loves in measure as God loves. The best way in which you and I can express appreciation for our salvation is to love God and one another. This means we shall pray for, care, support, exhort from the Word of God, encourage, admonish, have fellowship with, rejoice in the Lord with, weep with, sympathise with, provide for and protect one another: *'Love one another.'*



## 9. WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

### *1 John 4.14-21*

We have been considering many different aspects of walking with God, and it may seem somewhat overwhelming. However, these truths are not learned overnight but they are given by an elderly apostle writing from experience. John, inspired by the Holy Spirit and using his experience, is providing a manual for Christian living.

This next passage teaches us about some characteristics of walking in the Spirit. This teaching flows from the truth stated for assurance in verse 13. To help us the Apostle John provides for us four evidences of walking in the Spirit and dwelling in God. By these evidences we may know assuredly that we are ourselves truly born again and living in the Spirit.

The four evidences provided by John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, are faith, love, confidence and obedience.

#### **1. Faith: 1 John 4.14-15**

*‘And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.’*

We have already noticed how faith and love are mentioned many times in the various letters of the apostles. There is a constant reminder to the churches of these vital pillars of the Christian walk. Here it is specifically faith in the doctrine of salvation in Christ Jesus alone that John has in mind.

The apostles were those who had visibly seen the Lord and had a personal one-to-one encounter with Him. They were men who also had been divinely called by the Lord Jesus Christ as Head of the Church. The apostles were those responsible for laying down the doctrine of salvation as the foundation for faith. They were taught

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personally by the Lord Jesus Christ and confirmed His teaching to the Church for all time.

As an apostle John teaches that God the Son was sent by God the Father to be the Saviour of the world. Here the emphasis is on the divine purpose of the God of love to send for us His way of salvation.

The apostles saw not only the Person of Christ, but spiritually, under divine inspiration, His doctrine as well. They came to see how God the Father was the Architect Who planned and purposed the way of salvation. John saw how this plan was perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ the Son of God in life, in death, and in resurrection.

Here is the first evidence given by John: confession of faith that Jesus is most assuredly sent by God the Father and is the Son of God. To confess that Jesus is the Son of God means to believe wholeheartedly that God sent His beloved Son. It is a sure sign we are born of God!

John confirms this for our comfort later in the epistle:

*‘Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him’ 1 John 5.1.*

Then he says for our assurance:

*‘Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?’ 1 John 5.5.*

Confession of faith in Jesus Christ the Lord was first given by Christ Himself as an evidence of salvation.

*‘Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven’ Matthew 10.32.*

In harmony with this confession, the Lord promises Himself as a Mediator on our behalf for our confidence. Paul also teaches that confession of faith in the Lord Jesus is a sign of salvation:

## *Walking in the Spirit: 1 John 4.14-21*

*‘That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved’ Romans 10.9.*

To confess that Jesus is the Son of God means to witness of your total dependence upon Him for salvation. It means to be fully persuaded of and being in submission to God’s true doctrine of salvation. It means to appreciate that the surest way to please God the Father is to believe in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the way we can be sure that God dwells in us by His Holy Spirit.

### **2. Love: 1 John 4.16**

*‘And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.’*

The second evidence that John gives is to believe the love God has for us. It is through the gift of His only beloved Son that we can be sure of the love of God towards those who believe. To believe in the love God has to us is to believe in His Son as a gift of grace towards us as sinners.

The best way we can show respect to God is to rejoice in the Lord and His provision for us in salvation. Always endeavour to deepen your appreciation of this wonderful gift of God’s love to you.

Now God did not *create* His Son before time in eternity to be the Saviour of the world; He gave His Son who *has always been* and *forever will be* the Son of God as Saviour to this world.

God the Son, like His Father and the Holy Spirit, is uncreated. He has always been and forever will be. God the Father planned before time and in eternity that His only beloved Son would be Saviour of the world. He was indeed made and created a Man to live and die and rise again, but has always been the Son of God.

Some people consider the Saviour as created of God simply for the

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purpose of salvation. They only see Him as a man, Jesus of Nazareth, who died on the cross as a sacrifice for sin. However, to know and believe the love that God has to us is to worship and adore Him for:

- sending His one and only begotten Son, the eternal I AM, the Alpha and Omega, to this world; and
- giving to us what was most eternally and always precious to Him as God the Father, His Son Who has always been His Son, eternally, from everlasting to everlasting.

In this way we see and know in a deeper way the love that God has for us. We see a picture of this in the testimony of Abraham – see *Genesis 22*.

*‘He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.’*

We dwell in love by:

- worshipping God for His wonderful gift of love in Jesus Christ the Lord;
- appreciating and respecting this gift;
- showing our respect in our testimony of faith;
- trusting and following the Son of God;
- obeying Him and learning of Him;
- loving God and His people.

Love is one of the great evidences that we are in union with God. This love is not just a feeling, for this can waver. Love is a command for obedience; to love is to obey God. We show our love to God in worship, devotion, prayer, service and witness.

It is to love our brethren because they, like us, are loved of God and are saved by Jesus Christ. We do not love our brethren only if we like them, or get on with them, or feel drawn to them. This love

## *Walking in the Spirit: 1 John 4.14-21*

does not depend on sentiment and feeling: it is shown by actions of kindness, care and forgiveness. We love despite difficult behaviour, temperament, harsh words or anger. We love because this is the firstfruit of the Holy Spirit and God's way of showing we are truly born again.

Love is the clear evidence that we have God dwelling within us by His Holy Spirit, for to love as God commands us – sacrificially, freely and constantly – is a gift of God within us.

There are two ways of being united: one is by being frozen together, and the other is by being melted together by love.

We have noticed in this epistle how John continually challenges and comforts. Inspired by the Holy Spirit he beautifully sets forth God's pattern for the Christian walk. Here is another characteristic which flows like a majestic river through the epistle. The divinely-inspired emphasis is laid upon the blessed partnership of truth and love. Because we are imperfect Christians we are often imbalanced. This means that we may be courageous for truth but not courageous in love; or we may be courageous in love but not courageous for truth. The Word of God teaches us that we need to be valiant for both. We need a confession of faith in the truth *and* a testimony of love by action.

### **3. Confidence: 1 John 4.17-18**

*'Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.'*

Now John brings us on a very positive note to the significance and importance of love for our wellbeing. He reminds us here that love is therapeutic medicine for the soul because it brings the answer of a good conscience. It will bring a boldness in the Day of Judgement,

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when we will have to give an account before the Lord. If we are following our Lord in love, loving for Christ's sake, loving for God's honour, our souls will be blessed; fear will be removed because we are living to please God, not our old nature.

Here is a profound statement for all time – *'There is no fear in love.'* We torment our soul when we stop loving and start hating or showing hardness to others. We do more damage to ourselves than to others, for we are shutting the door to fellowship with God. We will be afraid of God, of His judgement, of His rod and afraid to die in this condition.

Love is the key; love to God and to others is the heart of the issue. Love brings confidence and assurance. Note *Psalms 18.33*:

*'He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places.'*

There is a fear in natural love; we may love someone but fear that same person is going to reject us. Many have been the broken hearts caused through the rejection of natural love. People live in fear that maybe their wife or husband is being unfaithful. In reality there is much cruelty in a world that focuses on 'eros' love with no morals. It leads to fear.

But there will never be a broken heart for those abiding in God's love. God is faithful. The Lord heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds. Christian love – 'agape' love – is secure, faithful and kind. God's love casts out fear; it is unchangeable, steadfast, pure, faithful and eternal.

Here is John's third great test of our relationship with God. Believing in God without believing and trusting in His love is really unbelief. It will bring us into the bondage of fear, and this fear will torment us.

### **4. Obedience: 1 John 4.19-21**

*'We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love*

## *Walking in the Spirit: 1 John 4.14-21*

*God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.'*

Here again we are reminded of the first source of love. We love Him because God first loved us. We can take no merit in and of ourselves for loving God. Love for God is a gift manifest in the new nature.

Here John brings the axe to the root of hypocrisy: love and hatred are like chalk and cheese. Now when John speaks of loving his brother this does not mean we will always agree with his actions. Love admonishes, warns, reproves, and sometimes, as unto the Lord, we must separate rather than compromise.

The point is that Christian love is not meant to compromise with truth and doctrine but harmonise with it. This is why John begins this passage with doctrine. If our doctrine of Christ is weak, then our Christian love will be weak; it will be reliant on social friendship.

Natural love tends to measure fellowship by natural standards, not spiritual standards. In this way people accuse those who have been led to make a stand of being unloving. But notice here what John is saying very carefully. The love that matters is not natural friendship love, a love that can tend to compromise. The love that matters is a Christ-centred, God-honouring love that will be of blessing on the Day of Judgement because as He is so are we in this world. Are we obediently living, loving and suffering for Christ's sake?

### **Conclusion**

John has given us four evidences that we are truly born again and walking in the Spirit: confession of faith; love; confidence; and obedience.

Like an engine, we may not always be firing on all these four cylinders at once, and when we are not we lose power. Our spiritual life

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misfires when these evidences are not exercised in our lives. May we live like a well-tuned engine operating smoothly on all four evidences (graces). If we are not, we should go in humility to God for repairs and renewal.

# 10. WALKING AS AN OVERCOMER

## *1 John 5.1-5*

### *1 John 5.1-5*

*‘Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?’*

Central to the first five verses of this chapter is the assurance of overcoming. A Christian overcomes this world of temptation, opposition, persecution, idolatry, materialism and lust by faith. John, inspired by the Spirit in his writing, expresses this overcoming of the world as being victory by our faith.

This is the first time John has used the word ‘faith’ in his letter. He is using the word here in its assured sense to mean the heart and witness of our Christian life.

John provides for us three characteristics of God-given, overcoming, victorious faith as it is exercised in our life: believing, loving and obeying. Note that as we follow the pattern of John’s teaching it requires our attention to constant repetition of key themes. So once again we are considering these essentials of believing, loving and obeying. They are like a three-stranded cord of the Christian life, giving a testimony that is not easily broken.

Note here how that the three characteristics that manifest overcoming, victorious faith are continuous. They are like the Christian’s daily

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exercise in life. They help us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

### **1. Believing**

'*Whosoever*' is one of the most encouraging words in all of Scripture. It is an all-embracing word that extends to people throughout the whole world, of every tribe and nation. There are no race barriers; social barriers; intellectual barriers; financial barriers; or sinful-past barriers.

'*Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.*' To believe that Jesus is the Christ is to believe He is the Messiah, the Anointed One of God. It is to believe He is the Son of God also now made a Man. It is to believe He is the only Saviour, that He is the Lord. It is to surrender your whole being to Him as the Lord of your life, and is one of the great signs of spiritual new birth of God. Only a person with a God-given new nature can believe that Jesus is the Christ.

*'But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned'* 1 Corinthians 2.14.

All the glory therefore must be to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

A Christian is born of God. The Spirit comes to sinners who are spiritually dead and alienated from God, and He makes them spiritually alive. He gives them the gift of repentance and the faith to believe that Jesus is the Christ. To believe that Jesus is the Christ is to believe in Him not only as Saviour, but to follow Him as Lord of your life. It is this God-given faith which overcomes the world.

I would like to note again that believing here is meant in the continuing, growing sense. Christian believing grows as it focuses on its certain object, certain truth and a certain outcome.

Christian faith has a wonderful object. It trusts and believes in Jesus

## *Walking as an Overcomer: 1 John 5.1-5*

Christ the Son of God. It is willing to rest on a statement of truth, and upon a foundation which is unique. So our believing develops only as we increase in our knowledge of God and His Word, centred in Christ.

Now to many people faith is a journey without a fixed-truth destination. Faith is simply a subjective experience, an emotion, a sense of wellbeing, or 'what works for me'.

Over 100 years ago Robert Louis Stevenson foreshadowed this twenty-first-century attitude when he said: 'To travel hopefully is better than to arrive. The journey is everything, because there can no longer be a fixed destination.'

Many consider their faith as being a journey of discovery without any fixed point of reference or destination. It is all about sense and experience, emotions and discovering their own truth upon which to depend.

Christian belief has fixed points of truth on which to focus and in which to grow, and it has a fixed destination point. God-given faith says, 'I believe that Jesus is the Christ': a certain truth, and a fixed point of reference. It develops in the continuing sense only as it focuses on its object, which is unchanging truth.

There was a research student given a fish to study only with his eyes and hands: he had no microscope. After a short while he thought his work was done and that he had seen enough. However, his findings were not enough for his professor who sent him back to the fish to study more. Then he began to draw the fish, and this helped to formulate his thinking. At the end of the day he went to the professor who told him his findings were good but still inadequate, and he would question him further the next morning. This made him think more about the fish and he came up with more thoughts about its structure which helped him in the question time. In the end it turned out that

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the student spent three whole days researching the fish with his eyes, hands and mind. The result was that his research report included facts about the fish otherwise missed in a short cursory consideration. His research grew only as he studied his object. The more he studied his object, the more he learned about it.

So with believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. We grow as we study Him, learn of Him and walk with Him.

### **2. Loving**

Here John reminds us that that Christian love is unique; its strength lies first in our love for God. Whereas we can have a deep natural love for a person without loving God, we cannot have a spiritual love for brothers and sisters in the Lord without love for God.

The word 'begat' here refers to the sovereign work of saving grace emanating from God the Father. Those begotten of Him are those who are chosen and called by grace and adopted into the family of God.

It is about first loving the Father of the family of God, and then from this loving the children of the family of God. The two go hand-in-hand together; there is not one without the other. We cannot say we love God the Father while at the same time hating some of His children. We cannot say we love God's children while at the same time rebelling against God the Father.

But notice here how John teaches the order of the loving. We love God the Father and that love then extends to His children. Here is a helpful guide for us: love grows for His people as we develop in our love for God. The more we believe in God, the more we will love God, and so our love for the children of God grows.

Believing and loving are two characteristics of God-given faith. Now I would bring your attention to another fundamental aspect of Christian love.

## *Walking as an Overcomer: 1 John 5.1-5*

### **3. Obeying**

In verse 2 John teaches us that the best, kindest and wisest way to show love to our brethren is in godliness. Here is the true test that you really love the children of God: when you respect the importance of your testimony you will not want to hurt, offend or hinder by it. It is very important to consider this in the current culture of Christian witness.

How vital it is that we are not a hindrance to the children of God by a testimony of worldliness or ungodliness. It seems this teaching is discarded in our day and age. If you were to read the blogs and Facebook pages of some Christians you would not know they are Christians. But John says here: We know for sure that we love the children of God when we keep God's commandments. These commandments should not be grievous or burdensome to the true child of God. God's commandments are for our good; for our growth; and for our spiritual and practical wellbeing.

Of course this principle of godliness extends to our witness to the world. Many people teach that to witness to the world as a Christian you must show that really you are no different from them. However, John teaches that the best way to witness is to love God and keep His commandments.

*'And they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus' Acts 4.13.*

Here then is John's test of love especially for the children of God. You attend first to your love for the Lord and your walk with Him. In this way you are in the best position to be of help and of support to the children of God.

Not only do we show our love to the children of God by keeping God's commandments, we also show our love and respect for God by keeping His commandments. We live in an age when the law of God

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has been under intense attack, even in Christian circles. Any movement suggesting the keeping of the law is rejected as legalism.

It is true the Christian is no longer under the law's condemnation, but it does remain the believer's rule of life. A negative attitude towards the law as the believer's rule of life does not accord with Scripture, for here we are taught that God's commandments are not grievous. The word 'grievous' here means not burdensome, not a heavy weight on our shoulders.

We may say that the Gospel is now the believer's rule of life. Nevertheless, the Gospel of God does not contradict the law of God, for our Saviour came to keep it. The condemnation of the law is taken away in Christ but not its authority as God's guide. So we follow the Lord and His commandments because of His love to us and our love to Him.

The hymnwriter Joseph Swain wrote about a Christian's salvation followed by the godly walk:

*Come ye souls by sin afflicted,  
Bowed with fruitless sorrow down;  
By the broken law convicted,  
Through the cross behold the crown;  
Look to Jesus,  
Mercy flows through Him alone.*

*Blessed are the eyes that see Him,  
Blest the ears that hear His voice;  
Blessed are the souls that trust Him,  
And in Him alone rejoice:  
His commandments  
Then become their happy choice.*

*Joseph Swain (1761-96)*

We follow the Lord and His commandments because of His love to

## *Walking as an Overcomer: 1 John 5.1-5*

us and our love to Him. While the condemnation of the law is taken away in Christ, its standard remains as our guide for life.

John has taught us in his letter that love is at the heart of keeping God's commandments. Here he is following the teaching of the Lord, for the Lord tells us that love is a summary of the law from which all other aspects flow:

*Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets' Matthew 22.37-40.*

Love is the first fruit of the Holy Spirit:

*'But the fruit of the Spirit is **love**, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law' Galatians 5.22-23.*

Love brings forth the fruit of godliness which accords with God's law, in the keeping of which there is great reward spiritually, as the Psalmist teaches us (*Psalm 19.11*).

### **Application**

We have considered three ongoing aspects of true God-given, Christ-centred Christian faith: believing, loving and obeying. Only as these are in exercise can the born-again Christian overcome the world. Our victory is not known out of Christ, for only as we believe that Jesus is the Son of God are we victorious. The proof of our new birth is not spectacular gifts: it is simply believing, loving and obeying together. The promise is victory through faith in Christ – to be overcomers!

Notice here John's teaching: the Christian is called to overcome the world, not to compromise with it. The world that John is speaking

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about is the spirit of the world and worldliness. The spirit of the world is the spirit of antichrist, the attacks on His name. The spirit of worldliness is the spirit of error, idolatry, temptation, lust and materialism. The system of the world is opposed to the things of God. This is because it is under the control of the evil one.

The clearest feature of the evil one and of the world system is denial that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Since Christ has come, all the devil's efforts have been directed towards denying His deity and His humanity. But when a person comes to believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the enemy's hold on that person is broken forever. We are released from Satan's prison!

There is only one way to overcome the world: that is by faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Everything again depends upon our relationship with Christ.

*'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me'*  
*Philippians 4.13.*

Note also:

*'Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ'* *2 Corinthians 2.14.*

We show our faith in Him by believing, loving and obeying. But you may say, 'I feel to fail so often; my witness is not strong; I seem to get worse rather than better.' (See *Romans 7.24.*)

The new spiritual life implanted in a born-again Christian is constantly warring against the old nature. But the more the Christian abides in Christ as the True Vine, the more they will find strength to overcome. Jesus said:

*'Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world'* *John 16.33.*

We overcome by faith in Him. So much depends on our relationship, belief, respect and union with Him, how we abide in Jesus

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Christ. Remember Jesus Christ has defeated death, and the Person who has defeated death can defeat anything!

*'But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ' 1 Corinthians 15.57.*



# 11. WALKING WITH BELIEF IN THE WITNESSES GIVEN BY GOD

## *1 John 5.6-12*

In John's day teachers were claiming that the divine nature of Jesus Christ descended upon Him first at His baptism, and then left Him at Calvary before His death upon the cross. According to their teaching, the divine nature of God rested on Christ temporarily during His public ministry here on Earth. They also taught that Jesus was really only the natural born son of Joseph and Mary. This was the error John was dealing with in this part of his letter. He provides a guide to how we interpret these verses, including both the baptism and death of Jesus.

It is a very serious problem when our faith is depending on a false view of Jesus Christ. To refute this heresy John appeals to witnesses who bear testimony to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. There are three witnesses on Earth: the water, the blood and the Holy Spirit; and three witnesses in Heaven: the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit. So the witness of God in Heaven is in perfect harmony with the witness of God on Earth. We will consider these witnesses set before us by John, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

John teaches us that the name of Jesus Christ has to be proclaimed in definite and bold terminology. So here John states boldly, '*This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ.*' He is stating unequivocally both the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ.

What relevance does this have for us today? Some may say, 'This is just doctrine; this is not stimulating me – we know all this.' But how important is it? Verses 10 and 13 explain to us how important it is to be sure our view of Jesus Christ is true:

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*'He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son' v10.*

*'These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God' v13.*

God's name and our eternal life depend upon it. If the believers in John's day needed to be reminded, we certainly also need to be reminded. The same battle is raging today. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, remains under attack, but we must never give ground on an issue which is so fundamental. The Holy Spirit will only bless that ministry which correctly honours His great and glorious name.

Paul warns:

*'For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him' 2 Corinthians 11.4.*

Peter also clearly preached this truth:

*'Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ' Acts 2.36.*

### **Three witnesses on Earth to Jesus Christ: 1 John 5.6, 8**

*'This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth...And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.'*

#### **1. Jesus Christ: The witness of the water**

Jesus was baptised in Jordan at the commencement of His public

## ***Believing the Witness Given by God: 1 John 5.6-12***

ministry. Water baptism was used as a sign of the authority and obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ. The importance Jesus placed upon this ordinance is also found in the way He addressed John the Baptist:

*‘Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness’ Matthew 3.13-15.*

Baptism for us as believers symbolises the forgiveness of all our sin in Jesus Christ by His precious blood. It also symbolises the cleansing, sanctifying work of Jesus Christ in our lives, and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It has to do with death and life. It is a public witness of our union with Jesus Christ, with His life and with His death and with His resurrection.

Many times in the *Acts of the Apostles* we have testimony to the pattern of repentance, faith and baptism.

### **2. Jesus Christ: The witness of the water and the blood**

This is a direct reference to His death at which time from His body poured forth blood and water. This verse is significant for us because of what the original baptism of Christ pointed to. The blood and the water symbolise forgiveness and cleansing through Christ; justification through the blood and sanctification through the water.

*‘But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water’ John 19.34.*

Jesus Christ – not only by water, but by water and blood.

### **3. Jesus Christ: The witness of the Spirit**

Our faith in Jesus Christ is based upon fact. Jesus Christ:

- was born in Bethlehem;
- was baptised in the River Jordan;

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- preached and healed;
- died upon the cross, and from His wounded side poured forth blood and water;
- rose again and ascended to Heaven.

However, true faith in Jesus Christ is not something purely intellectual; it is more than mental assent to these facts. True faith is inspired by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit of truth Who testifies to these truths on Earth. The Holy Spirit only witnesses to truth, only blesses truth, and only applies truth:

*'Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come'*  
John 16.13.

It is the Holy Spirit that reveals and applies the truth of Jesus Christ the Son of God through His inspired Word. The salvation of Jesus Christ means nothing to us without the Holy Spirit's witness:

*'But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me'* John 15.26.

We have the outward testimony and evidence of Jesus Christ through the Word, His life, His teachings, His compassion, His miracles, His death, resurrection, and ascension. But without the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit we would not believe these things; they would remain foreign and irrelevant to us.

For example, one person hears of Christ and is moved and convicted by the Holy Spirit. He knows no peace until he rests upon Jesus Christ by faith. Another person can hear the same message and remain unmoved, itching to get the service over and carry on with life on the outside.

## *Believing the Witness Given by God: 1 John 5.6-12*

The nineteenth-century evangelical politician and campaigner against slavery, William Wilberforce, once brought his friend, William Pitt, the youngest man ever to be Prime Minister, to hear Richard Cecil preach. Cecil proclaimed the Gospel and Wilberforce revelled in it, feeling he was almost in Heaven. At the conclusion of the service he could hardly wait to ask Pitt what he made of it. Pitt, an intelligent man but not an evangelical, could only reply, 'I didn't understand a word he was talking about.' What was the problem? The Spirit of God was testifying to Wilberforce but not to Pitt.

There are three witnesses mentioned for us here on Earth. The first two witnesses, the water and the blood, present historical facts in the testimony of Jesus Christ: His baptism by water and in His death blood and water from His wounded side. The third witness, the Holy Spirit on Earth, makes these truths real to us in our mind and heart and in our soul.

### **Three witnesses in Heaven to Jesus Christ: 1 John 5.7**

*'For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.'*

#### **1. God the Father**

God the Father in Heaven witnessed to Jesus Christ's divinity through sending the angels. God the Father chose to use the baptism of Jesus Christ to verify that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God, by His audible voice:

*'And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' Matthew 3.17.*

This reminds us of the importance and significance of baptism.

God the Father witnessed the same again at the transfiguration of Jesus Christ by His glory and voice.

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We may also see the witness of God the Father as Jesus spoke in His suffering:

*'Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me' John 12.27-32.*

The witness of God the Father at His death came as the sun was darkened, and in the tearing of the veil of the Temple. At His resurrection the Father witnessed to the divinity of His Son by the resurrection of some believers, and through the angels at the tomb.

### **2. The Word**

The second witness is the Word, referring here to the eternal, divine nature of Christ as the Son of God. *'The Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1.1)* – He existed before the world was. He made the world as the Word, the eternal Son of God, whereby He showed that He was truly God with the Father.

The manifestations of His deity while here upon Earth also witnessed to His eternal, divine nature as the Word. He witnessed of the glory He had from all eternity with the Father as the Word, the Son of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ came from Heaven to Earth as the Word made flesh and dwelling among us.

## *Believing the Witness Given by God: 1 John 5.6-12*

### **3. The Holy Spirit**

Firstly, He witnessed to the divinity of Jesus in the miraculous creation of the immaculate human nature of Christ in the virgin Mary's womb, the Holy Spirit coming upon her.

Secondly, in the visible descent upon Jesus Christ at his baptism: the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily shape as a dove:

*'The next day John [the Baptist] seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God' John 1.29-34.*

Thirdly, He was a witness in an effectual conquest of the spirits of hell and darkness. The Lord Jesus said:

*'But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you' Matthew 12.28.*

Fourthly, the Holy Spirit witnessed through the visible descent upon the apostles at Pentecost to furnish them with gifts and powers to preach Christ.

Fifthly, He witnessed in supporting the name, Gospel and interest of Christ by miraculous gifts through the apostles.

### **The witness of God is greater than the witness of man: 1 John 5.9**

*'If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater:*

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*for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.'*

John has gathered together for our faith three witnesses on Earth and three witnesses in Heaven. See how careful John is to present his case through reliable witnesses. This is all for the purpose of vindicating the truth that Jesus is the Son of God most assuredly made a Man.

Now John argues that if you receive the testimony of a man, how much more should you receive the witness of God. Practically speaking, all through our life we are continually receiving the witness of men. We go into a restaurant and order a meal. We expect that when the meal arrives it is the same as ordered from the menu. Or we are guided by a map, or by our Sat Nav, both witnesses prepared by man.

But the witness of God is greater than all the combined witness of men for all time.

### **Conclusion: 1 John 5.10-12**

*'He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.'*

God could not have done more to confirm the manhood and deity of Jesus Christ. Society speaks of the pyramids as one of the seven wonders of the world. Sadly, one of the greatest wonders in the world is the vast pyramid of man's unbelief. Unbelief is nothing short of calling God a liar! To deny the deity of Jesus Christ is to call God a liar. It is to say that Jesus Christ was the greatest liar Who ever walked upon this Earth: He claimed to be something He was not.

The very nature and character of God is at stake here; if we deny Jesus Christ we deny God. Satan is forever trying to separate Jesus

## *Believing the Witness Given by God: 1 John 5.6-12*

Christ from God. Satan has no problem with people saying they believe in God, as long as that God is not the triune God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

What John is saying is that we cannot sit on the fence. If we believe in God, we must believe in the Son of God. To deny the Son of God is to deny God and call Him a liar. So when you read of religious leaders denying the Sonship of the Lord Jesus, remember they are saying God is a liar. This is what is at stake here!

But believing in the testimony and witness of Jesus Christ gives eternal life. Eternal life is in His Son; we cannot have eternal life without believing in the eternal Son of God. Do you have the Son? Do you trust in Him, submit to Him, follow Him, rest in Him? Do you have life?

I have tried to show how carefully John sets forth his doctrine of Jesus Christ. Using witnesses he shows to us, inspired by the Holy Spirit, that the witness of God is greater than man. If you are one of those that does not have the Son and fear to trust and fear to come, just think of one word in Scripture – ‘whosoever’! That brings you in. Listen to the God that does not lie. What does He say to you in His Word? That you may have the Son and eternal life in Him in your own life.

*‘And it shall come to pass, that **whosoever** shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved’ Acts 2.21.*

*‘To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name **whosoever** believeth in him shall receive remission of sins’ Acts 10.43.*

*‘**Whosoever** believeth on him shall not be ashamed’ Romans 9.33.*

*‘For the scripture saith, **Whosoever** believeth on him shall not be ashamed’ Romans 10.11’*

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*'For **whosoever** shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved' Romans 10.13.*

*'**Whosoever** shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God' 1 John 4.15.*

*'**Whosoever** believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him' 1 John 5.1.*

*'And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And **whosoever** will, let him take the water of life freely' Revelation 22.17.*

## 12. WALKING IN TRUE CHRISTIAN CONFIDENCE

### *1 John 5.13-20*

In his manual for Christian living John now brings before us the theme of confidence and assurance in Christ. These final verses could actually be described as a summary of the epistle. They culminate in a beautifully-worded, concise statement of belief given for us in verse 20:

*‘And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.’*

In this passage there is a key word: ‘know’. It appears no less than seven times in verses 13-20. John is therefore teaching and reminding us again that it is desirable the Christian should live in the comfort of the knowledge of their security in Jesus Christ. A Christian should know of their eternal life through Jesus Christ and experience its felt blessing now. This is borne out by the teaching in verse 13 and what follows.

Notice here how this theme of confidence and assurance comes not from signs and wonders or emotions but from simply believing in the Word of God which reveals to us the Saviour Jesus Christ.

*‘Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead’ Luke 16.29-31.*

*‘And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded*

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*unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself'*  
*Luke 24.27.*

The self-confidence the world promotes often hides the truth of our real ability and knowledge. Human philosophy says: 'Believe in yourself – your truth and your views are most important.' Or it promotes a confidence that does not require substance, or even truth. Outward image presentation is vital to ensure you come out on top and your view wins the day.

I was struck recently by a conversation with an estate agent in London dealing with the progression of the sale of a house. I was subjected to a lengthy presentation of how this person was dealing with the situation, that all was under control and progressing well, when in reality I knew that the groundwork had not been properly done, and necessary phone calls had not been made. A couple of pertinent questions made it obvious this was really a front which had little substance to support it.

When this approach becomes a way of life, reality and truth take second place to presentation. Actually such outer confidence without a certain foundation proves very stressful and unsatisfactory. But having confidence in Christ provides a secure platform upon which we can build our lives assuredly.

### **A clear purpose to assure Christians: 1 John 5.13**

*'These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.'*

John has been writing for the positive benefit of believers. He has written to warn them, teach them, encourage them and assure them. Now here, as we have mentioned, the themes of the letter are being drawn together as one. So at the end of his letter, John objectively states the ultimate purpose of the epistle.

## *Walking in True Christian Confidence: 1 John 5.13-20*

John communicates in a very positive, direct and yet pastoral manner. He is perfectly clear as to whom his letter is intended for – those who believe in the name of the Son of God. He is also perfectly clear as to its ultimate purpose – that you may know you have eternal life.

How may we describe eternal life? We know the word ‘eternal’ means ‘everlasting’, ‘never-ending’. But what does eternal life mean?

*‘And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life’ v20.*

*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent’ John 17.3.*

From this we know that ‘eternal life’ means to be in everlasting union with God. Being in everlasting union with God is totally dependent upon our union with Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

*‘He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life’ 1 John 5.12.*

Our eternal life is in the Son of God; it is dependent upon our union in Him as the True Vine:

*‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing’ John 15.1-5.*

This means the Christian walk is continually to believe in the name

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of the Son of God; to believe in the name of the Son of God means to believe in His Person and character. He has been given a name which is above every name. This is the one name that is eternally trustworthy. The *Book of Proverbs* tells us:

*'The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe' Proverbs 18.10.*

We are secure in His name and Person, in Who He is, in His promise to His people and in His faithfulness.

Remember this passage is about the blessing of Christian confidence and assurance. This is John's desire, that we may know that we have eternal life!

John has already given us four tests by which we can know whether we are a true Christian believer:

a. Do I confess my sins and put all my trust in Jesus Christ? (*1 John 1.9*);

b. Do I sincerely seek to keep His commandments in a spirit of love? (*1 John 2.3*);

c. Do I love other Christian believers? (*1 John 3.14*);

d. Do I continually believe and confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, Who became a Man and is now both perfect Man and perfect God? (*1 John 4.15*).

Now here again in verse 13 is assurance from belief in Jesus Christ the Son of God.

Other apostles also wrote of the blessing of Christian assurance and confidence in Christ:

*'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose' Romans 8.28.*

*'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he*

## ***Walking in True Christian Confidence: 1 John 5.13-20***

*was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich' 2 Corinthians 8.9.*

*'For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day' 2 Timothy 1.12.*

*'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers' 1 Peter 1.18.*

Christian assurance grows and is maintained as we go on believing on the name of the Son of God and as we trust wholly in the Word of God that reveals to us His Person and work as Saviour and Lord. To go on believing is to grow in Him, and as we grow in Him our confidence in Him grows.

### **Confident prayer: 1 John 5.14-15**

*'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.'*

John now encourages believers to confidence in prayer. Believe in a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God; pray, *'Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.'* True prayer is conforming our will to God's, not God's will to ours. It is to pray in accordance with God's Word and His promises towards His people.

There is not one prayer which God hears which will remain unanswered if we pray as Jesus taught us. If we pray according to His Word and with submission in accordance to His will, He will hear us.

Our prayers are to be wrapped around by faith in the will of God, our heavenly Father.

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*'Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven'*  
Matthew 6.9-10.

As we pray as Jesus taught us – by faith with reverence, submission and dependence, for God's glory – then we will have the petitions we ask of Him. God's answers to our petitions will come in accordance with His wise will and way.

The answer to our petitions may not always come in the way or when we expect. Our desire by faith seeks the will of the Lord in our petitions, but His timing is often different to ours. The answer may not be what we expected but the answer to our petitions will always be better for us, because God has something better, a wiser way and plan according to His perfect work.

*'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts'* Isaiah 55.8-9.

We may have asked for deliverance from a trial, but God determines rather to give grace to endure the trial. He hears our petitions and He answers our petitions in accordance with His will.

See this working in Paul's life:

*'And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me'* 2 Corinthians 12.7-9.

## *Walking in True Christian Confidence: 1 John 5.13-20*

Paul's desire in prayer accorded with God's will inasmuch as it was given with a desire to serve the Lord. How much easier it would be without the hindrance of this messenger of Satan to buffet him! Now the Lord answered Paul's petition in His wisdom enabling Paul to serve Him through His strength. Thus Paul's desire to serve was answered, but in such a way that the power of Christ more fully rested on him.

Be sure that God always answers prayer that is made by faith in accordance and submission to His will. When our petitions are for His glory and our spiritual good and in accordance with His will, then God will always, without fail, answer those petitions and grant our desires of Him in His perfect way.

This assurance should give confidence in prayer. Why can we be so confident in prayer? Why can we be so confident in a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God?

*'For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but 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' Hebrews 4.15-16.*

### **Charitable prayer: 1 John 5.16-17**

*'If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.'*

Pray for backsliding believers. The problem with backsliding believers is that they are suffocating their spiritual life given to them by God. Repentance and restoration, in that order, is what is required. Their lives are being led by the old nature not the new. Christian

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believers through intercessory prayer can be instruments in God's plan for the restoration of backsliding believers.

Notice how John speaks of seeing our 'brother' sinning a sin. It is a believer being spoken of here! Prayer for a backslidden believer is a better option than condemnation, gossip and criticism.

The perfect example of intercessory prayer is given by Jesus when He prayed for Peter.

*'And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren' Luke 22.31-32.*

We are to pray for spiritual restoration that comes through repentance and humility before the Lord. John repeats this for our assurance, reminding us that all sin is unrighteousness. *'There is a sin not unto death'*: this is sin that we commit, but *do* repent of, and that comes by faith under the blood of Christ.

But there is a prayer that we are *not* to pray and it is not charitable to do so. Remember, for example, the false teachers in John's day were denying the deity of Jesus Christ. To deny the deity of Jesus Christ, the very Person the Holy Spirit is a witness of is, in effect, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit!

These people were teaching that you could commune with God on a higher spiritual level which bypassed Jesus Christ, as New Age spirituality which has no need of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Son of God. These people were claiming to be super-spiritual, having special insights, while at the same time living ungodly lives and denying the deity of Jesus Christ. In effect they were calling God a liar both in their speech and their actions. Eventually these false teachers went out from the church; they forfeited the blessing of fellowship in the church.

## *Walking in True Christian Confidence: 1 John 5.13-20*

We are not to pray for the Lord to bless a person whose life is a denial of the Person and deity of Christ. We should not pray for God's blessing on a liberal, worldly Christian lifestyle which contradicts God's Word.

We should not, as ministers or churches, join with Liberals and seek God's blessing on fundamental error. To have a prayer meeting with men who do not even believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is wrong!

At my first church I was constantly being invited to join the Family of Churches. This group included churches whose ministers denied Creation, hell and the deity of Jesus Christ. One day one of those ministers came to visit me saying that we were really all one, and I should allow my church to join the group. He assured me that our doctrine was the same, so I invited him in for a coffee and chat over a few fundamental doctrines. It transpired that he did not believe in Creation, in hell, the resurrection and deity of Christ, or the inspiration of Scripture! At the end of our meeting he suggested we should pray together. I declined, saying that when we could unite on the fundamentals I would be willing to do so.

A key to this difficult verse lies in understanding what the phrase '*sin [leading] unto death*' means. Sin leading to death means unrepented sin; living a life without repentance and respect for His way; living a life rejecting Jesus Christ as the Son of God and yet parading as a Christian.

For example, it is like a person wilfully and knowingly sinning against the light given to him by God, at the same time asking presumptuously God's blessing on such a lifestyle. Such a lifestyle unrepented of leads to death, and is evidence that a person is not truly converted. If that person carries on in such a way and does not repent, despite the warnings of God, they will die in their sin because they have despised the precious way of Calvary.

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But notice here how cautious John is. We need to take great care not to be unwise in our discernment. When a person wilfully embraces liberal theology and denies the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that person refuses to repent and deliberately rejects the teaching of God's Word and remains hardened. We must not pray that person's sin will be forgiven knowing they are at the same time rejecting Christ. All we can do is to pray the person will repent of their sin and truly turn to Christ. We cannot pray the person will be forgiven while at the same time they deny Jesus Christ and do not repent.

God does not contradict His Word – God is able and willing to save unto the uttermost, but He will not forgive outside of Jesus Christ and without repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. '*Sin unto death*' is unforgiven sin that is not covered by the blood of the Lamb Who has been rejected.

### **Consistent practice: 1 John 5.18**

*'We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.'*

When a Christian is being governed by the new nature he does not sin. Sin happens when we are led by the old nature. This verse does not mean a Christian never sins, but it does mean our attitude towards sin has changed. We are no longer entrenched in sin, habitual sin, continually sinning. And when we do sin, under the influence of the old nature, we repent. Our desire is to walk according to the new nature which enables us to live a life separate from sin, showing that we are '*born of God*'.

The final part of the verse is referring to the disciplined Christian life and security from the evil one. John understands that being kept is a partnership between the power of God and the faith of the believer. In other words, all the glory must go to God but He does not keep us like a robot, but in exercise of our faith.

## *Walking in True Christian Confidence: 1 John 5.13–20*

*‘Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time’ 1 Peter 1.5.*

This is perfectly displayed by Paul in his teaching on the Gospel armour in our battle against Satan. He writes that we must take up the Gospel armour that is provided by God without which we must fail. However, the armour is to be used and exercised by the believer. For example, the shield of faith in exercise by the believer quenches the fiery darts of the evil one.

*‘That wicked one toucheth him not’* does not mean we are not being attacked or assaulted by the wicked one. It means Satan cannot so touch the soul of the believer unto condemnation or destruction.

*‘Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?’ Romans 8.35.*

Jude has the same teaching in his letter:

*‘Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life’ Jude 1.21.*

This is looking forward by faith to the day when Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord will receive His people unto Himself. In doing so, we are conscious that this event can only be through the mercy of Jesus Christ. ‘Remember’, Jude says, ‘Christ is the door of mercy to our eternal inheritance.’

When we consider the eternal security of the Christian, we must always see it to be so in Christ by faith, for in its perfect sense the Begotten of God, Jesus Christ, kept Himself pure and withstood the evil one.

Ultimately this part of the text refers to Jesus Christ Himself; our only real security is in Him.

*‘And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to*

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*pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one'*  
*John 10.28-30.*

So while there is an exercise to godliness, the victory is assured only by faith in Jesus Christ. He ensures our security; He intercedes for us and promises that not one of His sheep will be lost.

*A sovereign Protector I have,  
Unseen, yet for ever at hand;  
Unchangeably faithful to save,  
Almighty to rule and command;  
He smiles, and my comforts abound;  
His grace as the dew shall descend;  
And walls of salvation surround  
The soul He delights to defend.*

*Augustus Toplady (1740-78)*

### **Clear position: 1 John 5.19**

*'And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.'*

Who is our commander? Who is our Lord? How much of our life is influenced by God? A Christian belongs to God: we are of Him, chosen by Him, saved by Him, and blessed in Him. We are on God's side, in His family, living by His rules, and destined to live with Him eternally. But the whole world lies under the sway, the influence, of the wicked one, held captive by the devil.

For example, in recent times the Western world has become very interested in the occult. Many bookshops carry more literature dealing with the occult than with Christianity. The world remains under Satan's influence without realising it. It lies in wickedness, rests in it, is at home in it, helplessly enslaved to wickedness. One commentator said:

## *Walking in True Christian Confidence: 1 John 5.13–20*

‘All the major compulsions of the twentieth century – alcohol, sex, drugs, and gambling – are in fact attempts to escape from the slavery of sin into a world of personal fulfilment and satisfaction. This is like drinking salt water. The more you have the more you want; the more you want the less you are satisfied. This is always the devil’s way.’

### **Concise platform: 1 John 5.20**

*‘And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.’*

John is not afraid to make a statement which he says as the truth. Notice how he uses this word ‘true’ three times. He refers to a God who cannot lie, Who is true to His Word, and to truth itself, perfectly displayed in all its wonder, beauty and security in Jesus Christ, revealing God the Father to us. This statement by John wonderfully brings to us the glory of the Triune God as being true!

We know and believe by faith that Jesus Christ has come. We have a spiritual understanding because Jesus Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to teach us from His Word, so that we may know God the Father through His Son Jesus Christ that is true. This is one of the reasons our ministry is to be Christ-centred, because in God’s wisdom He reveals Himself to us through the Person and Word of His Son, Jesus Christ.

*‘Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?’*

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*he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father' John 14.6-12.*

Jesus said, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.' We are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ is the divine Ladder whereby we reach the eternal pinnacle of fellowship with God.

In this verse John summarises salvation in Christ Jesus, bringing us into eternal union with God the Father by the divine power of the Holy Spirit.

*'This is the true God, and eternal life' – this is it!*

*'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made' John 1.1-3.*

# 13. THE CHRISTIAN'S CLEAR LOYALTY

## *1 John 5.21*

*'Little children, keep yourselves from idols.'*

The opening term in the final verse, *'little children'*, is one we have already noticed in the epistle. It appears no less than eight times and is a term directed with love particularly to Christian believers.

John is addressing believers who are not immune to the influence and danger of idolatry upon their lives! John's kind approach here teaches us how we can effectively be warned and warn about danger. Note that John does not threaten: he lovingly warns.

We can threaten someone vindictively against taking a course of action; alternatively we can lovingly warn someone of the danger of taking that action with a view to protecting them. Oswald Chambers said: 'God never threatens; the devil never warns.'

Note that threats are negatively recorded in the Bible, only being used by those in opposition to God, whereas warnings are positively recorded, being given by God and by those serving Him.

*'Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears'*  
*Acts 20.31.*

The way in which we warn often determines the outcome of the warning. Here John uses a term of endearment to warn in a spirit of loving care. We can learn from this the right spirit and way in which we should warn!

We now move on to ask two important questions of the text: 'What is an idol?' and 'How may we keep ourselves from idols?'

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### **What is an idol?**

An idol is anything that replaces God as the chief of our affections and worship. John has been dealing with the problem of false teachers whom he describes as ‘antichrist’, meaning ‘instead of’, ‘in place of’, ‘against Christ’. A form of idolatry is where false doctrine and false teaching stand in the place of God’s truth; where man’s opinion takes the place of God’s revealed truth and we follow the wisdom of man rather than God.

But what about in the context of the local church here and now? It is easy for us to look outside of ourselves and our church and think the danger of idolatry is distant. For example, we may say, ‘I do not worship idols; I have no icons; I do not kiss statues of the virgin Mary; I do not bow down to images; and I do not worship a man-made god.’ We may also say at this point in our minds, ‘I believe in the biblical truth about Jesus Christ: I am doctrinally correct.’ So we may comfort ourselves that idolatry is not an issue in our lives, either culturally or doctrinally.

Note here the warning to the Church at Ephesus in *Revelation 2.1-7*. They had left their first love; something was taking God’s place.

We could consider idolatry in family life, work life, social life, in our possessions, or our education. However we will consider idolatry particularly in the context of potential idolatry in worship. It takes various forms.

**a. Covetousness:** Looking at other people in the congregation, considering their looks, lifestyle, possessions, responsibilities, gifts, or position. These are horizontal thoughts instead of thoughts directed to God.

**b. Materialism:** Allowing our mind to be distracted in worship, eg: buying furniture, decorating a room at home, solving a problem

## *The Christian's Clear Loyalty: 1 John 5.21*

at home, business, work or a financial problem in your mind during worship, setting the little god against Almighty God.

**c. Worshipping self:** Seeking attention, especially in a gathering for worship, whether by action, dress or voice, can make us the 'instead-of-God' person in the congregation. When we place ourselves as the pivotal point of why we have come to worship, worship becomes in our mind 'to serve me rather than God.' Starting with man instead of God is a form of idolatry; we are taken up with the creature rather than the Creator. Are you taken up with God or with self?

**d. False humility:** In the context, people were worshipping angels instead of God. In our contemporary situation, it could be that the worship itself is a subjective experience, instead of being for God. Subjectivity is refusing to look out of self to Christ:

*'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God' Psalm 42.11.*

A show of humility disguises a desire to worship out of God's will.

*'Little children, keep yourselves from idols'* – worshipping that which is instead of and in place of God.

### **How may we keep ourselves from idols?**

The exhortation *'keep yourselves from idols'* has the meaning of 'guarding against'. It is reminding us of our own personal responsibility in this matter. For a Christian believer, an idol should be considered as an intruder with evil intent. A helpful illustration might be to think of how we install and use an alarm system to warn against intruders.

To guard against an idol intruding into our lives we need to take the following actions:

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**a. Use the Word of God** to examine your life, to search out for idols and sound the alarm. As an alarm sensor on the wall picks up the unauthorised entry of intruders, alarm your conscience to be activated against unwelcome idols!

**b. Pray** to be kept by the power of God. The alarm system has to be powered by electricity; it is useless without it.

**c. Exercise yourself** unto godliness. Godliness means to be living a life towards God, worshipping God, facing in the right direction.

*‘Delight thyself also in the Lord’ Psalm 37.4.*

Fixing the alarm sensor in the right direction on a fixed point enables it to detect unauthorised entry – it tells us the laser beam is broken. When we look by faith in the right direction, and serve the Lord and live for Him, our laser beam is directed toward God. When it is broken, the alarm of the conscience should sound! We are then better able to detect when our fellowship with God is being broken.

Do we know the code to switch the alarm off and reset it? Recently we viewed a house with an estate agent. As she opened the front door, the alarm went off. She did not know the code, so had to make phone calls to find it out and switch it off.

The alarm sounding tells us an intruder is about and must be banished from the house of our heart. The Apostle Paul writes to the church at Ephesus about putting off the old man and putting on the new. Jesus Himself said, *‘Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation’ (Matthew 26.41)*. When the intruder is gone and the alarm of the conscience is reset, it is back on guard, watching.

### **Conclusion**

Where do our loyalties lie? *‘Little children, keep yourselves from idols.’* Be loyal to God – God is a jealous God! One of the chief characteristics of walking with God is loyalty to Him. This will mean we will have:

*The Christian's Clear Loyalty: 1 John 5.21*

- Commitment to the cause of God;
- Care about the honour of God;
- Courage to stand by the truth of God;
- Confidence in the name of God.

AMEN! So may it be.